Negotiated Transnationality: Memberships, Mobilities and the Student-Turned-Migrant Experience

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Shanthi K. Robertson
B.A. (Hons)

School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
Design and Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University
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Declaration

I certify that:

a) except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone;

b) the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;

c) the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;

d) any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged;

e) ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Shanthi K. Robertson

26th August 2008
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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory study of the lives and experiences of international students who apply for and gain permanent residency (PR) after completing tertiary study in Australia. These ‘students-turned-migrants’ are a rapidly growing migrant group due to changes to skilled migration policy since 1998 that favour international graduates of Australian educational institutions.

The thesis uses sociological theories and methods to focus on the ways that students-turned-migrants maintain transnational connections and practices, and negotiate their memberships and sense of belonging across Australia and other countries. This research is important because there is negligible extant literature that connects the international study experience and the skilled migration experience as two steps in the same process. Furthermore, research that does address this phenomenon tends to look at students-turned-migrants as a ‘policy problem’, usually focusing on their labour market integration. In contrast, this thesis foregrounds this distinctive group of contemporary migrants’ subjective experience of the migration process and their ongoing transnational connections.
The research was undertaken using cultural probes (packages of mixed media materials such as diaries, maps and disposable cameras, which participants used to document aspects of their lives) and in-depth interviews to provide a rich understanding of the multiplicity and breadth of participants’ individual experiences, with various reflective representations of the individuals’ narratives at the core of the study.

The analysis covers two central aspects of the student-turned-migrant experience: the acquisition of *memberships*, such as PR and citizenship, and the maintenance of *mobilities*, including virtual mobility through media and communications technology, and corporeal mobility through forms of travel such as return visits. The analysis reveals that students-turned-migrants undergo a distinct migration experience, characterised by three sequential gates of membership: their entrance as transient students, their acquisition of residency and their decisions about citizenship. Transnational consciousness diffuses their decision-making at each stage of this process, as they negotiate the memberships available to them as a means to balance their desires and obligations across home and host countries. The analysis reveals that student-turned-migrant choices and experiences are often affected by macro-political forces. Choices about citizenship are heavily influenced by global regimes of mobility and the media, and their acquisition of residency is negotiated through the institutions and regulations of the immigration regime.
The analysis also reveals that students-turned-migrants engage with a diverse range of transnational practices, many of which are closely grounded in the use of technology to maintain transnational connections. The migrants in this study used a range of communications technology to sustain relationships at a distance. However, the findings reveal that while technology provided a range of ways in which students-turned-migrants could facilitate and manage transnational connections, it was seldom unproblematic. Furthermore, the use of technology was not inherently transformative; it facilitated social practices in new ways, but did not radically alter how individuals maintained relationships and fulfilled their obligations to friends and family.

The findings reframe students-turned-migrants as more than just a policy problem, but rather as a unique group of contemporary migrants, with several key features that set them apart from previous waves of Australian migrants. While they are less integrated into established local ethnic communities, they maintain very strong connections overseas. They maintain regular contact through virtual mobilities and display a high propensity for return travel. They value mobility highly and display an acute awareness of both the advantages and challenges of sustaining mobile lives. The study of their experiences not only reveals a great deal about the nature of transnationality and mobility in an
increasingly globalised world, but also suggests that if this type of migration continues in the future, it may have implications for Australia’s patterns of cultural diversity and international integration.
Chapter One: Introduction

During 2003 and 2004, I was working for RMIT University, teaching English for Academic Purposes to international students who were intending to enter degree programs at the university. In the course of my work, I often asked students about their study pathways and career aspirations. There were a number of reasons why students had chosen to study overseas, many of which were similar to the reasons that I myself had studied abroad as an undergraduate: to learn a second language, to travel and experience a new culture, and to study at an institution that could perhaps offer more than the universities at home. The most common reply, however, particularly when I asked students why they had chosen a particular degree, was “for PR”. The goal of Australian permanent residency (PR) was, for a large number of these students, the central desired outcome of their international education experience. For some, this would be a long and costly journey, involving up to two years of full-time language classes, a three to four year degree, and possibly also postgraduate study. I began to realise that my classes consisted not just of transient students who would sojourn in Australia for a few years, but of potential residents who were in the early stages of a complex and relatively new type of migration pathway. I saw glimpses of the challenges that they faced in living far from family and friends, and in navigating a new social world that could one day become their permanent home. I began to wonder about how people experienced
the later stages of this migration process, and how they, as contemporary migrants, would continue to negotiate their relationships with Australia and their countries of origin as their migration paths progressed. This thesis is an attempt to explore and to understand the student-turned-migrant experience in Australia, focusing in particular on the complex ways in which students-turned-migrants, as mobile subjects, negotiate transnational life-worlds.

It is firstly important to recognise the global and national contexts that have given rise to the student-turned-migrant phenomenon. The aspirations of my English students in 2003 and 2004 were reflective of the broader context of the modern knowledge economy. Since the late 1990s, governments of skill-hungry nations, mostly in the developed West, have begun to recognise the movement of students as a significant dimension of the general movement of human capital, and as a resource that can be tapped to put them ahead in the global race for skills. Khadria (2000: 45) aptly dubs students “the semi-finished human capital”, arguing that studies of skilled migration should consider the movement of students alongside the movement of graduates and qualified professionals. Amidst this recognition of the link between international education and skilled migration, a variety of policy responses have emerged from key migrant-receiving nations. Australia currently has an acute skills shortage and an increasing reliance on private funding in the tertiary sector. As such, it is a leading receiver of
both skilled migrants and international students. Of Australian tertiary enrolments in 2007 (which include higher education and vocational education and training), 294,672 were international students (AEI 2007). In the same year, international students made up 17.3% of all university places in the country (OECD 2007: 309). In addition, according to the Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA\textsuperscript{1}), in 2004-05 the Skill Stream represented about 65% of the Migration Program, compared to about 34% in 1997-98.

With these high intakes of both students and migrants, Australia has been one of the first nations to explicitly link international education and skilled migration in policy (Ziguras and Law 2006), and as I shall discuss further on, a significant proportion of international students now become permanent residents after graduation. This began at the end of the 1990s, when Australia began to overtly recruit international students into the skilled migration stream. Firstly, since 1998, international students have been able to move from a student visa to permanent residency while remaining onshore. Prior to this, former students hoping to become migrants had to return home in order to apply. The new process of onshore application, dubbed ‘student switching’ by McLaughlin and Salt (2002), allowed individuals to effectively switch their status from student to migrant without having to leave the country or obtain employer

\textsuperscript{1} The Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) was renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in January 2007. Therefore, any citations prior to this date will refer to DIMIA, while any from 2007 onwards will refer to DIAC. As fieldwork was primarily completed during 2005 and 2006, however, participants consistently referred to the Department as DIMIA. As such, I will generally refer to the institution as DIMIA throughout the analysis.
sponsorship. Furthermore, new policies have also been able to favour international students over other applicants through the points system used to evaluate migration applications. Since 1998, applicants for permanent residency with an Australian tertiary qualification have been awarded extra points and in July 2001, a new visa category, Skilled-Independent Overseas Student, was created specifically for this group. This category initially allowed holders of an Australian tertiary qualification to apply for permanent residency onshore within six months of completing their study. This legislation was again modified in 2003, with the number of extra points granted increasing depending on the level of Australian qualification attained. Bachelor degrees, diplomas and trade qualifications earned five points, Masters and Honours degrees ten, and Doctorates 15.

