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Gordon TAN
Singapore University of Technology and Design

Jessie P. H. POON
SUNY University at Buffalo

Orlando WOODS
Singapore Management University, orlandowoods@smu.edu.sg

Citation

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Gordon Kuo Siong Tan[1], Jessie PH Poon[2], and Orlando Woods[3]

[1]Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore
[2]University at Buffalo, the State University of New York, USA
[3]Singapore Management University, Singapore

Abstract

A burgeoning literature on 'left behind' places has emerged that captures the backlash against globalisation and highlights the locales that lag world cities. This paper integrates the 'left behind' and world cities literatures through the lens of discontent in the context of Singapore, using sentiment analysis and topic modelling as well as interviews with local professionals to unpack the multidimensional aspects of discontent. Focusing on the Singapore–India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement that spurred discontent directed at foreign Indian professionals, we show that the worlding generated by transnational flows has accentuated intra-urban inequality through racialisation and spatialisation of financial business and suburban residential hubs. Discontent from intra-urban inequality unsettles years of efforts by the state to cultivate cosmopolitan spaces aimed at reducing social exclusion and difference in the world city of Singapore.

Keywords

Introduction

While the world city scholarship has contributed to understandings of globalisation (Derudder and Taylor, 2018), there has also been a backlash against globalisation in recent years. This backlash has been accompanied by a burgeoning literature on 'left behind' places, with the rediscovery of laggard places and economically disadvantaged groups being sources of discontent (Martin et al., 2021). Both literatures point to spatial inequality from the agglomeration of skilled workers in large cities. Whilst world cities scholars tend to approach spatial inequality from a predominantly structural view, there are calls to diversify the ways in which world cities may be researched (van Meeteren et al., 2016). This paper contributes to thematic diversity by integrating the 'left behind' and world cities literatures through the lens of discontent. Specifically, we highlight intra-urban dynamics of inequality by focusing on Sassen's (1999) contradictory, and often exclusionary, spaces of discontent that emerge from the consumption practices of skilled migrants.

In the past two decades, Singapore has aggressively pursued an ambition to become a world city and has actively participated in the global competition for talent (Ng, 2011). In recent years, however, discontent has begun to surface, which intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The People's Action Party (PAP) – Singapore's dominant political party since the country's independence in 1965 – saw an erosion of voter support in the 2020 election. Singapore's case contrasts with studies on 'left behind' places that highlight the displacement of population in peripheral regions and cities. As a

premier world city, it is neither a 'left behind' nor laggard city. Discontent is associated not just with the economically disadvantaged, but also with relatively well-educated, well-compensated professionals in a city that has generated much wealth from its worlding activities. But discontent in Singapore shares one common feature with the 'left behind' literature: both highlight the backlash against globalisation. This is best seen in criticisms against the Singapore–India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, or CECA. Highly dependent on trade and the global economy, Singapore has signed 27 free trade agreements (FTAs) (Enterprise Singapore, 2022). Yet CECA has borne the brunt of the globalisation backlash. To examine the role of intra-urban inequality in discontent, we draw on two sources of data, namely 20,000 social media texts and interviews with 15 local professionals.

The paper proceeds as follows. The second section situates the study in the geographies of discontent and 'left behind' places literature and discusses how CECA has fostered discontent. The third section details the methodology involving the gathering and analysing of social media comments and participant interviews. The fourth section analyses and discusses the results of user comments on social media and incorporates interview data. The last section concludes the article.

World cities, left behind places and discontent

Situated at the nexus of urbanisation and globalisation processes that unfold over space and time, world cities derive their 'global' character and economic, social and cultural prominence from a high degree of transnational flows of people and capital, such as well-remunerated expatriates in high-profile industries like finance (Beaverstock, 2002). In particular, a cadre of highly skilled transnational elite is critical to the vibrancy of world cities, serving as 'conduit(s) through which capital is accumulated, networks built, (and) connections made' (Beaverstock, 2017: 240).

Notwithstanding the importance of transnational elites to the formation and vitality of world cities, recent years have witnessed an eruption of discontent across both the Global North and South as reflected by the embracing of right-wing populist movements (Florida, 2021). Motivated by recent trends of individuals being excluded from the gains of economic transformation and globalisation, a distinctly spatial imaginary and vocabulary have been invoked by mainstream political and media discourse in explaining this phenomenon. This resonates with Florida's (2021) argument that rising discontent among 'left behind' places is a 'quintessentially geographic phenomenon – a fundamental product of distinctive economic and cultural geographies and of deepening differences in the day-to-day lives of different class and racial groups' (p. 619). Studies have unpacked the geography of discontent by casting a spotlight on spatial inequality in the EU and UK (see e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2020; Leyshon, 2021) and, to a lesser extent, the US (Kemeny and Storper, 2020).

