

RESIDENCY, CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING: CHOICE AND UNCERTAINTY FOR STUDENTS- TURNED-MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Since 1998, Australian migration policy has overtly recruited international graduates into the skilled migration stream, and evidence suggests that increasing numbers of international students are considering their study in Australia as a pathway to residency. However, the nature of the journey from student to resident as a migration process remains largely under researched, particularly in terms of the transition from transient student to permanent resident, and from permanent resident to citizen. This paper, based on in-depth interviews with students-turned-migrants from a variety of source countries, examines the choices and strategies of these migrants in terms of applying for residency and considering naturalisation. Viewing the student-migrant experience through a transnational lens, this paper will foreground the meanings that the participants ascribe to residency, citizenship and belonging. I will consider their choices in terms of the negotiation of their belonging across multiple nations, and outline some of the challenges and uncertainties they face through this decision making process.

INTRODUCTION

"Immigration officer: Your passport please!
Passenger: What do you mean by passport?
Immigration officer: Your identity documents, please.
Passenger: Sorry, but I have a fluid identity".

(Zierhofer 2004: 104)

Since 1998, policy changes in Australia's skilled migration programme have favoured international students as potential skilled migrants, including legislation allowing holders of an Australian tertiary qualification to apply for permanent residency (PR) onshore within six months of completing their study. This process, dubbed 'student switching' by McLaughlan and Salt (2002), has resulted in increasing numbers of international students who view their study in Australia as a pathway to residency. The number of

permanent residencies issued through the newly created overseas student visa subclasses increased from 5,480 in 2001–2002 to 14,441 in 2004–2005, and these successful applicants now outnumber those who apply from offshore (Birrell et al. 2006: 26). There is currently, however, a dearth of sociological research into the nature of this migration process. This paper will focus on the student-turned-migrant experience as a process of negotiated transnationality. In particular, I will analyse legal status as the formalised, official relationship between the migrant and the various nation-states within their transnational networks.

Primarily, I will describe four main motivations behind my participants' choices about naturalisation and PR: subjective motivations, the desire for security, the desire for political participation and the desire for mobility. More specifically, in doing so, I will examine how aspects of transnational social capital are limited or expanded by different membership choices, and how individuals negotiate their decisions about legal status to attain the best balance of their needs and desires. As such, this analysis will constitute an examination of how transnational ties can influence membership choices. Prior to the analysis of the interview data, however, it is worth looking briefly at how relevant ideas of dual state membership and migratory processes are framed in the current literature. I will begin by outlining and theorising the options for nation-state membership and belonging that are open to students-turned-migrants in the Australian context, using Hammar's (1990) metaphor of 'gates' to describe the staggered process of entrance.

Some recent theoretical scholarship has claimed that the significance of the formalised relationship between the individual and the nation-state is changing drastically in the face of globalisation (Appadurai 2003; Tambini 2001). Some authors further suggest that the power of the nation-state as the boundary unit of analysis for membership is weakening (Soysal 1994; Castles & Davidson 2000; Aleinikoff & Klusmeyer 2002). Bloemraad (2004: 400) summarises certain theoretical tendencies towards the weakening of the singularity of nation-state membership by stating that "both transnational and postnational frameworks claim that subjective identities and lived experience trump legal constructs dividing people into geographically bounded nation-states." However, I believe that, as the introductory paradox from Zierhofer (2004) implies, despite the rhetoric of 'postnational identities' legal status is still paramount in terms of the way in which it impacts on the ability of individuals to maintain their transnationality, particularly regarding aspects of transnational capital, such as the ability to maintain mobility across borders and various rights and freedoms across different states. Legal status places limitations on people's

choices, and impacts on the way in which they see themselves and their relationship to different national communities. I would in fact argue against any kind of firm delineation between 'legal constructs,' 'subjective identities' and 'lived experience.' For the participants in this study, these three spheres of belonging were inextricably linked, and Zierhofer (2004) appears correct in asserting that paperwork still matters. As Salter (2006: 167) attests, "the visa and passport systems are tickets that allow temporary and permanent membership in the community." Legal status, made tangible in the form of visa and passports, can thus operate both functionally as a means to maintain rights and physical mobility across borders, and subjectively as a marker of identity and belonging.

In theorising the processes of legal belonging, Hammar (1990) states that immigrants must pass through three entrance gates in order to enter a new country: regulation of immigration, regulation of their status as permanent residents, and naturalisation. In the student-turned-migrant context, the first 'gate' is obtaining a student visa, which grants entry to the country and temporary residency. While occupying the identity of 'international student', individuals are legally resident aliens. Officially, they are still largely viewed as transient, despite the evidence that many are in fact engaged in the first stages of a long-term migration strategy (Baas 2006; Birrell et al. 2006). The second gate is applying for residency, which usually happens after the completion of the required course of study. Migrants must then reside in Australia as permanent residents for a required period before they can apply to naturalise. After this, individuals are able to progress to the third and final gate of naturalisation.

