RESEARCH ARTICLE

Belonging and Communicating in a Bounded Cosmopolitanism: The Role of Mobile Phones in the Integration of Transnational Migrants in Singapore

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Original Submission: September 9, 2015

Request for Revision: March 3, 2016

Re-submission: March 15, 2016

Word Count: 7287 words

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This work was supported by the International Development Research Centre under the SIRCA Grant.

Abstract

The unabated influx of transnational labor migrants has been accompanied by complex societal fissures, from differential policies to the creation of isolated cultural geographies. In Singapore, citizens voice their aggravation caused by transients' lack of acculturation, and the resultant risks posed to the cosmopolitan vision of the state. We examine the intersection of transnational acculturation with mediated communication via mobile phones within the domains of life and work. Data from in-depth qualitative interviews (75) allowed for thick descriptions. We find that, despite encountering heterotopic practices, transnational migrant workers engage in a phenomenon we label 'bounded cosmopolitanism', or the ability to engage in learning, enjoy economic growth, and embrace cultural hybridity, to escape the shackles of race, class, and gender. Mobile phones play a significant role in providing open participatory spaces, yet this phenomenon signifying openness, innovation, and acceptance is restricted to organizational workspaces. We therefore conclude with comments on the implications of applying management perspectives to broader societal challenges, and propose shifting of the discourse from the bounded confines of the organization to that of society.

Keywords: ICT, mobile phone, migrants, acculturation, cultural identity, organizational commitment, cosmopolitanism, integration

Belonging and Communicating in a Bounded Cosmopolitanism: The Role of Mobile Phones in the Integration of Transnational Migrants in Singapore

One of the few uplifting narrative within the migrant crisis unfolding across the globe concerns mobile phones. In Europe, the media reports on the life-saving influence of the refugees' use of smartphones for gaining information about about route-maps, border restrictions, transportation and accommodation and most recently, real-time updates on parliament proceedings regarding legislation (Brunwasser, 2016). In Singapore, mobiles phones aid blue-collar foreign workers to keep in touch with distant friends and family (Thompson, 2009). There is a rich literature on migrants in Singapore, ranging from financial remittances (Sundarajan, Sirajudin, Jinnah, & Chib, 2016), trans-national mothering (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014), resisting employer control (Thomas & Lim, 2011), and for gender empowerment (Nguyen, Chib, & Mahlingam, 2016).

This research study aims to investigate the role of mobile phones in alleviating or deepening the marginalization and alienation experienced by migrant workers. We further existing research by parsing the impact of ICTs on significant life domains of firstly, personal well-being, and secondly, professional livelihood attainment. A secondary objective is to build upon existing research conducted within the respondent group, triangulating results of quantitative analysis with qualitative data to provide thick descriptions of the lived experience, and discuss possible explanations from a critical perspective.

To achieve these objectives, we situate the analysis within the theoretical lens of acculturation as a bi-dimensional model encompassing both home and host cultures. We argue that the impact of mobile phones needs to be examined as a complex social phenomenon, with differences across, in this specific case, gender, life domains, and cultural

belonging and diversity. Finally, we comment on the impact of the intersection of transnational mobility with mediated communication on the Singaporean cosmopolitan ideal.

Migration

The unprecedented movement of peoples across and within national boundaries has been accompanied by societal fissures between glimmering megapolises and abandoned villages, between suave cosmopolitan urbanites and hard-hat donning construction workers, between the documented and the illegal. Hitherto largely dormant, these stresses are being catalyzed by the global market-based system's insatiable demand for growth. Of a total global migrant stock of 232 million (United Nations, 2013), labor migrants constitute 105 million (IOM, 2014); the sheer numbers causing substantive pressure on host country societies. A developmental success story, Singapore has historically encouraged labor inflows from South and Southeast Asia to combat local labor-force declines (Yeoh, 2007), with the consequence that migrant workers now constitute 40% of the population of the tiny island-state of 5.4 million (Sing Stat, 2014).

Singaporean policy, guided by open market principles, has historically emphasized multiculturalism (Noor & Leong, 2013), because of, and despite, ethnic Chinese comprising almost three-quarters of the population. Multiculturalism as a discursive and policy tool for ethnic harmony amongst residents has since been expanded to incorporate cultural hybridity to attract international financial investment and human talent. A broader and longer-term imagining of the vision has added globalization and sophistication to arrive at cosmopolitanism as a discursive tool for the promotion of the island (Yeoh & Soco, 2014). While these neo-liberal principles have performed remarkably efficiently for those citizens and highly skilled 'foreign talent' at the upper income strata, the social compact in Singapore has faced considerable challenges when faced with an influx of transient low-skilled migrant workers (Jones, 2012).