Existing studies collectively represent inequality using spatial markers such as 'left behind places' that lag 'metropolitan cores' (Sykes, 2018). 'Left behind' places tend to be regions adversely affected by globalisation. They display a mix of characteristics, including lower economic growth and employment (Dijkstra et al., 2020), lower living standards, shrinking population, poor infrastructure development (Furlong, 2019) and political inattention. They offer a stark contrast against 'superstar' world cities that attract large numbers of highly educated, skilled and well-compensated workers (Martin et al., 2021). Cities, as the critical engines of economic growth and innovation (Glaeser, 2012),

have commandeered significant political attention and resources in urban and regional development. However, even the biggest 'superstar' cities can be plagued by discontent (Florida, 2021).

World city scholarship has accentuated a longstanding literature that highlights the advantages of the clustering of highly skilled and networked firms and professionals in driving innovation. These networks map how global capital is (re)produced through multiscalar control and coordination of worldwide offices. Such a focus presumes that the networks of world-city makers, specifically professionals in the advanced producer services/information technology (APSIT) firms, are responsible for the overall network structure globally (Coe et al., 2010; Derudder and Taylor, 2018). APSIT workers are central actors in developing new circuits of value and the embedding of financial logics in global capital (Bassens and van Meeteren, 2015). However, as the next section shows, talent mobility facilitated by global production and financial networks has also become a source of discontent. In particular, the growing monopoly power of the technology sector, and a concentration of finance firms and their financing activities, have been accompanied by the rise of a transnational cosmopolitan professional class. In Singapore's case, the small domestic population of professionals has encouraged a relatively open immigration climate that saw the relocation of skilled expatriates and immigrants from India (henceforth, PIs), including relocation associated with CECA.

While the Global Talent Competitiveness Index ranks Europe, the US and Singapore highly for their relatively liberal immigration policies (Monteiro and Lanvin, 2021), anti-immigration views have driven populism and anti-urban elite sentiments in the US and UK (Florida, 2021; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). In the context of globalisation backlash and anti-immigration sentiments, Coe et al.'s (2010) question of who wins and who loses in globalisation is pertinent. The 'left behind' places literature has attempted to address this question by focusing on discontent in economically stagnant places. For example, London's financial services-led model of economic growth is said to exacerbate income and social inequality in the UK (Leyshon, 2021), magnifying individual discontent where widening income inequalities create the perception that 'some people matter more than others' (Lenzi and Perucca, 2021: 441). Undoubtedly, world cities play a role in exacerbating inter-urban inequality within national economies. In this paper however, we are interested in intra-urban inequality dynamics.

According to Sassen (1999: xxxi), the world city expresses 'an immense array of cultures from around the world, each rooted in a particular country, town or village, and reterritorialised in a few single places, places such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London and most recently, Tokyo'. Describing widening intra-urban disparities between the 'urban glamour zone' and an 'urban war zone' (Sassen, 1999: p. xxxiii), she contrasted the prosperous central business (financial) district dominated by modern skyscrapers against declining neighbourhoods consisting of mainly low skilled workers and immigrants. However, world cities' business districts also demand a homogenised urban space that sanitises difference to accommodate cultural diversity among transnational professionals. In this cosmopolitan space, cultural encounters that erase particularity and difference of class and race are promoted. Yet, as Sassen (1999) hints, difference is often transformed, reproduced and reinforced rather than erased in the cosmopolitan world city.

In the context of Singapore, we suggest that difference is (re)produced through consumption practices of urban spaces, specifically, in new urban glamour zones inhabited by immigrant and expatriate communities of condominium dwellers. Condominiums are a prized housing asset in land-scarce Singapore, where 78% of the local population live in government subsidised public housing built

by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). Living in a condominium apartment grants individuals social status through cultural practices and a lifestyle that can be considered exclusionary to HDB dwellers. But gated condominiums also limit cultural and social encounters, not just with the low income but also with Singaporean professionals. As we suggest below, condominium consumption underscores the reterritorialisation of urban space through constitution of race and space, in this case, the spatialisation of professional talents from India.

Singapore, an economically prosperous city-state, is hardly a 'left behind' place, nor has it experienced a populist revolt like in the US and UK. Discontent is directed specifically at the APSIT sector brought in by CECA. While CECA was ratified in 2005 and did not attract much attention initially, sentiments began to change by the mid-2010s. One thorny issue relates to intra-corporate transfers (ICTs), which allows Indian managers and executives who have worked in their parent companies for a year to be transferred to subsidiaries in Singapore. The list includes professionals who specialise in APSIT work, ranging from systems design, programming, data analysis, information and software to taxation, accounting, auditing, financial and fund management. While ICTs are temporary, an influx of skilled PIs has fuelled discontent, particularly the perception that CECA is used as a stepping-stone to permanently migrate to Singapore. Whilst anti-immigration sentiments are not new in Singapore (see Woods and Kong, 2023; Yeoh and Lam, 2016), this paper draws attention to the emergence of racialised exclusionary spaces that have spurred discontent.

CECA and discontent

Singapore presents an interesting case study in contextualising 'left behind' places within the context of world cities. The city's workforce is well represented by a cadre of professional, managerial, executive and technical (PMET) workers, consisting of both local and foreign professionals who are highly sought after by APSIT firms. Singapore has actively courted foreign professionals to address local manpower shortages in certain skills-intensive industries, such as finance and IT. According to the head of Singapore's central bank, Singaporeans contribute only a third of the estimated 25,000-strong tech workforce in financial services (Daga, 2021).

