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Sexing the nation: normative heterosexuality and the 'good' Singaporean citizen

Lenore T. Lyons

University of Wollongong, lenorel@uow.edu.au

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What does it mean to sex a nation? In the discourses surrounding nationalism, nations frequently take up gendered positions – as 'motherlands' or 'fatherlands', with their leaders as the 'mothers' or the 'fathers of the nation'. In the family of the nation, gendered subjectivity is built around heterosexual reproductive relations in which men and women perform their 'natural roles' within families[2]. Where the language of nationalism reveals the gender of the homeland as female (Britannia, Mother India), the nation-as-woman is built on a "particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal" (Parker et al. 1992: 6). And yet, even when the imagery of the chaste mother/daughter is invoked, nationalist movements are often built around a masculinized memory of *emasculation* at the hands of colonial powers. This tension reveals the inherent contradiction between the depiction of the nation as female and the male homosociality of nationalisms. Benedict Anderson views nationalism as a distinctly homosocial form of male bonding; the nation as a 'deep, horizontal comradeship', a fraternity, a passionate brotherhood (Anderson 1991: 7). This deep homosociality reminds us that, although the imagery of colonialism rests on a metaphor of rape in which nations occupy positions as rogue/warrior states and passive/feminised states, it is actual material women's bodies that are often violated in the cause of nationalism. Nations, along with their citizen-subjects, are not only gendered but also sexualised.

Sexuality is intrinsically tied to nation-building, as the growing body of literature on the intersection between nationalisms, gender and sexuality reveals (Mohanty et al. 1991; Parker et al. 1992; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Manderson and Jolly 1997a; Jolly and Ram 2001). Nationalist struggles are fought out figuratively, and literally, on the bodies of women. Caught within multiple

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[1] When writing this paper I was reminded of Elspeth Probyn's 'Sexing the self: Gendered positions in cultural studies' (1992). This text was widely read and distributed among women's studies students when I was a graduate student. I distinctly remember the disgruntled husband of one close friend angrily scrawling **De-**Sexing the Self across her precious copy. In the complex and contested gender politics of marriage he was not only reacting to the changing nature of sex roles within the home, but also the stripping away of sex and sexuality within the bedroom – the place where his wife spent her time reading. De-sexing is a process often associated with family pets whereby they become known as 'it', a derogatory term also used to identify a range of deviant 'others' – transsexuals, transvestites, homosexuals, lesbians. In preparing this paper I re-read sections of Probyn's text, and was struck by her reference to 'sexing chickens' in her introductory paragraph. I recently discussed the sexing of chickens with my grandfather as he reminisced about his brief foray into chicken raising in the 1930s, and it was the arbitrariness of assigning 'sex', as well as 'de-sexing' that struck me as significant in my own research on gender and citizenship in Singapore.

[2] It is this normative element of heterosexuality that is deliberately called into question by the radical politics of 'Queer Nation' and 'Lesbian Nation'.

and shifting discourses that serve to inscribe place, allegiance and behaviour under the rubric of 'culture' and 'tradition', they are "victims of social backwardness, icons of modernity and privileged bearers of cultural authenticity" (Kandiyoti 1991: 431). Within these discourses, sexuality functions as a regulating mechanism of social control; it is not just "an autonomous realm of the senses but embedded in power' (Manderson and Jolly 1997b: 26). At the same time, as Manderson and Jolly suggest in their title of their work *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, sexuality cannot be separated from libidinal desire (for the love of the nation?).

The nature of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality is vigorously contested within feminist scholarship (see Vance 1984; Butler 1990; Connell and Dowsett 1992). The term 'sex' is often used to refer to the biological characteristics of individuals (chromosomes, external morphology, reproductive organs), while 'gender' refers to cultural traits and attributes (masculinity or femininity). Understanding where biology ends and socio-psychological processes begin, however, is a much more complex process than the binary pairing - sex/gender - suggests. The study of sexuality, for example, not only calls into question the stability of the 'body' as natural and unchanging, but also raises questions about how individuals create and negotiate identity and desire. And yet, state authorities assume that members of the nation are unproblematically sexed/gendered. Benedict Anderson notes that, "in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (Anderson 1991: 5). Anderson refers here to essentialist understandings of sex/gender where all human beings are assumed to be either 'male' or 'female'. But, as feminist critiques of nationalist movements clearly show, state power to restrict access to citizenship and nationality has a gendered dimension. Where gender is cross-cut by class, race, culture and sexuality, the assertion that all citizens have 'a gender' is further problematised.