In the student-turned-migrant context, this linear movement from alien (belonging legally to the source country) to citizen (belonging legally to Australia) is disrupted in two ways. Firstly, many individuals choose to remain permanent residents, and never progress to the third gate. They therefore maintain source country citizenship alongside Australian permanent residency, a status that I shall henceforth refer to as denizenship. I use this term in accordance with Hammar's (1990: 15) definition of denizens as "persons who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status." Secondly, some individuals are eligible for dual citizenship, and thus can pass through all three entrance gates into Australia without relinquishing their membership to the source country. Both of these 'disruptions' to Hammar's linear model construct a type of dual state membership, which allows individuals to maintain rights, duties and belonging across two states. If we adhere to Marshall's (1973) commonly accepted schemata of citizenship as consisting of civil and social as well as political rights, then the issue of denizenship is particularly significant in the

Australian context, where legally "civil and social rights attach to residency and are subject to little or no change with naturalisation" (Evans 1988: 243). It is worth noting here that, in Australia, the extra rights afforded to citizens over residents are: the right to vote, the right to hold permanent positions in the public service, and the right to an Australian passport (Evans 1988).

METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper is part of a larger qualitative project on transnationalism and mobility in the lives of students-turned-migrants in Australia. The founding paradigm of this research is a constructivist approach, which values the co-construction of meaning and an ongoing critical awareness of the researcher's own subjectivities. The inquiry was conducted through a blending of traditional ethnographic strategies of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a reflective research diary. Cultural probes are purposefully designed packages of mixed media materials (in this case, disposable cameras, journals, postcards and maps) that were given to participants to explore and complete in their own homes. They are designed to provoke "inspirational responses" (Gaver et al. 1999) about participants' lives, feelings and experiences, and to allow participants time to reflect upon the themes of the research whilst ensconced within the private realm of their own homes. They also allowed researchers to bridge some of the distance between themselves and the research participants (Crabtree et al. 2003:4). The completed probe materials thus served to give me some clear ideas about the experiences and thoughts of each particular participant prior to the interviews, thus allowing me to adjust the interview schedule and develop rapport through an understanding of each individual's specific context.

The interviews were used to collect the bulk of the data, but this was complemented and reinforced by visual and textual fragments from the probes and critical self-reflection in the research diary. The analysis was aided by qualitative coding software, and the interpretations are presented by utilising 'thick description' and verbatim quotes. Ultimately, the basis for these methodological choices was the desire to appropriately record and reflect the lived experiences of the participants, and thus to enhance sociological understanding of real lives, lived transitionally.

I adopted a multi-pronged approach to participant recruitment. I placed advertisements for participants in university alumni and staff online newsletters, on notice boards around university campuses, and on the staff message boards on several major Melbourne corporations. I also accessed migrant and international student online newsgroups on the networking sites

Friendster and Yahoogroups, and attended a 'student migration fair' at the Melbourne Town Hall to hand out flyers and business cards. Due to the fact that the population under study was not a unified group or community, the response rates for the initial recruitment were low. Successive participants were thus sourced using a snowball sampling technique.

My sample deliberately included a range of source countries and an approximately equal number of males and females. I felt it important to have a diverse sample of nationalities, as so much of the international student literature, particularly the literature that deals with pedagogical concerns and acculturation, falsely equates being an international student with being 'Asian'. I was keen to show that, although the majority of the skilled overseas student visas are granted to Indian and Chinese nationals, other groups are growing rapidly, and the population is more diverse than is often assumed. I acknowledged that the findings of the study are limited to the group of participants studied, and while elements may prove transferable to different contexts, the primary goal is to provide a 'snapshot' of the specific individuals studied. The following tables show the general demographic characteristics of the 20 participants, as well as their naturalisations intentions and eligibility for dual citizenship.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of participants.

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Family status S = single M = married DF = defacto	Career
Caryn	Taiwan	F	30–35	S	Postgraduate (Education Leadership and Management)
Devendra	India	M	25–30	S	Postgraduate (Business)
Gayesh	Sri Lanka	M	40–45	M + 3 children	Academic (Geoscience)
Hannah	China	F	30–35	M + 1 child	Accountant
Hualing	China	F	35–40	M + 1 child	Postgraduate (Education Leadership and Management)