Trade agreements facilitate globalisation as part of the institutional infrastructure that supports transnational capital and labour flows. Singapore has embraced labour liberalisation in its trade agreements to alleviate skilled labour shortages, with intra-corporate transfers being the most popular form of labour mobility (Jurje and Lavenex, 2018). Singapore's admission of Indian professionals (PIs) under CECA is expected to be temporary – up to five years under long-term temporary entry, and two years under shorter term entry. In addition, PIs need to attain at least three years of 'post-secondary' education including Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral degrees (Government of India, n.d.). This clause explicitly targets the highly skilled. Specifically, the agreement describes the 'manager, executive and specialist' sector as the main target of freer labour mobility. CECA has no provision for intra-corporate transferees from India to become permanent Singapore residents or citizens.

Expatriation is essential to world city making. As Beaverstock (2017) argued, foreign talents influence world cities' competitiveness by augmenting knowledge in domestic markets. Intra-corporate transfers reflect transnational intra-firm assignments. Like other expatriates, Indian professional expatriates are drawn to Singapore because of its world city stature. Professionals are seen as a vital channel of knowledge transfer that adds value to APSIT firms. Sanderson et al. (2015) found that world

cities are home to more diverse immigrant populations than less central cities. Singapore has a long history of expatriate influx supported by a concentration of multinational firms. Nonetheless, criticisms mounted regarding the number of PMET work visas that were perceived to have been granted to professionals from India. This took on a more negative tone in August 2020, when a Facebook post with a photo allegedly showing the CEO of Singapore's largest domestic bank, the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS), surrounded by Indian IT employees, went viral. The photo caption read 'Damn the policy of giving to foreigners what belongs to the locals', giving the impression that the bank had been biased in its employment practices. Despite DBS's swift clarification that the photograph was taken at their India office, the story quickly led to CECA becoming a flashpoint for online discontent. Not surprisingly, this incident showed that despite government assurances of the temporary nature of intra-corporate transfers, citizens' anxiety remained palpable. The sources of discontent are complex and reflect ongoing contemporary shifts in the world economic order (De Ruyter et al., 2021). These include globalisation, inequality, technological disruption and environmental change. Anchoring these shifts using CECA as an example points to a relevant mechanism in the production of discontent.

Methodology

Discontent can be expressed through various modes, ranging from voting power or public protests to venting on social media (De Ruyter et al., 2021). We examine discontent by analysing social media posts using sentiment analysis and topic modelling. In Singapore, where social and political order is prioritised, discontent is displayed mainly on social media. While studies have attempted to define 'left behind' places using conventional social and economic indicators such as wages, unemployment rates and skills (World Bank, 2009), social media data have not been sufficiently utilised in studying the 'left behind'. Using social media data not only provides a more direct measure of discontent and perceived socio-economic inequality, but also captures a more detailed 'on the ground' understanding of the bread-and-butter concerns of the people who are affected by the globalising traits that shape world cities.

This paper draws from Facebook and YouTube user comments to news articles and videos on CECA. These two platforms were chosen as they reflect Singaporeans' news consumption patterns that often favour online sources. In Singapore, WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube are the most popular online channels for accessing news, with users largely preferring mainstream news outlets such as Channel News Asia (CNA) and The Straits Times (Tandoc, 2022), both of which have established official channels on Facebook and YouTube. We searched these two platforms to derive a list of official news articles covering CECA, published between August 2020 and September 2021. Forty-five Facebook and 15 YouTube news article links were obtained.

The user comments were collected using each platform's application programming interface (API). After data cleaning, we obtained 16,485 and 4034 comments from Facebook and YouTube respectively. The VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) package (Hutto and Gilbert, 2014) was used to evaluate the sentiment of each comment. VADER is a widely used lexicon and rule-based analysis tool designed specifically for analysing social media sentiments. It is versatile in handling informal text and even emojis/emoticons in determining sentiment polarity and intensity. VADER

classifies each comment using a weighted compound sentiment score that ranges between −1 (most negative) and +1 (most positive).

However, VADER has some limitations. It is unable to properly evaluate the local context of the comments and to detect sarcasm. Therefore, it might be biased towards neutral and positive comments, as the model is based on text corpora from the standard English dictionary. Given that Singaporean English ('Singlish') involves the use of dialects and other non-standard English terms,[1] the algorithm may misclassify comments as being positive when they should be negative. To overcome this problem, we adjusted the default thresholds[2] and used the following parameters to classify the comments: ≤0.05 (negative); >0.05 and <0.20 (neutral); and ≥0.20 (positive). These thresholds were determined by experimenting with different thresholds and evaluating them against a random set of comments to see if those comments were correctly classified by VADER. Given VADER's limitations, we acknowledge that our chosen thresholds may still result in an undercounting of the actual proportion of negative comments. Simply, we can reasonably expect real-life sentiment to be *more* negative than that captured in our empirical analysis.