My interest is in how sexed/gendered bodies are subjected by institutional regimes and practices; that is, how they are rendered productive and useful to the state. Sexual behaviour and sexual orientation are intrinsically tied to this process because they are integral to both a state's legitimacy and a Nation's future. In sexing the nation, states undertake a process not only of assigning biological sex (for example, by requiring all citizens to identify their sex/gender on birth certificates, identification papers and passports), but also (re)inscribing sexed/gendered subjectivity (for example, by restricting women's access to education and employment). States also have a keen interest in the sexual activities of bodies found within the borders of the nation-state, most often expressed through legislation (who can have what kind of sex with whom). They actively seek to subdue, subsume or erase the voices of sexualised Others as a way of ensuring the legitimacy of

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their own claims to represent the Nation. Such claims, however, are necessarily fragile and frequently contested.

In this paper I examine the ways in which non-reproductively oriented sexualities are excluded from dominant representations of the Singaporean nation. Scholarly attention to reproductive policy in Singapore highlights the roles that families, and women as mothers, play in naturalising the nation-state (Heng and Devan 1995; Heng 1997; PuruShotam 1998). By privileging the state's own emphasis on 'Asian families' such work continues to reinforce a view of dominant reproductive heterosexuality. What is missing in these accounts is an examination of the ways in which non-reproductive sexualities (homosexual, transsexual and celibate sexualities) and alien sexualities (migrant workers) are inscribed as deviant, and how sexuality, reproduction and patriotism intersect in shaping models of 'good' citizenship. Debate about 'Asian values' is central to this analysis; dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in opposition to 'western values', and 'tradition' is often deployed in the service of modernity. Exploring the tensions between cultural and reproductive constructions of the nation provides a means to explore the contradictions inherent in the state's own discourses. At the same time, by focusing on the *politics* of subjectivity, that is, how these positions/subjectivities are created and produced, it is possible to avoid the tendency to see the state as all-powerful, a risk that is heightened in the case of Singapore because of its common association with authoritarianism.

Normative heterosexuality and motherhood

After achieving independence in 1965, the Singaporean government embarked on a program of widespread social and economic transformation aimed at boosting economic growth and maintaining social and political stability. The cornerstone of this program is a model of strong government built on a limited social welfare network and an emphasis on technological innovation aimed at maintaining a competitive edge in the global market place (Rodan 1993). Such an approach has seen Singapore outstrip its neighbours in terms of both economic growth measures and social/lifestyle indicators. During this period, the People's Action Party (PAP) maintained its political dominance such that the government, the state, and the political party are synonymous in terms of both everyday governance and public sentiment. The government's most recent policy statement on its vision for Singapore, *Singapore 21*, identifies "Strong Families" as one of its key ideas for the new millennium:

> Strong families are the foundation for healthy lives and wholesome communities. They give security and meaning. They are the 'base camp' from which our young venture forth to reach for high aspirations. They are the avenue through which our old pass on the values and lessons they have learnt in life. They ensure that our children grow up happy and well, and that our elders enjoy respect and dignity. They are an irreplaceable source of care and support when we need it, at whatever age (S21 Facilitation Committee 2003).