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Family status S = single M = married DF = defacto	Career
Ivy	China	F	25–30	M	Postgraduate (Accounting)
Jaime	Colombia	M	30–35	M	Engineer
Jolene	Malaysia	F	20–25	S	Accountant
Madeleine	France	F	30–35	S	Postgraduate (Business)
Miguel	Colombia	M	25–30	DF	Postgraduate (Education Leadership & Management)
Nueng	Thailand	M	30–35	S	Academic (Education)
Penny	USA via NZ	F	40–45	M	Advertising
Rafael	Venezuela	M	25–30	S	Arts Promotion
Rathi	Malaysia	F	25–30	DF	Postgraduate (International Studies)
Shui	Malaysia	F	25–30	M + 1 child	Academic/Con- sultant (Conflict Resolution)
Sunee	Thailand	F	35–40	M + 2 children	Postgraduate (Education)
Takahiro	Japan	M	25–30	S	Musician/Super- market night fill
Tariq	Bangladesh	M	25–30	M	Postgraduate (Planning)
Tina	China	F	20–25	M	Postgraduate (Business)
Vincent	Hong Kong	M	25–30	S	Town Planning

Table 2

Eligibility for dual citizenship and naturalisation intentions.

	Eligible for dual citizenship	Ineligible for dual citizenship	Total
Naturalised	1	0	1
Intending to naturalise	3	3	6
Not intending to naturalise	1	8	9
Undecided	0	4	4
Total	5	15	20

SUBJECTIVE DESIRES: OBLIGATION, ATTACHMENT AND BELONGING

In this paper, I define 'subjective motivations' as motivations relating to perceptions of obligation, emotional attachment and a sense of belonging, as opposed to more direct and tangible social, legal or economic benefits of citizenship. There is a prevalence of instrumental conceptions of citizenship in the migration literature, such as Ong's (1999) conception of 'flexible citizenship' or Kelley and Mcallister's (1982: 428) formula of decision-making as based on the "real and perceived advantages and disadvantages" of citizenship. In contrast, my research found that subjective reasons were very prevalent in the sample, although such reasons often existed alongside instrumental reasons. Gayesh, who had considered the citizenship choices of his family extremely carefully, clearly demonstrated this blending of subjective feelings of attachment and obligation to Australia with the acknowledgement of citizenship's opportunities and benefits, and the desire to maintain connective links to the country of origin:

It's purely based on my personal beliefs. I'm—I've contributed to this country now I believe and at the same time—I should not be as a half sort of person, so I feel that I should be the—I should take Australian citizenship and it gives me a lot more opportunities and a lot more benefits, but at the same time [...] I feel that me, and my children, we might want to go back, keep that option open [...] The bad things happening in my country sorted out and things get better, so we'll be—we will—we might go back there. So it's really hard decision but so—so I feel that I should keep the residency in Sri Lanka and I will become a citizen here as well.

The difficulty of Gayesh's decision encapsulates the dilemma of the transmigrant: because his migration journey could be circuitous, rather than linear, he was reluctant to rescind his membership to Sri Lanka. While he acknowledged the 'opportunities and benefits' of citizenship as an incentive to naturalise, he also had strong beliefs about participating in and committing fully to Australian society, of not being 'a half sort of a person'. Thus, Gayesh decided that maintaining Sri Lankan residency with Australian citizenship was the best choice for his family.

Madeleine similarly tried to balance her subjective attachments with keeping options for her mobility open. Unlike Gayesh, she had the advantage of being able to maintain dual citizenship, and, due to her continuing transnational connections to France, stated that she would not give up her French citizenship for Australian citizenship:

I wouldn't give my French passport for the Australian one. If I had to choose I would keep my French one. I would think I would have the feeling that I'm losing my French identity. I wouldn't be able to participate to the voting to the...yeah. And I think having citizenship is being a full, um...you become...you sort of gain a full status. PR, you're still a migrant. If I give up my French citizenship then I'm becoming, what, a permanent resident of France? It doesn't work. So... plus it gives me access to all European countries. And I'm quite proud to be French.

We can similarly see in Madeleine's comments how the subjective and the instrumental are blended, rather than distinct. Her French passport is multiply representative of her French identity and her pride in being French, her right to politically participate in France, and her ability to maintain mobility in Europe. Madeleine also stated that her decision to naturalise in Australia is also "to get a bit more belonging, also take some responsibility." We can thus see in both Madeleine and Gayesh's comments the trope of the 'half' or the 'full' member of society. In their eyes, to be a denizen is a less 'complete' status within a society than to be a citizen. Citizenship, although it has instrumental perks, can primarily function to complete one's belonging, to create a holistic sense of social identity.