The rationale behind these student switching policies is clear. In Hawthorne’s (2005) words, Australia’s current migration focus is on “picking winners”, that is, the targeting and recruitment of highly skilled and educated individuals who will best meet the needs of the labour market. Within this rationalist context, international graduates of Australian universities theoretically represent ideal candidates, as they are young, proficient in English, locally qualified, and presumably already socially and culturally adjusted to Australian life (Ziguras and Law 2006). More recently however, research has emerged to reveal that, in terms of labour market integration, student switching has not met the expected
outcomes (Birrell and Rapson 2005; Birrell 2006a; Jackling 2007). Questions over the employability and English language skills of foreign graduates have led to a reassessment of policy. Amid concerns that inexperienced international student graduates were not being readily absorbed into the job market, student switching legislation underwent further modification in 2007, with many graduates now required to gain work experience on a temporary visa before being granted PR (DIAC 2007). While the 2007 changes require a longer period of temporary residency, the intended outcome of the policy is still primarily on retaining students as permanent residents, rather than temporary workers.

These pathways have appealed to a significant number of potential migrants. The number of permanent residencies issued through the newly created onshore skilled overseas student visa subclasses have increased from 5,480 in 2001-02 to 14,441 in 2004-05, and these successful applicants now outnumber those who apply from offshore (Birrell, Rapson and Smith 2006: 26). Research has also found that permanent residency is now not only a key outcome but also a key motivation for many international students who undertake degrees in Australia. At the 2005 Australian International Education Conference Birrell (2005, as cited in Baas 2005) noted that 38% of Chinese students and 66% of Indian students who graduated in 2002 obtained permanent residency. Moreover, the 2007 University and Beyond Survey from Graduate Careers
Australia reveals that 65% of international students surveyed intended to apply for permanent resident status, while a further 6.8% had already achieved PR (Tilbrook 2007).

As a ‘new wave’ of Australian migration, students-turned-migrants remain under-researched. The small body of literature that does deal with the phenomenon has been preoccupied with labour market outcomes. Yet students-turned-migrants’ personal narratives; the complex and shifting nature of their identities; and their dynamic relationships with multiple nations have potential for far wider sociological reflection. There are two key factors that I will argue make this group of migrants unique and worthy of further research. The first is the staggered nature of their migration process as a defining feature of the student-turned-migrant experience, and the second is their high potential for transnationality, that is, ongoing connectedness with their countries of origin and other countries overseas. I will elaborate on these two key points below.

Firstly, student switching policies have created a distinct migration process. Individuals ostensibly enter Australia with a temporary status, although their intentions may be to remain after the end of their student visa. As students apply for and gain PR, they then undergo the process of shifting their status and identities from transient students to permanent residents, which is often accompanied by a shift from the university to
the workplace. Furthermore, student switchers generally experience a waiting period while their applications for residency are being processed. Delays in processing are common, so applicants can often spend six to twelve months awaiting confirmation of their residency. This period of uncertainty, of waiting for confirmation of their future, is also a distinct element in the process of transition from student to migrant. In theorising the processes of legal belonging, Hammar (1990) states that immigrants must pass through three entrance gates in order to enter into 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 fact that many are actually engaged in the first stages of a long-term migration strategy. The second gate is applying for permanent residency, which usually happens after the completion of the required course of study. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to the status of permanent residency as ‘denizenship’, in accordance with Hammar’s (1990: 15) definition of denizens of a nation-state as “persons who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status”. Migrants must then reside in Australia as permanent residents for a required period before they are able to progress to the third and final gate of naturalisation. In this thesis, I will explore precisely how individuals experience this staggered
acquisition of memberships into Australian society, and how they make choices regarding denizenship and naturalisation.

I believe that the second defining feature of students-turned-migrants is their potential transnationality. While I will provide a detailed critique of theoretical conceptions of transnationality in the following chapter, and provide precise definitions and boundaries for the term, it is apparent that, generally speaking, students-turned-migrants are likely to sustain strong connections both overseas and in Australia, even after they have acquired permanent residency. On the one hand, their period of residence as students means that they may already have strong social networks and subjective ties to Australia by the time they apply for migration. On the other, they would also have migrated as adults and probably maintain close ties with their country of origin. A majority of international students also arrive in Australia without their immediate families, thus increasing the likelihood that they will desire to remain highly mobile and in close contact with home. Their relative youth and the ubiquity of technology at Australian universities also imply that they will be highly likely to use modern communications technology to sustain such contacts overseas. These characteristics raise interesting questions about how students-turned-migrants negotiate their obligations, relationships, and desires across national borders, and what role virtual and actual mobilities play in this negotiation. Moreover, while a good deal of the literature on international students and students-turned-
migrants in Australia (which will be critiqued at length in Chapter Three) focuses on their adaptation and integration into Australian society, I believe that transnational frameworks and theories of mobility will in fact provide a more rounded research approach for exploring this group.

**Research Questions**

In light of the above discussion of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon, this thesis aims to explore their acquisition of memberships and engagement with different modes of mobility as negotiated processes that sustain transnational connections. I will explore several specific dimensions of the student-turned-migrant experience within this broad frame:

1. How do students-turned-migrants experience the shift in their status from temporary international student to permanent resident?
   - What factors influence their decision-making?
   - How do they negotiate the process of student switching?
   - How does the shift impact on their social positioning and self identity?

2. What patterns of connectedness do they maintain with their countries of origin and with other countries?
   - How do they keep in touch with families, friends, and communities overseas?
• How do they construct or imagine narratives of return?

3. How do they negotiate formal and informal modes of membership to Australia and their countries of origin?

• Do they see residency in Australia as permanent or as contingent and flexible?

• How do they perceive the significance of citizenship and how do they make decisions about naturalisation?

