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Transient Mobility
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Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility

with Jonathan Tan

I have suggested throughout this book that respondents create social networks (friendship groups) with people who were in the same circumstance as them. So international students were friends with international students, exchange students become friends with other exchange students, foreign white-collar workers formed friendships with fellow non-local white collar professionals and working holiday makers became friendly with fellow backpackers. These social networks were determined primarily because of the specific common experience of being transient. Moreover, while nationality seemed to play a role in further determining the social networks of respondents, it was not a factor in making them become friends with other transients who were not in the same circumstance as them. For instance, in Australia working holidaymakers did not typically become friends with international students, while in Singapore international students would not be friends with foreign talent workers. This could be because of different experiences and intentions within the circumstance they were in, even though they were all transient migrants. The experiences of working holidaymakers were primarily focused around travel, with casual work used to support this, while international students' primary motive was study, with not all of them supporting themselves through casual work. Moreover, each group would meet future friends in specific places where those sharing their circumstance were likely to be found, such as in the workplace, accommodation and academic institutions. Even exchange students did not typically become friends with

international students, although both groups were students and likely to meet in the institutions they attended, albeit with students on exchange predominantly being overseas for a shorter period of time. Common motivations within their specific circumstance may well have determined why they did not include each other into their friendship networks. While both groups valued their overseas study experience, exchange students were much more likely than international students to be motivated by the foreign experience itself. International students, in the meantime, were motivated by their program of study and discipline (e.g. Bachelor of Commerce). It is these friendship networks that allow transient migrants to form communities which are centred around their circumstance. Yet this raises the question, do transient migrants become involved in other communities outside their particular circumstance?

While some respondents reported being involved in activities outside their study and working lives, such as sporting clubs and volunteer work, the most significant groups respondents belonged to were those pertaining to religion. Although there were a number of Muslim respondents, very few revealed whether they made friends with people from the mosque they attended or from the wider Muslim community connected to their place of worship. Those who did were men but their numbers were not significant. The Muslim women involved in this study noted that their faith was very important to them, especially during the time of Muslim festivities such as Ramadan and Eid. Moreover, Muslim women who attended face-to-face interviews all arrived wearing the hijab, a clear sign of the significance their faith held for them. Despite this, however, none of them stated that they were part of any Muslim community while in the host nation. There were a handful of Hindu respondents who stated that their faith was important to them, but they likewise admitted that they were not active members of any Hindu Temple or community within the host nation itself. Christianity was the religion that emerged as that most significant to respondents in terms of the social networks they formed. Further, the churches they joined provided them with a strong sense of community while in transience.

What stood out in a number of interviews with respondents who were either working professionals or university-level international students in both Australia and Singapore was the active role played by Christianity in their self-perceived identities and their social networks. Interestingly, almost a third of respondents in both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys in Australia and Singapore stated that they were Christian.

Respondents identified themselves as Catholic or simply as 'Christian' and came into Christianity either as practising faithful or as converts while in transience throughout Australia and Singapore. Moreover, the majority of Christian respondents stated that they were active participants in their respective churches and formed strong friendships with fellow worshippers they met in their congregations. This chapter thus acknowledges the significant role played by Christianity in the lives of the transient migrants interviewed in this project. In doing so, it also highlights the particular significance of Christianity in Singapore—an Asian nation where Asian religions such as Buddhism and Taoism are on the decline in favour of Christianity. This chapter further suggests that Christianity functions as a culture of transnational mobility that allows for connections to the homeland to be maintained and a sense of community within the host nation to be created.

In other words, transient migrants who identified themselves as Christian turned to Christianity as a way of coping with everyday life in transience. On one level, the Christian groups they joined allowed them to create a sense of community while being away from their home nation. This sense of community, though, was formed with other transient migrants rather than with locals. On another level, these transient migrant congregations created parallel societies both in Australia and in Singapore: while Christianity is the most established religion in Australia, it is also the fastest-growing religion in Singapore.

Christians who come to Australia and Singapore bring with them the rituals and traditions of Christianity as practised in the home nation and replicate them in transience. These rituals and traditions serve as reminders of home while at the same time help to create unique congregations that are nationally based. In other words, congregations openly use signifiers of nationality such as language in order to duplicate significant aspects of their home nation life in transience and engender a sense of community while overseas. This chapter highlights, for instance, the Indonesian Christians and the Filipino Catholics who are part of congregations that are based exclusively on nationality. In Singapore, Christian churches hold services and masses in Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog in order to service the growing numbers of Filipino Catholics and Indonesian Christians respectively.

This chapter, which I co-authored with religious studies expert Jonathan Tan, also features a particular emphasis on international students, since they not only comprise the largest group of transient migrants in Australia but also the largest group interviewed for this study. It was thus

unsurprising to find that Christian churches have clergy administering to the needs of their international (student) flock. Melbourne, to take one example, is home to several significant churches catering to international students, including the Cross Culture Church. Situated in the heart of the city, the Cross Culture Church, which belongs to the Churches of Christ denomination, has services in English and Mandarin and one of its pastors is dedicated to ministering specifically to international students. This church, which has the capacity to hold 700 people, hosts packed Sunday services in both languages. Even the serviced apartment complex Arrow on Swanston, which almost exclusively caters to international students during semester sessions, has church facilities in its basement and likewise holds regular Sunday services. Both the Cross Culture Church and Arrow on Swanston are close to what is known as the 'university precinct' of Melbourne (City of Melbourne, 2009), being located within walking or tram distance from a number of state universities such as the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and Victoria University as well as several private education providers such as Shillington College and the Centre for Adult Education. Tertiary institutions in Australia are also host to Christian fellowship groups catering specifically to international students, such as Overseas Christian Fellowship and Cantonese Christian Fellowship, which provide spiritual as well as social networks for members. This sense of community was also to be found among individuals who converted to Christianity in the host nation.