Some participants, however, although eligible for citizenship, did not connect naturalisation to a sense of identity and belonging. Shui and Vincent had both been in Australia for more than six years, and were very much settled, in terms of having established careers and very strong social networks in the country. They were well past the transition stage from student to migrant, and both were committed to their lives in Australia

above their transnational obligations. In Batrouney and Goldlust's (2005) analysis of immigrants and identity in Australia, such individuals would be described as demonstrating strong feelings of attachment to Australia. However, unlike the individuals in Batrouney and Goldlust's (2005) sample, this did not necessarily translate to naturalisation. Neither Shui nor Vincent saw naturalisation as something that they required in order to feel that they belonged. In the following exchange, Vincent outlined why he did not feel the need to naturalise, despite the fact that as a Hong Kong national he was eligible for dual citizenship:

R: I mean the thing is there's not much difference.

I: Between PR and citizenship?

R: Yeah. In terms of benefit you get, you get Medicare, you get all kinds of subsidies that you need, and in terms of your belonging-ness, which the sense of belongingness, yeah. It—I'm not the kind of person that feels a passport really tells people who you are. I don't—I mean, I don't mind—I don't mind getting a citizenship but that is not—there's no strong motive for me to go for it.

I: You don't think the passport's going to make you belong?

R: Yeah. At the end of the day people have to know—I mean, I have to know myself, as who I am and people have to know me by how I interact with them. Not by passport. But I mean, some people might do it but I don't feel it so—yeah.

Shui similarly felt little motivation to naturalise. For her, for the need for belonging through legal status had attenuated over time:

I actually felt it's a really big part of identity many years ago, about six years ago when I first arrived in Australia. At that time I really need a sense of belonging. When I first arrived I felt that I cannot be a nobody here, I need to be somebody. So I really thinking that at least I got a permanent residence, it give me a security, a status, a belonging. But now I've got a permanent residence of Australia. I don't feel that strong sense of belonging, I felt that already got it. Especially that I'm married. I feel really secure. And I don't need like a citizenship any more. I think this PR is enough.

When Shui first arrived in Australia, she was anxious to secure PR in order to 'be somebody' in Australian society. However, after putting down strong personal roots in the country, particularly through her marriage to an Australian, she no longer felt that her sense of belonging needed to be officially validated. As such, she felt like she 'doesn't need' citizenship to complete her identity and her position in Australia. Her sense of security and belonging came from less tangible personal sources, rather than from official status.

Shui and Vincent felt their belonging in Australian society was validated in ways other than gaining citizenship, namely through their relationships and their social positioning rather than through their legal status. The legal status did not have subjective meaning for them, as their sense of belonging came from their close personal ties, networks and their social positioning as part of the community. Combined with the perception of a lack of instrumental advantages to naturalisation, the lack of subjective meaning behind citizenship led to a clear decision to remain a denizen.

For other participants however, naturalisation was highly symbolic, and denizenship was not a satisfactory permanent status:

I have a count down on my computer. Yeah, because, not because of—you see not because of being you know PR and how people talk about PR and that and your experience because you are amongst a lot of international students here, all seeking PR. I think that is the big holy grail. For me it's not that. [...] Now, citizenship is important for me because I share, I totally share the Australian way of life, I totally share it and I believe that what I believe is what I—is exactly the same as being an Australian, it's just to give someone a free go based on what they are in this country of immigrants, I'm an immigrant. [...] I'll embrace it so, I have a burn my Colombian passport party. [...] And also easier for travel and all those I call them perks of citizenship, but they are really secondary to being Australian (Jaime).

Jaime was 'counting down' to the date that he can legally naturalise. He differentiated himself from other international students for whom PR is the 'holy grail' of membership. For Jaime, the main motivations to naturalise were subjective reasons that are closely tied to identity and an idea of shared values, beliefs and way of life. He wanted to be able to identify dually as both an 'immigrant in a country of immigrants' and 'an Australian'. Yet his naturalisation would also conversely mark the rejection of his Colombian identity in his 'burn my Colombian passport' party. Jaime was not interested

in maintaining a dual or transnational status, he already felt that his beliefs and values were compatible with the Australian way of life, and he saw naturalisation as a move away from being Colombian to being an immigrant of Australia. Devendra revealed a similar attitude towards citizenship. He was keen to naturalise as soon as possible, and, like Jaime, would be glad to relinquish his original citizenship, "Once I transfer everything, I'm happy to let it go. I just want to stay here and enrich this country." Naturalisation thus becomes a symbolic statement of *not* belonging to the source country as well as a statement of belonging to Australia. It is unsurprising that, of the sample, Devendra and Jaime also displayed the weakest transnational ties and the most critical outlooks on their source societies.

For another set of participants, the subjective attachment to citizenship was connected primarily to their original citizenship. For those who were not able to gain dual citizenship, their main reason for not considering Australian citizenship was that they simply did not want to lose their original one. For this group, giving up the citizenship of their country of origin would involve a sense of loss:

Yeah, I would be sad to give it up. 'Cause I—I'm very much Malaysian, and I don't want to give that up. I'm not ready for that (Rahti).