**Research Approach**

While a full justification for the theoretical approaches and methodological choices will be provided in Chapters Two and Four, I will summarise here the foundations of the research approach. As discussed above, I believe a transnational theoretical framework, with a focus on diverse modes of mobility, is highly appropriate to the study of students-turned-migrants, who are without doubt mobile subjects, and yet are more often studied from a point of view of acculturation and integration than mobility and transnationality. Furthermore, as the subjective experiences of students-turned-migrants are under-represented in the current literature, I will use a qualitative research paradigm and methods, including interviews and cultural probes, in order to build a detailed snapshot of their experiences and perspectives.
This research also aims to foreground the diversity of the student-turned-migrant experience. While previous research focuses on specific ethnic groups (Pang and Appleton 2004; Baas 2006a, 2006b) or specific career paths (Jackling 2007), the sample in this thesis includes participants from a wide variety of source countries and fields. In particular, the sample includes non-Asian participants as a means to go beyond the tendency in the literature to see the international student experience as an exclusively ‘Asian’ experience. Thus, while several participants are from the most prominent source countries for students-turned-migrants, such as India and China, the sample also includes participants from the United States, Europe, and South America, as well as a number of other Asian countries. The sample includes a roughly even division in terms of gender. Furthermore, a relatively small sample has been selected, in order to create a depth of understanding of individual cases, rather than a broad overview of the population as a whole.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. The following two chapters, Chapters Two and Three, constitute the literature review. Chapter Two will deal with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the research. This involves firstly outlining Urry’s (2000b) proposed ‘new rules’ for sociological research that conceptually privilege the metaphor of mobilities, and establishing how a selection of these ‘rules’ function as a guiding theoretical framework for this thesis. In addition, Chapter Two
will discuss how this study will view the interactions and experiences of students-turned-migrants in Australia through a transnational lens, which aims to illuminate not only how and why individuals forge and sustain links across national borders, but also how these links colour their decisions, their perceptions of their experiences and their perceptions of themselves. Chapter Two will elaborate on how, in the study of migrants and migration, the adoption of a transnational perspective fundamentally means a rejection of one-way, linear, and permanent models of migration across borders. Transnational approaches rather acknowledge that migrants may in fact sustain significant ties within both the countries of origin and of settlement, creating transnational social spaces that stretch the interactions of their daily lives across multiple localities. The central debates and extant literature on transnationalism will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. In this chapter I will fully justify the use of transnationalism as a theoretical framework, and also make explicit my particular definitions of several terms connected to transnationalism for the purposes of this research. As the concepts of citizenship and denizenship as formal modes of belonging are also central to this thesis, Chapter Two will also include a discussion of contemporary citizenship theory, and outline Australia’s current policies on citizenship as the context within which students-turned-migrants make their decisions.
Chapter Three will move on to review relevant empirical work that has informed this research. While literature that is more specific to each analysis theme will be incorporated into the analysis in Chapters Five to Nine, Chapter Three will constitute a broad overview of relevant empirical studies. This chapter will firstly show that despite the increasing numbers of students who become migrants, there is a paucity of sociological and qualitative examination of this particular migration process. While there is policy driven research which debates the merits of migration policies that target international students, such studies tend to look critically at the effectiveness of labour market integration from a statistical standpoint, but are disinterested in students-turned-migrants’ subjective experiences (Birrell 2006b; Birrell, Healy and Kinnaird 2007; Jackling 2007). There is also a great deal of research that explores the international student experience, in terms of adaptation, integration, identity and acculturation (see, for example, Leung 2001; Hellsten 2002; Ghosh and Wang 2003; Doherty and Singh 2005). A more limited range of literature discusses their post-graduation choices and mobility (Rizvi 2005; Hazen and Alberts 2005, 2006), including the possibility of migration. The most relevant of this qualitative literature on international students will be fully discussed and analysed in Chapter Three. I will draw also on a wide range of other literature that is relevant to the research themes, including empirical studies of transmigrants, and studies of citizenship and belonging in the lives of mobile individuals, including the concepts of flexible citizenship and multiple belongings. While sociological studies
of both international students and transmigrants will be reviewed, this chapter will show that scholars often fail to explore the link between these two fields. International students are still largely viewed as transients, rather than potential settlers, and transmigrants are seldom framed as former students. This thesis, in contrast, aims to acknowledge the student-turned-migrant process as a singular and emerging migrant experience that warrants distinct and in-depth examination.

Chapter Four will provide a discussion of the methodologies employed to conduct this research, including an outline of the research sample. It will describe and justify the use of an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, and ethnographic strategies of enquiry. In line with this epistemological framework, in Chapter Four I will also establish a reflexive research stance, by acknowledging my inherent biases as a researcher, and examining how they may have impacted on the research process. This chapter will also describe in some detail the data collection methods, which involved the triangulation of the traditional qualitative techniques of in-depth interviews and a reflexive research diary with the more novel use of cultural probes. I will also provide a summary of the analysis techniques employed. Finally, this chapter will acknowledge and describe some of the limitations and challenges of the project’s design and its subsequent outcomes.
Chapters Five to Nine constitute the analysis sections of the thesis. The analysis is divided into two parts. Part One deals with the theme of acquiring memberships, and is framed in terms of Hammar’s (1990) model of the entrance gates that regulate migrant belonging. Chapter Five will thus deal with the processes of deciding about and acquiring residency and Chapter Six will deal with how decisions about citizenship are made. These chapters will address the issue of membership, both in terms of the formalised memberships of PR and citizenship, and their relationship to subjective constructions of home and belonging. Part Two of the analysis will focus on the theme of maintaining mobilities. This will address the various forms of transnational social interaction present in the participants’ lives through virtual and corporeal mobilities. Chapters Seven and Eight will closely address the significance of modern communications technology and globalised media in the transnational practices of participants, drawing in particular on Appadurai’s (1996) tropes of ‘technoscapes’ and ‘mediascapes’, while Chapter Nine will analyse ‘narratives of return’ in terms of both short-term visits and more permanent return to the country of origin. The final chapter, Chapter Ten, will draw together the various thematic strands of the thesis, summarise the key findings, and reflect on avenues for further research.

This study aims to provide a qualitative exploration of the newly emerged student switching migration experience. It has been prompted by changes to Australian migration policy that closely intertwine the
international education experience with opportunities for permanent migration, which have resulted in many of Australia’s most recent skilled migrants being gleaned from the vast pool of foreign students who complete Australian degrees each year. These migrants undergo a distinct process of entrance into Australian society, and due to their particular characteristics as a migrant group, seem highly likely to value mobility and display transnational behaviours. Despite this, there has been very little research that deeply explores these migrants from a sociological perspective. This study thus aims to understand the student-turned-migrant experience from the perspective of individual migrants, using a transnational conceptual framework to embrace the possibilities of mobility and multiple belongings in their lives.
Chapter Two: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Introduction

The impacts of globalisation have been central to recent sociological theory and debate. Social theorists have reconstructed ideas of the human condition in light of the impact of globalising forces in the modern world, in particular the impact of the increased mobility of people, capital, objects and information across vast distances. In this chapter, I will critically discuss some of the key theoretical concepts from this literature that form the conceptual framework of this thesis. This will mainly consist of a critical examination of the use of transnationalism as a theoretical framework, as well as some discussion of other core concepts from social theories of mobility, citizenship and globalisation, in particular looking at Urry’s (2000b) ‘new rules’ of sociological method.

The term ‘transnationalism’ has frequently been employed in research that empirically explores the consequences of globalising forces, most specifically in the study of migration and human mobility. The term has been employed to such a wide variety of ends and in so many disciplinary capacities, however, that defining its parameters in research has become increasingly challenging. While Vertovec (2003) asserts that the complexity of debate and distinct lack of consensus surrounding the term often divulge it of its capacity to be meaningful, I believe the
concept is valuable as an epistemological perspective and research tool, particularly to the phenomena under examination in this study. However, thorough care must be taken to define its parameters in this context. In other words, it is important to clarify which of the many forms and definitions of transnationalism to be found in current academic discourse will be adopted into this study, and why they are the most pertinent choices. In this section of the literature review, I will endeavour to do this by discussing some of the central debates and extant literature on transnationalism and transnational migration. I will summarise the most relevant of these arguments, contextualise the issues, and explain their worth within the context of this thesis.

Concepts of citizenship and denizenship as formalised denotations of the relationship between individuals and nation-states are also central to discussions of student-turned-migrant belonging and mobility in this thesis. As such, the final section of this chapter will engage with theories of citizenship and transnationalism, in particular looking at the possibilities for dual state membership that are provided by denizenship and dual citizenship. Within this section, I will also outline current Australian government policy on these issues.

**Urry’s Theorisation of Mobilities**

Urry’s (2000a, 2000b, 2002) theorisations of mobility are a guiding concept in this research. Essentially, Urry notes that sociology’s tendency
to focus on direct interactions between people and groups who are physically proximate to each other is no longer sufficient to describe modern social life. Rather, Urry asserts that sociological research must draw mobility into the centre of analysis. Importantly, his work draws a theoretical distinction between different kinds of mobility: the corporeal, in which social relationships are formed and maintained through face-to-face co-presence; the virtual, in which relationships are mediated by various modes of communication at a distance; and the imagined, in which social worlds and interconnections are abstractly conceived. Urry (2000b: 256) uses the central notion of mobilities to propose a set of ‘new rules’ for sociological method, based around the following assumption:

One should investigate not only physical and immediate presence, but also the socialities involved in occasional co-presence, imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence. Indeed all forms of social life involve striking combinations of proximity and distance, combinations that necessitate examination of the intersecting forms of physical, object, imaginative and virtual mobility that contingently and complexly link people in particular patterns of obligation, desire and commitment, increasingly over geographical distances of great length.

