

Responding to Globalization

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Responding to Globalization

Nation, Culture and Identity
in Singapore

SELVARAJ VELAYUTHAM



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*For my parents, Velayutham and Rajamani
&
my wife, Amanda Wise*

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
INTRODUCTION: Globalization and the Nation-State	1
Background	3
Dealing with Globalization	5
State Legitimacy and Control	10
Outline of Book	13
1. The Making of the Singapore Nation-State and the Quest for a National Identity	20
Imagining Singapore: From Colony to Nationhood	21
Developing the Singapore Nation: Strategies and Policies of Nation-Building	26
The Question of National Identity in the Academic Literature	36
Internationalizing Singapore: Nationhood and Its Connections Elsewhere	41
Conclusion	46
2. The Rhetoric of Asian Values and the Embracing of a “New Asian” Identity	52
Introduction	52
Family, Community, Order: The Discourse of Asian Values	54
Asian Values in the Singapore Context	56
Safe, Clean, Controlled: Characterizing the Commentary on Asian Values	58
Economy, Identity, Modernity, Ambivalence: Four Functions of Asian Values in Singapore	61
Asian, Western or New Asian: Relabelling and Re-sorting Our Boxes	73
Conclusion	76

3. Creating National Citizens for a Global City	82
Introduction	82
A City in Transition	83
<i>The Next Lap: Building the Global City 1991–1997</i>	85
Singaporeans Emigrating	93
<i>Singapore 21 Solutions: From Next Lap to "Heartware"</i>	97
Putting <i>Singapore 21</i> into Practice	101
Unhomely Anxieties, Global City Dilemmas	102
Analysing the <i>Singapore 21</i> "Heartware" Solutions: Strategies to Create More Homely Citizens	106
The Usefulness of "Folk": Appropriating Singapore's Heartlanders	107
Synthetic Homeliness and the Logic of National Development in Singapore	109
Conclusion	112
4. Re-Branding Singapore: Cosmopolitan Cultural and Urban Redevelopment in a Global City-State	119
Introduction	119
Culture and the State	121
Domesticating Singaporeans and Attracting Talents from Overseas	124
Cosmopolitanizing National Culture: Recent Cultural Policy Trends in Singapore	128
Speaking Proper English	133
Managing and Branding: Evaluating Singapore's Vision for a Cosmopolitan Global City	135
Nationhood and the Dilemmas of the Cosmopolitan City-State	148
5. At "Home" in a Globalized City-State?	159
Introduction	159
Singaporean and Related Identities	162
Being Singaporean in a Global City	166
Affect, Identity and the Materiality of Nation	169
The Contradictions of Singaporean Social Modernity	176
Managerial Speak and Governmental Forms of Belonging	181
Singapore and the Gift of Social Life	190
Conclusion	195

CONCLUSION	202
From a Barren Piece of Land to a Thriving Global City	202
Global City/Nation	203
The Nation-State in the Global Context	204
The Uncertainty and Hopefulness that is Singapore	208
<i>Bibliography</i>	211
<i>Index</i>	233
<i>About the Author</i>	239

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Introduction

GLOBALIZATION AND THE NATION-STATE

The cities which in the late twentieth century we call world cities are beginning to lead their lives rather distinct from those of their territorial states again, and entities such as Singapore and Hong Kong may even suggest that city states can at least in some ways be viable social forms.

(Hannerz 1996, p. 143).

The more the government provides for Singaporeans, the higher their expectations of what the government should do. The more we educate Singaporeans, and the more economic opportunities we create for them, the more internationally mobile they will become. The more they gain from subsidised HDB [Housing Development Board] housing, the more money they have to buy cheaper houses in Australia. Will Singaporeans be rooted to Singapore? Will enough Singaporeans stay here, to ensure the country's long-term survival?

(Goh Chok Tong, *Straits Times*, 19 August 2002).

The first of these quotes comes from a section in Hannerz's book, *Transnational Connections*, where he examines the cultural role of world cities in the context of contemporary globalization. Hannerz suggests that Singapore and Hong Kong are representative of an emerging new form of cultural life and exemplify what he has termed cities of the global ecumene (see also Hannerz 1989).¹ This is indeed a thought-provoking assertion. These two city-states offer many possibilities for thinking about places which are distinct from, and different to, the territorially and culturally bounded form of the nation-state. Now that Hong Kong is no longer a British colonial territory, it remains to be seen whether it will be allowed to evolve as an independent cultural entity under Chinese rule. Singapore, on the other hand, is a city-state which is both a nation and, as we shall see, a world city. While nations have clearly defined territorial boundaries, continuous histories and

common identities, world cities are very much of the contemporary global ecumene.

