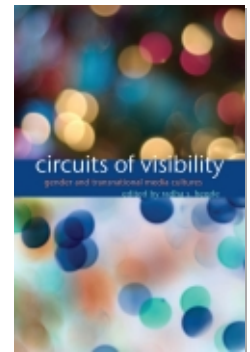14. Doing Cultural Citizenship in the Global Media Hub: Illiberal Pragmatics and Lesbian Consumption Practices in Singapore

14   **Doing Cultural Citizenship in the Global Media Hub**

Illiberal Pragmatics and Lesbian Consumption Practices in Singapore

Audrey Yue

The recent development of a global media hub in Singapore has enabled the emergence of a queer public culture despite the illegality of homosexuality. State-funded gay films, subsidized theater plays, Internet portals, and nightclubs are part of the new spaces and practices that have been direct beneficiaries of this policy initiative. In a city-state such as Singapore, cultural citizenship is contested through the way sexuality functions as a technology for the creative economy. While the government has mobilized sexuality as a policy tool to promote cultural liberalization, gays and lesbians have also seized on these practices to claim their right to produce and participate in public culture.

This chapter examines how lesbians "do" citizenship and carve out modes of expression through their consumption that allow them to fit in, use, and twist the governmental framing of media environments. The critical focus on governance will show how new sexual and gendered formations are produced in and through the developments of cultural and creative industrial policies. Singapore lesbians negotiate a nonnormative sexuality through the resistant and complicit practices of what I call the illiberal pragmatics of cultural and media policies. At the national level, their participation in public life shows the intensity of social networks and indicates strong civic engagement. At the transnational level, social capital is used to bridge global, diasporic, and inter-Asian cultural flows. Across these flows, lesbians' media consumption practices evince alternative rather than Western homonormative queer tastes, combining queer globalization, diasporic queer cosmopolitanism, and inter-Asian queer proximities. The global media hub produces a queer Singaporean identity without assimilating into the Western liberal discourse of homosexual rights. For lesbians, mediated networks have opened up new ways of making claims to and contesting cultural citizenship, as well as participating in trans/national life.

In the Global Media Hub

Singapore's strategic location between Asia and Europe has marked its symbolic and material presence as a hub for capital flows and postmodern consumption.

Fig. 14.1. Singapore's Chinatown riverside arts and nightlife hub, with the iconic Merlion and the Esplanade: Theatres on the Bay. (The photograph, entitled "Esplanade," was taken by Northernstar, from *Uniquely Singapore: Singapore in Pixels*, http://www.visitsingapore.com/pixels/)

Since its postcolonial independence in 1965, it has transformed from a transit for labor and food produce into a regional base for manufacturing, transportation, and multinational corporations.[1] In the 1980s, it began to establish itself as a global media hub, offering a knowledge-based economy and world-class digital infrastructure.[2] The arrival of international media production companies and venture capital led to a nationwide media restructuring that worked in conjunction with the service and consumer economy.[3] In 2002, the knowledge economy was consolidated into the creative industry, and media developments included the creation of a global media city, export of locally made content, and the growth of the media talent base through education.

Critical discussions of Singapore as a global media hub typically focus on the way technology is used for internal social control and external regional branding. While the embrace of digital media has expanded business opportunities, it has also allowed the authoritarian state to increase surveillance and suppress the civil society.[4] The cosmopolitan appeals to Eurocentric art and an English-language audience, while anachronistic, still remain hegemonic in the region.[5] These tensions problematize the hub's place-making capacity to "enhance individual potential, link communities locally and globally, and finally, improve the quality of life."[6] Celebrating the livability of the place through postmodern consumption, such strategies do not consider social stratification, inclusion, and cohesion.[7]

Aihwa Ong describes Singapore's hub strategy as replicating a "baroque economy," with its different clusters and multileveled scales of production.[8] As capital

is used to leverage international collaborations to privilege knowledge workers and network participants, neoliberal governance has "reconfigur[ed the] relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality."[9] In this strategy, neoliberalism is mobilized as technologies of governance and self-governance, and it holds the potential to create new forms of inclusion and exclusion.

A few characteristics of the media hub emerge: the hub is engineered by neoliberal governance and uses market conditions as technologies of measurement for citizenship; it provides a milieu to critically consider the quality of life for the local population; it is a place of contradictory local/global cultural consumption; and it is also a hegemonic state that strictly controls social cohesion and suppresses the civil society. These characteristics are further complicated when sexuality is considered.