I will never give up my Malaysian citizenship. Why? Proud to be a Malaysian (Jolene).

I don't want to lose it [...] I was born there, that's my country. And even though I haven't lived there for a very long time, there's a certain amount of allegiance still (Penny).

Rahti, Jolene and Penny all demonstrated that, for those not eligible for dual citizenship, naturalisation can become a choice of allegiance, a question of deciding between the source country and Australia. Ultimately, for these participants, any instrumental benefits of Australian naturalisation could not outweigh their sense of attachment to their country of origin, so the best choice was to remain a denizen. All three framed their decision in terms of a subjective sense of loyalty and identity, particularly in terms of pride and allegiance to their country of birth, although instrumental reasons such as maintaining mobility and return options often co-existed with these subjective factors.

THE DESIRE FOR SECURITY: UNCERTAINTY AND TENUOUS STATUSES

One of the strongest patterns in the data, and one that was largely not anticipated by the literature, was a sense amongst participants of insecurity: a distinct fear that PR was not, or perhaps in the future would not be, a secure position in Australia. Most of the literature on naturalisation choices in Australia determines that migrants see the right to vote and the right to a passport as key advantages of naturalisation (Batrouney & Goldlust 2005; Zappalà & Castles 2000). Security and the removal of the threat of deportation are generally only mentioned as advantages in the case of stateless persons (Batrouney & Goldlust 2005; Keely & Mcallister 1982) or as merely a "minor advantage" of citizenship (Betts & Birrell 2007: 48). However, despite the relatively secure bundle of rights granted to permanent residents under Australia law, there was a strong perception that citizenship was much more secure, and an underlying fear that as a permanent resident, they could conceivably be deported or otherwise mistreated by the government. Whereas Kelley and Mcallister (1982) see security and the removal of the threat of deportation as significant motivations to naturalise only for stateless persons, the perception in my sample was that the threat is there for all permanent residents. It is not unreasonable to conclude that the contrast in the national and global political climate between Kelley and Mcallister's work in the early 1980s and my fieldwork from 2005–2007 plays an important role in this distinction.

For example, well-publicised controversies over immigration issues in Australia seemed to be colouring the participants' perceptions that their status as permanent residents was tenuous. Such controversies included the cases of Cornelia Rau, an Australian resident, who was wrongfully retained at a detention centre as an illegal immigrant for 10 months in 2004 and 2005 (Palmer 2005), and Indian national Mohamed Haneef, who in 2007 had his working visa cancelled without hearing on 'character grounds' after links to suspected terrorists were found (Nicholls 2007). Although the Coalition government's official amendments to the Migration Act in 1999 only allow long term residents to be deported if they have been convicted of a criminal offence and spent more than one year in prison (Nicholls 2007), mediated reports of deportations and abuses have probably contributed to making the status of non-citizens seem unsound.

Furthermore, at the time of the fieldwork, specific changes to migration policy were looming, such as the new temporary residence periods for 'student switchers' in July 2007 and the introduction of a citizenship test in October. The Department of Immigration Multicultural

and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)¹ was largely seen by participants as a capricious and unpredictable entity, and the politicians in charge of migration policy were viewed with a fair amount of mistrust. It is difficult to find parallels to this phenomenon in the Australian literature, perhaps because the policy changes and the subsequent 'atmosphere of fear' were a relatively recent paradigm shift at the time of writing. There has been significant mention in the literature about the changing social position of certain migrant and ethnic groups in the post-September 11th global climate (see, for example, Noble 2005; White 2007; Poynting 2002). Alberts (2007) also specifically analyses the increased border security post September 11th as a concern of international students in the States. However, little of this research has specifically addressed how such global issues affect resident non-citizens and their migration choices within the Australian context. Most significantly within my sample, individuals who expressed strong emotional connections to Australia also expressed strong fears over the security of their status.

The sense of insecurity among participants was thus often directly connected to perceptions about the current political climate in Australia. Gayesh, who, like Devendra, expressed strong subjective claims to Australian citizenship, felt that his decision to naturalise had also been influenced by the political atmosphere, characterised by a fear of policy changes that may affect the security of residents.

In response to what is happening in the world and things changing in the world, the government is sort of screwing or tightening—and then at some stage there may be development that there will be differences between citizenship holders and residency.

Jaime had a very similar view, yet stated his case much more bluntly:

If Philip Ruddock [Attorney General] is alive it is safer to be a citizen than a resident. Because the minute Kevin Andrews [Minister for Immigration and Citizenship] came to my house, don't give any explanation whatsoever he can cancel my visa, that never happened but just to be more secure.