Unlike those who carry their Christianity from the home nation with them, converts in transience use Christianity as a new self-identifying marker that allows them, along with other transients, to become part of a non-nationally based community. Like longer-term Christians, more recent converts are attracted to identifiers they grew up with or became accustomed to in their home nation, in particular language. Hence while Christianity itself may be new to converts, the Christian communities themselves are immediately appealing because they feature familiar identity markers such as similarities in ethnicity (e.g. significant numbers of the Chinese diaspora are brought together by language), nationality (e.g. Indonesian Christians and Filipinos) and current circumstance (e.g. being an international student in Australia).

These Christian communities thus provided respondents who identified as Christian with solid social networks of friends who gave support and companionship while overseas. Christianity, in other words, arms transient migrants with the tools they need to navigate everyday life in transience

and thus cope with the traumas inherent in voluntary uprootedness, such as loneliness and homesickness. These support systems are facilitated by host nations that are open to Christian faiths.

As a global and transnational religion, Christianity is in a pre-eminent position to ride the waves of transnational mobility and migration. From its inception Christianity has been a religion that thrives on the mobility of enthusiastic migrants professing their newfound faith in Jesus. The New Testament bears witness to the migration of Jewish and Gentile Christians across the Mediterranean world in the early years of the nascent Christian movement (see e.g. Acts 8:1 on the scattering of Greek-speaking Christians following the martyrdom of Stephen, or Acts 18:1–3 on Prisca and Aquila fleeing Rome for Corinth, where they established a thriving house church [Tan, 2014, p. 172]).

Elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles one comes face to face with the apostle Paul, itinerant missionary and migrant *par excellence*, who along trade and migrant routes in the Mediterranean basin established house churches among the upwardly mobile 'gentiles', that is, non-Jews in the thriving cities of the Greco-Roman world, including Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus and Rome. While it is undeniable that the apostle Paul was often pilloried for diluting the 'Jewishness' of the teachings of Jesus, in truth he both recognised and utilised the mobilities inherent in the greater Roman Empire to establish transnational yet local churches that transcended ethnic identity to be defined by their acceptance of Jesus and his teachings. For better or worse, the nascent 'Jesus Movement' broke away from its historical Jewish ethnocentricity to embrace the mobility and transnational identity of a universal faith that thrived on mobility, allowing it to eventually reach the ends of the world. Likewise, in the First Epistle of Peter, we see the apostle Peter claiming a migrant identity (1 Peter 2:11) and inviting his readers to do the same. For Peter, migration and mobility are not incidental but rather inherent dimensions of being Christian.

Beyond the witness of the New Testament, early Christian missionaries travelled across the known world preaching the Christian Gospel, as exemplified by accounts of Saint Thomas travelling to India and establishing thriving centres of Christianity along the Malabar Coast and Assyrian missionaries travelling along the ancient Silk Road to propagate Christianity in Tang-era China (Tan, 2014, pp. 11–13). The author of the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* spoke of early Christians who held the view

that 'any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country' (Tan, 2014, p. 172).

PRACTISING CHRISTIANITY IN TRANSIENCE

Respondents who came from countries where other non-Christian religions were dominant or who were recent converts to Christianity revealed that practising their faith was incredibly important to them. All the Indonesian Christians I spoke to, for instance, joined Indonesian Christian congregations in Singapore. These congregations, moreover, were serviced by pastors from Indonesia with services conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Orchard Road Presbyterian, located in the heart of Singapore's Central Business District, is one such church. For 31-year-old Indonesian IT professional Charlie the practising of faith extended to his choice in online downloads, and he openly stated that he subscribed to a number of Christian YouTube channels featuring pastors and preachers. Others, such as 28-year-old Masters student Jerome, used messaging apps such as Line and WhatsApp together with Facebook to maintain regular contact with his church friends and discuss church-related activities:

I also chat in [a] WhatsApp group talking about ... [an] ... event with my church buddies. I also chat in Line group, talking about our May's bible camp matters. I used Indonesian language as all of them are Indonesian.

Meanwhile, a few Indonesian Christian respondents noted that it was easier for them to practice their faith in Singapore than in Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion. They found Singapore a place that permitted them to practice their faith openly since Christianity, as we will discuss later in this chapter, is a growing religion in the city-state. Sally, a 20-year-old Indonesian Christian undergraduate student, explained that she felt that being in Singapore allowed her to actively practice her Christianity even more openly than she did in Indonesia. For Sally, being able to practice her Christian faith more freely than she was able to back home provided her with a sense of community in Singapore, particularly since she attended a Christian church whose attendees were primarily fellow Indonesians. Her sense of community in Singapore was enabled, in other words, by her being part of a group that not only shared the same faith but the same nationality. The sense of

community engendered among transient migrants in Singapore by means of Christianity is an issue we likewise explore in depth later in this chapter.