The Singaporean state has sought to strengthen the family as a key social structure and simultaneously to construct its own vision of family life. Asian values provide an important context for public scrutiny of both family and sexuality. The rhetoric of Western versus Asian values is constantly reinforced through a public campaign of comparison, in which the Singaporean government is represented as the archetype of Asian traditions and values. Women are intrinsically tied to this debate through their role as mothers. As Nirmala PuruShotam (1998: 145) says, "Asian-ness is importantly located in the normal family, the core of which is patriarchal". Such a family structure and form is located in antiquity, is Chinese, ageist, sexist, and retains a powerful morality (PuruShotam 1998: 135). But, mothers are not simply the imparters of Asian culture, they are (re)producers of the 'Asian family'. More specifically, in a country with declining birth rates amongst the predominantly Chinese upper and middle-classes, they are the mothers of the Asian as Confucian nation.

This is evidenced in the furore that developed in 1983 around then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's call for graduate mothers to have more children. Lee feared that in a country whose only resource is its people, a decline in birthrates amongst the well-educated would result in a 'thinning of the gene pool', and thus national economic disaster (Straits Times 1983). Using an eugenicist approach, Lee argued that while all women can be mothers, better-educated women *should* be mothers. The issue was dubbed 'The Great Marriage Debate' by the local press. The state's solution to this crisis of nation-building is a combination of public campaigns, financial incentives and educational rewards aimed at encouraging well educated mothers to produce more children, and less educated mothers to 'stop at two' (Saw 1990). While issues of marriage and child-bearing affect both men and women, the 'problem" is largely understood and represented by the government and the media as one faced by graduate women alone.

The government's stance on graduate women provides a context in which both the state and individual families can read 'traditional values' against the concept of 'national good'. Not only are graduate women letting down their families by failing to marry at the right age and have the right number of children, they are also letting down their nation. In this context being a 'good mother' involves two aspects – providing children with the best genetic wiring possible (the state needs

intelligent (Chinese) workers); and inculcating children into state-defined national values (understood as 'Asian' values). As the Great Marriage Debate shows, however, not all women fulfil their state-defined destiny. This tension between the government's desires and women's actual practices serves to rupture state definitions of 'womanhood' enshrined in the Women's Charter.[3] The Charter inscribes a "legal definition of feminine identity codified around marriage, divorce, and relationship to children" (Heng 1997: 37), and thus of 'women' as specifically gendered (and sexualised) subjects.

This is clearly demonstrated in the ways the state deals with women who do not fit its model of motherhood. Some women - notably the less educated - carry a heavier burden as workers. More educated women (particularly the Chinese) are required to perform a stronger role as mothers. This hierarchy of motherhood, however, does not include a role for unmarried mothers. The patriarchal family is the only site within which mothering should take place. This in part explains the state's rejection of single motherhood as a solution to the graduate woman problem. As Heng and Devan point out "behind the ostensible crisis of maternity and reproduction – too much or too little, never exactly enough – was a crisis of *paternity* and reproduction". Such a solution, "struck at the core of state fatherhood itself, the institutional basis on which governmental patriarchy was posited" (Heng and Devan 1995: 202).

Within these overlapping discourses of family values and national values, the unmarried woman (not mother) is rendered socially deviant. Public and state responses to the Great Marriage Debate show that there is no recognised 'single' status for women - the graduate woman is marked out as a 'spinster' or an 'old maid' by her failure to marry (Lyons-Lee 1998). She is, by definition, 'unmarried' and therefore lacking. Being unmarried becomes in turn a life-style choice that women have to explain and support - whether through reference to the 'right man', career or desire. Not only is being unmarried unnatural, immoral, and a source of potential and actual shame to families, it is unpatriotic. Celibacy and non-marriage threaten the biological reproduction of the nation itself.

Non-reproductive sexualities

The Singaporean state is not the first to promote a return to 'family values' built around normative heterosexuality. What makes Singapore unique, however, is the extent to which the ruling PAP is

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[3] The Women's Charter covers laws dealing with marriage, divorce, custody, maintenance, inheritance, property rights and protection against violence (although it is unevenly applied to Muslim women who are also covered by Islamic law).

able to manipulate social policy to achieve its vision of family life. As discussed above, marriage and childbearing have been promoted through a range of financial and other measures aimed at encouraging couples to fulfil their 'national duty'. At the same time, the state has sought to restrict sexual behaviour that falls outside its family model. Although government policies privilege the state's vision of family life (patriarchal, nuclear or extended), not all forms of sexual behaviour outside heterosexual marriage are targeted in the same way. These differences reflect an understanding of 'natural' gender difference built around sex roles and sexual urges.