The central premise of this thesis is very much congruent with Urry’s approach. Prior research into international students and transmigrants (discussed in the following chapter) reveal their potential to be strongly engaged with the diverse mobilities of modernity; yet do not deeply assess how these different kinds of mobilities function. In examining the
social worlds of students-turned-migrants, I aim to explore in detail the aspects of virtual, corporeal and imagined mobilities that exist in their constructions of transnationality. More specifically, I aim to describe and assess how these mobilities impact on their daily lives, social perspectives and decision-making. While Urry (2000b: 18-19) constructs a number of ‘rules’ that pertain to ‘mobile theorising’, it is worth isolating those that relate directly to the concepts and subjects under examination in this thesis:

- To examine the extent, range and diverse effects of the corporeal, imagined and virtual mobilities of people (…)
- To describe the different bases of people’s sense of dwelling, including their dependence upon various forms of mobilities of people, presents, photographs, images, information risks and so on
- To comprehend the changing character of citizenship as rights and duties are increasingly owed to, and derive from, entities whose topologies criss-cross those of society (…)
- To explain changes within states towards an emphasis on ‘regulating’ mobilities
- To illuminate the increased mediaisation of social life as images circulate increasingly fast and with added reach (…).

While these new conceptualisations of social research are certainly valuable in terms of recognising that “mobilities are transforming the historic subject-matter of sociology” (Urry 2000a: 186), critics claim Urry’s ‘metaphors-based manifesto’ on how social research should be done
lacks grounded empirical observations or methodological considerations (Favell 2001). This is a salient point. While his later work in *Mobilities* (2007) contains more empirical engagement, his manifesto *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000) sidelines the practical challenges of employing the ‘new rules’ in favour of dissecting postmodern metaphors of space and flow. This thesis thus constitutes an attempt to rise to this critical challenge: to make Urry’s theories ‘work’ in empirical discussions by embedding his concepts within the analysis of the life-worlds of students-turned-migrants, and by framing this analysis within established epistemologies of transnationalism.

**Defining the Boundaries: Transnationalism as Theoretical Lens and as Social Practice**

If we move from broad discussions of mobilities and globalising forces to specific literature on contemporary migration, the concept of transnationalism is ubiquitous. It is important to note that in most of the literature, the term is used in two distinct, yet inherently interconnected, ways. Firstly, it is used to describe an epistemological perspective, that is, a new way of considering migration and a new approach to analysing empirical data. Secondly, it is also used to refer to patterns of migrant behaviours, social actions, institutions, and migrants themselves. It has thus been both a theoretical lens for research and a descriptor of various social practices, and its meanings need to be clarified at both of these levels.
The use of transnationalism as a theoretical lens is perhaps less complex than the use of the term to describe social practice. This is mostly because of the diversity of migrant behaviours that are analysed under the transnational umbrella. In the field of migration studies, adopting transnationalism as a theoretical framework usually denotes a paradigm shift from an assimilationist, unidirectional, and nationally bounded perception of cross-border migration to one that is multicultural, multidirectional and deterritorialised (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). Essentially, researchers adopting this framework do not focus solely on migrants’ adaptation to the receiving country, but also on their ongoing relationships and connectedness with their countries of origin, and also in some cases with a global diaspora (Inglis 2002). In this sense, ‘transnationalism as theory’ in migration studies is linked to wider theoretical movements that question the boundedness of the nation-state as a unit of social analysis, or in other words, cast doubt on the ‘container model’ of society (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). This in turn is epistemologically congruent with Urry’s (2000b) ‘new rules’ of mobile sociology in which the flows across and between geographic boundaries become central to theorisation and empirical analysis.

Furthermore, Appadurai (1996) conceives that individual agents living in modernity have, largely through exposure to global media, become able to imagine a much broader collection of possible lives than ever
before, and that this imaginary is ‘unyoked’ from limited senses of place and territory. In some ways, this concept can thus be linked with Urry’s concept of imagined mobility. However, Appadurai (1996) sees the imaginary in modern cultural processes as not merely fantasy or contemplation, but as real-existing social practice, central to all forms of agency. It is apparent in the way in which people construct their lives, communicate with each other, make their choices and contemplate their futures. Scholars of transnational migration further argue that modern migrants in particular forge and sustain a wide variety of cross-border linkages, which, through constant flows of people, goods, ideas and communication can ultimately form ‘transnational communities’ (Portes 1999; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Voigt-Graf 2004) or ‘transnational social fields’ (Goldring 1998; Levitt 2001). The central premise of these theories is that modern migration no longer constitutes a linear, one-time movement from home to host country, involving the eventual adaptation and assimilation of the migrant into a new social, cultural and political community. Nonetheless, more specific definitions of migrant transnationalism are various and abundant.

The pioneering work of Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994: 4) defines transnational migration as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement”. Yet this definition now seems limiting given subsequent research which shows that transnational
connections can stretch beyond the dually territorialised home/host paradigm, and into more globalised networks (Ong 1999; Voigt-Graf 2004). I also find Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc’s (1994) definition somewhat lacking in that it fails to acknowledge the broader context in which these border crossing social relations develop. As such, I greatly prefer Ley and Kobayashi’s (2005: 113) definition, which situates migrant transnationalism within the context of contemporary globalisation without prescribing the types of interactions and behaviours that can be termed transnational:

Transnationalism invokes a travel plan that is continuous not finite. Immigrants never quite arrive at their destination because they never quite leave home. Indeed, the whole problematic of ‘home’ can become extraordinarily complex in an age with increasing levels of dual citizenship, labour contracts with short-term visas, family members located on opposite sides of national borders, and fast and ever cheaper lines of contact between nations.

An equally apt definition comes from Ong (1999). She prefers the term transnationality, defining it simply as “the conditions of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” (4). I find Ong’s (1999) designation valuable because it recognises the dependence of individuals’ ability to enact transnational practices on wider global forces, stating that transnationality also alludes to “the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour that are incited, enabled and regulated by the
changing logics of states and capitalism” (4). Thus, I will borrow from both Ong (1999) and Ley and Kobayashi (2005) in constructing my own definition, which takes cognisance of contemporary social, economic and technological factors within ‘mobilised modernity’ that often result in mobility that is non-linear. Moreover, it recognises that this mobility leaves a trail of networks and relationships which need to be sustained over distance. In the context of this thesis, transnationalism may be understood as the recognition and study of these processes.

In terms of the lack of consensus that exists in the literature with regard to the terminology used to describe transnational phenomena, I agree with Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006: 288) that “concepts like ‘transnational fields’ or ‘transnational communities’ are rather vague for empirical research”. I also feel that these terms may be inappropriate to the subjects I am investigating, as a great deal of the literature that refers to transnational communities or transnational social fields focuses on diasporic communities who are engaged with grassroots political and economic action in the homeland. Portes (1999: 464), however, acknowledges that this is not the only kind of transnationalism:

When migration is massive and motivated by political convulsions at home, it is likely that immigrants remain morally tied to kin and communities left behind and, hence, are more likely to engage in a variety of activities to bridge the gap and sustain a common bond (...) On the contrary, where migration is a more individualized process, grounded on personal and family decisions,
transnational activities are more selective and, at times, exceptional, lacking the normative component attached to them among participants in a political diaspora.

While students-turned-migrants may have diasporic connections, it could be expected that they are more likely to belong to the second categorisation that Portes (1999) discusses above, as their migration decisions are likely to be more individualised, and they may not necessarily become deeply integrated with already established ethnic communities. As an alternative to discourses of transnational communities, Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006) suggest the term ‘transnational involvement’. Similar to Appadurai’s (1996) trope of the imaginary or Ong’s (1999) of transnationality, transnational involvement encompasses both transnational activities (migrants’ border crossing practices) and transnational identifications (migrants’ identifications with communities in the sending country or in the diaspora). I would however, argue that further specific distinctions need to be made to identify the social relationships that instigate transnational activities.