Additionally, those who said that their religious identity was important to them embraced their faith wholeheartedly, as 21-year-old Vietnamese Anh, who was studying in Singapore, passionately explained:

I am a Christian ... [and I] ... know that God is real ... [it] is not a decision ... with [those who] belong to our social group it's just that God is real and his desire is to save everyone and when I come here then I hear about a Gospel, but before that, before I really find out who he is I already can have this feeling because yeah, because you know I think I will live here knowing that God fought in our heart, that this hole that need[s] to be filled by him and his desire to—his desire to come to him, but at that time when I didn't hear about God I do not know who that person is and what his desire is for and then he ... I can come to realise that it is he who I keep questing for, who I keep feeling the yeah, feeling the desire to like to yeah to turn [to] our [God] ... yeah so that's how I felt to ... this ... I think it is because in Singapore people talk about religion openly, yeah so I have the chance to hear about a Gospel.

While on one level the concept of the Christian God was extremely important to Anh, she also pointed out that this was facilitated by her ability to learn about the religion further in Singapore. Like Sally, she alluded to the notion that Christianity is openly discussed and practised in Singapore.

A WAY OF DEALING WITH LONELINESS AND HOMESICKNESS

In Singapore, transient migrants are part of the ethnographic landscape, with social encounters involving transients taking place on a quotidian scale. Still, literature in this area has largely been limited to unskilled labourers, particularly the foreign domestic workers with a focus on their lack of rights in the Singaporean state and the tensions they encounter as live-in maids with employers (e.g. Ford and Piper, 1–21). Research on skilled foreign talent, namely white-collar professionals and international students in Singapore, is still in its infancy, with research in the area generally concerned with economic and policy issues (e.g. Rahman and Tong, 80–98). Work on transient migrants such as international students in the

USA and Australia, meanwhile, often focuses on the issues these students face while in transience, with loneliness and homesickness often attributed as being the primary conditions of their unhappiness in the host nations (e.g. Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune 2011, pp. 281–295; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia 2008, pp. 148–180, Gomes, 2015c).

Transient migrants in Singapore were not unique in this regard, with respondents almost universally noting that they experienced loneliness and felt homesick at least some of the time. Respondents also noted that they actively struck up friendships with people in order to help cope with the traumas of their voluntary uprootedness, with Christianity being a key feature of this quest. Of the 202 participants interviewed in both Australia and Singapore, a quarter reported alleviating these conditions by making friends with people from their respective churches. While a few participants were already practising Christians prior to coming to Singapore, such as the Filipino Catholics and the Indonesian Christians, others found Christianity while living in transience. James, a 19-year-old French international student in Australia, Essie, a 34-year-old international student from Korea studying in Australia, Prudence, a 23-year-old former international student from China who was on a bridging visa while awaiting the processing of her Australian permanent residency application, and Ling, who we first met in the chapter 'Identity on My Mind', a 26-year-old Malaysian Chinese working in the hotel industry, for instance, were several such persons.

James, who had previously lived in Australia as a high school exchange student, expressed the significance of Christianity to him:

I'm a Christian so I go to church quite often and I see my friends at church ... Church friends, I think it's real friendship...

For James, his identity as a Christian helped in navigating his social networks. The notion of Church thus comprised more than just a building or a set of rules for the faithful, instead providing him with a community he clearly felt comfortable with. For others, such as Prudence, Church provided a link to locals:

[B]efore, I know some Australian friends in church, that's all and ... when I studied in English school, I still have ... some friends from the school.

Church was, for Essie, one of the first places where she had the opportunity to meet and make friends with Australians. So despite differences in language skills, nationality and ethnicity, Church became a bridge for Essie

to build up her social network with locals and therefore perhaps develop some sense of belonging to the host nation. Essie however later admitted that most of her current friends were fellow international students, around 80 per cent of whom came from her home nation of Korea. In the case of recent Christian convert Prudence, Church provided her with most of her friends. She pointed out moreover that these friends were similar to her in terms of being either from Asia or from China itself:

Probably 50 per cent of my friends come from the same background as mine, which is Asian or Chinese. But my largest [group of friends are my] fellowship groups ... at the church ... I just became a Christian last year and, which is a big change ... [in] ... my life.

Prudence's conversion to Christianity had become a large part of her identity, to the extent where almost all her friends were fellow Christians. In talking about them she employed the term 'fellowship', which is often used within certain Christian denominations (e.g. Presbyterian) to describe groups of people meeting for worship or other related activities such as bible sharing. Unlike Essie, Prudence was part of a Christian community whose members were similar to her in terms of ethnicity, nationality and region. Being around people similar to her in certain significant aspects such as place (region and country) and religious belief was sufficient not only to help navigate her everyday life in transience but also led her to actively take steps to stay in Australia as a permanent resident. This was in spite of the fact she did not openly state throughout the interview that she had any (Asian) Australian friends. What about respondents in Singapore?