Cultural Citizenship and the Illiberal Pragmatics of Sexuality

As an authoritarian state that considers homosexuality a crime, creative industrial policies have paradoxically used sexuality as a tool to lure foreign talent and companies. The impetus for this strategy was drawn from Richard Florida's thesis that businesses will flock to cities that are tolerant, technology intensive, and talent rich.[10] Adopting Florida's thesis, the Singapore government has strategically used sexuality as a technology for cultural policy.[11] Elsewhere I have argued that sexuality is inscribed in the regulatory frameworks of the creative media city through new immigration policies that allow gay foreign talent to freely migrate for employment, new employment policies in the public service that do not discriminate against out homosexuals, and urban-planning and town-rejuvenation policies that encourage gay and lesbian businesses to cultivate a nighttime economy that enhances the vibrancy of the city.

These developments underpin what I have critically framed as the illiberal pragmatics of sexuality,[12] which suggests an illogical mode of governance that treats homosexuality through the pragmatics of illiberality. While homosexuality is continually policed at the level of everyday life, it is also pragmatically encouraged by the neoliberal demands of economic affluence and societal liberalization. In recent years, in spite of the increased police raids in gay saunas and the banning of public gay parties, creative queer cultures, from popular literature, the arts, broadcasting, and cinema, have flourished as sites of cultural production and consumption. More than simply a mode of commonsensical pragmatism, Singapore's illiberal pragmatics of sexuality, I argue, involves an active engagement with cultural politics and criticism.[13] For gays and lesbians in Singapore, this engagement

Fig. 14.2. Singapore's third gay and lesbian public party, "Nation: 03," held on August 8, 2003, at Sentosa island, where forty-five hundred people celebrated Singapore's thirty-eighth National Day. (The photograph was taken by Sylvia Tan for *Fridae*, from "Fridae Photo Vault," http://www.fridae.com/fotos/ fotos20030808_2.php)

with pragmatism, coupled with the contradictory logic of the illiberal, has enabled them to actively use, fit in, and twist the governmental framing of culture.

The global media hub provides a rich arena to critically consider how the new cultures of consumption have impacted the quality of life of local gays and lesbians. What do the consumption practices of gays and lesbians reveal about their desire for acknowledgment, recognition, and inclusion? If the illegality of homosexuality has excluded them from the domain of social and political rights, what can their participation in the cultural sphere reveal about claims to citizenship in a neoliberal state? Here, I suggest cultural citizenship as an alternative framework to consider the ways in which gays and lesbians, as minority groups, make claims to culture, identity, and belonging. As sexual citizenship (the right of a citizen to a sexual subjecthood) does not exist in Singapore, gays and lesbians assert their identity not through sexual emancipation but by actively participating in cultural life.

Cultural understandings of citizenship are concerned not only with "'formal' processes, such as who is entitled to vote and the maintenance of an active civil society, but crucially with those whose cultural practices are disrespected, marginalized, stereotyped and rendered invisible."[14] These concerns highlight difference by emphasizing the "redistribution of resources" and a politics of "recognition and responsiveness."[15] In cultural policy studies, these conceptual developments

are pragmatically applied to cultural institutions as key sites for facilitating the public sphere, engineering social conduct, and remaking new identities.[16] From art policies to urban rejuvenation strategies, the role of citizens as producers and consumers in shaping material culture is emphasized.[17] For Singapore lesbians, the global media hub has provided a mediated transnational conjuncture to consider the conditions of possibility for a certain type of public participation in national life. As Aihwa Ong attests, cultural citizenship is a dual process "of self-making and being made in relation to nation-states and transnational processes," shaped by "negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory."[18]

Singapore lesbians perform cultural citizenship with resistant and complicit practices enacted through consumption. By focusing on the "doing" of cultural citizenship in an online survey with lesbians in Singapore about their practices of cultural participation and media consumption, I demonstrate cultural policy's pragmatic approach to cultural citizenship. A critical engagement with the "doing" of cultural citizenship among lesbians in Singapore reveals how everyday practices repeat and rework the illiberal pragmatic logic of neoliberal governance in Singapore.

"Doing" Cultural Citizenship

In a context in which the individual self is celebrated and the space of the political is kept invisible or compromised, how does one access the social fabric of lesbian life and understand the nature of lesbians' participation in the cultural life of the city? Ironically, it is the very tool of the marketplace—the survey—that provides access and a point of departure. Surveys measuring audience reception or the forms of cultural practices are used in market and social sciences research as instruments to truth. A technology designed for population surveillance, surveys are now widely used to tap into lifestyle trends and consumption patterns. They have become commonplace in the current climate, which values the individual and champions the public display of private selves. People not only readily and anonymously open up areas of their life; they are also socialized into survey instrumentation. Here, I read the survey and the responses received as a critical text that maps the complexities surrounding the quality of life, social capital, and cultural participation.