Heterosexual relations outside of marriage

Women and young people have been the specific targets of state campaigns around heterosexuality outside of marriage. Pre-marital sex is frowned upon and largely circumscribed by the tendency for children to remain in their parents' home until marriage. In addition, there are no support services for single or unwed mothers, and abortion and contraceptives are freely available. The state's attitude towards single mothers is clearly expressed by Minister of State for Defence, David Lim, in 1999. Lim stated that:

> Young unwed mothers do need help. They need our empathy, and our understanding. Many may have ended up in dire circumstances through ignorance, carelessness, or thoughtlessness. Perhaps a moment of passion, or madness, or both! They've made a mistake, but they deserve a second chance. But in finding ways to help them, we should not create support systems that encourage more young girls to behave like them. Because this would weaken the family, and demote the importance of personal responsibility (The Straits Times 1999).

Young unwed fathers remain the unspoken 'other party' in Lim's account. In the absence of welfare policies to support 'unwed mothers', the state insists that they must be incorporated into their natal families or, if possible, 'married off'.

In a move to encourage marriage, single men and women under the age of 35 are restricted from buying or renting Housing and Development Board (HDB or public housing) flats, which account for approximately 88% of all housing. The eligibility requirements for most HDB flat stipulate that applicants under the age of 35 must form a family nucleus with one of the following:

1) Your spouse, and children (if any). An occupier who is married must also form a family nucleus with his spouse;
2) Your parents, and siblings (if any);
3) Your children under your legal custody (for widowed/ divorced);

4) Your fiancé/ fiancée; or
5) All your unmarried siblings if your parents are deceased (Housing and Development Board 2003).

There are few alternatives outside the HDB system for singles seeking to live on their own or with other single persons. Privately owned property is prohibitively expensive, and the private rental market is small. Single owner occupation and cohabitation are consequently very rare.

State attempts to regulate the sexual activity of non-married persons through housing policy have given rise to a range of social/sexual practices which seek not only to circumvent the HDB guidelines, but also the laws of marriage enshrined in the Women's Charter. Such practices include the phenomenon of 'being registered' but 'not married'. Most marriages in Singapore involve at least a two-fold process of legal solemnization and registration at the Registry of Marriages followed by a customary ceremony which reflects the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the couple. The period of time between the 'registration' and the customary ceremony can range from days to years depending on the particular circumstances of the couple. Although engaged couples can apply to purchase a HDB flat (on condition of producing their marriage certificate within three months of receiving the keys to their property), the long waiting times for flats and the rising property market in the 1980s led to a situation where couples 'got registered' in order to apply for their flats and then 'got married' when it became available (Tan 1998). During the interim period most couples continue to live apart as 'unmarried' or 'engaged' persons. Depending on family attitudes, some couples may cohabit before their 'marriage', while others may engage in sexual relations when they go abroad on holidays together. There is evidence to suggest that some couples have used the registration of marriage process to defraud the HDB (see Tan 1998). The 'registered' status has also given rise to an increase in petitions to the courts for annulment of marriage on the grounds of non-consummation. In a society in which divorce still holds considerable social stigma, annulment for couples who claim not to have had sexual intercourse because they were as yet not 'married' in the eyes of their families and community, has proven to be a more socially acceptable solution. The phenomenon of 'being registered' is an inventive response to state attempts to curb sexual behaviour and reflects changing social and sexual mores. Ultimately, however, such behaviour is supportive of state prescribed reproductive heterosexuality because it fails to question the centrality of marriage as the basis of family and kinship ties. The state's ability to insist that its citizens marry remains unchallenged in the absence of alternative housing opportunities.