The findings highlighted in this chapter echo similar insights by North American sociologists studying transnational Asian migrant networks and Christianity in North America. For example, Judith Nagata's groundbreaking transnational 20-year study on Chinese Christians in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Canada on the implications of Christianity for superseding ethnic identity concluded that subethnic Chinese identity is often subordinated to a broader Christian transnational religious identity (Nagata, 2005). Likewise, Kenneth Guest's important ethnographic study of undocumented Fuzhounese migrants in the Chinatown of New York City highlighted, among other things, the deep involvement of migrant Fuzhounese Christian congregations in nurturing transnational social networks of these undocumented migrants, who found themselves marginalised and disenfranchised within broader US society by virtue of their irregular immigration status, as well as by their lacking both the English-

language and economic skills to escape their frequently menial jobs (Guest, 2003, pp. 201–206, see also Guest, 2005, pp. 159–161). In Guest's words:

For the majority of the Fuzhounese, their transnationalism is much more nascent, grassroots, and fragile; an ocean-borne transnationalism of the working poor, not the jet-set transnationalism of the elite ... As workers, many of them undocumented, they are disciplined by economy and state alike ... Through these [transnational] networks, they seek to transcend regulated national boundaries and construct broader notions of citizenship and participation. They utilize their emerging transnational religious networks to articulate an alternative existence and identity in the face of the homogenizing influences of global capitalism and the U.S. labour market. Their participation in the life of their home communities—encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded through these religious networks—assists in creating and enhancing a transnational identity which may in fact serve as an alternative to immigrant incorporation in the host country (Guest, 2005, pp. 160–161).

Foreign talent transient migrants, and in this case transients from Asia, have an added dimension where they see Christianity as providing a platform for networks which transcend national similarity. Instead, they adapt to social networks which provide them with some measure of similarity even though they also contain elements of newness. Therefore, while Christianity was a different experience for her, becoming part of a Christian community in Singapore was not a totally fresh adventure for Ling: while Christianity represented a brand new ideology and identity for Ling, the Christian group she joined was made up of Mandarin-speaking ethnic diasporic Chinese and thus provided a marker of familiarity. She was, after all, a Mandarin-speaking ethnic diasporic Chinese, and this particular identity provided her with the ability and confidence to navigate through the newness of her Christian faith. In other words, she found a community that was new on one level (religion) yet familiar on another (diasporic Mandarin-speaking ethnic Chinese). Transience, then, fosters the creation of communities that create fellowship and support while containing elements of familiarity for members.

FINDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN TRANSIENCE

Continuing the discussions raised in the previous chapter on transient migration due to the global movements of people for work and study as part of everyday life, this chapter asserts that transient migrants in Australia and Singapore create a sense of community while being away

from the home nation. In Singapore, Ling's devotion to the Christian faith, for instance, also revealed her involvement in a community quite different to those she had been used to in Malaysia. Ling, after all, grew up in Malay-Muslim-dominated Malaysia in an ethnic Chinese Hokkien-speaking family of practising Buddhists. Like many Malaysian Chinese, Ling was multilingual and thus able to converse not only in English and Bahasa Malaysia but also in different Chinese languages and dialects such as Mandarin and Hokkien. She seemed to be aware of how different the Christian community was for her and expressed the fear that if she ever went back to Malaysia she would lose her newfound faith because she had no Christian friends back in the home nation. Moreover, almost all her friends in Singapore were fellow Mandarin-speaking Christian transients from countries other than Malaysia. While Ling's Christian church friends came from countries other than Malaysia, the same cannot be said about other Christians in Singapore who were part of church groups exclusively catering to people from their home nation.

During my fieldwork in Singapore, I spoke with two Indonesian professionals—29-year-old Alice and 27-year-old Jim—on the grounds of the church they attended. They explained that the particular church they had joined held special Indonesian services on Sundays which were conducted by an Indonesian pastor and that they also attended a bible studies group which catered exclusively to Indonesians. These services and group meetings moreover were held in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language spoken throughout the Indonesia archipelago. For members of this Indonesian Christian community, church thus served to provide reminders of home in addition to helping them cope with the negativities associated with transience such as loneliness, which as mentioned earlier was a common theme among respondents. As Jim explained:

Because my parents are away, not in Singapore, so I need a social support—my friends and I don't want to be—probably a sense of belonging, like you know I come from this church and that is my identity, because to me it's pretty important to know who I am, where I'm from and things like that, so ... I would say yeah ... [this church gives me a foundation for my Indonesian identity] ... because it kind of reminds me of things back home, you do have—firstly because the service are in Indonesia, so it is similar to what I had back then and sometimes we do have food fair and things like that where we—there people sell Indonesian food, so that again is a ... reminder.

Jim thus revealed that Christianity was incredibly important to him on multiple levels. Besides reminding him of home, the practice of Christian worship and fellowship allowed him to feel a sense of belonging to a community while at the same time allowing him to express his Indonesian identity. This was due to his belief that activities undertaken with his church community in Singapore were a replication of those he conducted with his church community in Indonesia. Jim's response thus evokes a different complexion to the practice of Christianity for Indonesians living in transience in Singapore. Unlike Sally, the Indonesian Christian who earlier situated the practice of Christian worship and fellowship in Singapore as an element of freedom that differed from her experiences in Indonesia, for others like Jim the religious experience was translocal. Here we borrow Greiner and Saktapolrak's definition of translocal as being a 'phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation, and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries' (2013, p. 373). This translocal experience for Jim comprised the transposition of everyday life from Indonesia to Singapore through the practice of Christianity in terms of community activities. This translocal experience similarly took place for respondents from the Philippines.

All Filipino respondents stated that they were practising Catholics who attended Sunday masses and often weekday masses as well. Furthermore they stated that they met other Filipino friends at such masses, which were often conducted in Tagalog. Shirley, a 25-year-old Filipina working in Singapore, clarified:¹

For me I go with my community of friends and get a bit and then we go to church with the priest there is Filipino and all the person there is also Filipino. My Auntie is invited me to Filipino meals with some outside parties maybe parties or then sometimes she invited me to go to the ... because all the Filipino have been played volleyball, basketball so yeah, then go to Filipino restaurant.