We are particularly interested in the ensuing societal stresses within the context of transmigration across home and host national boundaries, expanding the examinations to relationships in multiple domains of life and work (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994). Labor migrants, or working-class cosmopolitans (Yeoh & Soco, 2014) with limited education in the liberal arts or exposure to multicultural settings, already face a multitude of adaptation difficulties, culminating in psychological alienation and, often, depression (Swagler & Ellis, 2003), to which is added the burden of a far from welcoming environment. The systematic differential treatment of immigrants has ranged from preferential government policies (Lei & Li, 2012) to employment entitlements (Aldashev, Gernandt, & Thomsen, 2012) for locals and long-term residents. Being employed in low-income, blue-collar occupations (Low, 2002; Rahman & Lian, 2005), and segregated into distinct cultural geographies (Law, 2001), transnational migrant workers face marginalization in terms of limited legal, financial, political, and social status versus citizens (Yeoh, 2004).

The systemic marginalization of migrants has recently extended to social exclusion and public resentment (Jacobs, 2012, "Singapore's angry", 2013). In the midst of a recession, and unable to match wealth levels of a global elite class arriving on their shores, citizens reacted negatively to the perceived pressure put on their wages and public services by these highly visible migrant workers. Typical sentiments expressed include, "*... foreigners feed our sense of insecurity. If that sounds like a poor reason for our mistrust of foreigners, we can lay claim to the second: Foreigners, through no fault of their own, cannot partake in a strong and pulsating Singapore identity."* (Chang, 2010). Similar to the immigration backlash being witnessed globally in migration-recipient nations, civil society in Singapore offered staunch resistance to a White Paper on Population , aimed at enhancing migration, promulgated by the government (Goh, Yong, & Sim, 2013).

Acculturation

As a basis for research on the impact of communication on cultural belonging (Kim, 2007), the concept of acculturation is defined as "phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Migrants are faced with a conundrum, having to align their existing relationship with the home culture with the new, and largely unfamiliar, host culture encountered (Berry, 1997). This pluralistic-typological approach to acculturation has been used to describe the problems migrants face in the new culture (Liu, 2007; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdrzálek, 2000). We operationalize the bi-dimensional acculturation indicators as *cultural identity,* which determines the loyalty felt towards a home culture, and *multiculturalism,* which denotes the level of affinity and favorable attitudes exhibited towards other cultures. Prior research finds that cultural identity negatively affects acculturation (Jeffres & Hur, 1981), and is often evoked in response to discriminatory practices and policies (Rumbault, 2008), while multicultural attitudes have a positive effect on adaptability (Chae & Foley, 2010; Frankenberg, Kupper, Wagner, & Bongard, 2013).

The bi-dimensional model has faced criticism for being fragmentary in explaining the totality of human experience (Skuza, 2007). Prior studies have noted that migrants are treated differentially by the host society depending on demographics such as socio-economic and gender backgrounds (Luque, del Carmen García Fernández, & Tejada, 2006; Yeoh & Huang, 2014). Further, scholars find that migrants acculturate differently to distinct life domains such as work, social life, religion, and politics (Arends-Tóth & Van De Vijver, 2003; Navas et al., 2005). After establishing the progression of our research on male migrant acculturation across gender and class, we extend the application of the bi-dimensional model of acculturation to analyze migrant adaptation outcomes across specific life domains. We operationalize the two adaptation outcomes as migrant *life satisfaction* within the personal domain and *organizational commitment* to professional organizations in the work domain.

The concept of life satisfaction was derived from the series of studies associated with the Mutual Intercultural Relations In Plural Societies (MIRIPS) (Berry, 2010), and comprises proficiency in the host society language (Berry, 2005) adaptation to host society rules, and overall comfort in the host society (Skuza, 2007). Organizational commitment denotes employees' attachment to an organization, and is comprised of three constructs—compliance, identification, and internalization (Claus, Lungu, & Bhattacharjee, 2011; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). In this study, we examined for both cultural identification and engagement within both personal and professional domains.