While the state has shown a particular interest in the sexuality of young unmarried persons, female prostitution and the establishment of relationships with mistresses remain outside the state's own

sphere of interest. The Women's Charter was primarily a response to the efforts of women's groups to end polygamy and concubinage. Among the provisions covered by the Women's Charter are monogamous marriages for all non-Muslims and a requirement to register all marriages. During the furore of the Great Marriage Debate, Lee Kuan Yew reflected on the possibility of reintroducing polygamy[4] in order to provide a solution to the graduate woman problem. He voiced admiration for the Chinese patriarchs of the past who had sired large numbers of children through their wives, mistresses and concubines, but regretted that nowadays, "our women will not stand for it" (Lee cited in Saw 1990: 44).

Pimping and soliciting in public places is illegal in Singapore, but prostitution is not a criminal act. The authorities usually tolerate prostitution, which largely involves foreign women, some of whom are illegally trafficked. Where arrests against pimps and traffickers are made they usually result in a return of the foreign women to their country of origin without prosecution (see discussion of Alien Sexuality below). All brothel-based sex workers in Singapore are placed under the Medical Surveillance Scheme that requires them to undergo regular screening for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The Police Anti-Vice Unit works closely with the Ministry of Health to ensure that sex workers attend their regular check-ups. The Unit can suspend sex workers from brothels, deregister them from the medical scheme, and/or deport them to their home country if they do not comply with the screening tests (Chan and Chee 1997). Other forms of sex work (bar hostessing, masseuses, and home-based sex work) are much less regulated.

Although limited in scope, social research on sex work in Singapore suggests that prostitution is considered to be a socially acceptable way in which men release their 'natural sexual urges' (Quah 1987: 68). Prostitutes are an important outlet for uncontrollable male sexuality and are tolerated for the supposed role they play in protecting 'innocent' and 'respectable' women from the threat of rape. State regulation of prostitution takes place within a medicalised discourse that seeks to control the spread of STDs and particularly HIV/AIDS. The government's 'tolerant' and 'progressive' attitude towards the non-criminalisation of prostitution is reflective of a state that seeks to regulate disease rather than male sexual behaviour. Police activity against brothel owners and non-licensed pimps ensures greater regulation of the bodies of sex workers, while at the same time overlooking the social and class status of prostitutes and other sex workers. This stance helps to explain the curious juxtaposition of 'family values' in *Singapore 21*, and the recent development of an 'AIDS travel pack' by the Ministry of Health for men who travel alone overseas. Prostitution and extra-

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[4] He was of course referring to polyandry.

marital relationships provide an important outlet for male (hetero-) sexual urges and, unless they threaten the family, do not challenge the nation. Second families (established through relationships with appropriate mothers) may in fact support the state's pro-natalist policies. This 'double standard', by definition, does not apply to women.

Homosexuality

The medicalised discourse surrounding prostitution is in contrast to the moralising frame that informs state attitudes towards homosexuality. Legal prohibition of male homosexuality in Singapore dates from British colonial rule and criminal sanctions are frequently enforced against practising male homosexuals. Singapore's Penal Code contains two clauses on homosexual acts. The first (Section 377) deals with 'unnatural acts' and stipulates anyone who "voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animals". The Court of Appeal has held that natural sexual intercourse (sex which is in the order of nature) involves coitus of the male and female sexual organs. This definition is sufficiently narrow to exclude a range of sexual acts between and amongst men and women, including oral and anal sex. The second (Section 377A) deals with 'gross indecency' and specifically relates to sexual acts (excluding penetration) between male persons. Most homosexual 'crimes', however, are generally pursued as 'outrage of modesty' or 'molest' (Section 354) usually against undercover policeman (Leong 1997). Leong argues that the law is concerned only with male homosexual behaviour and ignores lesbians with the result that officially, lesbianism does not exist. However, Section 377 has not been tested in relation to two women, and it is unclear how the courts would interpret the law in such instances.