The survey was posted through e-mail and forum postings on the Red-queen e-mailing list, the Herstory forum, and the Sayoni forum, three of the largest and most popular e-lists for lesbians in Singapore.[19] The questions in the survey capture separate but related domains of life, such as family, job, leisure, and

networks, in order to map how respondents perceive the satisfaction they derive from these aspects of their life. As the following analysis will show, the distinction of domains is increasingly blurred in the current culture of networked individualism that has produced new practices of social and cultural conditioning. Since cultural citizenship in the neoliberal context is assessed and evaluated by the performance of consuming, this logic frames the three market-driven frames of access that are incorporated in the survey: quality of life, cultural participation, and social capital. These framings provide a space to describe a contested and transnational lesbian public culture.

1. Quality of Life and Singapore Lesbians

The concept of "quality of life" (QOL) has gained popularity in recent years as a result of cultural-planning and urban-rejuvenation developments that emphasize the livability of a place.[20] In the survey, it served as a critical method of access and offered an instant portrait of lesbian lives as trends monitored in the urban structures of Singapore. The majority of the respondents are between the ages of eighteen and forty, with the dominant group in their mid- to late twenties. Chinese respondents predominate over Eurasians, Indians, and Malays, reflecting the Chinese hegemony in multicultural Singapore. Less than half of the respondents have tertiary education, and most are in full-time employment and earn less than five thousand Singapore dollars a month.[21] Although they work across professions in accounting, computer technology, engineering, hospitality, and sales, the creative arts industry dominates, with one in five respondents employed in design and media entertainment. While most live in public housing, more than a third live with their families, and only eight live with their partners.

These indices construct the profile of a working-class group of lesbians who are tertiary-educated, predominantly employed in the creative and service industries, and live with their families. This profile contradicts the earlier criticisms of the cultural hub as English-centric and promoting only a particular type of middle-class cosmopolitanism. As the site of the survey—the Internet—reveals, network access has enabled working-class lesbians to bridge the social stratifications that had earlier prevented their access to culture and information. The global media hub has also provided opportunities for working-class lesbians to work in the creative and service industries. Its promotion of a bohemian lifestyle and an attendant culture of flexibility suit the queer creative worker well, especially butch tomboys, who prefer the androgynous casualness of dress and disposition.[22] In concert with the way gays and lesbians in Asia negotiate their sexual coming out by not leaving the blood family, lesbians who live at home continue to conform to the communitarian demands of Confucian filial piety. Despite the

potentially erosive impact of the hub's transnational flows, family values feature strongly. This is evident in the responses to questions about life satisfaction, overall well-being, and identity indicators.

Less than half of the respondents are satisfied with their standard of living (e.g., housing, car, furniture, material possessions, leisure time, income). Although almost all are comfortable with their sexual orientation, half bemoan a lack of sexual freedom. While only some have experienced discrimination, most do not feel that they have independence to do what they want to do or that they are included by others. And if given the opportunity, most will emigrate. These patterns suggest the deep discontent felt by the lesbian respondents about their position and lack of acceptance in the larger structures of urban politics.

QOL refers to more than just the economic definition of "the capacities or opportunities to have a life of well-being"; it also relates to the ethics of a person's behavior and how this is evaluated in terms of making choices.[23] As societal constraints prevent lesbians in Singapore from achieving the functionings of a good life, they carve out modes of survival through the importance they place on social capital and cultural participation. This is evident, first and foremost, through the hierarchy of indicators they feel are important to their identity.

All of the respondents list "friendship" as the most important indicator of their identity, above family and financial satisfactions, and about half belong to some form of community or social network. The need for a social life is ranked higher than career advancement or a personal relationship. Sexuality and gender are also more important than ethnicity, religion, and nationality. Interestingly, this hierarchy departs from a recent study of the mainstream population, who rank the family first.[24] By placing friendships above family, Singapore lesbians rely on the cultivation of social networks to make claims to inclusion, participation, and attachment. They poach the generic practices of social networking that are promoted in contemporary media culture to negotiate sexuality within the dominant logic of family values, by appropriating the structures of networked individualism to carve out a personal life and sexual identity that is compartmentalized between work, family, and friends. Clearly, for political and social reasons, they resort to such compartmentalization for reasons that are quite different from those envisioned by the market. This appropriation reveals how neoliberal governance has also paradoxically created new practices of sexual negotiation. The low regard the respondents have for nationality and ethnicity also shows how the flows of the global media hub have produced transnational rather than national affiliations.