Mobile Phones

There is a substantial research tradition examining the usage of modern ICTs such as mobile phones by migrant groups. From a functional perspective, mobiles have aided in the maintenance of relationships with the home country (Thompson, 2009; Vertovec, 2004) and are associated with remittance transfers (Singh, 2010; Sundarajan et al., 2016). From a professional perspective, mobile phone usage enabled economic benefits garnered in the host culture (Qiu, 2009), and has facilitated job networking (Fortunati, Manganelli, Law, & Yang, 2008; Ngan & Ma, 2008). There is evidence that communication with informal social networks acts as a significant source of emotional, informational, and instrumental support for migrants (Aroian, 1992; Hernández, Pozo, & Alonso-Morillejo, 2004; Leslie, 1992; Lynam, 1985), enabling both personal well-being and professional growth.

At this point, we depart from the extant literature and focus on Singapore, first in terms of differential gender effects of technology adaptation. For women, we find that mobile phone usage acts as both a constraining technology and a liberating technology, with employers of domestic workers limiting usage and using it as surveillance tool (Anderson, 2000; Lin & Sun, 2011), and as a means of resistance to overcome employer control (Law & Peng, 2008; Thomas & Lim, 2011), respectively. In their personal lives, foreign domestic

workers use mobile phone strategies to balance the dialectic tensions arising from transnational motherhood (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014). An earlier study amongst Bangladeshi male and Filipino female migrants (Chib, Wilkin & Mei Hua, 2013) found that for women, mobile phone usage alleviated stress by increasing social support; in particular, emotional support positively influenced psychological well-being.

Our second point of departure from the extant literature regards the "blurring of lives and livelihoods" framework developed by Donner (2009). He argues that motivations of using the technology have resulted in a blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life domains. Continuing from the study described in the preceding paragraph (Chib, Wilkin & Mei Hua, 2013), we found that, in contrast to women, the stress experienced by male migrant workers increased with mobile usage, particularly whilst receiving increased emotional support. We argued previously (Chib & Aricat, 2012) that the increased stress caused by calls from friends and family was a reason for the distinct separation of mobile phone usage in personal and professional social spaces by male migrant workers. In this research study we aim to distinguish between well-being in these two life domains for male migrants, caused by their acculturation orientations and mobile phone calling practices.

To further investigate these phenomena, we conducted quantitative analysis (Aricat and Chib, 2014) to determine the influence of acculturation (cultural identity and multiculturalism) and mobile phone usage (calls to home and host cultures) on adaptation outcomes of life satisfaction and organizational commitment in personal and professional life domains respectively. We found that multiculturalism positively affected life satisfaction and organizational commitment, while cultural identity positively affected only organizational commitment. This paper illuminates the quantitative investigation with an in-depth triangulation of qualitative data. Building upon the argument derived from the literature , the research question interrogates the role of the mobile phone in professional and personal

setting in the process of acculturation for migrants within host societies that aim, as a discursive ideal, for multi-culturalism and cosmopolitanism.

Methodology

We conducted 75 in-depth interviews among male blue-collar workers from Bangladesh and India in Singapore. The aim of the exercise was to triangulate the quantitative results in terms of an enriched understanding of migrants' communication strategies in the two life domains, and their influence on adaptation outcomes. Following the bi-dimensional model, qualitative data were analyzed under the themes of: (i) Differential impact of cultural identity and multicultural thinking in organizational setting on migrants' adaptation to personal and professional domains, and (ii) Migrants' mobile phone communication to members of home and host cultures as pertaining to social and work life. We recorded a series of narrative descriptions and present a thick description of the lived experiences of the respondents, drawn from interviews and ethnographic methods, including the lead researcher's participant observation in migrants' day-to-day activities. The interviews were conducted in English, Hindi, and Malayalam, and were translated and transcribed for analysis and presentation. In order to preserve the integrity of the data and capture the lived experiences of the respondents, the quotations have retained the particular intonations and cadence of the respondents. We have elaborated upon the interpretations only where necessary. The minimum age of participation was established at 21, following approval from Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board.

Findings

Belonging and communication

The quantitative results (Aricat & Chib, 2014) suggest that migrants' multicultural outlook has a positive influence both in the context of organizational and personal life, while their identification with ethnic culture was positively related only to organizational

commitment. Mobile phone calling to the home culture had no influence in either the personal or the professional realm, though mobile phone calling to members from other communities in the host country was related positively to organizational commitment. Migrants who were older and more educated experienced greater life satisfaction. The remainder of the section presents the qualitative findings to support, and explain, the results of the quantitative analysis.