Thus, bearing in mind the variety of terms that have been used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe different aspects of the broad field of transnationalism, I would like to construct my own terminological distinctions to be used throughout the thesis. Firstly, I prefer to make clear the distinction between transnationalism as a theoretical lens and as social practice. As such, in this thesis, I will henceforward use
transnationalism to refer to the theoretical movement, and, borrowing from Ong (1999), transnationality to refer generally to the real existing social practice of agents in the empirical literature and in my own research. However, transnationality encompasses a very broad set of ideas. As such, I will refer further to transnational connections to describe the social relationships that students-turned-migrants maintain overseas, and transnational consciousness to describe more abstract or imagined fields of connection and belonging, which are closely linked to Urry’s concept of ‘imagined mobility’. I will use the term transnational practices to describe what students-turned-migrants do to maintain these ties and this sense of belonging. In sum, this thesis examines how individuals forge and maintain transnational connections, and how the process of sustaining transnationality affects their daily lives.

Empirically, ideas of transnationality as real existing social practice have been explored in a variety of contexts. They have been used to describe the construction of typologies of diasporic space (Voigt-Graf 2004), the transformation of gender relations (Pratt and Yeoh 2003) and new forms of political agency (Itzigsohn 2000). Previous research has also explored institutionalised forms of transnationality, such as diasporic political associations and religious networks (Itzigsohn 2000; Roudometof 2000; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002) or forms of economic connections through remittances and ethnic entrepreneurship (Moallem 2000; Landolt 2001). Thus, considering the broad range of practices that have
been considered transnational, it is also worth making explicit what kinds of connections and practices are of prime concern to this research.

In essence, I am interested in two aspects of student-turned-migrant transnationality: the negotiation of membership and the negotiation of mobility. In terms of mobility, I will focus on the practice of employing frequent virtual and corporeal mobility in order to sustain family relationships and friendships, to fulfil kinship obligations, and to maintain in contact with the culture and community of the country of origin. Thus, in Portes’s (1999) terms, the focus of this thesis is a ‘broad’ transnationalism, characterised by both occasional and regular linkages rather than institutionalised and highly regular participation. Or, in Levitt’s (2001) terms, practices that are ‘core’ rather than ‘expanded,’ in that they are generally linked to one area of social life, in this case primarily intimate social relationships, rather than expanded greatly into other spheres, such as economic, religious or political participation. In terms of memberships, I am interested in the process of how students-turned-migrants obtain memberships to the Australian nation-state that allows them to maintain their transnationality, in particular their experience of the processes of acquiring and relinquishing memberships and their decision-making throughout these processes.

**Transnationalism’s Contested Grounds**
There are two central debates about the appropriateness of transnational frameworks in migration research, which concern the definition and categorisation of both transnationalism as theoretical lens and transnationality as social practice. The first is the question of whether or not the concept of transnationality is actually concerned with new phenomena, and the second is the debate surrounding the categorisation of different forms of transnationality. Here I am covering ground that has been previously covered many times in the literature, and by many very qualified scholars. As Vertovec (2004: 3) has noted, these concerns are “the usual suspect criticisms” of the transnational movement. However, as these debates tend to frame so many existing theoretical discussions of transnational phenomena, I feel it is important to establish my own position with regard to these contested grounds.

Firstly, critics of the transnational perspective claim that transnational practices (what I have termed transnationality) are not purely contemporary (Kivisto 2001; Moya 2004). They argue that transnationality is historically a part of the migration experience, and that current discussions do not essentially bring anything theoretically or empirically ‘new’ to the field. Within this debate I have two positions that I would like to establish. Firstly, I position myself alongside the group of scholars who argue that while transnational behaviours are not in themselves ‘new’, the development of new theoretical perspectives in migration studies does constitute a notable paradigm shift. This essentially concerns the
complex relationship between epistemological perspectives and empirical data in social research. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) for example, assert that nationalist methodological assumptions of the nation-state as the means to define and demarcate the research sphere previously hindered empirical exploration of migrants’ cross-border interactions, particularly during the post-World War II era. Rapid globalisation and broadening outlooks in academia have challenged these basic assumptions, allowing researchers to look beyond the fixed territory of the nation-state.

Foner (2001) empirically supports this view through a comparison of research on early 20th century New York migrants with research on their modern counterparts. She identifies that early migration research marginalised transnationality, due to the domination of the assimilationist model that focused on migrant integration. This early research thus primarily saw migration as a unidirectional process. Gupta and Ferguson (1997a: 37), writing from an anthropological perspective, concur that past studies reveal not so much a lack of transnational behaviours per se, but rather a lack of acknowledgement or recognition of them in the field, stating “people have undoubtedly always been more mobile and identities less static than the static and typologizing approaches of classical anthropology would suggest”.
These assumptions are also highly relevant to the Australian context. In Australia, the assimilationist model dominated migration research and policy until the 1970s (Jordens 1999). Moreover, the end of the White Australia Policy and the political and social acceptance of multiculturalism did not in themselves signal the beginnings of transnational considerations in Australian migration research, as Australia maintained a general policy of permanent settlement and full citizenship as the desirable and appropriate outcome of immigration (Zappalá and Castles 2002). Although migrants were now welcome to maintain their ethnic identities, languages, and traditional practices, government policy strongly encouraged naturalisation, and, unlike many other OECD countries, Australia never promoted temporary migration over permanent settlement. It is only relatively recently that the ideas of cross-border existences, mobility and semi-settlement have entered the outlooks of both academia and policy-making in Australian migration (Inglis 2002; Salt and McLaughlin 2002).

Thus, although the phenomena of transnational practices in themselves may not be entirely novel, I believe that the new epistemological recognition of their significance to individual migrants and to sending and receiving countries, along with changes to Australia’s policy and position on immigration, are placing them in a new light. The reconfiguring of academic and political assumptions from assimilationist/permanence to multiculturalist/semi-permanence has
opened up a new perspective that allows ideas of transnationalism to play a much larger role in the discourse surrounding Australian migration. This is very much apparent in recent Australian migration scholarship, including the work of Baldassar (2001), Boncompagni (2002), Voigt-Graf (2005) and Colic-Peisker (2006). These studies, however, all focus on particular ethnic or national migrant groups, who mostly arrived under earlier migration schemes of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Students-turned-migrants as a consequence of the student-switching policies of the late 1990s are scarcely represented in Australian transnational migration research.

In this thesis, I do not purport to be examining transnationality as an entirely new phenomenon. My more modest goal is to use transnational theory to shed light on the previously under-examined student-turned-migrant experience. However, I do believe that recent developments in epistemological and political assumptions about the nature of migration mean that transnational explorations of migration are still to some extent an emergent field, and that this study therefore represents an important contribution to a relatively new field of inquiry.

Another significant point in the debate about the ‘newness’ of migrant transnationality is the impact of global media and communications. With the gradual emergence of these new forms of social interaction, theorists such as Urry (2002), Giddens (1990, 1991) and Appadurai (1996)
have heavily influenced conceptualisations of the role of mediated communication and media within the context of modernity. Appadurai’s prominent metaphors of the ‘technoscape’ and the ‘mediascape’ describe broad dimensions of globalisation, which encompass various forms of both mechanical and informational technology that move “at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (1996: 33).