In both Gayesh and Jaime's comments, there was a level of distrust for the government, in particular the immigration regime. Gayesh felt that the gap between residents and citizens could widen in the future, while

¹ Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) was renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in January 2007. As fieldwork was mostly completed during 2005 and 2006, however, participants consistently referred to DIMIA. As such, I will generally refer to the institution as DIMIA throughout the analysis.

Jaime saw a direct and immediate threat from the (then Liberal) government's conservative ministers.

Madeleine also expressed a scepticism regarding the status of permanent residents remaining stable under the current government. In her case, she felt reluctant to be absent from the country long term without Australian citizenship:

R: I don't think I would leave Australia with only a PR. Because I would be scared that your Australian government is going to change it's policy. And it has been so difficult to get one, um, that I would really wait for the passport.

I: What kinds of things make you fear change of policy? Do you think it's the current political climate?

R: Yes, I think it makes me pretty nervous. The fact that it's becoming quite conservative. And immigration, just the way I've seen it, they can actually change, probably not for PR 'cause it's such a big deal, so many Australians who have been there for ages prefer permanent residency to citizenship, because they would lose their previous citizenship. But on little things like the number of points they change them overnight [...] And I don't know, not everybody was aware of it. It's normal that it doesn't make the news, but still for some people it's really important.

Like many of the participants, Madeleine had already lived through immigration policy changes that had a direct effect on her options, such as the skills list changing or points requirements shifting², and this has fuelled the fear that more drastic changes could come without warning. Madeleine rightly noted that such changes may seem insignificant to the general population in Australia, but for 'some people', presumably those on temporary visas as pathways to residency, even minor changes can have a significant effect on their plans.

² Australia uses a points system to evaluate migration applications. Points are awarded for age, qualifications, work experience and language proficiency. Since 1998, applicants with Australian educational qualifications have received extra points. The (Skilled) Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) is a list of occupations which have been identified as being in demand in Australia. Applicants received points if their nominated occupation is on the MODL list. Pass marks for skilled migration categories and the MODL list are subject to regular change in response to labour market needs.

POLITICAL DESIRES: PARTICIPATION, RESPONSIBILITY AND AMBIVALENCE

The right to vote is central to the legal distinction between denizenship and citizenship in the Australian context (Evans 1988), and as such could be expected to be a strong incentive to naturalise. However, I found that many participants (whether they were intending to naturalise in the future or not) viewed collective action, community involvement, or participating in political discourse as alternatives to suffrage—a means by which to have a political voice without having full political citizenship rights:

I think that there's other ways to influence. Politics is often about federal or national politics, whereas if I really wanted to try and influence something I would probably try and get on my local council or something. But most people just like to have a jolly good whinge rather than really want to get stuck in (Penny).

You can always go to the protest, which is what I do, if it's something very important. Like, we went against the French policy for the war in Iraq, all those international issues (Madeleine).

I'm involved somehow because I raise my opinion and you see I'm pissed off that we are so wealthy and we don't have coverage in Medicare. Those kind of things. So in that regard I participate in politics every day, I'm a fairly political person. I went to a public uni in South America, so I'm fairly politically—not lefty but I'm very right, but I'm a fairly political person and I engage in politics, I guess I can't vote and that's fair enough but when I can vote I will exercise that right (Jaime).

This political engagement focuses on speaking out about political issues within the host country, often current issues that also concerned many citizens, such as Australia's health care policy (Crook & Pakulski 1995) or involvement with the war in Iraq (Brander & Hornsey 2006). This kind of localised political agency is at first glance quite dissimilar to the border-crossing political practices often discussed in the transnational literature (Fitzgerald 2000; Itzigsohn 2000). Yet I would suggest that such practices are embedded within the process of transnational negotiation, in so far as they are a means by which the non-citizen asserts belonging in the host community through political agency and discourse, without completely severing their political links to the source country. We therefore see a compromise in the student-turned-migrant desire to somehow straddle both

worlds, to negotiate a political space that encompasses both here and there. These individuals defied any conceptualisation of denizens as apolitical, or without political agency. Whether they were intending to naturalise or not, these students-turned-migrants found ways to make their views heard politically through public protest, community involvement or simply participating in political discourse.

However, many other participants were ambivalent about the significance or benefits of the right to vote, with most, like Jolene, citing a lack of interest in politics generally, "Um, voting? I think for me I'm not really into politics, so that—in that respect voting is not a top priority". Two of the Chinese participants, Ivy and Hannah, were not even aware that suffrage was a main benefit of citizenship:

I: One of the main differences though, is that if you have PR you can't vote. But with citizenship you can vote.

R2: So there's no point for us.