Professional domain

First, the strict distinction between personal and professional domains described by Chib and Aricat (2012) is repeated. Migrant workers often have to comply with industrial work-place regulations which limit their ability to answer mobile calls. Further, the risk of their professional identity being compromised, as well as safety concerns, lead to self-control.

> *I was in refinery earlier. There no one is allowed to use mobile phones. It's the specialty of the area. Safety issue.*
>
> *Work time, I on top go… working high… but I cannot take hand phone. Because this time my mind is "I working". If I take hand-phone, then drop… then it's problem. Because I go the ladder, this time call I take one... one hand no enough… after fall down… that's why I cannot.*

The resistance to personal mobile use in the workplace can also be attributed to the heightened anxiety felt by recipients of potentially urgent calls from the home culture, failure to respond to which led to increased stress. This reiterates the finding that increased emotional support via mediated mobile communication leads in turn to greater stress (Chib, Wilkin, & Mei Hua, 2013). We further argue that migrant workers increasingly identify with the professional nature of the organization that characterizes Singapore, and modify their behaviors accordingly.

> *Work time my house any problem, eh…* [family] *call 'missed call'. Important time, eh… many many call. Normal time one time call, ok. Two time three time. So, two three missed call means something urgent. I asked them, "This time, this time you call me, I know. This time this time my work time. Don't disturb." Not family members alone, but everyone knows, all my friends, everyone.*

As a consequence, migrants create distinct rules that isolate personal and professional mobile usage. Certainly there is instrumental value in the mobile phone usage, with acquisition of knowledge about advanced uses of the mobile phone to address migrant workers' inadequacies in English.

> *There is internet* [on mobile phone] *now. Many things can. I don't know some English vocabulary. I don't know its meaning. I can searching my phone, eh… My phone dictionary I can get from very soon. Last time eh.. I waiting, go to room and see dictionary. This one taking a long time. Because, sometime I go to room also I forgot this word. Actually, I hear this word, eh.. I cannot* [understand]. *This is happens many times. Because, somebody talked to me, some higher officer also talked to me. Some they give me a letter, or something eh… project details, something. Because, some words I don't know. Then I need to check this: 'what is the actual meaning of this one'. Now I am very easy. I can use this some Android app, eh… That way it's very helpful. English is very much required to go up in my career. Exactly.*

The use of the mobile enables micro-coordination at work (Ling & Yttri, 2002), further occurring within the organizational hierarchy, allowing for a mediated space for multi-cultural interactions.

> *I use mobile phone during work to discuss work related matters with co-workers and company professionals like supervisor and engineer. Calls are related to work, like arranging materials… in my case, my duty is to take measurement. For matters related to these, we call the supervisor and engineers always on mobile phone. On mobile phone, this communication becomes easier. Without mobile phone this coordination will not happen.*

Migrant workers realize the value of the mobile phone communication within the multicultural job environment, to the extent that they are willing to accept infrequent exceptions to the barrier established between personal and professional mobile usage. Migrant worker's personal subsidization of work calls points to the perceived value of mobile phone usage to their organizational commitment.

> *Work-related calls is only at the time of work. Outside work sometime only.*

> *We use mobile to call our boss and to call our colleagues. Yes, I receive job-related calls in the mobile. The company does not pay me for that. It doesn't pay because, we're not making job-related calls always. Sometimes… during work, if one falls sick, I call the manager….then the manager himself will take us* [to the doctor].

Migrant workers' organizational commitment was enhanced by perceived shared cultural values with the organizational management. The following narratives contrast the treatment of workers in Singapore versus prior work engagements; note the mediation of the mobile phone in both intense personal situations occurring within the professional environment.

> *Once a call came from home saying my grandfather passed away. They did not call me, but my manager. The manager called to our work site and conveyed the news. He asked my supervisor to allow me to sit in the canteen for 10 to 15 minutes or to make arrangements to go to the room, if I wanted so. This was in between my work. He permitted me to call home, if I wanted to, or to go back to my room and call home, whatever I chose to.*

> *When I was in Saudi, I was not even informed when my father passed away. The company didn't inform me. Some firms are like that, especially in Arab countries. They don't inform, thinking that we will leave immediately. So, I didn't know about my father's demise. I got to know after a few months. Everything was through letters then. Now, we call daily.*

Co-ethnic professional networks aid migrant workers in adapting to the professional behaviors and routines required in Singapore, and in furthering their career ambitions.