This availability of global media and communications technology has furthermore been identified as one of the specific characteristics of modern migrant transnationalism (Lessinger 1995; Panagakos and Horst 2006). While migrants in the past have certainly maintained linkages between origin and source countries through traditional means such as letter writing and remittances, the conditions of globalisation have allowed an unprecedented access to technological modes of communication and engagement with homeland and global affairs (Smith 1998; Cunningham 2001). Online news services have transformed access to local media across vast distances, allowing migrants to be instantaneously updated on events in their countries of origin and throughout the world. Furthermore, not only have computer mediated forms of communication such as online messenger services and email have become more popular, but overseas telecommunication has been transformed through the drastic reduction in price of long distance calls and the advent of mobile phones and text messaging. The more recent
emergence of relatively inexpensive real-time web-based video cameras and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), while as yet fairly under-researched, also provide new and singular modes of transnational communication that are readily accessible to techno-savvy migrants.

These are all micro-aspects of transnationality that are distinctly contemporary in nature. Urry (2002) further asserts that virtual mobility, which is facilitated through technology, is becoming, alongside imagined and physical mobility, intrinsic to social life as a means to link people across vast distances. I therefore argue that, although transnationality itself undoubtedly existed prior to the advent of this technology (Mintz 1998; Roudometof 2000), such ‘resources of modernity’ constitute virtual mobilities that could transform or intensify migrant transnationality, and these modes of mobility warrant careful research.

Another area of contention in the burgeoning field of transnational migration studies that I would like to address is the contestation surrounding the categorisation of transnationalism, often into dichotomous ‘types’. Most prominently, Smith and Guarnizo (1998) make a distinction between ‘transnationalism from above’ and ‘transnationalism from below.’ Research involving ‘transnationalism from above’ places global markets, transnational corporations and nation-states as the main actors. Individuals are merely passive agents whose
lives are influenced by transnationalism as a powerful exterior force, driven by rapidly changing political and economic factors. In contrast ‘transnationalism from below’ focuses on the everyday behaviours of individual actors and communities at a grass-roots level. It foregrounds transnationality as an active set of choices made by individuals in their life strategies and planning. Overall, my research has more in common with the second stance, in that my primary interest is in the everyday social relations and decision-making of individual migrants.

However, rather than adopting the ‘emancipatory’ take on transnationalism that dominated much of the early research, and saw ‘transnationalism from below’ as liberating individuals from the nation-state (Al-Ali and Koser 2002), I acknowledge the complex intertwining of personal agency and macro forces in transmigrants’ lives. As Faist (2000: 192) states, “transnational social spaces are constituted by the various forms of resources or capital of spatially mobile and immobile persons, on the one hand, and the regulations imposed by nation-states and various other opportunities and constraints on the other; for example, state-controlled immigration and refugee policies, and institutions in ethnic communities.” Essentially, this implies that the agency of individuals and the agency of states and institutions cannot easily be segregated in any detailed examination of transnational practices. Mobile migrants are ultimately limited in their ability to retain mobility by the state’s regulation of borders. Moreover, the process of sustaining
mobility in fact requires a fairly high level of engagement with state functions.

This view is now widely supported in the literature, with many scholars noting how macro-level state and institutional forces impact directly on migrants’ transnational practices. Ong (1999), for example, notes that within transnationality, everyday practices need to be considered as embedded in specific frameworks of power. In addition, Smith (2003: 4) notes that “politically constructed state policies, legitimating discourses, and institutional practices are key elements through which transnational social formations are being constituted as migrant networks interact with state-centred actors”. Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004: 1178) agree that “states and the politics conducted within their borders fundamentally shape the options for migrant and ethnic trans-state social action”. In accord with these scholars, I am interested in the regulatory effects of particular institutions and regimes that “shape people’s motivations, desires and struggles and make them particular kinds of subjects in the world” (Ong 1999: 5-6). Institutions and regimes of power such as the global media or the national and international regulation of mobility shall thus be carefully explored in terms of how they shape the perceptions and pathways of individual transnational actors.

While Urry’s theories briefly address the changes in modern states with regard to the regulation of mobilities, a more thorough
conceptualisation of the regulating power of the state over the mobile individual is required to understand the experiences of students-turned-migrants. Urry tends to focus on macro-level structural changes to states as they adapt to the regulation of flows across their borders. However, this thesis is more concerned with precisely how such regulation impacts on the lives and practices of individuals. As such, Foucault’s (1997) theories of governmentality provide a useful framework. The concept of governmentality, like many of Foucault’s concepts, is complex, and has been variously interpreted and reinterpreted. Essentially, the term refers to both particular historical changes in modes of governance within nation-states, and the consequences of these changes. It is conceived as a modern form of multifaceted state power that emerged in the ‘early modern period’ in certain Western societies. The central object of this new form of power is the population. It is concerned with the optimization of the population in terms of its health, prosperity and efficiency, “the endeavour...to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population” (Foucault 1997: 73).

While Foucault (1997) tends to focus his analysis of this regulation within the internal and static population of the single nation-state, Ong (1999) and Salter (2006) both note that citizenship requirements and the global regulation of mobility are extensions of the earlier forms of power that Foucault describes. In addition, Cunningham (2004: 329) notes that
transnationalism, global interconnection and mobility must be conceived as “occurring within established structures of power...as stratified and highly regulated”. Moreover, she rightly approaches the theoretical trend towards metaphors of mobility, fluidity and flow with caution, noting that since September 11, nations have been reasserting their boundedness, and that this obviously impacts on human agents who are traversing borders. Thus, although the term has been used to describe and analyse various forms of discipline and power, in this thesis, I equate the notion of governmentality with the power relations between the mobile individual and the state as gatekeeper: the regulator of who may enter and who may belong. In this case, the operation of state power is often through bureaucratic institutions such as DIMIA. Intrinsic to this is the idea that “regimes of truth and power create disciplinary effects that condition or sense of self and everyday practices” (Ong 1999: 6). In Chapter Five in particular, I will examine how, within the staggered process of entrance described in Chapter One, power discourses between the individual and the state are played out in ways that impact intimately on migrants’ everyday lives and selves.

In accordance with this literature, this thesis recognises the tensions and negotiations of mobility as a regulated act, and will not adhere to the naive assumption that transnationality is consistently empowering. In the study of migrants, and transnational migrants in particular, the political, economic and social contexts of both sending and receiving countries,
as well as regional and global contexts, are vital to gaining a thorough and rounded representation of migrants’ decisions, motivations and feelings. As social actors, students-turned-migrants must interact with the institutions and regulations of the state on a regular basis, particularly during processes of applying for PR and citizenship. While this is ultimately a study in which the lived experience of individual actors is most vital to the collection and analysis of empirical data, it will also be acknowledged that transmigrants have to negotiate the limitations put on them by two or more national bodies. They may thus experience competing allegiances, ambivalent legal status, bureaucratic hurdles, and fear of political changes that could destabilise their status.

**Citizenship and Transnationalism**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, students-turned-migrants acquire membership to the host country through a staggered process of entrance, moving from transient alien to permanent resident, and then, in some cases, to full citizen. This thesis closely examines the citizenship practices and decisions of students-turned-migrants as transnational subjects, in particular how they negotiate multiple memberships to different nation-states through combinations of residencies and citizenships. In order to situate the research within wider sociological debates on transmigration and citizenship, this section will discuss relevant theoretical work on citizenship and transnational migration. I will outline Australia’s current policy directions in the area of citizenship and
naturalisation in order to contextualise the possibilities for transnational membership available to this study’s participants within a context-specific political framework. I will then critically examine some of the current theoretical debate on these themes, and discuss their relevance to students who become migrants in Australia. Extant empirical studies on transnational migration and citizenship will be discussed in detail in the next chapter; the focus here is exclusively on the theoretical concepts and policy context.