The gay movement in Singapore is small and remains underground and informal. Gay rights issues have only received an officially sanctioned (but limited) voice in relation to activism around HIV/AIDS (see Leong 1995). There is no officially registered gay or lesbian organisation in Singapore, and attempts to formally register such groups have failed. In 1997 a group of gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual men and women calling themselves People Like Us (PLU) applied to register as a society. PLU's mission statement sought to "promote awareness and understanding of the issues and problems concerning gay, lesbian and bisexual persons" via small group discussions, research, social events, and the circulation of a newsletter (People Like Us 1997). The application was rejected without explanation despite a lengthy period of appeal (see Heng 2001). Instead, gay men and lesbians have turned to the Internet as a forum in which to meet

and discuss issues associated with their identity and sexuality (see Ng 1999). In addition, informal gay and lesbian social groups operate underground, and there is a growing gay dance club scene.

The government has consistently argued that its policies are not homophobic but merely reflect the views of the majority of its citizens[5]. In response to a 2002 government survey which showed an 'erosion of social values' among youth, including 'a more relaxed attitude towards homosexuality' (only 71% of youth surveyed found it to be unacceptable), the Acting Minister for Community Development and Sports called for a stronger program of school education on family values: "Because we want to catch them when they are young. We want to inculcate in them values about family, about marriage and what have you" (The Straits Times 2002b). The Minister's comments reflect the inherent contradictions in the state's argument that the government reflects community attitudes. In this instance, a 'relaxation' of attitudes towards homosexuality is not cause for re-thinking the state's own views on homosexuality, but rather the need for an education program which re-emphasises heterosexual marriage relations 'before it is too late'.

There is another underlying tension within the state's public statements on homosexuality. While at the same time emphasising 'traditional' public values and sentiments which proscribe more liberal attitudes towards homosexuality, the state also publicly implies that gays and lesbians are free to 'do what they like' in private. In 2000, one Member of Parliament was quoted as saying: "As I see it, anyone in Singapore can have his private interests and everyone can do anything he wants in his life, so long as it does not violate the laws of our society" (Ng 2000: 84). But male homosexuality clearly does 'violate' the law. In 2000 local gay man Mr Alex Au applied to the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit for a permit to hold a public form to discuss the place of gays and lesbians in the national vision of Singaporean society enshrined in *Singapore 21*. His application was rejected on the grounds that: "The Police cannot allow the holding of this forum which will advance and legitimise the cause of homosexuals in Singapore. The mainstream moral values of Singaporeans are conservative, and the Penal Code has provisions against certain homosexual practices. It will therefore be contrary to the public interest to grant a public entertainment licence" (People Like Us 2000). The Minister of State for Trade & Industry and Communications & Information Technology, Mr Lim Swee Say later commented:

> If the intention of the forum is to push for general acceptance of homosexuality in Singapore, then my view is that what people do in private about their sexual orientation is up to them. But please do not try to promote general acceptance of homosexual behaviour

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[5] For a study of attitudes towards homosexuality in Singapore see (Lim 2002)

in public, because we are still a conservative society, for very good reasons. So, instead of creating a platform specifically targeting people with a homosexual orientation, they can always join the many platforms available to Singaporeans at large. Community at heart, we can work together to help many more people live a better life in Singapore 21 (The Straits Times 2000).

But, as I have argued above, to be a 'good citizen' and a 'patriotic Singaporean' is to be implicitly sexed and gendered. The state's attitude towards gay men and lesbians needs to be read against its promotion of marriage and the family as a cornerstone of society. In these terms, homosexuality "constitutes a threat and an aberration to the paternalistic state because same-gender unions usually do not result in procreation, and indeed they subvert the cause of genetic engineering" (Leong 1995: 18).

Transsexual marriages

This view of a state preoccupied with reproductive heterosexuality at first appears quite at odds with recent legislation pertaining to the marriage of transsexuals. The figure of the transgender/transsexual subject is not alien in Singapore. Lawrence Leong notes that Bugis Street gained a reputation as a transsexual haunt, a 'society of spectacle' under the gaze of locally-based foreign military personnel (Leong 1997). In a move to 'clean up' the less savoury elements of Singapore's night culture, Bugis Street was razed and re-built in the 1990s, this time with sanitised, tourist oriented 'drag shows'. Bugis Street has become another tourist destination along similar lines to the state-sponsored renewal of the 'Malay Village' and 'Little India'; in a parody of their former selves, transsexuals titillate the senses of their mixed (Western) audiences who speculate 'is s/he or isn't s/he?'