> *You should see this place in the morning, when everyone awaits their transport to work. It becomes a sea of workers. We do coordinate between ourselves using mobile devices. We wake up early in the morning setting alarm in it.*

> *Actually speaking, I'm trying to get into a better job than the current one.. sometimes..* [while working in the religious organization] *I can get introduced to many Malayali friends. With them I sometimes enquire whether there is a good chance.. I ask them about it often… then I can get to know about many people.*

Personal domain

Telecommunication has long been identified as an important means of maintaining regular contact with distant friends and family in the home culture (Metykova, 2010; Vertovec, 2004). Within Singapore, migrants reached out to familiar co-ethnics for companionship and social support, particularly informational, as related to their workplace (as described in the precious section). From an instrumental perspective, as seen in the

professional domain, mobile phones allow for micro-coordination (Ling & Yttri, 2002) with co-ethnic migrants.

> *Mobile phone has helped me many things in my Singapore life. Example, one day my friend called me 4.30: "Hey, do you have any information of the particular movie – Deiva Thirumagal." I want to see movie. That time I don't have the newspaper, magazine anything. So, I come to see the shop, there also no stock. Then I go to my mobile, just browsing the time I find out the timing – 6 o'clock. …. We could save time and coordinate properly.*

Mobile phone calling to the home culture, however, acted as double-edged sword. Migrants need to struggle with the dialectical tension (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) caused as a consequence of mediated communication. On the one hand, communication alleviated feelings of loneliness and provided much needed succor.

> *Sleep time I talk to my mother… because every people mother very important… father-mother. I talk to night time one minute, two minute, five minute… And I sleeping, I very happy.*

Yet, on the other hand, the brief snatches of mediated contact accentuated these very same feelings and acted as a reminder of the vast distances between the home culture and the departed migrant. Mobile calling to the home culture was found to have limited (quantitative) effects, with frequent mediated communication with family creating dialectical tensions for migrant workers.

> *Sometimes I use internet on mobile, but most of the time I go to the cybercafé. And through Google and through Internet Explorer I read news… I want to make them* [fellow countrymen] *concern what's going on in my country just now. I make them aware. I talk to them about these matters. We earn money here, but we sacrifice our times. You know, I left my family, my friends. All I miss it here, so much. But I have nothing to do. Because here life is very difficult.*

The cultural identity of the migrant is often juxtaposed versus that of the local culture, whose practices remain a source of mis-alignment for the new arrival.

> *So many people have some or other things do … some people have girlfriends, like this… Singapore*[ans] *also have, right? But I don't like this one… Saturday Sunday coming, many people drinking, I don't do that… I don't' spend money on these things.*

The heightened cultural identity of the migrant, often reinforced via mobile phone communication, also acts as a cocooning force within limited geographical locations, such as the factories, ports, and construction sites constituting the workplace, the dormitories where they reside, and ethnic ghettos such as the Little India neighborhood. Yeoh and Soco (2014) point out the irony of these pioneers of transnational mobilities being constrained within fixed boundaries of cultural experiences within cosmopolitan environments created upon the premise of cultural diversity and difference. These cultural geographies, often cordoned away from the local populace in outlying locations, become an echo-chamber of cultural identity, with activities ranging from the mundane and daily, such as cooking ethnic meals (Law, 2001), to the special, such as religious or social events.

> *In Singapore I have more than 50 friends from my own community* [Tamil]*. I have their numbers, I contact them regularly. No specific purpose, just friendship.*

> *There is no socially oriented activity to involve. No such organization has approached us, nor have we been informed that there is any such activity going on. We don't know about it. The usual activity outside job is to chat with people from our Malayali culture, go shopping along with them…nothing else.*

Nonetheless, we find that the lived experience of the worker in a diverse workplace increasingly marks a shift from partaking in a confining cultural identity to a nascent multiculturalism; however, much of this arises from opportunities presented at the dormitories and the workplace. For some migrants, interaction with other cultures from their own nation was a novel experience. The presence of fellow nationals from states other than one's own offered a common experience in a foreign environment that led to emergent bonds of friendship.