In the modern era, as Bauböck (1998: 320) asserts, “the territorial rigidity of states, on the one hand, and the increasingly transnational mobility of societies, on the other hand, makes for a growing discrepancy between membership in a polity and in a society.” Goodhart (2004), however, rightly argues that within modernity’s increasingly globalised flows of people, goods and information, national citizenship continues to be the fundamental unit of political activity. Yet, while citizenship remains significant, it is also becoming apparent that formalised national citizenship is not always synonymous with a genuine sense of membership in or belonging to a nation, and that national and ethnic identities can be two distinct entities (Hoffman-Axthelm 1992). As such, concepts of transnational or multiple modes of membership have been influential in recent theoretical discussion.
One of the first prominent discussions of transnational membership emerged in the late 1990s in Soysal’s (1994) concept of postnational membership. Soysal suggests that the emergence of supranational human rights organisations reveals a paradigm shift away from traditional citizenship models to a postnational citizenship based on globally accepted human rights. The postnational model has been critiqued by many (see for example, Schuck 1998; Castles and Davidson 2000; Fitzgerald 2000; Shuster and Solomos 2002), mostly on the grounds of its lack of applicability outside the European Union, and its assumption that international human rights organisations have the power to dilute the influence of individual national regimes. However, Soysal’s (1994) theories have opened debate on the reconfiguring of the singular, territorially-bounded conception of citizenship in light of the increasing mobility of people across nation-state borders. Much theoretical debate has followed Soysal (1994), with various terms such as “cross-border citizenship” (Smith 2003), “transnational citizenship” (Bauböck 1994; Castles 2001) and “extra-territorial citizenship” (Fitzgerald 2000) used to describe the different forms of multiple membership that are emerging for transmigrants. Indeed, most theorists now agree that the traditional singular and nationally bounded framework for belonging needs rethinking, particularly in the context of the multiple modes of economic, political and social participation, and the complex enmeshing of belonging and allegiance apparent in the lives of transmigrants across the globe.
Faist (2000) clearly addresses the link between the development of transnational modes of membership and transnational migration. Faist (2000) identifies three broad approaches to immigrant adaptation: assimilation, ethnic pluralism, and border-crossing expansion of social space (transnationalisation). He then links these approaches to three different modes of membership, that is, national citizenship, multicultural citizenship and dual state membership respectively. He sees the acceptance of dual state membership as the ultimate outcome of transmigration. Faist (2000: 203) also points out the inherent difficulties of multiple political memberships which assume that multiple allegiances are not or will not be conflicting, “while national citizenship envisages an assimilation of immigrants to a unitary political culture, transnational citizenship trusts the compatibility of citizens’ loyalties to multiple states.”

Such typologies indeed prove useful in the study of students-turned-migrants in Australia. The mode of adaptation, or the level of acculturation of immigrants, may correspond to their views on and experiences of citizenship and the extent of their transnational practices may also be an important factor in their citizenship choices. For example, a migrant whose everyday life involves sustained and frequent social interaction across borders may be inclined to prefer some form of multiple membership, whether it be in the form of maintaining permanent residency in Australia and citizenship overseas, or
maintaining dual citizenship or dual nationality where possible. A migrant who feels more highly socially connected and culturally involved in Australia, however, may be more inclined to relinquish previous memberships in favour of full citizenship in Australia. Such presuppositions will be analysed in detail in Chapter Six.

While typologies such as Faist’s (2000) are clearly useful in providing succinct predictions of different modes of adaptation, integration and political and cultural belonging, they are ideal-typical models. It is unlikely that many students-turned-migrants will ‘fit’ exactly into any one category. Another weakness in Faist’s (2000) theories is the lack of in-depth examination of denizenship. Faist (2000: 209) briefly mentions the combination of denizenship in one country with citizenship in another as “less fully fledged form” of dual state membership, but he does not examine in detail its limitations and possibilities as a transnational status for the many migrants who are ineligible for dual citizenship. If we adhere to Marshall’s (1973) commonly accepted schemata of citizenship as consisting of civil and social as well as political rights, then this is particularly significant in the Australian context. Legally, in Australia, “civil and social rights attach to residency and are subject to little or no change with naturalization” (Evans 1988: 243).

Unlike theorists such as Faist (2000), Hammar (1990) brings the issue of denizenship into the centre of the citizenship debate. His models for the
staggered entrance of denizens into the political and social community will be used extensively in Chapters Five and Six to analyse the student-turned-migrant process of membership acquisition. The influence of acculturation, adaptation and transnational connections on the citizenship choices and perceptions of student-turned-migrants will be addressed in this study through a close examination of the influences on and motivations behind individual migrants’ ultimate decisions in negotiating formalised national membership across borders.

Modern theorists have thus constructed varied frameworks of citizenship that reach beyond a traditional sense of rights, duties and obligations that are attached to an individual’s belonging to, or membership of, a single nation-state. This epistemological rejection of the ‘container model’ of the nation-state in citizenship debate has taken on a number of forms, ranging from Soysal’s (1994) somewhat overly-idealistic conception of an emancipatory “postnational belonging” to Ong’s (1999) highly instrumental idea of “flexible citizenship”. Furthermore, migrants’ transnational practices have often been cited as a clear indicator that traditional modes of single-state belonging need to be overhauled in favour of a conception of formalised national membership that accommodates the cross-territorial nature of many peoples’ lives and identities. There is however a distinct lack of qualitative research that examines the intricacies and possibilities of transnational membership and belonging through analysis of the real-world
experiences of migrants themselves. The thesis will bridge this gap in the literature by empirically exploring how different types of multiple belonging actually function in students-turned-migrants’ negotiations of transnationality.

**Australia’s policy context**

Legally, there are two forms of membership available to migrants in Australia that could be described as transnational, that is, forms that allow individuals to maintain some kind of political or social membership in Australia alongside membership to another nation-state. Like many of the key Western migrant-receiving nations, Australia has recently begun to legally recognise dual citizenship\(^2\) under certain conditions. In April of 2004, section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* was repealed to allow Australian citizens to acquire a second citizenship while retaining Australian citizenship. While this is certainly a significant step towards a greater inclusion of transnational membership in Australia, it is unlikely to be of great import to the subjects of this study, who will be, in contrast, foreign nationals who wish to gain Australian citizenship without relinquishing their current one. Migrants’ legal ability to obtain dual citizenship is governed by the citizenship laws of the country of origin. In other words, if a migrant’s country of origin tolerates dual citizenship, Australia does not require them to relinquish their original citizenship upon

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\(^2\) While the terms ‘dual citizenship’ and ‘dual nationality’ tend to be used interchangeably, they are technically distinct. Citizenship refers to political and legal rights and nationality to psychological attachments and identifications (Brown 2002). In addition, there are variations in the legal and political rights of dual citizens in different national contexts. In this thesis, I will use the term ‘dual citizenship’ to refer to the situation in which an individual is able to carry two passports, and is granted most of the legal and political rights of a citizen in two countries.
naturalisation. Holders of dual citizenship enjoy all the rights and freedoms of Australian citizens, and are only required to relinquish their other citizenships in the event of joining the Commonwealth Parliament.

Thus, depending on an individual’s country of origin, the possibility for dual legal membership is available within Australian law. However, it is often perceived as “abnormal and problematic” (Castles 2001), rather than a desirable or beneficial norm. Betts (1995), for example, has argued against dual citizenship on the grounds that it erodes social cohesion, divides loyalties, and could lead to the legitimisation of dissonant ethnic or national interests. While stopping short of calling for a ban on dual citizenship, in 2006 Treasurer Peter Costello, backed by Prime Minister John Howard, suggested that dual citizens should adhere to ‘Australian values’ or lose their Australian citizenship (Gordon and Topsfield 2006). Other conservative commentators seem to concur to differing degrees. For example, also in 2006, business leader Hugh Morgan called for dual citizenship to be outlawed on the grounds that loyalties and passports should be in accord (Morton 2006).