Topic modelling was used to identify themes from the comments. Topic modelling measures the frequency of terms to identify word usage patterns within a text corpus. The Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) corpus of English stop words was used to remove stop words that carry very little meaning, such as 'a', 'the' and 'of'. We used Gensim, a Natural Language Processing package, specifying a latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) approach to extract the underlying topics (Rohani et al., 2016). We derived six final topics (Immigrant, Trade, Concentration, Displacement, Politics and Others) and calculated the proportion of comments that belong to each topic.[3] In the discussion below, we focus on displacement, immigrant, and concentration, and show how discourses on these topics highlight the emergence of new contradictory spaces from the influx of Indian expatriates and immigrants.

We supplemented social media data with 15 qualitative interviews with Singaporean professionals that were conducted during January to May 2022. Utilising a random sampling approach, the semi-structured interviews took place largely via Zoom and WhatsApp as the city was still under lockdown, and they lasted from 30 minutes to an hour.

Worlding and discontent

World cities scholars have privileged certain cities as 'basing points' (Friedmann, 1986: 71) in the articulation of production and markets. As worlding agents, highly mobile and skilled elites are an essential component of the financial and trade flows that connect spatially dispersed sites of offices, establishments and factories through their control activities. Intra-firm networks and flows of financial firms and other advanced producer services examined by world cities scholars capture management functions that shape these flows. In this sense, the successful negotiation of CECA broadens Singapore's articulation into the South Asian market by worlding agents. Singapore's financial institutions and IT firms welcomed the opportunity to enter India's protected market; indeed, CECA was the first trade agreement that India had signed with any country.

As mentioned earlier, DBS's CEO, Piyush Gupta, is of Indian origin but now a naturalised Singapore citizen. Mr. Gupta is widely credited with transforming DBS into a global bank with significant digital capability, as the finance sector embraced fintech. This meant adopting cloud computing and data analytics, as well as raising employees' technology capabilities (DBS, 2017). The

raising of technology capabilities was paralleled by the recruitment of professional talents from India, encouraged by intensification of a skill-based information economy. DBS's digital transformation depended on hiring 'from the outside', largely professionals in specialised knowledge domains with expertise in data analytics and actuarial science (Grant, 2018). As a few interviewees shared, many PIs came from the well-regarded Indian Institutes of Technology and were highly sought after by US technology companies. One interviewee who works in a fintech company pointed out that Indian hires possess post-graduate degrees in STEM fields, which are less common among Singaporeans, and that Mr. Gupta's Indian roots helped in the successful recruitment of Indian expatriates. Notwithstanding, as mentioned earlier with regard to the DBS photo incident, Mr. Gupta himself became a target of online discontent.

To assess the overall pattern of discontent associated with Singapore's worlding push, we first turn to social sentiment analysis. Table 1 presents the breakdown of comments by sentiment for Facebook and YouTube respectively. The breakdown of sentiment polarity is similar for both platforms, with negative sentiments accounting for about slightly more than half of all comments (57 and 53% for Facebook and YouTube respectively). However, there is a sizeable proportion (around 40%) of comments that are positive. Comments expressing neutral sentiment account for only a very small fraction (around 5%) of all comments. Public sentiments surrounding CECA appear somewhat polarised with more people holding negative perceptions towards CECA.

The histogram of sentiment scores presents a more nuanced picture (Figure 1). The figure for Facebook comments shows a distribution in which most sentiments are slightly negative and with relatively lower proportions of extreme sentiments on both ends. A similar pattern is observed for YouTube comments. It is possible that the muted negative sentiment may result from individuals who acknowledge the benefits of CECA to Singapore. But a more likely explanation is that the model is unable to pick up the context of the sentiments, a limitation highlighted earlier in the methodology. For example, the sentences below are classified as highly positive even though they are clearly critical of CECA:

How does creating jobs for foreigners benefit Singaporeans in own motherland? (Score = 0.6369)
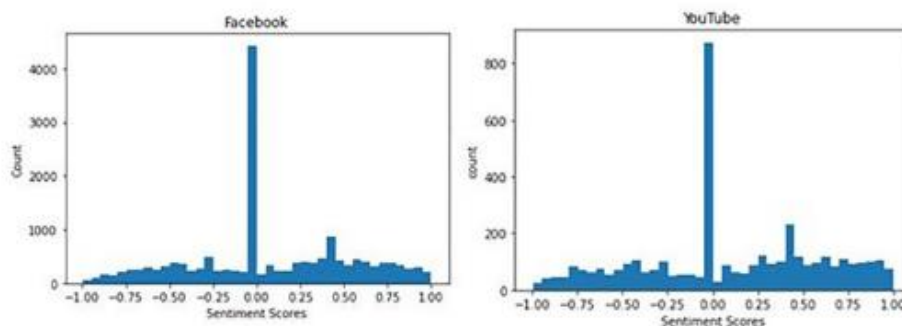Years of CECA, how many of these imports have been converted into Singaporeans? (Score = 0.9198)

Figure 1. Histograms of sentiment scores.
Source: Authors.