> *I have lot of friends from my own* [Tamil] *and also from Malayali community. Around 15 of them. We have life outside work… for instance, tomorrow they have arranged for a trip to Marina Bay. They called me and informed me.*

The multicultural make-up of the Singaporean workplace led to close proximity with both local and foreign, other than the migrant's own, cultures. We further note that the communicative practices, and therefore locations for multicultural engagement, occurred not merely with peers at the bottom of the hierarchy, but within the organization structure as well (as noted above). As migrants from South Asia collaborated during work-hours and developed language skills, social relationships formed. The mobile facilitated these nascent practices of cosmopolitanism that achieved cultural diversity and incorporated difference into daily practices.

> *I don't have very close friends from other cultures. But, things are going fine. I communicate to them using English. I am comfortable communicating with them. They understand my English…*
>
> *I do communicate with other communities, especially at work – to Burmese, Bangla and Thai. I call them sometimes, outside work also. With some I do talk outside work also…. Say, when he goes home for leave then also I maintain contact.*

Whilst we acknowledge that experiences of migrants may lead to a growing cosmopolitanism in the workplace, we cannot deny broader societal trends, and specific events, that act as a brake on these ideals of openness and inclusion. Against the backdrop of a global economic recession, and a concomitant hardening of conservative opposition to a variety of migrants, Singaporeans attitudes towards migration have coalesced, catalyzed by a rare 2013 riot[1] by South Asian migrant workers numbering around 400. The resultant, often incendiary, debate revolved around the complications of harboring a significant population of non-acculturated migrant workers; focusing on their lack of socialization with Singaporeans, labor grievances, alcoholism, behavioral issues and xenophobic sentiments triggered by the riot (Heng, 2013).

> *These bunch of ingrates must be repatriated. We had* [sic] *not had a riot since the early days n* [sic] *we r* [sic] *not going to have one due to foreign elements. I want*

[1] An Indian migrant worker was killed in a bus accident in Little India, a busy business district in the country. The driver of the bus was a Singaporean.

my old country back. Someone up there must do something swift. ("Not the Singapore", 2014)

Some (Mei Hua Raman, 2014) suggest deeper underlying motivations to the phenomenon of migrant flashpoints, in contrast to existing viewpoints attributing these incendiary events to particular circumstantial factors. Given the discussion here, it is worth noting that the event occurred in a social space appropriated by migrant workers as a cultural geography, and not in a workplace setting. For the general mass of migrant workers, the associated discrimination and incrimination, created alienation (separation within the bi-dimensional acculturation model) (Berry, 2005), possibly making it relatively easier to adapt within the confined organization culture than broader Singaporean society. Perceived discrimination by the host society causes reluctance of migrants to interact with locals, as well as makes them less willing to see themselves as intercultural (Chen, 2010)

Singapore culture is OK. Each one will have his own opinion about it. What I feel is that those in high status do not have any connection with us. They are in their own level. People like us are in our own groups.

Beyond the longer-term imperatives of acculturation with the host society, in the face of resistance and discrimination, the primary purpose of short-term employment with a focus on economics is a constant reminder by distant relatives. Those left behind are often financially dependent on the migrant's remittances and often burdened by the debt incurred to ensure passage and employment.

In any case, we will not be able to go home. We have to stick to it somehow. When I call home they say, "Whatever it is, you stay there for two years. Look for another job." That's what they say. There is nothing to be done after going home. So, I'm thinking of sticking to it for two years.

I don't use mobile during work. I don't try to do that… because, when I do my work, if a call comes from home, then I would be tensed. Then saying that if the matter to be conveyed over the call is likely to cause tension, then I would be tensed, I never use the mobile [during work]. *I have told my family not to call during this time.. Urgent calls during work... but I leave behind my mobile in the room. When I work, if something negative comes to my knowledge, then I feel tension. Then the attention goes there.*

For migrants on temporary work permits, the migrant experience necessarily remains of a transitory nature, intensifying cultural identity and exacerbating the problem of ghettoization (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008; Weiss, Nincic, & Nolan, 2005).