Like Jim, Shirley's translocal experience was not confined to Catholic-related activities such as worship and bible study but also applied to social activities popularly practised in the Philippines. The nationally based church community, in other words, provides nationality-based social networks while recreating certain practices from the home nation that are clearly important to transient migrants as ways of both connecting to the home nation and coping with the trauma of uprootedness.

My findings mirror similar trends among immigrant Asian Christian communities in the USA. For example, as far back as 1990 Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim observed that 'among the majority of Korean immigrants [to the United States], the religious need (meaning), the social need (community) and the psychological need (comfort) for attending Korean church are inseparable from each other' (Hurh & Kim, 1990, p. 31). In a similar vein, Pyong Gap Min's 2003 ethnographic study of Korean churches in New York City revealed the trend of many Korean immigrants joining Korean churches because of the important role that these churches play in promoting Korean culture and identity in the diaspora and fostering social networks among Korean Christian immigrants:

The major reason Korean immigrants prefer a Korean church is their need for a communal bond. Due to their uprooting experiences, all immigrants seek a communal bond by establishing ethnic organizations ... Because of their cultural homogeneity, Korean immigrants try to confine their social interactions largely to fellow Koreans, and stick to Korean language, customs, and values (Min, 2003, p. 131).

Borrowing an insight from Peggy Levitt, who originally made this observation in the context of recent Catholic immigrants to the USA, one could surmise that the close identification of culture, ethnicity, nation, identity and Christian faith among Asian transient migrants in Singapore emerges when these migrants assert their cultural, ethnic, transnational and religious identities simultaneously by their participation in religious and community activities in their immigrant Christian congregations. To paraphrase Levitt, these Asian transient migrants would be hard-pressed to distinguish what is 'national' or 'ethnic' about themselves from what is 'religious', and therefore, when they 'act out these identities, either privately and informally or collectively and institutionally, they express important parts of who they are and pass these formulations along to their children' (Levitt, 2005, p. 397).

A CHRISTIAN PARALLEL SOCIETY

The previous chapter argued that transient migrants form parallel multi-cultural societies made up of other transient migrants from their respective circumstances (e.g. international students with other international students) who primarily came from the home nation in the first instance,

followed by the current region and then elsewhere. Such respondents created dynamic communities of support made up of other international students whose social networks themselves consisted almost exclusively of fellow international students, skilled workers and working holiday workers respectively. As also noted earlier, members of these parallel multicultural transient migrant societies seldom mixed with locals. Asian respondents, for instance, did not generally mix with Asian Australians or with Singaporeans even though approximately 12 per cent (Colebatch, 2012) of Australians claim Asian ancestry and Singapore itself is an Asian country. Therefore, even though respondents in Australia and Singapore had common ethnic and cultural connections with Asian Australians and Singaporeans, they were not part of the transient migrants' social networks. This is mainly because respondents felt that Asian Australians were more Australian than Asian and hence different from them and that Singaporeans were also 'different' even though many of the respondents in Singapore shared similar ethnic and cultural heritages with locals.

In Australia, respondents who self-identified as Christian likewise created their own societies within the parallel transient migrant societies they were already members of. They accomplished this through fellowship groups, the Christian churches they were affiliated with and the institutions in which they studied. All international students involved in this project, whether they took part in the face-to-face interviews in Melbourne or the nationally released online survey, stated that their friends were almost exclusively international students. Moreover, international student Christians may experience difficulty forming connections with Australians through Christianity because of the lack of actively practising Christians in the country, as we explain. Additionally, as Essie admitted earlier, while she made friends with Australians in the church she joined when she first came as an English-language student, these friends were fast replaced by other international students she met in her English-language course and from her university course thereafter. For her, the familiarity of nationality, ethnicity and language together with the cultural similarity of other Asian international students—she stated that besides Koreans, her other friends were Chinese international students—created stronger friendship bonds. Perhaps if the friends she initially made in the church were other international students, she might have had stronger interpersonal relationships with them, as was reported by respondents from Singapore.

It is clear that Christian respondents turned to religion in order to help them cope with their transient life in Australia and Singapore, even though some only converted in the host nation. For respondents in Australia—a country whose national identity and dominant culture are arguably based on Christian Anglo-Celtic traditions—adopting Christianity might well be a strategy that international students (and other transient migrants) use to adapt to Australian culture without being part of that culture. It is through Christianity, in other words, that they find a connection to Australia. In Singapore, while respondents generally mixed with Christian friends from the home nation, embracing Christianity allowed transient migrants to blend in with the cultural practices of an increasing number of Singaporeans. While some transient migrants may not have had large circles of Singaporean friends, practising Christianity, especially in terms of community activities such as attending church and associated meetings (e.g. bible studies), allowed them to replicate one aspect of everyday Singaporean culture. This is because Christianity is a significant religion in Singapore and, as Vietnamese international student Anh earlier observed, is openly and routinely discussed: '[In] Singapore people talk about religion openly'.