The focus on economic displacement is notable with the more negative sentiments pointing towards a desire for a more inward 'Singapore-first' policy as exemplified below. In this sense, populist sentiments resonate with the left-behind places literature where the population is underscored by considerable economic anxiety (MacKinnon et al., 2022). Resentment is directed at the Indian 'ft' (foreign talent) as one asked why 'our graduates couldn't find jobs' even though local universities are often placed highly in international rankings.

> Again diverting attention, everyone is pissed about CECA here, don't lump every foreign investment to talk.
> (Score = −0.4019)
> What's the point of bringing in these large nos. of overrated white-collar ft [foreign talents], only barely benefited Singaporeans.
> (Score = −0.296)

The above sentiment, however, is sometimes tempered by posts that recognise worlding mechanisms, namely the mobility of the skilled and their role in supporting Singapore's world city stature. This may be why there is a concentration of comments around low negative scores of the histograms.

> Mr. Lee [referring to Singapore's incumbent Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong] we know you care for Singapore but hopefully it is not NATO.[4] We also know foreign talents and professionals are needed … One highlight I share is why are employers so quick and so certain to hire foreigners?

Next, we conducted topic modelling and identified five themes (Table 2). They are immigrant, trade, concentration (of PIs), displacement and politics. A sixth category for 'others' is also identified. While the shares vary slightly between Facebook and YouTube, trade accounts for 55–60% of the posts followed by concerns of foreign workers or immigrants (~50%), politics (32–33%), displacement (22–24%) and concentration (6.6%). That trade carries a high share points to anxieties over globalisation, as keywords for the topic include 'CECA', 'globalisation', 'FTA', 'economic growth', 'foreign talents', 'white collar', 'finance', 'banking' and 'IT' (information technology). Displacement includes keywords like 'jobless', 'discrimination', 'hardship', 'suffering', 'unemployment' and 'unfair hiring'.

Table 2. Breakdown of social media comments by topic.

Source	Immigrant (%)	Trade (%)	Concentration (%)	Displacement (%)	Politics (%)	Others (%)
Facebook	49.77	55.97	6.56	22.26	32.56	23.03
YouTube	54.59	60.54	5.08	24.39	33.47	20.33

Negative sentiments related to both trade and displacement themes question the benefits of globalisation, and blame CECA for discrimination against local talents, in particular, the granting of employment passes to PIs through intra-corporate transfers (ICTs).

> MTI [Ministry of trade and industry] you have already opened the door to come in via CECA, furthermore CECA has a loophole called ICT that is exempted from advertisement requirements to employ foreigners, so they will do their best to get PR [permanent residency].

To apply for employment passes for foreign workers, a firm is expected to first advertise the position on a job portal for local jobseekers. However, ICTs are exempted from advertising, giving the impression of employment bias. The government has clarified that this exemption is offset by additional checks on work experience, employment history and other eligibility criteria. It pointed out that of the 17,700 employment passes in 2020, 4200 consisted of ICTs and only 500 of ICTs were from India (Tan, 2021a). Nonetheless, the service sector is responsible for 90% of employment passes led by professional services, information/communication (infocomm) and finance. Moreover, finance and infocomm accounted for 40% of the increase in employment pass issuances. Despite the government arguing that spillovers from these two sectors have increased overall employment growth (Tan, 2021c), social media postings expressing ICT concern remained frequent.

Notably, banks both local (especially DBS) and foreign are often singled out as agents of globalisation. The globalisation backlash may be traced to the perception that CECA benefits India more than it does Singapore. One interviewee, who sits on a bank's board of directors, explained that most Singapore financial professionals prefer China over India. This is because Chinese Singaporeans form the largest racial group (over 70% of the total population) and there is a presumption that cultural differences are easier to navigate in China. But there is also the perception that the Indian market (as opposed to the Chinese market) does not appeal to local talents. When asked if this reflects a racial bias, an interviewee (DD, male, Indian Singaporean, lawyer) who travels frequently to India declared:

> CECA makes no sense to me … I do not see any significance that the agreement has given to ordinary Singaporeans. I do think it's beyond dispute that no Singaporean covets employment opportunities in India … if you look at the banking sector, there are lots of Indians working for JP Morgan, Citi, Barclays, HSBC, BNP, etc. Not just Bank of India or State Bank of India.
>
> I think it will be near impossible for DBS or UOB [United Overseas Bank] or OCBC [Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation] to try to break into the Indian market … 70% or more Indians will choose an Indian bank for nationalistic reasons.

The above comments by an Indian Singaporean suggest that negative sentiments are not confined to the dominant racial group in Singapore, namely Chinese Singaporeans, in social media discourses. It has an intra-ethnic dimension as well. Another Indian Singaporean professional, also critical of the influx of PIs, argued that social segregation drives negative sentiment, whilst race plays a limited role since he is also Indian. Nonetheless, both respondents are also from South India and their ire appears to be directed at APSIT professionals from North India, which is experienced as an intra-ethnic difference. Facebook posts, for example, expressed sarcasm over Hindi overtaking Tamil (Tamil being an official language in Singapore). Yet Singapore's FTA with China, where the financial market is relatively controlled by state-owned banks, has not produced similar hostility. One possible explanation is that Chinese professionals are not as heavily concentrated in Singapore's financial and IT sectors as compared to professionals from India. Another explanation is that the concentration of Indians in the financial sector is more palpably experienced socially and culturally as difference. As we suggest later, such difference is also racially spatialised.