Hannerz's view that the city-state of Singapore can in some ways be a viable social form is based on his historical reflection on the role during the medieval age played by city-states like Venice, Florence and Amsterdam. What he means by viable social form is that these city-states can be conceived of as having had a global function, and in many ways as representing the "mosaic model of world culture". As such, they were distinct from the social form of the nation-state, in the sense that there were no considered efforts made by the respective nation-states in which they were located to define their boundaries, produce their people or construct them as part of a national culture. Instead, these city-states thrived precisely because of their cultural organization as world cities which located them as distinct places with their own evolving history and identity.

The city-state of Singapore is indeed a distinct place. A small island located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula with no hinterland, it has a multi-ethnic population consisting of a Chinese majority in a region surrounded by Muslim countries. Singapore is by far the most developed and modern country in Southeast Asia. Once a quiet fishing village, it started developing into a thriving metropolis over a century and a half ago under British rule. In the process, it attracted immigrants from East, South and Southeast Asia who came in search of economic opportunities and eventually settled on the island. As a territorial and administrative entity, Singapore is wholly a product of colonial modernity. The ruling elite, which inherited the apparatus of the colonial state following Singapore's independence in 1965, began engineering its development into a modern nation-state. Nation-building, or the political process of constructing a "nation" and a sense of belonging via the state, is therefore a key feature of Singapore's socio-cultural formation. After 37 years as an independent nation-state, the nature of the polity under the rule of the People's Action Party (PAP) has largely remained unchanged. It remains characterized by a centralized power structure and a close, elitist policy-making apparatus (Chua 2000). At the same time, the city-state of Singapore has evolved dramatically; beginning as an export-oriented economy, becoming a newly industrialized economy and presently a "wannabe" world city.

This brings us to the second quote at the head of this introduction. It comes from a National Day Rally speech delivered by then Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong in which he focused on an

urgent issue facing his government — that of Singaporean citizens emigrating overseas and the effect this will have on the future survival of Singapore as a nation. These anxieties about national viability exist in spite of Singapore's rapid economic transformation and ambitious plans to become a world city. Singapore is an immigrant society and a young nation-state. The fate of its government therefore hinges on the development of a national identity and a sense of national belonging among its heterogeneous population. A nation-state needs its citizens to be committed and loyal. In the thirty-seven years since independence, the government has attempted to develop and maintain national identification among its people with the Singaporean nation-state, while at the same time increasingly promoting that city-state as a global city. Singapore's dual orientation toward both the nation-state and the global city raises interesting questions about national identity in the global age. How are governments to deal with these two seemingly contradictory goals? How do they actively manage the socio-cultural forces of globalization, when the very survival of the nation-state is reliant on engagement with the global economy to remain competitive in the contemporary economic climate?

BACKGROUND

The current research began with an interest in examining the ways in which the discourse of Confucian and Asian values has been used in the late 1980s and early 1990s by some Asian states to define their national cultural values and sense of identity. The Singaporean state was one of the most vocal champions of Asian values. Intellectual interest in the subject soon began to increase, and varying schools of thought emerged contesting, commenting on, or defending the assumptions and validity of the Asian values discourse (see, for example, Chua 1995; Tu 1996; Robison 1996; Dirlik 1997a; Mahbubani 1998). This debate emerged at a time when Asia, as a geographical region, was considered by many to be rapidly "catching up" and even overtaking the West in terms of economic development and prosperity. For many commentators, Asia's economic success (dubbed as the "Asian miracle") spelt the end of the global European/American economic and cultural dominance. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore rode the wave of economic success.

Accounts of these emerging economies, in particular South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, sometimes referred to as the Asian

Tigers or Asian "mini dragons" (Sheridan 1995), often explained their success and achievements by referring to Confucian values, as embodied in effective government policies, high saving rates, hardworking populations, a free market economy and educational development. The 1990s therefore was an interesting time as it brought to the surface a peculiarly "Asian" interpretation of modernity. By the mid-1990s however, when the economic bubble began to burst with the Asian economic crisis, the Asian values debate lost its momentum. In Singapore, at least, the official concern shifted from Asian values to globalization. The concern over the role of tradition in the modern era and questions of cultural preservation and national identity which preoccupied the political elite throughout the previous decade, shifted towards addressing the uncertainties presented by globalization.

As the issue of globalization took centre stage in Singaporean official discourse and rhetoric, I became interested in examining more broadly the ways in which nation-states were responding to the process of globalization. There is a growing body of literature across various academic disciplines dedicated to the study of globalization.² Emerging from these developments are various academic theses that seek to map the contemporary global condition.³ The cultural homogenization thesis, for instance, proposes that the globalization of consumer capitalism involves a loss of local cultural specificity and diversity (see, for example, Schiller 1976; Tomlinson 1991). It stresses the growth of "sameness" and a presumed loss of cultural autonomy, which is cast as a form of cultural imperialism. This argument revolves around the idea that one culture, usually conceived in national terms, dominates all others. The principal agents of cultural homogenization are said to be transnational corporations (Schiller 1976). Consequently, cultural imperialism is the outcome of a set of economic and cultural processes implicated in the reproduction of global capitalism (Miyoshi 1993).