R1: No, we don't care [laughs]. One of my friends, she has already got citizenship, and the last one, I think it was 2004, she was in China that year, and she missed to vote. And she didn't know, and no-one vote for her, and she got penalty. Yeah, she said 'oh my God!' [laughs]

This ambivalence about the political process, quite understandably for participants from a source country with a one party system, was in stark contrast to Madeleine, for whom the exercise of democratic rights and the value of democracy was a distinct element of her French identity. All other participants fell somewhere in between these two extremes, in terms of the importance that they placed on gaining suffrage.

THE DESIRE FOR MOBILITY: FLEXIBILITY AND RETURN

One of the key instrumental motivations behind citizenship choices was the desire for a passport that offered easy entrance (for example entrance without a visa) to a wide variety of countries, mostly for the purposes of leisure travel. This was particularly important for the younger participants, especially those without spouses and children. However, as Neumayer (2006) and Cunningham (2004) note, modern transnational mobility is characterised by highly unequal access to foreign spaces, with passport

holders from privilege nations granted far fewer restrictions. My participants whether from the 'privileged' or the 'restricted' nations, all demonstrated a clear awareness of the mobility value of their source country citizenships, and several participants from less developed nations felt that a shift to Australian citizenship would give them freer and easier access to the world as travellers and migrants:

The Western World is pretty much turning its back to Venezuela. So, if anything, we're not viewed very favourably when immigrating or travelling abroad. [...] I need something more practical. I need tools to work with here. It'd be good. Give me something to work with (Rafael).

I know if I got PR or citizenship in Australia, I can go abroad. I can go other countries whenever I want, because, you know, China, all these developing countries Level 4³ countries—yeah, you cannot go to other countries freely. Yeah, but level one countries can go to other countries. For example, even the USA—you just go there and get visas from their embassies, just – whenever you come there (Tina).

It's just like advantage when you travel overseas, because with the Bangladesh passport, you might have troubles (Tariq).

All the participants here were referring in some way to how global power structures shape their ability to travel freely in the world. Essentially, uneven power differentials between their source countries as part of developing regions or regions of uneven stability and the coalition of powerful and generally Western countries have created barriers to their individual mobility as citizens of nations who are not viewed 'favourably' by the bureaucratic constructs of global border regulation. Thus, in the context of global mobility, these migrants primarily saw Australian citizenship in Rafael's terms: as a 'tool' that will practicably enhance social capital through increased mobility.

However, the Australian passport did not always provide greater 'mobility capital'. In the experiences of other participants from more developed or higher ranking countries, the source country membership

³ DIMIA assigns risk assessment levels from 1 to 4 to all student visa applications. The level is assigned based on nationality and education sector, and is calculated on a detailed analysis of the immigration compliance data for student visa holders from specific countries. China is currently one of the few nationalities assessed at Level 4 (highest risk) across all education sectors.

could often provide broader options. Madeleine, as an EU passport holder, was unwillingly to give up the great freedom of movement across Europe, and Rahti and Jolene both perceived greater mobility across Asia and Eastern Europe with their Malaysian passports. These individuals thus negotiated their belonging based on their specific desires for global mobility. I have earlier discussed Rahti and Jolene's subjective desire to maintain their Malaysian citizenship as an identifier of their Malaysian identities, yet we can see here that this primary subjective motivation was further underpinned by the instrumental practicalities of mobility.

The possibility of long term return is also significant to the discussion of mobility as a factor affecting citizenship choices. For the participants who were not eligible for dual citizenship, naturalising and renouncing their original citizenship carried the risk of limiting their options for a long-term return to their country of origin. While Penny wanted to keep her US passport in case she wanted to return and work, for Shui and Takahiro, it was the concern that their families may need them that spurred their desire to remain able to return:

Yeah I would lose Japanese, they don't accept a double passport. Yeah if something happened to my family I want to be able to go back and stay there (Takahiro).

I do not want to do that, to give up Malaysian citizenship, because I was thinking what if something happen? And I want to go back. But if my parents is really ill and I need to stay longer than three months? What if something happens here and I need to go back? I want to give myself that (Shui).

Essentially, for individuals from countries that do not permit dual citizenship, family back in the source country was a significant incentive to remain a denizen, as was the possibility for future professional mobility.

For other participants, the concept of mobility did not centre on desires to travel overseas for leisure (that is, beyond the geographic realms of source and host countries), nor were they concerned with circumstances that might 'push' them to return home. Rather, they envisioned their future lives as a 'back and forth' between Australia and their country of origin, with fluid professional and residential options across this transnational lifeworld. This is an inherently different conception of mobility from the desire to travel for leisure or the desire to maintain citizenship 'in case I need to go back.' It is rather a broader envisioning of lives and careers that span the two

localities. For Miguel, this kind of flexible, dually territorialised existence was an inherent part of his long-term goals:

The flexibility of coming and going, and therefore, you know, like don't get stuck in one place, that's how you don't really want. Because if I go back to Colombia right now I won't have any visa, you know, like to easily move and try to connect [...] And, for example, if—with a citizenship I can work in Australia and—I don't know, for some years, and let's say if I decide to start a family I could decide which way to go depending of what—of what I want for my kids or whatever.