In 1997 the Singaporean Parliament amended the Women's Charter in respect to determining the capacity of individuals to marry. This amendment has had specific implications for the marriage contract and on the ability of transsexuals to marry. The Women's Charter stipulates that solemnized marriage between persons who are not respectively male and female shall be void. While prohibiting marriage between persons of the same sex, the Charter further stipulates (s.12.3) that for the purposes of this section, sex is determined by what is stated on the individual's identity card, and that a "person who has undergone a sex re-assignment procedure shall be identified as being of the sex to which the person has been re-assigned" (Ong 1998: 168). The administrative practice of the National Registration Office (NRO), which issues identity cards to all citizens and permanent residents, is to permit reassigned sex to be noted on the ID card. This change has

effectively created a situation where individuals who are 'sexed' male or female at birth but subsequently undergo surgical re-alignment to 'psychological gender' (common sense understanding of transsexual used by the NRO to change ID cards) are permitted to marry.

How are we to understand the state's and the judiciary's position in relation to transsexual marriage in light of the strong legal and social prohibitions against 'unnatural sex'? Changes to the Women's Charter were brought about as a result of anomalies in the previous legislation in which there was no express requirement for parties to a marriage to be of different sexes. The need to review the legislation became apparent after a woman petitioned the court for a decree nullity on the grounds that she discovered after marriage that her 'husband' was a transsexual (see Ong 1998). The recent legislative change, by permitting transsexuals (but not transvestites or homosexuals) to marry, continues to reflect the state's implicit homophobia. With advances in medical procedures that allow men and women to alter their physical appearance through surgery and hormonal treatment, the state has had to accommodate the needs of a minority of transsexuals who wish to marry in order to avoid the spectre of cohabiting married couples who, while biologically 'opposite' physically appear to be 'the same'. By privileging biological/chromosomal sex, the state confronted the possibility of condoning same *gender* relationships/marriages. To avoid this spectacle, transsexual persons are welcomed into the national collective through their incorporation into the patriarchal, monogamous, heterosexual family.

The limitations of such a move, however, are manifold. The status of transsexual marriages in relation to laws regulating sexual activity (eg unnatural sexual acts), consummation of marriage and adultery remain unclear (see Ong 1998). Accommodating transsexuality within the bounds of the heterosexual family may satisfy the appearance of 'Asian family values', but it does not address the specific purposes of those families. Transsexuals cannot contribute to the biological reproduction of the nation-state through 'natural' monogamous sex, and hence become full citizens. It also remains unclear whether such couples have the same opportunities as 'normal' couples to adopt and/or raise children via other means. For a government committed to science and technology, the figure of the transsexual represents a Frankenstein-like monstrosity best kept within the family. Whether the extension of marriage rights to transsexuals will provide other transgressive sexual Others to challenge the state in similar ways depends in part on whether transsexual marriage is able to challenge gender as well sex within the family.

Alien sexuality

The sexuality of non-citizens represents the most tangible threat to the nation. The state actively uses orientalist discourses about dangerous male sexuality (coded around the 'dark' bodies of construction workers from the Indian sub-continent) and lascivious female sexuality (coded around the bodies of poor rural women from South and Southeast Asia) in debates about immigration and employment. Media reports on prostitution often focus on the national origin of prostitutes, perpetuating stereotypes about the sexual availability of poor Asian (and by definition non-Singaporean) women. Many Thai women have reported harassment by Singaporean Immigration Officials who imply that they are entering Singapore as prostitutes (The Nation 1999). Similarly, Chinese nationals report that they are often mistaken for karaoke lounge hostesses or prostitutes. Foreign prostitutes are subject to contradictory discourses which code them as 'wily temptresses' and 'innocent victims'. As active agents, Asian prostitutes (sometimes posing as domestic workers) deliberately cross state borders in search of a 'better life' for their families, bringing with them the threat of disease (see for example The Straits Times 2002a). As innocent victims, poor gullible women arrive in Singapore with the promise of employment only to find on arrival that they had been sold into prostitution (The Nation 2002).