CHRISTIANITY IN HOST NATIONS

Australia

Christianity traces its origins in Australia to the arrival of Anglican colonial missionaries, beginning with Richard Johnston (1753–1827), the chaplain on board the First Fleet who celebrated the first Christian service in Australia on 3 February 1788. Early Anglican missionaries under the aegis of the Church Missionary Society, for example Samuel Marsden (1764–1838), transplanted an evangelical form of Anglicanism to early-nineteenth-century Australia with financial support from colonial authorities and mission societies (Jupp, 2009). The arrival of large number of Irish convicts from 1791 onwards challenged this early Anglican hegemony. For a time, the colonial administration forbade the entry of Catholic chaplains out of fear of instigating rebellion. With the relaxation of the prohibition on Catholic clergy after 1820, Catholic priests were allowed in to minister to the growing number of Irish Catholics (O'Farrell, 1987). The arrival of the first Methodist clergy in Sydney in 1815, a Scottish Presbyterian minister in 1824 and a Baptist missionary in 1834 added to the incipient

but growing diversity of Christian churches in Australia beyond colonial Anglicanism (Jupp, 2009). They were followed by Congregationalists from the British Isles, Lutherans from Germany and Scandinavia and Orthodox Greeks and Russians. The dissolution of the White Australia Policy in the post-World War II period paved the way for further diversity of Christianity with the arrival of African and Asiatic Christians.

Notwithstanding the increased arrival of migrants professing the Christian faith, Christianity in Australia has undergone a slow but steady decline in post-World War II Australia, a trend that has affected different denominations to varying degrees. The increasing separation of religion on the one hand, and politics and statecraft on the other, followed by the rise of secularisation that accompanied upward socioeconomic mobility slowly transformed the Australian social landscape in the decades after World War II, resulting in the slow erosion of Christianity's influence and impact on the Australian populace at large (Thompson, 2002, pp. 137–138). Moreover, the increased arrival of transnational migrants following the abandonment of the White Australia Policy and growing globalisation brought about the growth of other religious communities led to an increasingly multifaith Australia (Bouma, 1997, 2002, 2003). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the 2011 Australian Census revealed that Christianity suffered a decline from 63.9 per cent of the Australian population in 2006 to 61.1 per cent in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). This decline affected Australian Christianity across the board, with Catholics looking at a 0.7 per cent decline in real terms, Eastern Orthodox experiencing a decline of 9.1 per cent, Anglicans dropping 19 per cent, Presbyterian looking at a decline of 19.6 per cent and the Uniting Church a jaw-dropping 27 per cent (Australian Census Statistics, 2012). Correspondingly, the category of 'no religion' rose from 18.7 per cent of the population in 2006 to 22.3 per cent in 2011. The Australian Bureau of Statistics further noted:

The most common non-Christian religions in 2011 were Buddhism (accounting for 2.5 per cent of the population), Islam (2.2 per cent) and Hinduism (1.3 per cent). Hinduism had experienced the fastest growth since 2006, increasing from 148,130 to 275,534, followed by Islam from 340,394 to 476,291 and Buddhism from 418,749 to 528,977 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a)

More significantly, the 2011 Census data revealed that among the 25–34 age range, a group colloquially known as the 'millennials':

In the 25–34 range, Christianity performs even poorer than in broader ranges. An absolute reduction of 241,676 among this age range does not bode well for the future of the religion in Australia. In contrast, religions fuelled by immigration are showing significant increases, including Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam... Together with Christianity and other religions, this leaves a net absolute reduction among this age range of 84,811. It should be noted that this net reduction is despite the population increasing by 246,687 in the 25–34 age range. This pattern of absolute reduction of Christian following in Australia is a trend that cannot be sustained if the religion is to avoid a slow, lingering death. Contraction among this age range is outpacing natural population growth and the generational effect may accelerate contraction further in future, as older followers die off and young parents choose not to associate their children with their Christian religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

It is not surprising that some of the respondents found community through Christian churches in Australia, for reasons previously discussed. Christian churches in Australia—other than those attended widely by international students or with international student ministries—are not typically well attended by Australians. By Australians, I refer to those who were born in Australia or who migrated to Australia decades previously. Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Australia, for instance, tend to be dominated by long-term migrants from countries such as Italy and Greece respectively, since these were the faiths they brought with them when they migrated. The data from the 2011 Census appears to confirm that the increase of international students participating in church activities is overwhelmed by massive decline in Australian participation.

Singapore

In Singapore, meanwhile, Christianity constitutes the most rapidly growing religious ideology. According to the 2000 Singapore population census Christianity was the fastest-growing religion, primarily due to increased conversions on the part of ethnic Chinese (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2001, 33–40). Catholicism accounts for one-third of all Christians in Singapore, with the rest belonging to other denominations such as Presbyterianism (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2001, 33–34). Moreover, Christianity in Singapore is also exclusively connected with the Eurasian ethnic group, with most Eurasians identifying themselves as Catholic.³

While Islam, Buddhism/Taoism and Hinduism are Asian-centric religions that are well rooted in Asia and have successfully circulated throughout Southeast Asia for centuries, Christianity is a relatively new faith to be making a profound impact on the Asian region as a whole. The first waves of Christianity marked the arrival of European and American colonial powers in Asia as far back as the fifteenth century. Catholicism, for example, was spread by Spanish and Portuguese colonists in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Malacca. Other incarnations of Christianity such as Methodism and Protestantism found their way to the colonies, mainly through European conquerors in different parts of Southeast Asia. Comprising a transnational (and transitional) place of trade, the British crown colony of Singapore became a valuable location for proselytising by Christian missionaries, who set up churches for the newly baptised and educational institutions known as 'mission schools' for orphaned or abandoned children. Today such mission schools have become somewhat exclusive and often cater to the English-educated and middle class rather than the indigent and orphaned as in times past.