What emerges from this analysis is a profile of an urban and hip generation of working-class lesbians who are filial, network savvy, and transnational in their

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affiliations. These qualities are further evident in their participation in cultural activities and in the way these activities enable the formation of social networks.

2. Cultural Participation

Given global trend for states to flex to market demands, the notion of cultural participation problematizes the connections of cultural citizenship to diversity, lifestyle, identity, and ethical governance. Cultural participation studies measure "the realization of cultural citizenship"[25] as contingent on capacity (the economic and social capability to participate), competency (the cultural capital to participate), and taste (possessing the shared cultural values to participate). For Singapore lesbians, it provides a critical pathway to examine how state-induced participation creates resistant identities that are complicit with and antagonistic to the new structures of neoliberal governance. In the survey, cultural participation is evaluated through the time devoted to lifestyle and leisure, the use of media and communication technologies, and participation in the nighttime economy and in arts and cultural activities.

The respondents' weekly leisure time is mostly spent with friends at a hawker center, restaurant, shopping mall, cafe, pub, bar, or club. These places have developed as a result of the creative economy's industrial policies that have supported the growth of the global media city. Hawker centers, usually located in the suburban heartlands, are food courts offering cheap local and regional food, while restaurants are usually more up-market, air-conditioned eateries serving European cuisine and located in shopping centers or bohemian clusters. Eating is a significant practice in the Singaporean lifestyle, touted by academics and tourism campaigns alike as the country's favorite pastime after shopping. Bars, pubs, and clubs are located in the inner-city creative enclaves of the Chinatown riverside and around the famous shopping precinct of Orchard Road. Bars and pubs are usually locally owned small businesses catering to different-language-speaking clienteles. They range from do-it-yourself retro chic to kitsch karaoke joints, and class distinction is measured through the quality and cost of the beer on tap. Dance clubs such as the Ministry of Sound franchise offer memberships and are more engineered large-scale sites of spectacle located in or near international hotels. As with other global dance clubs and parties, celebrity DJs usually stop over for a quick stint on their way to Bangkok, Hong Kong, or Tokyo.

Although hawker centers have been progressively "cleaned up" in the state's modernization of social hygiene, bars and clubs are more recent developments that have flourished in the new agenda of the creative city. Located in the creative media and tourism hub, they add to the vibrancy of a nighttime economy and

create opportunities for new local entrepreneurships and joint global partnerships. For lesbians lacking private space in the family home and facing the high costs of rentals and homeownerships in land-scarce Singapore, these venues have shaped their lifestyle. Shopping, going to the movies, dining out at restaurants, and hanging out at cafes and bars make up the most common monthly leisure activities for these lesbians, and more than half engage in these activities with their gay and lesbian friends. Cultural participation clearly provides the requisite literacy to cultivate, embody, and perform lesbian sexuality. This is further evident in their media participation.

More than half the respondents watch gay and lesbian films at least once a month at home through online purchase or Internet download.[26] Most watch for a sense of identification, belonging, and support for the community. Here, the access to and spectatorship of queer cinema demonstrate the global media hub's contradictory logic of flow and control. While most of these films are banned from theatrical release, they are accessible on the Internet, a medium that is itself a policy outcome of the nationwide implementation of digital infrastructure. Lesbian film spectatorship has created a subcultural group that depends on media for its community; it has also shaped the conditions for an alternative queer transnationalism. In popular films and television series watched in the past six months—*The L Word*, *Saving Face* (Alice Wu, 2004), and *Spider Lilies* (Zero Chou, 2007)—global, diasporic, and regional queering practices are both incorporated and indigenized.