One bank interviewee (SH, female, director of bank compliance) pointed to the importance of data scientists and analysts. Data analysts are among the most mobile financial professionals. Due to their relatively small supply in Singapore, they carry a wage premium and are characterised by a high turnover, since an analyst with two to three years of work experience could easily double or triple his/her

salary in a short period of time. SH explained that she had lost several local Singaporean data scientists to other institutions because of high demand. Competition has forced financial institutions to look to Indian expatriates, who are less mobile and are also relatively cheaper because of their immigrant status.

But Indian expatriate professionals are also recruited to tap into extra-territorial professional networks. In particular, wealthy Indians who are located not just in India but in Dubai or Hong Kong may be potential customers for wealth management or 'family dynasties', as highlighted by MH (male, Chinese Singaporean, fintech startup manager). Indeed, Singapore's worlding ambition has taken the financial industry into the family dynasty business. Offering generous tax incentives for family investment vehicles, or family offices, Singapore is responsible for 25% of Asia's family office business followed by Hong Kong (20%) (Shadbolt, 2022). These are ultra-high net worth individuals who are looking to manage multi-generational wealth and build a multifaceted portfolio. One prominent example is India's Reliance Industries chairman, Mukesh Ambani, who chose Singapore to set up a family office.

PMET jobs make up almost 60% of Singapore's workforce (Tan, 2021b). This explains why 'immigrant' has the second highest share of social media posts. There is concern about the sorting of locals into lower-paying and lower-skill jobs because of discriminatory hiring practices that favour Indian nationals. One interviewee AK (male, Malay Singaporean, lawyer in a large American law firm) shared a widely circulated meme from social media. The meme highlights perceived inequality between Indian expatriates and local Singaporeans in the workforce using Dubai and Singapore as contrasting examples (Figure 2). AK, who had worked for a few years in Dubai, pointed out that the meme conveys false information, as Dubai's financial sector has recruited many skilled Indian professionals like other world cities. Nonetheless, criticisms have continued to target the highly skilled, including Mr. Gupta as he is not a 'homegrown' CEO. When asked if management should be hired based on merit regardless of national origin, DD (the Indian Singaporean lawyer), reiterated that globalisation has reinforced intra-class differences, a recurring concern on social media:

Has our tertiary education system and planning failed to produce the professionals needed to propel Singapore forward?
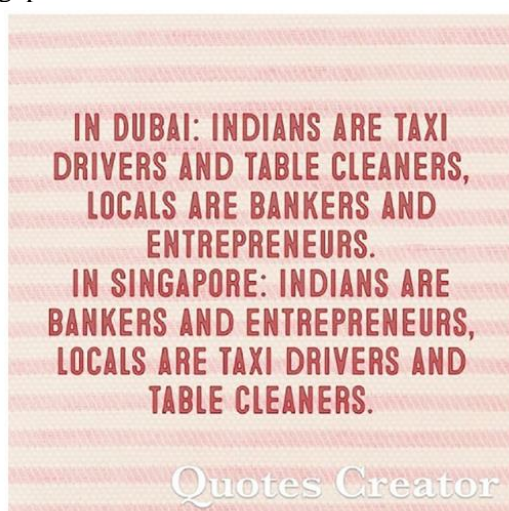

Figure 2. Meme contrasting the job opportunities for Indians and locals in Dubai and Singapore.
Source: Interviewee (AK).

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AK rationalised the negative sentiments by pointing to the relatively small size of Singapore's domestic Indian population (about 7.5%). The *Economic Times* of India reports that the number of professionals in Singapore increased from 13% to 26% between 2005 and 2020 (PTI, 2021). AK observed that the influx of nationals from India relative to the small domestic base has meant that foreign Indian professionals (PIs) are 'more visible'. Such visibility is also spatialised: the third relevant topic 'concentration' most vividly articulates visibility by highlighting the spatialisation of race and ethnicity. Not only are foreign Indian talents visible as a professional class in the financial and IT sector, but such visibility is spatialised in financial business hubs. Similarly, visibility is also spatialised in suburban condominium areas where many Indian professionals have taken up residence. These are explored in the next section.

Contradictory spaces: Business and residential enclaves

Discontent is multidimensional, encompassing not only displacement, which is emphasised by the 'left behind' literature, but also the lived experiences of difference and exclusion. Lipsitz's (2007) spatialisation of race and racialisation of space are useful in understanding the lived dimension of space and race. Labour market sorting that privileges highly compensated APSIT professionals has led to skilled PIs being sorted spatially from other professionals. Such sorting has both a spatial and racial dimension. Major financial business hubs, one located on the east side of the city (Changi Business Park) and the other in the heart of the central business district (Marina Bay Financial Centre), have become racialised as 'Chennai Business Park' (CBP) and Mumbai Financial Center (MBFC) respectively.