Foreign sex workers provide an important outlet for the sexual urges not only of local men but also the large male foreign workforce[6]. Male construction workers pose a threat to the modesty of local girls and women, a threat that is only partially controlled by housing these men in fenced-off compounds on building sites. In contrast, white-collar expatriates from Europe, North America and Australia are actively wooed by a state that deploys images of 'oriental/exotic sexuality' for economic purposes. Witness the enduring image of Singapore Airlines 'Singapore Girl' as an icon of business tourism. Anxiety about the sexuality of foreign sex workers is also closely tied to underlying tensions about 'Chinese chauvinism' and the maintenance of the ethnic/racial balance. Despite a largely restrictive immigration policy, the government has encouraged Chinese nationals to settle in Singapore in recent years in a partial move to address the declining birth rate amongst the local Chinese population. Minority groups as well as locally-born ethnic Chinese have expressed some concern about the implications of migration for Singapore's cultural and ethnic composition (Leong 2002).

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[6] The Ministry of Manpower does not release details on the gender or nationality of foreign workers. In 2002 there were more than half a million foreign workers on work permits. See (Leong 2002)

Where non-citizens enter into reproductive marital relationships with citizens, a hierarchy of ethnicity/race, class, and education is used to determine whether the progeny of such unions are beneficial to the nation, and in turn whether the privileges of citizenship can be formally bestowed on them. It is much easier for the foreign wives of Singaporean men to gain permanent residence and citizenship than it is for the foreign husbands of Singaporean women. A foreign husband (the 'head of the household') must be gainfully employed and able to support his wife and dependents, but a foreign wife (a dependent) does not face the same requirements. Even so, working class men have found it difficult to obtain visitors' passes, work permits, and permanent residency permits for their foreign spouses (Mathi 2000). Under the Marriage Restriction Policy, work permit holders are not allowed to marry Singaporean citizens or permanent residents without the Ministry of Manpower's approval. The purpose of this restriction is to prevent large numbers of low-skilled foreign workers settling in Singapore through marriage and placing a potential welfare burden on the state. The foreign wives and children of many Singaporean men thus remain physically separated from their husbands by state borders.

Conclusion

Attention to the presence/absence of issues of sexuality in state discourses of nation-building in Singapore reveals not only the extent to which heterosexual reproductive relations are inscribed as normative, but also the ways in which sexually 'deviant' groups challenge dominant constructions of citizenship and nation. Sexing the nation is an integral part of the Singaporean state's management of citizenship and reflects an inherently gendered vision of the nation. This vision, however, is cross-cut by race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, and mediated by state defined 'Asian values'. The state's vision of 'traditional family values' is inherently Chinese and patriarchal, and implicitly manufactured in the service of the modern nation-state. The state seeks to 'strengthen' these values through direct policy intervention in the sexual lives of its citizens. The forces of globalisation pose a direct threat to these attempts at social-engineering. The increasing movement of people across Singapore's borders not only increases opportunities for inter-ethnic, cross-national sexual liaisons (including marriage), but also facilitates the spread of ideas, technology and disease that fundamentally alter the meanings and practices of sex, gender and sexuality. The Internet provides a forum for Singapore's sexualised Others to 'meet' and 'perform' sexual difference. Nonetheless, the opportunities for sexually deviant groups to challenge state discourses or to play a formal role in re-imagining the nation are limited. Up to the present, the most fruitful avenue for Singapore's sexual Others to engage the state is via its own discourse of the patriarchal,

heterosexual Asian family. Such an approach while limited in scope and fraught with compromise may provide a means to begin challenging the hegemony of normative heterosexuality.

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