The L Word is a successful American television drama series hailed as the first in mainstream television for the lesbian community. Its popular appeal to Singapore lesbians shows the impact of global queering on local communities in non-Western societies. Like the cultural and media imperialism thesis, the globalization of queer cultures—global queering—has resulted in "the internationalization of gay, lesbian, and transgender identities and cultures."[27] While the series has been criticized for the sexual "Westernization of the Rest," its impact is evident in the local incorporation of its ideologies. Although banned from television broadcast in Singapore, it is still the most popularly watched DVD television series in the community. Despite the illegality of homosexuality and the fact that most lesbians live in high-rise apartment blocks with their parents, the anachronistic West Hollywood shared-household lifestyles of a bunch of professional lesbians, transgenders, and their friends are hailed as ideal lesbian identities. The series has themed local club nights. Two Queens Party, a lesbian event-management company, regularly screens the episodes in lesbian bars; for those who do not own the DVD and even those who have already watched it on their own, these fortnightly screenings present a collective opportunity to get together and cultivate a communal sense of belonging. The series's famous dating chart,

kept by the protagonist, Alice, was also used as a motif for a January 2009 lesbian party, with the slogan "Are you L enough?" These spectatorship practices mediate a community and materialize a set of norms that replicate the nonmonogamous and pro-same-sex-marriage lifestyles proffered by the protagonists of the show. While the series's popularity shows how the clandestine Singapore viewership aspires to Western homonormative values, other film spectatorship practices reveal equally significant roles played by diasporic queer cultures.

Saving Face is an Asian American film about the "coming out" of a Chinese American doctor to her traditionalist mother. It was screened in a local multiplex and used as a fundraiser for various HIV/AIDS events. Contrary to the queer globalization of *The L Word*, *Saving Face* shows how diasporic identity is negotiated in Singapore. In Western queer Asian diasporas, gays and lesbians encounter the double marginalization of sexual and cultural difference from heteronormative mainstream and ethnic communities. The diaspora's ex-centric location, both culturally and sexually, enables diasporic queers to challenge the heteronormativities of the homeland and hostland, as well as local ethnicities. This tactical location of the ex-centric is also evident in Singapore, where postcolonial legacies and global flows have Westernized the population as much as the ideology of Asian values, initiated in the 1990s as a defense against the infiltration of Western values, has Asianized them. Like the queer diaspora, Singapore's queer culture is culturally and sexually ex-centric, a Western and Asian cosmopolitan hybrid. In such a context, the values promoted by the film's Westernized but well-educated and filial Chinese lesbian protagonist resound with the values of many lesbians in Singapore who have grown up in a rapidly developing country built by the contradictions of Westernization and indigenization. Like the protagonist, Singapore lesbians are not only Westernized; they also uphold the Asian values of filial piety. These similarities show queer Singapore, like the queer Asian diaspora, as a potential site that contests colonial heteronormativity and local patriarchy. It also reveals the global media hub as a space for the flows of diasporic queer cosmopolitanism.

Spider Lilies is a Taiwanese teenage lesbian melodrama about a webcam girl who falls in love with her tattooist, who used to be her old school flame.[28] The film belongs to the queer Asian genre of schoolgirl lesbian romance that revolves around teenage girls and their same-sex experiences in high school and that are usually set in the present context of the college or told as a flashback story by the protagonist.[29] The popularity of the film shows how Taiwanese high school lesbian cultures are also shared across the inter-Asian region through practices of cultural proximity such as the similarities of language (Mandarin), adolescent queer memories, and cityscapes of developmental progress, alienation, and media trends.

In these films and television series, lesbian spectatorship practices construct the global media hub as a space of alternative flows, including queer globalization, diasporic queer cosmopolitanism, and inter-Asian queer proximities. These forces expose the contradictory logic of illiberal pragmatism; while encouraging media globalization and maintaining media censorship, neoliberal governance has inadvertently provided the conditions for an alternative transnationalism and the self-fashioning of an unofficial lesbian subculture.

Internet use by lesbians in Singapore further shows how technology has cleared a space for new localisms.[30] The most popular Web portals visited are Fridae, Herstory, Sayoni, and Two Queens Party. These local sites are not only important to maintaining personal networks and group participation; they also show how the illiberal pragmatics of sexuality is operationalized in the global media hub. These portals have mushroomed as a result of new information-technology policies that encourage the uptake of new media in all facets of work and everyday life, despite the illegality of homosexuality, the prohibition of registered gay and lesbian groups, and the banning of public and collective group gatherings. Their popularity demonstrates the global media hub as a space for indigenized lesbian practices and queer media entrepreneurships. Online, these websites function as expressive spaces for minority groups; by advertising offline local lesbian venues and events, they materialize and anchor new social spaces and cultural practices. As sites of alternative transnationalism, these officially banned portals and material practices show indigenization as a form of translocality—how local social spaces have changed, as a result of the impact of transnational forces such as those of global and regional queering. They also highlight neoliberalism's optimizing technologies of subjectivity and subjection. As self-enterprising and net-savvy citizens, lesbians and lesbian businesses participate in capital accumulation afforded by the hub's new consumption cultures. In these neoliberal spaces of subjection, they self-engineer an unofficial culture that provides new conditions for sexual belonging and identity.[31]