> *Comparing working here and in our homeland, I can be close to my family if I work in Kerala. Not only that, there family means, everyone has a connection with one another. I don't see it here. Other cultural differences… here it's modern, whereas our place is not that modern. I don't have any interest to mix with the culture here. If I get a good benefit from the job, I will stay here for long-term. But to stay here permanently as a citizen, I'm not interested.*

While the observed emergent practices of multiculturalism suggest a shift towards a working class cosmopolitanism arising out of a lived experience, these forces nonetheless remain limited and bounded.

> *I have friends from local cultures also – Malay, Chinese, Singaporean. The local friends are sometimes my colleagues and also those who are staying here. I have the numbers of all of them. I don't call them regularly, but only if necessary.*

Conclusion

The next chapter in the Singaporean growth narrative as a cosmopolis (Reid, 2004) is premised, beyond integration in the global capitalist enterprise with concomitant flows of goods, services, and people, on ideals of multiculturalism and cultural hybridity (Turner, 2010). The ideal cosmopolitan state, as opposed to the nation with notions of boundaries, hierarchies, and citizenship, is designed to embrace diversity and difference as extended to openness and acceptance of the Other. As a space for openness, these ideals unleash the forces of creativity, innovation, sustainable growth—all situated within an inclusive participatory environment.

This discourse has piqued the interest of a global elite, substantial proof of which is readily available in the form of the foreign capital and foreign talent that has arrived on these shores as the global economic malaise forces them to scour the planet for growth opportunities. Yeoh (2004) argues that the transient and transnational migrant slides in-between the discursive spaces, not so much forgotten as systematically excluded as a

legitimate participant in the cosmopolitan ambition. We counter-argue that, instead of being marginalized, the differences of the subaltern allow for the practice of a "bounded cosmopolitanism", aided partially by the advent of global ICTs such as mobile phones. It is important to note that we conceptually distinguish 'bounded cosmopolitanism' vs. the 'bounded solidarity' (Ling, 2008; Ling, Bertel, & Sundsay, 2011), which argues that mobile phones may re-inforce close ties at the expense of weaker ties in our social networks. In fact, we find the reverse phenomenon to be true in the case of migrants, for whom mobiles open up opportunities in both personal and professional realms.

The research problem was premised on an emergent social situation in Singapore – an otherwise multicultural society in which multiple ethnicities reportedly live in harmony – wherein transnational migrants are increasingly becoming target for host society's negative sentiments, antipathy and even resentment. Current practices engaging transnational migrant workers operate via the production of difference (Witteborn, 2011). Laws and policies differentially determine economic, legal, socio-economic status for migrant labor versus citizens and the elite guests. Witteborn (2011) describes the heterotopias, or places for social deviants, for asylum-seeking migrants to Germany as "material places and social places which represent exclusion" (p. 1148). The physical cultural geographies (work-sites, dormitories, ethnic ghettos, and even the open vans incessantly shuttling between them) of Singapore mirror these heterotopias; extended to the discursive heterotopia of the 2013 riots, which applies to every South Asian transnational migrant worker. The formerly quarantined spaces of physical being no longer afford the migrant worker the protection of anonymity and distance—the stain of heterotopia as a source of social instability is now carried by each individual.

This is not to argue solely for the existence of such a dystopic reality beneath the veneer of an elite cosmopolitanism created for citizens and foreign talent. We find succor in

the knowledge that a 'bounded cosmopolitanism' is simultaneously being negotiated by transnational migrant workers, aided by mobile phones. For these subaltern labor, there is an optimism and a focus in economic empowerment via the acquisition and execution of technical skills; there is pride and effort expended in the attainment of language and knowledge proficiency; there are the creation of multiple new relationships that transcend ethnicity, nationality, and hierarchy. Migrants are using their transnational experiences mediated by technology to transcend limitations of class, race, education, and gender. In effect, the ideals of cosmopolitanism are alive and well, although bounded.

We argue that information and communication technologies provide open participatory platforms for learning and growth. Mobiles in particular subvert the closed boundaries of restrictive spaces, cutting across the cultural geographies to allow communication with a variety of others, and providing access to information. We find that the influence of these technologies is greater in the professional sphere than in the personal environment—social transformation seems to be limited to the organizational context. An examination of the broader social context finds that technology usage is determined by the power structures in the society as well as the social practices of the users. In view of this multi-faceted critique of acculturation and technology's role in the process, we propose redrawing the contours of the concept of 'societal challenge' from a management perspective to a political praxis, shifting both the discourse and the practice from the bounded confines of the organization to that of society.

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