Christianity is, as mentioned, a growing religion in Singapore, with not only new converts but also expanding denominations taking root in the nation-state. Some very well-known and popular churches are home-grown, and their expanding overseas ministries have given rise to the term 'megachurches'. Two such examples are the New Creation Church (founded 1984) and City Harvest Church (founded 1989), both of which boast five-figure membership numbers. Often offshoots of the Baptist, Evangelical and Charismatic branches of Christianity, these new Christian megachurches minister to huge congregations, have very healthy finances and frequently number well-known Singaporeans among their adherents. City Harvest Church, for example, counts Mandarin pop singer Sun Ho (Ho Yeow Sun) as one of its followers. Sun, incidentally, is also one of the co-founders of the church and the wife of its principal founder, Pastor Kong Hee. At the time of writing, City Harvest Church and its executive which includes Pastor Kong were embroiled in financial scandal concerning the fraudulent use of church funds amounting to SGD\$50 million to support Sun's musical career in the US. While attendance at the church has declined particularly after the Singapore courts convicted the church leaders of misusing church funds, the faithful still worship in City Harvest by the thousands (Cheong, 2016).

It is thus far from an exaggeration to say that Christianity is openly practised and performed in Singapore. When I worked for the government

service, a number of my colleagues were practising Christians who brought their religion into the workplace. One small unit in the government department I worked in, for example, made Christianity part of their daily discourse by peppering their conversations with biblical references, playing Christian music on the radio at all times and displaying posters in the room dedicated to Jesus Christ and passages from the bible. Today, such displays of Christianity have reached new heights of performativity with the advent of social networking sites. Besides allowing users to display their allegiance to their faith through status updates, Facebook, for example, has numerous groups with healthy memberships dedicated to different facets, issues and denominations of Christianity in Singapore. A Facebook search for the words 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' revealed the existence of 21 groups, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed no less than 86 groups. Meanwhile, a Google search of the terms 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' yielded no less than 907,000 hits, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed over 68 million. For Christian respondents, practising their faith by actively becoming part of Christian communities, even though their specific congregations may not have included significant numbers of Singaporeans, was still an effective method of reproducing Singaporean culture. The process of constructing a sense of community in transience thus incorporated creating a way of life that paralleled the society of the host nation.

Part of the reason why Christianity is growing in importance among Singaporeans is due to its strong links with family and nation. Christianity generally stresses the importance of family, filial piety and obedience within an ordered hierarchical framework—values familiar to the ethnic Singaporean Chinese majority. In Singapore, the family is a basic tenet of the society's nationalist culture and agenda while serving effectively as microcosm for the nation. Moreover, the Singapore government has successfully managed to infuse the Chinese Confucian value of filial piety into the culture of Singapore through the 'Asian Values' label. Asian Values was a political ideology first introduced in the 1990s in Southeast Asia and East to differentiate Asian cultural and societal values from that of the West. It was a term often used by Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore, 1959–1990) and Mahathir bin Mohammad (Prime Minister of Malaysia, 1981–2003) to promote a pan-Asian identity which emphasised community and hierarchy over the individual. Hence loyalty to family in terms of structure and hierarchy becomes anecdotally interpreted as allegiance to the government and state and vice versa.

Beyond the social, cultural and political reasons for Christianity's growth and popularity, one must not forget that Christianity's ability to act as a bridge or commonality between diverse communities is also inherent in the universalism that is present at the birth of the Christian movement at an event known as Pentecost. Specifically, the Acts of the Apostles (2:9–11) presents a grand vision of the Christian movement embracing all cultures, ethnicities and languages of the world in a universal community without any requirement that these be abandoned for a singular normative culture or identity. This vision of the in-gathering of new believers took place at Pentecost, where those present in Jerusalem heard the gospel proclaimed to them in their own languages. This suggests that cultural, ethnic, national and linguistic particularities need not be abandoned when one embraces the Christian faith, as borne out by the fact that those present were not asked to give up their particular ethnicity, culture, national identity or language to hear the Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of the early Christian Movement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Churches and Christian groups create spaces for intercultural competency to take place. While churches may conduct masses and services separate to those attended by local parishioners, they are in an ideal position to educate transient migrants and locals about each other. This would be in keeping with Christianity's goal of creating a single (global) community with the common purpose of worship and, in the case of Singapore, perhaps reduce the speculative fear many Singaporeans have towards transient migrants.

While this chapter looked specifically at Christianity, it also highlights the significance of religion in the lives of Asian transient migrants. Institutions in Australia, for instance, need to acknowledge and use this to help both international students and local students of similar faiths meet and support each other. Multifaith chaplaincies in institutions could foster programs for international students to facilitate social contact with each other and with local students of similar faiths. The best times for such programs to take place would be during orientation and in the first year of study at the institution, since these are the times students need the most amount of support as they grapple with both a new environment and a new phase in their lives. These programs should not proselytise but rather aim to tap into existing avenues of similarities which may provide bridges for international and local students alike.