Lesbian nightlife in Singapore, similar to the translocal websites just discussed, has proliferated as a result of creative industrial policies in the media hub that provide rent subsidies to enterprising businesses to complement the necessary nighttime economy of any self-described "creative" cities. The creative cluster by the riverside in Chinatown and Tanjong Pagar has emerged as an unofficial queer precinct as a result of these initiatives. This zoned area has gay saunas, lesbian bars, queer nightclubs, gay- and lesbian-owned restaurants, and queer-friendly boutique hotels. The most popular lesbian nightspots are Alternative and Taboo, two English-speaking bars in Chinatown, followed by Cows and Coolies, a Chinese karaoke pub in Chinatown. Similar to the mainstream bars and clubs discussed earlier, lesbian bars and clubs are also differentiated accord-

Fig. 14.3. A punk segment from an annual "Butch Hunt"
competition final at Chinatown's Clarke Quay Gotham
Penthouse dance club on June 9, 2005. (Photographs
provided by the Butch Hunt competition organizers,
Herstory)

ing to language and customer base. English-language-speaking bars are usually frequented by overseas-educated university students, oft-traveled professionals who work for multinational companies, and Western expatriates. Regional migrant workers, small-business entrepreneurs, and service-industry personnel usually prefer Chinese-language karaoke pubs.

Two-thirds of the respondents frequently attend mainstream arts and cultural activities, and slightly less than half participate in gay and lesbian activities.[32] Some of the factors cited as preventing participation in gay and lesbian activities include being unaware of their existence, affordability, lack of time due to paid work, no public transport, no one to go with, fear of discrimination, and fear of feeling unwelcomed. These factors highlight the subterranean nature of the unofficial lesbian culture, the high costs of entertainment, and the long hours of work in the global media city. Exacerbated by the mainstream prohibition of homosexuality, lesbians are usually required to be "in the know," to be literate about subcultural activities despite the proliferation of bars, Web portals, and cultural events. Where a jug of beer can easily cost up to thirty U.S. dollars and working hours can last until ten at night six days a week, the bright queer lights of the global media hub are also as exclusionary as they have been inclusive. Increasingly, more hip venues situated in bohemian enclaves such as the old colonial quarters of Dempsey and Rochester Park are also only accessible by cars or taxis.

Clearly, the hub's new media and creative arts development policies have inadvertently created the conditions for an unofficial lesbian culture. This culture has also been constituted by the flows of queer globalization, diasporic queer cosmopolitanism, inter-Asian queer proximities, and new localisms. Its practices provide a high degree of personal identification for the individual and a collective sense of belonging to and support for the community. It is crucial to note how these practices generate social capital conducive to the participatory democracy of this marginalized community.

3. Social Capital

The social capital approach, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, has been applied in different contexts: "(a) as a source of social control; (b) as a source of family support; (c) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks."[33] A "by-product of cultural activities," social capital, according to Robert Putnam, refers to the skills in making cultural and social distinctions.[34] Key here is that participation breeds social capital, and social capital builds trust and reciprocity and cultivates social networks. The survey evaluates the duration of contact with others in various networks to consider how social networks enable social support and social

integration. The following analysis uses the three types of social capital identified by Putnam: bonding, bridging, and linking.

For Singapore lesbians, family networks are crucial in bonding social capital. Bonding social capital refers to "social networks that reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups."[35] Examples include bonds between family members and close friends that are good for getting by in life. Almost all the respondents say that their families are aware of their sexual orientation and that they are satisfied with their relationships to their families. The high priority placed on family (ranking second after friendship, as discussed earlier) indicates its importance to identity. Singapore lesbians "come out" not by leaving the biological family (as in the West) but by negotiating within the values promoted by the discourse of family values: social and economic reproduction and filial piety. This emphasis on the discourse of the family, rather than reinforcing the ideology of Asian values, shows how the social and economic value of the family has been reengineered to suit the self-regulating compliance of the neoliberal citizen.[36]

The social networks cultivated by lesbians demonstrate bridging social capital. Bridging social capital refers to "networks that are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages."[37] Examples include distant connections with acquaintances, groups, or social classes that are good for getting ahead in life. For minority lesbians, these networks are closely knit, formed with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate cohesion of sexual identity. Queer Internet consumption practices, discussed earlier, have enabled them to connect subculturally and transnationally across global, diasporic, and inter-Asian cultural flows. Participation in creative cultural activities has also expanded their local social networks. These practices not only generate enhanced information through increased networks of collaboration; they also extend network ties and the capacity for solidarity. All the respondents demonstrate that they have acquired high bridging social capital through media consumption and cultural participation: despite experiencing sexual discrimination and gender subordination, all unanimously claim a high level of support from and belonging to the community. For minority lesbians, bridging social capital adds to individual well-being and cultivates community development.