In opposition to the idea that globalization is a uniform process of cultural homogenization, there are those who propose the cultural diversity and fragmentation thesis. One of the most significant contributors to this discussion is cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996). He argues that contemporary global conditions are best characterized in terms of the disjunctive flows of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. In other words, globalization involves the dynamic movements of ethnic groups, technology, financial transactions, media images, and ideological conflicts which are not neatly determined by one harmonious "master

plan". Rather, the speed, scope, and impact of these flows are fractured and disconnected.

In these studies, the process of globalization (economic and cultural) and its implications are often the starting point for a discussion of the predicament facing the nation-state. The process of unprecedented economic and socio-cultural transformation, categorized broadly under the term globalization, in the form of an increase in the transnational mobility of capital, labour, information, culture and people, is said to unravel the conception of the nation-state as a bounded entity.

Within this context, the role of the nation-state is diffused and its capacity to contain the influx of movements is considered as becoming highly improbable. The process of nation formation, it seems, is at odds with globalizing processes. This is because the nation-state relies on a clearly defined territory, continuous history and a situated communal identity. Globalization, on the other hand, as Beck argues (2000, p. 11), is comprised of the processes through which "sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks". It has been in progress throughout history (Waters 1995) and is a process which at once unsettles and complicates the nation-state's project of producing a unified national identity.

The prevailing two contradictory processes of cultural homogenization and heterogenization have led some theorists to argue that the general effect of globalization has been to weaken or over-ride national forms of cultural identity (Ohmae 1995; Bauman 1998). Growing transnational movements and diasporic communities are said to result in a loosening of strong identifications with the national culture and at the same time the strengthening of other cultural ties and allegiances, "above" and "below" the level of the nation-state.⁴

DEALING WITH GLOBALIZATION

Many scholars regard globalization as a force which will inevitably bring about the decline (Held 1990, 1995), erosion (Hall 1991) or the end (Ohmae 1995) of the nation-state. As the argument goes, the process of globalization in its various manifestations is increasingly undermining the territorial boundedness, sovereignty and traditional role of the existing system of modern nation-states. These processes, often perceived in terms of disjunctive cultural "flows" as theorized by Appadurai (1996) and others, have necessitated the rethinking of the

nation-state as a territorially and symbolically bounded "imagined community" (Anderson 1983). The result then is a call to think beyond the nation-state, emphasizing the transnational, deterritorialized and cosmopolitan forms of imagined communities. There is the growing urgency in disciplines such as sociology (Featherstone 1990, 1995; Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1999), anthropology (Friedman 1994; Hannerz 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997) and cultural studies (Hall 1991) to develop new frameworks for the study of society and culture with a global focus rather than being overly concerned with a nation-state society approach. In this reformulation of theoretical thought, the borders of the nation-state are frequently characterized as becoming more porous and fluid, and the nation-state is seen itself as less relevant as a source of cultural identity.

On the contrary, of course, there are those such as King (1991), Smith (1991), Hirst and Thompson (1996), and Tomlinson (1999) who argue that the nation-state will not lose its relevance and will remain a formidable force. Summing up his theoretical inquiry into the birth of nationalism and national identity, Anthony Smith (1991, p. 177) postulates that until the needs of people are "fulfilled through other kinds of identification, the nation with its nationalism, denied or recognized, oppressed or free, each cultivating its own distinctive history, its golden ages and sacred landscapes, will continue to provide humanity with its fundamental cultural and political identities well into the next century".

Whether they are viewed as tenuous or durable, there is nevertheless considerable academic preoccupation with nation-states (Clark 2000). This may well be justified considering the pervasiveness of nationalism (bounded or unbounded) and nation-state formations in the twentieth century.⁵ With the exception of studies dealing with reactionary or revivalist types of nationalism (Hall 1992), localisms (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996; Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997), transnational nationalism (Smith and Guarnizo 1999), and postnational formations (Appadurai 1996), not to mention the highly abstract theorization of local cultures and locality (Featherstone 1995; Appadurai 1996),⁶ it seems that a grounded and systematic examination of the specific ways in which nation-states deal with globalization and its consequences has received little attention.⁷ In other words, while there is a growing field of study examining the different manifestations of nationalism arising within and beyond the nation-state and various emerging reactions for and against globalization, these studies do not generally address the strategies employed by nation-states to remain relevant under such conditions.