Both CBP and MBFC are spatial manifestations of racialised (and intra-class) difference as Facebook users assail financial and IT firms for favouring foreign Indian over local talents in their hiring practices. Whereas Sassen (1999) situated racialised workers in the low-paid service sector, we locate racialisation in the city's highly paid PIs. Construction of the racialised other, in this case, is reproduced through the transnational skilled labour market, drawing on spatial imaginaries such as 'Cecapore'. Facebook and YouTube discourses on Cecapore portray the world city as being overtaken by globalising 'Cecadia' professional workers that allegedly leads to issues of 'cross-cultural clashes, naturalised citizenship, loyalty and patriotism'. In particular, the perception that CBP and MFBC are distinct racialised business hubs constitutes a form of intra-urban border making where these hubs assume the characteristics of an exclusionary (work) space.

The intersection of race and space is articulated in a broader urban landscape of home and work: not only are financial business hubs racialised within the city, but suburban residential areas are also being racialised:

> Look at those condos in East Coast, it's filled with the same particular nationality … The reason is the government failure in enforcing its employment policies, once a dept head is from that nationality he can easily bring in his whole village.

The above resonates with Sassen's (1999) process-based understanding of the localisation of global elements, whereby international labour markets and their localised cultures are reterritorialised in the world city. In effect, reterritorialised localism captures two major sentiments: first, the subversion of state-led and publicly enforced policies of ethnic integration in Singapore; and second, racialisation of financial business hubs has also been accompanied by the racialisation of desirable condominium

residential areas. Since 1989, Singapore has implemented an ethnic integration policy that allocates public housing based on ethnic quotas (i.e. Chinese, Malay and Indian), to 'break up racial enclaves and remix them in public housing' (Pow, 2009: 219). Condominiums are built by private property developers rather than the government and are therefore excluded from the state's goal of integrating ethnic groups. However, they are highly desired by the aspiring middle class, as class markers of upward social mobility and economic success. According to one report, some 460 HDB apartments sold for over S$1.5 million in 2023 (Zhu, 2023), yet they are seen to be less desirable than private condominiums. One reason is how condominiums are branded and consumed as a form of luxurious living and exclusivity. Many of them are gated, with 24-hour security guards that segregate and alienate residents from large swathes of the local population (Pow, 2009). They represent urban glamour residential zones with amenities such as swimming pools and fitness centres that convey an affluent lifestyle in land-scarce Singapore. The exclusionary nature of condominiums is reinforced by their limited availability and affordability. In 2022, 17% of resident households lived in condominiums compared to 78% of HDB dwellers (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2023). The relatively high prices of condominium housing, averaging more than S$1 million for a small apartment, has skyrocketed since the Covid pandemic (Lin, 2023). Over 70% of condominium residents hold senior managerial and professional positions (Pow, 2009). Part of minimising difference in terms of class and race involves a large number of locals, including professionals, living in HDB flats. Diversity in HDB residential areas is celebrated but also flattened in an urban topography where inter-ethnic groups live alongside one another. Concentration of foreign Indian professionals in suburban residential areas on the other hand, disrupts this topography as one Facebook user wrote:

Just head to Sengkang, Punggol, East Coast, Telok Kurau, Tanjong Rhu. Though one will not be able to deduce the statistics on the numbers of PRs, naturalised citizens and expats living there, but it still makes one wonder on how they are able to form strong community thereby buildings their enclaves there.

As exclusive spaces existing outside the regulatory mechanisms of public housing, the spatialisation of race in condominium suburbs reveals the power of capital in subverting the state's integrationist efforts. One user posted: 'You should take look at the number of Indians staying in condos. People in HDB [public housing] don't feel the change because of ethnic quota … we are slowly being displaced'. This comment illustrates how displacement is not only felt economically through locals' perception of unfair PMET hiring practices, but also via a crowding out effect in private housing that stifles citizens' housing aspirations, where another user remarked that 'ft [foreign talent] stay in condo while [locals] stay in HDB second class now … enjoy'. Moreover, the (re)production of ethnic professional residential enclaves is often attributed to the anti-integrationist behaviour of PIs as illustrated by a Facebook post:

Ceca cook own food at home, they don't mix or integrate into local community but bring in families living in condominiums and socialize only among themselves. Maybe the main reason locals dislike them as they don't try to learn about our community cultures or be friends.