Lesbian cultural participation further links social capital. Linking social capital refers to relations of hierarchy with institutions of power. Consider, for example, the respondents' most frequented places in the past six months: Vivocity (shopping mall), Cathay Cineplax (shopping mall), Esplanade (a riverside theater and performing-arts venue), Chinatown (creative cluster), Holland Village (bohemian cluster), and Ministry of Sound (dance club). Consider, too, the most recent gay and lesbian cultural activity that the respondents have attended. Fourteen watched theater plays, one went to a queer poetry reading, one saw a photo

exhibition, three participated in the events organized by "IndigNation" as part of gay and lesbian pride month, and six attended support groups and talks. These places and venues are official cultural infrastructures that have been developed as part of the global media hub's "livable city" agenda, and most of these are creative precincts with gay- and lesbian-themed bars and clubs. Lesbian practices in these places engage official cultural institutions, goods, and services that are enabled by the government's pragmatic approach to the cultural economy. Even plays, poetry readings, or lesbian photo exhibitions are also events officially subsidized to add value to the creative media city. These consumption practices reflect how, despite the exclusion of homosexuality from heteronormative laws and cultural institutions, nonnormative sexuality is pragmatically negotiated by cultural policy that has aided the development of queer businesses and arts in recent years.

The intensity of social networks generated from the high rate of cultural participation reflects strong civic engagement.[38] For Singapore lesbians, cultural literacy is used as a platform for political advocacy. Activities such as attending gay and lesbian activities, participating at pride events, talks, or social gatherings, signing petitions about homosexuality, and donating or helping to organize a gay and lesbian event enables lesbians in Singapore to express their role as citizens. These activities and practices confer the right to marginal citizens to tell their stories and provide the capacity for subcultural groups to engage official institutions to expose power hierarchies and sexual inequalities. These practices of civic engagement reveal what Nick Couldry has outlined as "the quality of people's 'mediated' public connection."[39] He defines "quality" as the networks of social opportunities that become available from the public knowledge and information gained from cultural consumption. For minority lesbians, linking social capital problematizes the points of connections and disconnections in the cultures of citizenship to reveal not only their exclusion and subordination but also the different ways that "being" and "doing" lesbian has allowed them to actively intervene in the politics of culture.[40] These politics expose the claims to cultural citizenship and reveal the global media hub as a site of competing flows, contradictory policies, and alternative identities. For Singapore lesbians, it has enabled their participation in trans/national life and the assertion of their sexuality.

Conclusion

This chapter has read the market survey as a critical text to deconstruct the performance of cultural citizenship by minority lesbians in Singapore's global media hub. The hub has emerged as a result of a neoliberal governance that has adopted the demands of a creative economy and the market conditions for citizenship. While cultivating transnational media and capital flows and engineering new

competencies, it has also strictly enforced social cohesion and civil suppression. As a contradictory site of local/global consumption, it is a space for new inclusions and exclusions.

For the minority and unofficial urban lesbian subculture, the hub's media, cultural, and creative policy developments have constructed an illiberal logic of sexuality that has paradoxically enabled lesbians to pragmatically fashion a sense of their self and well-being. In such a city-state, working-class lesbians make claims to citizenship through their high rates of cultural participation. At the national level, they create strong social networks that are active in civic engagement. At the transnational level, they further cultivate social capital through diverse queer consumption. Despite the global media hub's normative flows, it has facilitated new mediated networks that allow lesbians to engage in participatory democracy and to create a local lesbian identity without assimilating into the liberal Western discourse of sexual rights and emancipation.

NOTES

1. Chia Siow Yue and Jamus Jerome Lim, "Singapore: A Regional Hub in ICT," in Seiichi Masuyama and Donna Vandenbrink, eds., *Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy: East Asia's Changing Industrial Geography* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 259–298; Clive Edwards, "Singapore: Reflections and Implications of Another Smart State," *Queensland Review* 10, no. 1 (May 2003): 53–69.