In the present phase of globalization, as Appadurai observes, the task of producing locality (as a structure of feeling, a property of social life and an ideology of situated community) is increasingly a struggle. He adds: "this is a world where nation-states are struggling to retain control over their populations in the face of a host of sub-national and transnational movements and organizations" (1996, p. 189). Appadurai's argument about the effects of globalization on social and cultural life and in particular on questions of cultural identity is an immensely persuasive one. Indeed, most of the available literature on globalization is filled with rich descriptions of "a world that has become deterritorialized, diasporic and transnational" (Appadurai 1996, p. 188). As the argument goes, not only are these new kinds of rootless, displaced and unbounded identity formations undermining our deeply historical and situated associations, allegiances and sense of belonging, they also shift our attention to the search for more dramatic and conspicuous alternatives to the nation (Hannerz 1996). Evidently these new and exciting developments and possibilities for research work have shifted much of the attention away from the apparently mundane and more familiar projects of the nation-state.

This is unfortunate. I would argue that it is crucial not to dismiss the nation-state's continuing significance, but instead to examine the different and actual strategies employed by nation-states in their responses to globalizing forces. It is important to bear in mind that individual nation-states employ a variety of strategies to deal with globalization, not all of which are reducible to ideas generated by Western modernity (as in the case of Confucian revivalism in industrial East Asia). Local national responses to globalization are not uniform. Responses may include attempts to promote, channel or block global flows depending upon the power resources they possess and the constraints of the configuration of interdependencies they are locked into (Featherstone 1995). That is to say, countries may act and pursue policies to cut themselves off and de-link from the outside world. Nevertheless, now more than ever there is also a great urgency for nation-states to participate and engage with the global economy.

The reason for exploring different national cultural responses to globalizing forces is to move beyond the often generalized and broad assumption that the nation-state is in crisis or decline (see, for example, the work of Hoogvelt 2001). The emergence of global corporations, human movement across the globe, and the role of the global mass media are contributing to transnationalized imagined communities

(Ohmae 1995; Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1996). While these developments call into question the project of the nation-state, as I argued earlier, the ways in which nation-states are responding to the staging of these consequences may vary from nation-state to nation-state.

There is a tendency in theories of globalization to reduce the work of the nation-state to a set of disciplining practices. For instance, as Appadurai (1996, p. 189) argues,

the nation-state relies for its legitimacy on the intensity of its meaningful presence in a continuous body of bounded territory. It works by policing its borders, producing its people, constructing its citizens, defining its capitals, cities, [...] and by constructing its locales of memory and commemoration [...] The nation-state conducts throughout its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous, and homogeneous space of nationness and simultaneously a set of places and spaces [...] calculated to create internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline and mobilization.

However, these kinds of disciplinary interventions are just one aspect of the work of the nation-state. The normative practices of the nation-state which involve policing, disciplining and reproducing compliant national citizens are not automatically efficacious. This may be because of the kinds of challenges facing the nation-state under globalizing conditions. So, nation-states are being forced to come to terms with and devise new and ingenious ways of legitimizing their continued existence (see, for example, Smith and Guarnizo 1999).⁸

This book, then, seeks to provide a critical assessment of the different ways in which the Singapore government has been responding to the process of globalization. In particular, it examines how the PAP government actively deals with the challenges to national identity posed by globalization. I am interested in the ways that the government has gone about engaging and negotiating what it perceives as threats and indeed opportunities arising from this process.

This book has another aim as well. Moving away from macro and at times abstract theoretical discussions of the impact of cultural globalization on identity, place and locality (see, for example, Featherstone 1995; Appadurai 1996; Soja 2000), I am reminded of Doreen Massey's much more grounded analysis and critique of globalization. Although Massey is specifically interested with the issue of power, inequality and access to mobility, her approach to analysing the experiential dimensions of the impact of globalization appears very useful (see also Abu-Lughod 1991;

Eade 1997). Massey (1994, p. 165), through her critique of the totalizing and universal effects of time-space compression and its outcomes, has raised an important question: "who is it in these times who feel dislocated/placeless/invaded". Challenging the hype and hyperbolic visions of globalization, Massey (1994, p. 163) notes pointedly that "most people actually live in places like Harlesden and West Brom. Much of life for many people, even in the heart of the first world, still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes". This reminds us that not every place and every person is completely swept away by the waves of globalization. Indeed, the experience and impact of globalization varies from place to place and more importantly from person to person.⁹ More to the point, as Massey (1994, p. 151) observes:

[M]any of those who write about time-space compression emphasize the insecurity and unsettling impact of its effects, the feelings of vulnerability which it can produce. Some therefore go on from this to argue that, in the middle of all this flux, people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet — and that a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub.

Massey contends that writers who interpret a desire for fixity and security in the middle of movement and change as necessarily reactionary are missing the point. This is where she poses an important question: "why is it assumed that time-space compression will produce insecurity?" (Massey 1994, p. 151) She adds "there is a need to face up to — rather than simply deny — people's need for attachment of some sort, whether through place or anything else" (1994, p. 151). Of course, Massey is mindful that such a need for attachment can be highly problematic, especially when it manifests itself in the form of reactionary nationalisms and introverted obsessions with localism. Nonetheless, and quite rightly, Massey's main argument is about reconceptualizing the notion of a sense of place as fluid, porous, and full of internal conflicts.