As we suggested previously, some of the anti-globalisation, anti-CECA sentiments involve a bordering process that is being experienced as exclusion. Contact between local and foreign Indian talents is perceived to be low, given the exclusionary nature of 'condominised' spaces that accentuate difference. Not all respondents we interviewed were negative about PIs, but those expressing positive

sentiment were a distinct minority. One of them, MH, argues that Singapore does not have sufficient local talents to participate in financial institutions' worlding ambitions. Digital innovation is seen to be key in the success of world city making, and PIs fill the gap. Nonetheless, he recognises that Changi Business Park's bordering may have intensified intra-urban inequality with the development of elite ethnic enclaves. It is important to note that PIs are excluded from public housing markets, as they are not allowed to purchase HDB flats and can only rent. Thus, while observations that Indian migrant professionals tend to congregate mainly in private housing echo Sassen's (1999) point on the formation of trans-territorial networks where immigrants claim their identities in world cities by making their presence felt through distinct spaces, this also reflects state practices in urban development and home ownership that use public housing as a policy lever to achieve prescribed social goals.

Overall, the social media data and interviews show that discontent is multidimensional, linking globalisation, displacement and new racialised spaces in the world city of Singapore. Singapore's case highlights not only intra-urban inequality dynamics but also globalisation backlash from the construction of difference through the co-constitution of race and space. This constitution extends to intra-racial, intra-ethnic differences that target Hindi-speaking North Indians:

Local Indians will have to learn Hindi when CECA outnumber them, Tamil will become obsolete.

Conclusion

To sustain its competitive branding as world city, Singapore relies on highly mobile and highly skilled professionals and entrepreneurial elites who make up the highly coveted 'foreign talent' class that other world cities are competing for. However, the world city's quest to attract foreign financial and IT elites has sparked growing discontent among the local population who feel left behind. Singapore's experience illustrates how the 'left behind' extends to the high waged professional class, spurred by CECA. Social sentiment analysis of social media comments and posts indicates negative sentiments overall. While negative sentiments capture displacement and class inequality, this is perhaps not surprising given the high wage nature of the APSIT sector. Racialised and spatialised dimensions of social exclusion are perhaps more concerning given the state's relative success in the past in addressing inter-racial integration through its housing policies.

The city's ubiquitous public housing is, however, a double-edged sword. While it guarantees some degree of housing security to Singaporeans in a city that is land-scarce and contributes to the negotiation of diversity by accommodating difference, it also encourages a separate housing and a residential market that attracts the high-income and professional class. As consumption aspirations rise in favour of condominium living among this class, competition for housing in the relatively small private market has intensified. The emergence of new urban villages in private condominiums dominated by Indian expatriates and immigrants reflects discontent from that competition. Within this exclusionary glamour zone, residents enjoy an amenity haven in lush surroundings and manicured landscapes. But the negative sentiments also capture Sassen's (1999) contradictory space through increased intra-urban differentiation. Racialised financial business hubs and elite residential enclaves render visible otherness, even though these are cosmopolitan spaces that typically welcome diversity and multiculturalism. Racialisation and spatialisation shape intra-urban inequality by intensifying the bordering process.

One reading, as Rai (2023) has done, is to see ethnic villages and enclaves as spaces of arrival, a zone of transition for the transnational skilled. Another reading, one that is adopted here, is to see the

formation of elite enclaves as subverting the cosmopolitan space so arduously cultivated by both the state and Singaporeans (Woods and Kong, 2023), in particular, the perception that the world city had worked hard for decades to decrease difference as one Facebook post writes:

Singaporeans had been living peacefully with our Indian brothers for centuries, we loved their curries and biryani … The Indians that came under CECA, brought with them the caste systems. They formed enclaves and don't mix around.

Singapore's case illustrates the challenges faced by policymakers in world cities in balancing the needs of citizens against the worlding aims of the APSIT sector. To address Singaporeans' concern over CECA, the government has introduced various upskilling programmes and career transition initiatives. But as we suggest in this paper, discontent also comes from the professional class, not just the unskilled or deskilled. For this class, racialisation of space creates anxieties over lack of access to work and residential spaces dominated by transnational Indian talents. In this sense, difference has been transformed rather than subdued, despite state integrationist policies. Policymakers should go beyond current fixations on growth-focused economic thinking, wealth management and human capital upgrading to consider more explicitly issues of belonging and attachment in the making of world cities. This is especially true in Singapore, where the speed and scale of immigration over the past decade have caused the state's model of multiculturalism to become increasingly fractured along nationalistic lines (see Ho and Kathiravelu, 2022). The question of migrant integration is now at the forefront of social concern, revealing a need for both academic and policy debates to overcome false distinctions between matters of politico-economic and socio-cultural interest. Economic growth impacts social growth, raising questions as to how complementarity can be forged. More integrative analyses that reflect the realities of our contemporaneous social worlds are needed. In this vein, our hope is that this paper offers an initial step towards realising such integration.

Notes

1. English is creolised as 'Singlish' in Singapore. It is often spoken informally and incorporates words from Chinese dialects, Malay and Tamil. Singlish has its own grammatical structure and colloquial expressions are common on social media as identity markers. Acronyms are also popular in Singlish. We insert translations in parentheses to facilitate readers' understanding.
2. The default thresholds are ≤-0.05 (negative); >-0.05 and <0.05 (neutral); and ≥0.05 (positive).
3. The percentages do not sum to 100% as each comment may contain more than one topic.
4. NATO is a local acronym that stands for 'No Action, Talk Only' that is, all talk but no action.

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