2. Mike Crang, "Singapore as an Informational Hub in a Space of Global Flows," *DISP* 154 (2003): 52–57.

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10. Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005). On criticisms of the way Singapore's policies follow this "institutional" trend, see Kai Wen Wong and Tim Bunnell, "'New Economy' Discourses and Spaces in Singapore: A Case Study of One-North," *Environment and Planning* 38 (2006): 69–83; Lily Kong, Chris Gibson, Louisa-May Khoo, and Anne-Louise Semple, "Knowledges of the Creative Economy: Towards a Relational

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11. Audrey Yue, "Hawking in the Creative City: Rice Rhapsody, Sexuality and the Cultural Politics of New Asia in Singapore," *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 365–380.

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13. Ibid., 156.

14. Nick Stevenson, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2003), 23.

15. Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism," in Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Miron, and Jonathan Xavier Inda, eds., *Race, Identity and Citizenship: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 255.

16. Toby Miller stresses the need to account for culture, policy, and citizenship through the political economy of television and popular culture, in *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); see also Toby Miller and George Yudice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage, 2002).

17. David Chaney, "Cosmopolitan Art and Cultural Citizenship," *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (2002): 151–174; Franco Bianchini and Jude Bloomfield, "Urban Cultural Policies and the Development of Citizenship: Reflections on Contemporary European Experience," *Culture and Policy* 7, no. 1 (1996): 85–113.

18. Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," in Torres, Miron, and Inda, *Race, Identity and Citizenship*, 262, 264.

19. Data were collected from April 14 to June 11, 2007. Fifty-six responded, and fifty-one were usable. The questions followed closely those used by Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison, and John Frow in *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

20. See, for example, David Phillips, *Quality of Life: Concept, Policy and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

21. In Singapore, five thousand Singapore dollars a month is the socioeconomic marker for the middle class.

22. On the dominant culture of doing butch in Singapore, see Yue, "Creative Queer Singapore," 157–158.

23. Joel Kupperman, *Ethics and Qualities of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

24. Ah Keng Kau, Jung Kwon, Tambyah Siok Kuan, and Soo Jiuan Tan, *Understanding Singaporeans: Values, Lifestyles, Aspirations and Consumption Behaviors* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2004), 219.

25. Catherine Murray, "Cultural Participation: A Fuzzy Cultural Policy Paradigm," in Caroline Andrew, Monica Gattinger, M. Sharon Jeannotte, and Will Straw, eds., *Accounting for Culture: Thinking through Cultural Citizenship* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 40.

26. Television consumption is omitted from the survey because of the strict censorship laws that prevent the broadcasting of gay- and lesbian-related content on free-to-air and subscription television.

27. Fran Martin, Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, and Audrey Yue, introduction to Fran Martin et al., eds., *AsiaPacificQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 6.

28. A webcam girl is a young woman, usually of college age, who performs live sex acts or chats in front of a web camera to an individual or group online audience for free or for a fee.

29. Asian lesbian films in this genre include *Blue Gate Crossing* (Chin-yen Yee, 2002), *Butterfly* (Yan yan Mak, 2004), *Memento Mori* (Tae-Yong Kim and Kyu-Dong Min, 1999), and *Tempting Heart* (Sylvia Chang, 1999), from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea.

30. Singapore lesbians are more e-oriented than is the mainstream population. Of my respondents, 94 percent reported Internet access, while only 59 percent have access in the mainstream population. For statistics on mainstream communities, see Kau et al., *Understanding Singaporeans*, 103–108.

31. On the new neoliberal technologies of optimization, see Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 6. On the indigenization of localization, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

32. This rate of 67 percent is higher than the reported 6 percent of the mainstream population who show an interest in arts and culture. For statistics on mainstream communities, see Kau et al., *Understanding Singaporeans*, 135–152.

33. Alejandro Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origin and Applications in Modern Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 9.

34. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). See also Bennett et al., *Accounting for Tastes*, 37.

35. Bennett et al., *Accounting for Tastes*, 22.

36. Ong discusses how neoliberalism has led to the demise of Asian values and the rise of an effervescent citizenship. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 164. On the new value of the neoliberal "queer" family in Singapore, see Yue, "Hawking in the Creative City," 372–373.

37. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22.

38. Henry Milner, *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work* (Hanover, NH: Tufts University Press, 2002), 18.

39. Nick Couldry, "Culture and Citizenship: The Missing Link," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2006): 330.

40. For more on "being" and "doing" lesbian in relation to Singapore's butch-femme cultures, see Yue, "Creative Queer Singapore," 157–158.