Hannah similarly envisioned a future of 'coming and going' as a life strategy for her family. Interestingly, as she was ineligible for dual citizenship, she saw the maintenance of a separate citizenship to her spouse as a distinct advantage towards maintaining this kind of fluid dual state mobility:

For me, it's just like another option. I think of my husband, he's got Chinese. If I can get Australian citizenship we can more frequently come here and go back to China. Like, more opportunity. If we like to stay in China, we stay in China. If we want to stay here we still have chance to go back.

As well as desiring transnational flexibility for themselves, Hannah and Miguel, along with Sunee and Gayesh, also saw themselves as the gatekeepers of mobility options for their families. While Gayesh was adamant that his family should all have the same passport for security reasons, Hannah saw maintaining a different citizenship to her partner as a means of increasing their mobility as a family unit.

Overall, in my discussions of mobility with my participants, a great deal of evidence amassed that they generally viewed their migration process as non-linear. Even the participants who were highly attached to Australia and expected to stay long-term did not want to make citizenship choices that could close off options for future mobility or the possibility of return.

CONCLUSIONS

The motivations behind the citizenship choices made by my participants were complex, and there were multifaceted inter-linkages of motivations in

each individual migration story. Generally, motivations comprised of a blending of the subjective desire to gain new or retain existing belongings, and the practical needs for the benefits of security, mobility and political voice. Making decisions about legal membership was often framed as a process of both strategic and emotional compromise, with the goal of finding the perfect balance of protecting allegiances, obligations and needs across both nation-states.

First of all, individuals who envisioned return, whether temporary or permanent, chose the best available option that kept residency, work, and entrance and exit options open across the two countries, while people who valued future mobility beyond the dual territories of source and settlement countries chose the membership that offered them the best opportunities for travel, usually based on where they most desired to go. In terms of mobility, there was also strong evidence in this study that the current global-political climate can impact on decision-making. For example, the 'ranking' of a source country in global power structures can limit the desirability of a particular citizenship by limiting its mobility capital.

Secondly, while political participation is often cited in the literature as a central advantage of naturalisation in Australia, only a minority of participants felt motivated to naturalise by the right to vote. However, for those who were politically engaged, denizenship was by no means an apolitical space, as individuals felt they could have agency within the Australian political sphere through alternative means. While their political agency as denizens is in some ways localised, it still represents a strategic negotiation in order to maintain some level of political participation across two nation-states.

Finally, eligibility for dual citizenship had a clear impact on decision-making. Students-turned-migrants who were eligible were less likely to discuss strong tensions and compromises in the decision, as it "does not necessarily require such a critical or decisive reorientation as when the original citizenship must be relinquished" (Ip et al. 1997: 372). Or, as Tariq simply stated, "You don't have to think about taking the citizenship." As such, those eligible for dual citizenship were more likely to choose naturalisation over ongoing denizenship.

Those ineligible, however, will spend an extended period of time living in Australia as denizens, and may perceive their denizenship as their long-term state of legal belonging. Denizenship can be a contradictory space, of feeling politically engaged without the right to vote, of identifying as belonging to a country without the official documentation. It can also be a flexible space, desirable because it provides the options of coming and going, and of maintaining broad sets of social rights and a sense of

membership across two national contexts. However, despite the relatively strong set of social rights and protections offered to permanent residents under Australian law, for some participants, occupying the space of the denizen also contained a sense of fear and uncertainty, which was often closely connected to the perceptions of the political climate, most notably impressions of increased regulation of migration, cases of discrimination against non-citizens, and rapid legislation changes. This was another example of wider political forces influencing decisions. In this case, the current policy atmosphere in the host country can be seen to exacerbate concerns about the secure status of residents and thus give greater desirability to naturalisation.

While this paper is intended to be a snapshot of the experiences and perceptions of a small group of students-turned-migrants, and not representative of the population as a whole, the findings do have some broad implications and consideration for further research and policy debates. Firstly, I would suggest that further research into the political participation of long-term denizens in Australia may be useful in constructing policy to engage resident non-citizens in social and political life in Australia, or to find ways to encourage naturalisation. Furthermore, policy makers need to consider that flexibility and mobility are high priorities for many contemporary migrants, and that allowing and expanding possibilities for multiple belongings may attract more migrants to Australia and help sustain grassroots links between Australia and various sending countries. I would also suggest that campaigns to promote education and awareness about the rights, benefits and securities of residency and citizenship might ease some of the fear and uncertainty that has arisen around Australian migration policy, and which can cause a great deal of consternation for migrants who feel that their status is tenuous.

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