In following Massey's work, with its emphasis on the lived and experiential dimensions of globalization, I wish to examine more closely the ways in which people articulate their sense of attachment to a place and their identity in this dynamic and rapidly changing environment. For all the hype of increasing deterritorialization of life (as exemplified in the processes of globalization), "most of us still depend for our everyday reproduction on the "here-and-nowness" of (a) home or sense of belonging, however defined" (Ang 1998, p. 26). How then are 'home' and sense of belonging defined and experienced in a rapidly globalizing

place such as Singapore? In particular, what kinds of affiliations and identifications do Singaporeans have with Singapore as a locality, nation and world city?

STATE LEGITIMACY AND CONTROL

In this book, I will examine the ways in which the PAP elite have responded and are responding to the challenges that global processes pose to their vision of constructing and creating a Singapore nation. To do this, it is necessary to begin with the founding moment of the Singapore nation. Nationalism, in the sense of asserting a cultural identity and association with both history and place remains a fundamental means of responding to globalization (Holton 1998). Yet it is apparent that the idea of a national society is itself a global phenomenon, in the sense that the institutions of the nation-state and nationalist consciousness are truly characteristic of all regions of the world (Robertson 1991; Smith 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Duara 1995; Axtmann 1997; Holton 1998). Thus as Holton (1998, p. 157) contends, "in this way, one may speak of the globalization of particularism, that is, of the model of nationhood as the embodiment of the specific claims of particular groups with a discrete history and identity of their own". The "particularization" of nation building invariably must be understood as itself a response to globalization.

Nation-state building is often defined as a "set of historical, institutionalized and affective processes that seeks to link heterogeneous populations together and forge their loyalty to and identity with a concept of a nation" (Schiller and Fouron 1999, p. 132). The forging of loyalty to and identity with the nation-state is quite a recent development in Singapore. Singapore was granted limited self-rule by the British in 1959. In order to secure complete autonomy, the ruling government led by the PAP joined a merger with the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. However, after two years Singapore was expelled from the merger. Thus on 9 August 1965, Singapore became an independent nation-state. Through the course of these events, it was the "state" which preceded and was instrumental to the development of the idea of a Singapore "nation". In other words, a "Singaporean nationalism" as such did not exist and had to be forged from above by the government through various nation-building projects.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, the objective of nation building was to bring together the heterogeneous immigrant population of

Singapore under a common and collective banner of the nation-state. The government hoped that through this process a distinctly Singaporean identity would evolve and that the population would identify with the nation. Later, the government feared that Singaporeans were becoming too "Westernized" and losing their "Asian" identity. It responded strongly by asserting and defending Singapore's identity as an Asian nation. It began promoting Confucian/Asian values as a counter-discourse against Western ideas of modernity. Singapore's territorially delineated national identity gave way to the articulation of a broad regional-based "Asian" identity (Chapter 2). By the early 1990s, the Singapore government began to realize that as a city-state it needed to embrace the world as its hinterland. The drive to globalize Singapore began in earnest with the government promoting and representing the city-state as a cosmopolitan global city (Chapters 3 and 4).

So the construction of national identity was largely driven by the state and not, as in much of the colonized world, by grassroots movements and supported by the population at large. The features of the modern Western nation-states in contemporary societies are: that power is shared; rights to participate in government are legally or constitutionally defined; representation is wide, state power is fully secular and the boundaries of national sovereignty are clearly defined (Hall 1984, pp. 9-10). The Singaporean "state" has most of these features, in that a democratically elected government runs the country, it is a secular state, and its territorial boundaries are clearly defined. However the hegemony of the dominant order (represented by the PAP) is rarely contested. As Yao (2001, p. 5) argues:

[I]n spite of their recent histories, nation-states in Southeast Asia are endowed with awesome coercive power to impose their iron will on their societies. In this context, state power is not merely an abstract entity but a sharp reality which permeates everyday experiences. From the time we pick up the morning paper, the moment we turn on the radio or television, the state is there with its busy pronouncements of another achievement of economic and national development, of another victorious crushing of political dissent which threatens national security or misleads the public about the doing of the government. Thus, those of us in Southeast Asia may be forgiven for overstating, out of experience and habit, the totalizing and systematic quality of the state and its power.

Yao's overview of state power and the role of states in Southeast Asia applies to Singapore. The PAP government has held power since 1959

with little effective opposition. The PAP maintains its political and popular legitimacy by constantly claiming to represent the collective interests of the nation. It has been peculiarly effective in repressing and silencing any form of dissent as undermining the "national interest". Democratic elections are held once in every five years in Singapore. These elections have been marked by a small and weak political opposition, gaining little success. The PAP government has preserved its power primarily by delivering on its election promises, by securing continued economic growth and security, and investing in public housing, education, healthcare and social security (Quah 1990; Chua and Kuo 1991; Brown 1998).