The findings in this chapter also reveal that government, media and public discussions on transient migration—and perhaps on migration in general—overemphasise Islam while simultaneously omitting the burgeoning presence of Christianity. Could an awareness of Christianity as a formidable presence among transient migrants allay the real or imagined fears governments and citizenries have of Islam? Will acknowledgement of religious diversity result in more balanced and informed discussions in public and private spaces, thereby creating less dissonance and fear-mongering? Could we be seeing a resurgence or reinterpretation of Christianity through the practices and activities of transient migrants and what impact do they have on religiosity as practised in the countries they pass through or eventually settle?

CONCLUSION

Transient migration for work or study is part of everyday life, yet in spite of its voluntary nature it still constitutes a form of uprootedness. In order to cope with the traumas associated with transience such as loneliness and homesickness, transient migrants employ creative methods in order to create a sense of community while overseas. As a universal religion that spread throughout the world in large measure because of transnational migration of peoples, Christianity has historically played an important role in helping migrants make sense of themselves and their lived diasporic experiences in strange and unfamiliar settings. At the same time, one could argue that just because transient migrants in Australia and Singapore embrace Christianity and make Christianity a part of their identity in both these nations, it does not necessarily signal their assimilation into broader Australian and Singaporean society or acceptance by their fellow Australian or Singaporean Christians. In Australia the issue is compounded by the dwindling number of practising Australian Christians, while respondents in both countries were largely unable to identify with, much less integrate with, Asian Australians and Singaporeans in general.

Moreover, for many if not the majority of these transient migrants who embrace their Christian faith and make it a part of their diasporic identity in Australia and Singapore, their Christian identity becomes an important and defining aspect of who they are, enabling them to communicate with Australian and Singaporean Christians while affording them the opportunity to carve out a niche where they can define their own identity apart from their fellow Australian and Singaporean Christians. This has profound implications for these Asian transient migrants, leading to heterogenised,

hybridised and conflicting constructions of faith-based identities that simultaneously connect yet distance them from other Australian and Singaporean Christians. It is important to further note that when Asian transient migrants embrace a Christian faith identity, often more fervently than they would in their homelands, this goes beyond mere nostalgic longing for home to encompass new opportunities for them to shape their own transnational, hybridised and often contested multiplicity of identities in Australia and Singapore. In Singapore, as this book has alluded to, transient migrants are at best tolerated or at worst vilified by locals, who express varying degrees of xenophobia against them.

In other words, Christianity affords a symbolic framework for Asian transient migrants to construct their diasporic social-cultural identity in Singapore. In turn, Asian transient migrants' embracing of Christianity also adds to the increasing pluralism in Australian and Singaporean Christianity beyond a normative expression to diversity and pluralism. In the longer term, such diversity and pluralism within Christianity in Singapore in particular also serves to challenge Singaporean Christians on the extent to which they are willing and able to transcend their xenophobic prejudices and welcome these Asian transient migrants as fellow Christians. The following chapter examines another culture of transnational mobility, which takes the form of aspirations for further transnational mobility.

NOTES

1. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of Catholic churches have at least one weekend mass in Tagalog to cater to the increasing Filipino community. While more and more Filipinos are working in Singapore in professional or white-collar positions, they are not the first such workers in the Republic: Singapore has seen large numbers of Filipinos workers arriving since the early 1980s, though almost all at the time were employed as foreign domestic workers.
2. Eurasians are the offspring of mixed-race unions between Europeans and Asians. Usually the Europeans were colonists such as the Southern Europeans (Portuguese and Spanish) and Anglo-Celtics and Anglo-Saxons (English, Germans and Dutch). The offspring of such unions became known as Eurasians and formed their own community with their own specific cultural identities. Within the Eurasian ethnic class structure, Eurasians who could trace their lineage to Anglo Europeans were considered on the upper levels of the class and ethnic hierarchy as they were fairer while Eurasians of Portuguese descent were on the other end of this spectrum

because of the colour of their skin. Often, Anglo Europeans were wealthier and educated while Portuguese Eurasians whose ancestry can be traced further back in Malayan colonial history are almost exclusively connected to fishing villages in Malacca. Whatever the lineage, Eurasian identity is firmly based on race and religion. While Eurasians adopted the various Christian religions of the European colonists, it is Catholicism that has become culturally synonymous with Eurasian identity, in particular among those descended from Southern Europeans.

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The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility

In April 2015 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's investigative journalism and current affairs program *Four Corners* aired an episode about international education in Australia, in which international students were portrayed as using their education as a pathway to gain permanent residency in Australia. The ensuing comments on the *Four Corners* Facebook page reiterated the belief of (Australian) viewers that the primary goal of international students is permanent residence.¹ To some extent, the perception of international students as intentional permanent residents has been supported by research and scholarship. In 2010, for instance, a J. Walter Thompson (JWT) Education survey of 1600 international students in Australia revealed that over one-fifth (22 per cent) intended to eventually apply for permanent residency (Harrison, 2010). More recently, Shanthi Robertson (2013) argued that international students are not merely in Australia to study but rather to invest their time and energy in securing permanent residence. This trend exists in spite of a widely publicised government crackdown on 'fly-by-night' institutions who in the mid-to-late 2000s preyed upon international students with fraudulent promises of permanent residency upon graduation (Lane, 2014) and the ensuing tightening of migration laws concerning international student permanent migration and subsequent restrictions on international student visa applications (Trounson, 2010).

Meanwhile in Singapore over one quarter (1.63 million) of its current population of 5.54 million are temporary migrants who work, study and