This is not to suggest that the PAP government has absolute power. Certainly, the PAP is frequently faced with a range of social and cultural challenges in its day-to-day running of the government. However as Birch (1993, p. 75) argues "within Singapore the very maintenance of a discourse of crisis is one of the main strategies adopted by the Singapore government to maintain its ideological control, anchor its people to the nation and create a climate of domestic uncertainty about the fragility of the state and the economy". The discourse of crisis varies in form and substance and refers to things as various as external threats (for example, the impact of Westernization on Singapore's Asian cultural traditions) and "inappropriate" social behaviour such as littering in public places and not flushing after using public toilets (see, for example, Birch 1993; Heng and Devan 1992; Clements 1999). Typically, these "crises" are represented by the state as a threat to Singapore's national survival or interests. In generating this discourse, the state is able to make swift changes to its policies and mobilize the full support of the population for its cause. At the same time, however, the frequent staging of social and cultural threats in discourses of crisis not only highlights some of the anxieties facing the PAP government to its continued dominance and legitimacy but also, in spite of its success, its structural vulnerability is best illustrated when Singapore is faced with external threats which are beyond the control of the ruling party.

The aim in this book is to explore the ways in which the Singapore state has been engaging with the challenges posed by global processes. Of particular interest are the strategies and policy initiatives undertaken by the state to resolve and overcome some of these challenges. Within this context, I shall explore how the relationship between global and national concerns is being constructed and played out by the state. To do

this, I have divided the book into five chapters around the following themes: history and nation-building; challenging Western modernity; globalizing the nation and establishing a national home; creating a Singaporean cosmopolitanism and identity; and affect and belonging amongst Singaporeans.

In focusing on these themes, my aim is not simply to develop a critique of the state and its policies but to highlight the critical shifts in the national imagining of the global. In looking at the construction of the Singapore nation-state as a bounded and contained entity through to its present re-imagining as a global city (both in public discourse and representation), I shall be concerned with the national question in an increasingly globalized world. While the first sections of the book focus primarily on government policy and representations of the nation, the closing chapter draws extensively on surveys and interviews with Singaporeans which asked them to reflect on their experiences and understandings of national identity and questions of belonging.

OUTLINE OF BOOK

This book draws on several key government policy vision documents and official discourses. They include: the White Paper on *Shared Values* (1991); *The Next Lap* (1991), *Singapore 21* (1999), the *Renaissance City Report* (2000) and *Remaking Singapore* (2003). These policy documents were issued within the space of a decade and were responses to key events, including the rise of the Newly Industrialized Economies of Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the subsequent economic meltdown triggered by the Asian economic crisis in 1997. They contain the policy visions of the PAP government for Singapore throughout the 1990s and the new millennium.

I begin, in Chapter 1, by looking at the ways in which nation-building has shaped the history and construction of the Singaporean nation-state. In particular, I map the ascendancy of the PAP government and trace its political ideology of nation-building. I explore this initial phase of nation-building which centred on the formation of national institutions and a range of programmes instituted by the government to ensure the creation of a Singapore nation, and I consider how local academics have approached the question of national identity. Out of these reflections I argue the merits of a critical transnational perspective in exploring Singapore's national response to globalization. This perspective sets the theoretical tone for the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 deals with the Asian values debate that rose to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with the rise of the Newly Industrialized Economies of Asia. In Singapore, the government became concerned that Singaporeans were becoming too "Westernized". To counter this social change, the government initiated a policy of "Asianizing" Singaporeans. The Asian values debate marked the beginning of the government's concern with issues of cultural globalization. In this chapter I assess the dimensions of the Asian values debates, the government's response and its eventual deployment of the discourse of "New Asia" as means of mediating the global and the local and tradition and modernity.

In Chapter 3, I deal with the third phase of Singaporean nation-building. Here, I consider a number of specific government policy initiatives between 1991 and 2003 aimed at transforming Singapore into a global city, on the one hand, while addressing the twin economic and cultural challenges of globalization, on the other. The policy initiatives I explore are: *Singapore: The Next Lap*, *Singapore 21: Making Our Best Home* and *Remaking Singapore*. These policies all situate the future success of Singapore in a global context, yet recognize that this brings cultural challenges with it in terms of maintaining a population committed to the national cause. In this chapter, I show how these policies attempt to reconcile some of the dilemmas facing Singapore as it becomes more globalized through programmes which seek to establish the necessary affective building blocks to provide Singaporeans with the feeling of being at "home" in Singapore.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to arts, cultural and urban redevelopment policies in Singapore. In this chapter, I explore the government's renewed interest since the late 1990s, in transforming Singapore into a cosmopolitan global city. I critically analyse the governmental logic underpinning this strategy and tease out some of its contradictions and implications on creating a Singaporean national identity.

Chapter 5 draws on research data gathered from an email survey, an internet discussion forum, newspaper reports and individual interviews, and it focuses on the responses of Singaporeans to issues of national identity and belonging within the context of globalization.¹⁰ The internet discussion forum that I monitored is called the *Straits Times Interactive Chat* (STIC).¹¹ This website is a Singapore-based internet discussion forum and it is linked to the electronic version of the *Straits Times*, Singapore's major English language newspaper. The issues and questions posted for discussions are topical and as such they serve as

an informal measure of the prevailing mood of Singaporeans on ongoing debates and issues. In particular, when I was monitoring the internet forum between August 2000 and December 2002 several of the discussion topics were concerned with the consequences of globalization for Singapore. I also conducted an e-mail survey between June and December 2001. A questionnaire was e-mailed to seventy voluntary recipients in Singapore. In this survey, I asked participants twenty-five short questions pertaining to national identity, the globalization of Singapore and belonging.¹²

I will also introduce responses from interviews that I conducted between January and April 2002 with ten Singaporeans currently residing in Sydney, Australia.¹³ These interviewees left Singapore in the mid-1990s and are now permanent residents of Australia. They do not intend to return to Singapore but have retained feelings and attachments to Singapore. They thus represent a small sample of a growing number of Singaporeans who have chosen to leave Singapore to settle elsewhere. I consider the reasons for their relocation and their present relationship with Singapore.

Chapter 5 considers the question of affect, belonging and identification with the nation. Through an analysis of Singaporean chat room discussions, newspaper reports, surveys, and a series of in-depth interviews, I consider how Singaporean citizens relate to the kinds of discourses on national identity presented by the government, and more broadly how they are responding to the forces of globalization in their own lives.

While the impact of globalization on the role and function of the nation-state has received substantial scholarly attention, nation-states' responses and their strategies to manage various globalizing forces have received little attention. In this light, the book in sum, examines the specific ways in which the Singapore nation-state deals with the major challenges of economic and cultural globalization, especially in the 1990s. A key challenge for the Singaporean state is how to reconcile the contradictory demands posed by globalization on the real and perceived need to maintain internal national unity on the one hand, and the global economic and other pressures which subvert this very emphasis on unity and coherence, on the other. Arguably most nation-states today face this dilemma, but the Singapore case is an extremely suitable starting point for its analysis, because the Singaporean state has always been explicitly interventionist in both economic and cultural terms in its management of the population and of national development.

Notes

1. The term "ecumene" refers to a "region of persistent cultural interaction and exchange" (Kopytoff cited in Hannerz 1989, p. 66). In this sense, the global ecumene refers to a world where cultural connections and relationships are becoming a norm.
2. The use of the term "globalization" as a theoretical concept is much disputed. A survey of the literature on the question of what globalization is, reveals that commentators are far from agreed on its nature, impact or possible outcomes, let alone its definition. Nevertheless the features of globalization, to cite Waters (1995) are: *increasing speed and volume* of transnational flows (the greatly accelerated possibility of movement of large volumes of goods, people and information); *shrinking space* (the freeing of spatial constraints through instantaneous flows via new communication technologies); *permeable borders* (political and geographical boundaries are becoming porous and nation-states more interconnected with one another); and *reflexivity* (peoples' orientation to the world manifests itself in contradictory ways as locals and cosmopolitans).
3. There is now an emerging sense of "the world as a single place", a world or global culture, "created through an increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (Hannerz 1996, p. 102, see also Featherstone 1995; Robertson 1995; Tomlinson 1999). While these authors acknowledge the significance of an increased sense of global interconnectedness, they argue that this process should not be seen as a totalizing logic. In other words, it would be wrong to assume that the process of globalization will decidedly spell the end of local cultures and that a single and homogeneous global culture will prevail. Rather than conceiving the global and local as a dichotomy, these authors argue that they must be understood as inextricably bound together. Any approach which insists on maintaining the global/local polarity is problematic (Massey 1994; Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997; Smith 2001). Instead there is a growing consensus that the global and local are "two faces of the same movement from one epoch of globalization" (Hall 1991, p. 27). Connected to these insights, some writers have drawn attention to certain "deglobalizing" processes (Hannerz 1996) arguing that global compression and the intensity of global flows have generated "nationalistic, ethnic and fundamentalist reactions often entailing a strong assertion of local cultures" (Featherstone 1995, p. 93). The assertion of localism or bounded locality expressed through a wide range of real or imagined affiliations has been explored by Featherstone (1995), Hannerz (1996), Castells (1996) and Appadurai (1996). There is of course the other ongoing theoretical interest that celebrates notions of hybridity, syncretism and the emergence of "third cultures" (Featherstone 1995) to dislodge the

notion of fixity of identity and which reinforces the view of culture as a process, as always in translation. As Appadurai (1996, p. 43) points out "the critical point is that both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterized by radical disjunctures between different sorts of flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctures". Edward Soja's idea of a "critical thirding" has emerged as a preferred mode of analysing the "glocal" precisely because not only does it debunk the range of polarities that circulate within the framework of globalization but it also seeks to offer a more complex picture of the contemporary global cultural landscape (see also Hall 1992). However, when such an approach is primarily aimed at locating "hybridized and glocalized movements and practices that recombine abstract flows and concrete places, opening up new and different real-and-imagined spatialities of resistance and contention at multiple scales" (Soja 2000, p. 215), it tends to overlook particular local combinations which may not always be resistive. As Dirlik (1997b, p. 85) cautions us, "in its promise of liberation, localism may also serve to disguise oppression and parochialism". At the same time, others like Kevin Robins (1991, p. 36) argue that "it may well be that, in some cases, the new global context is recreating a sense of place and sense of community in very positive ways, giving rise to an energetic cosmopolitanism in certain localities". It is clear therefore that the global-local nexus is not straightforwardly generating two parallel universes, one global one local.

4. In his article "Patriotism and Its Futures", Appadurai (1996, p. 176) argues that "as populations become deterritorialized and *incompletely nationalized*, as nations splinter and recombine, as states face intractable difficulties in the task of producing "the people", transnations are the most important social sites in which the crises of patriotism are played out" [emphasis mine]. The context of Appadurai's argument comes from a combination of changes that began to take place in the late 20th century. With the ever increasing flow and movement of people across national borders either voluntary or under the pretext of internal unrest, economic migration, collapse of the state (for example, the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia) and likewise with new arrivals to places like the United States, Britain, and Europe, the emergence of "transnations" and transnationalism is here to stay. For Appadurai, it is at these sites — amongst people of the diaspora, exilic and transnational communities — where a new form of nationalism is beginning to blossom creating a plethora of conflicting struggles for and against particular nationalisms. See also Smith and Guarnizo (1999).
5. A similar view is expressed by Anthony Smith (1991, pp. 143, 144) who notes that the idea of the nation is both "ubiquitous and pervade[s] the life of individuals and communities in most spheres of activity. In the cultural

sphere, national identity is revealed in a whole range of assumptions and myths, values and memories, as well as in language, law, institutions, and ceremonies. Socially, the national bond provides the most inclusive community, the generally accepted boundary within which social intercourse normally takes place and the limit for distinguishing the "outsider". The nation may also be seen as the basic unit of moral economy, in terms both of territory and of resources and skills".

6. On this point, see for example, political economist Linda Weiss's (1997) essay where she argues that the notion of the powerless state is fundamentally misleading. She points out that globalization theorists frequently ignore the adaptability of states, their differential capacity and the enhanced importance of state power in the new international environment in their consideration of the predisposition of the nation-state under globalization. Weiss (1997, p. 20) reveals that evidence from Japan and Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan indicates that strong states — that is, those with fairly firm control over socio-economic goal setting and robust domestic linkages — are acting increasingly as catalysts for the "internationalization" strategies of corporate actors and often facilitating the changes identified as "globalization".
7. There are of course many studies that examine how global managers of capital and multinational corporations develop strategies to enable the uninterrupted flow of capital across the globe. Terms such as "think global, act local", "glocalization" (Robertson 1992) and "global localism" (Dirlik 1997b) are used to describe how global capital flows adapt to local conditions and are able to flow freely across national borders.
8. Smith and Guarnizo's (1999) case study on "transnationalism from below" examines the ways in which the governments of the Philippines, Guatemala and Grenada are facilitating their respective labour diasporas through revised immigration policies and providing dual residency is a case in point. Another example would be the granting of dual citizenship. See also, for example, Hirst and Thompson (1996) on governance and the nation-state.
9. In Massey's view, different social groups and individuals are positioned in very distinct ways in relation to the flows and interconnections that constitute the "globalization" of capital and culture (Massey 1994).
10. The names of the participants in the e-mail survey and interview have been changed to ensure anonymity.
11. Throughout Chapter 5 the messages from the *Straits Times Interactive Chat* are followed by the name of the author (this is usually a codename) and the date when the message was posted.
12. The participants for this Internet survey were recruited through existing contacts in Singapore. More than 75 per cent of the survey forms sent out were returned fully completed.
13. Through my involvement in a migrant community organization (the Australian Malaysia and Singapore Association) I met many Singaporeans who had

migrated to Sydney and was able to recruit from this group ten participants for interviews. The ten participants were aged between 25 and 45, and all had left Singapore in the mid-1990s. The criterion for selecting these ten people was that they were new arrivals and therefore were representative of Singaporeans leaving Singapore in recent times — that is, in the decade of globalization — and their deliberations are central to the on-going debate in Singapore over the rise in the numbers of Singaporeans migrating overseas.