In addition to this lack of full acceptance of dual citizenship in Australian political and academic discourse, the possibility of ‘full’ dual membership in the form of multiple citizenships is limited to migrants from only a few source countries. Many prominent source countries for international students, including China, Singapore and Malaysia, prohibit
dual citizenship. Thus, many contemporary students-turned-migrants may turn to the other significant option for maintaining different sets of social, political and economic rights across borders, which is simply remaining a permanent resident. Permanent residency in Australia provides almost all the social rights afforded by full citizenship. It thus allows migrants to have full social and economic participation in Australian society without relinquishing their rights in their country of origin. Permanent residency operates as denizenship by offering social rights akin to those of citizens without the full right to political participation through suffrage. In contrast to the traditional citizenship ideologies of *ius soli* or *ius sanguinis*, denizenship operates on what Bauböck (1994) terms *ius domicili*, a person’s residence within the territorial grounds of a nation-state ultimately granting them some, if not all, of the rights of state membership. 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). These are certainly significant incentives to naturalise, the passport being especially significant for those wishing to obtain the increased ease of mobility it affords, for although permanent residents can enter and leave Australia at will, they must obtain a return visa.

Naturalisation rates in Australia are relatively high compared to other countries, with about 50% of migrants naturalising within five years of
arrival, and about 70% taking up citizenship within 20 years (Lynch and Simon 2003: 254). However, this still means that at any given time, there are a considerable number of denizens resident in Australia, and that a significant portion will remain denizens for a considerable length of time. Government estimates from 2005 put the number of Australian permanent residents who are eligible for citizenship and yet have not applied at over 900 000 (DIMIA 2005). It is thus apparent that many migrants see permanent residency as a desirable choice, and there are certainly many reasons why the combination of Australian denizenship with overseas citizenship may be an attractive option, particularly for students-turned-migrants. Firstly, it offers the flexibility of unrestricted rights to work and investment in Australia, while retaining the option of returning to their country of origin or moving on somewhere else in the future. Even those who intend to settle permanently in Australia may feel a sense of symbolic attachment to their original citizenship, and may wish to maintain it as a form of identity or cultural recognition. Denizenship may thus exist for both instrumental and emotional reasons, depending on the individual’s perception.

This kind of ‘unofficial’ dual state membership naturally raises many questions about the nature of belonging, loyalty and civic participation. Do permanent residents view themselves as full members of Australian society? Does dual belonging precipitate any sense of conflicting allegiances or fragmentation? How significant is the passport as both an
instrumental tool for mobility and as symbolic recognition of belonging and nationality? How do long-term residents reconcile with their lack of ability to participate fully politically, despite the fact they make an economic contribution in the form of their labour, investments and taxes? These questions will be addressed in Chapter Six within the context of the participants’ own specific experience of citizenship choices and decisions.

Student-Turned-Migrants in Theoretical Context

Having established some definitional boundaries and positioned myself within current debates, we now turn to the positioning of students-turned-migrants within this theoretical and conceptual framework. There are a number of reasons why I have chosen a transnational theoretical framework and concepts of mobile modernity to research students-turned-migrants. The first reason is that students-turned-migrants, as a contemporary phenomenon, do not necessarily ‘fit’ into the structures of traditional migration theory. Bailey (2001) notes that traditional international migration scholarship relies on a limited categorisation of migrants into types. For example, traditional analyses clearly divide short-term movements from long-term, permanent movements. The categories of ‘sojourners’ compared with ‘settlers’ are fixed and do not generally overlap. However, as Bailey (2001: 415) asserts, such categorisation is based on the assumption that “individuals or groups retain fixed and monogamous connections to the territory of one nation-
state or another, either the host or the origin”. Transnational approaches to migration scholarship, on the other hand, avoid this assumption, and are critical of the usefulness of such rigid typologies. Students-turned-migrants are difficult to typologise, especially in terms of the traditional dichotomy of permanence/temporariness and the categorisation of motivations. For example, is an individual on a student visa who has the intention of staying on and gaining PR classed as a sojourner or a settler? While legally their status is temporary, there is a strong likelihood that they will stay permanently. Or, alternatively, how can one classify a former student with permanent residency who is likely to return to their country of origin or move on to a third country after a few years?

As well as the blurriness that can surround temporariness and permanence, the traditional categorisation of migrants into types based on their motivations is also problematic in the student-turned-migrant context. As students-turned-migrants are not a homogenous group, motivations can be multi-faceted and complex. Some students-turned-migrants could be classed as economic migrants, coming to Australia for financial opportunities. Others could be better categorised in Fujita’s (2006) terms as cultural migrants, pulled by the cultural appeal of the ‘imagined West’. Students-turned-migrants from developing regions could also be escaping civil and social unrest or difficult living conditions without being officially stateless or displaced, as “domestic political uncertainty or international geopolitics prompts people to emigrate in
search of safe havens for their investments and/or securing a better life” (Lei and Teixeira 2007: 95). All these different motivations could in fact be simultaneously present in any individual student-turned-migrant’s decision-making. The fact that students-turned-migrants defy standard typologies is one reason to choose more flexible transnational migration theories above the more traditional.

Secondly, I believe that the nature of the student-turned-migrant experience is better understood through the theoretical lenses of transnationalism and mobility. Young skilled migrants with Australian tertiary qualifications generally have the education, financial resources and cultural capital to access the modern communications technology, transport, and organizations that make maintaining transnational connections through virtual and corporeal mobility increasingly possible. Virtual mobilities are a particularly important focus in this research because they are woefully under-researched in the transnational field. As Tomlinson (1999: 60) argues, Giddens (1991) neglects to fully explore how disembedding mechanisms such as media and communications systems may actually function, as he does not adequately employ thick description to address “the complex ways in which such mediated experience reaches into and transforms daily local life”. Similar criticism can be levelled at extant empirical work on transmigrants. Many scholars acknowledge that low cost air travel enables migrants to return often to the sending society and to pursue business and social interests
further a field, and that the Internet and modern information and communications technologies allow virtually instantaneous personal contact across borders as well as access to news and cultural items from various countries (see for example, Levitt 2001; Inglis 2002; Sahoo 2004; Preis 2005). However, few empirical studies actually explore in detail how individual migrants utilise these facets of modernity as resources in the construction of transnational lives. Vertovec (2000), while noting a dearth of research into these areas, wisely cautions against attributing a casual relationship to the development of travel and telecommunications technology and the prevalence of transnational migrant behaviours and communities. He notes that future research should rather aim to “understand the ways in which technology has combined with and perhaps facilitated or enhanced, rather than caused, transnational networks” (577).

This research will therefore contextualise the experiences of students-turned-migrants within the social framework of globalising modernity, and will address the factors that affect their ability to forge and maintain transnational links. The data collected will not just examine the extent and nature of transnational practices, but also what kind of modern technological tools are utilized in sustaining these links. Much empirical transmigration research focuses on traditional practices such as remittances, gift giving, letters and phone calls (see, for example, Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Armbruster 2002). This research will
build on this work by exploring whether virtual modes such as email, text messaging and online instant messaging are also significant. In Chapter Seven, I will attempt to describe some of the ways in which this virtuality is enacted in the lives of students-turned-migrants as globalised subjects.

Furthermore, it is clear that the state regulates its population through immigration by allowing ‘desirable’ individuals to enter and excluding ‘undesirable’ individuals. Such governmental practice can be clearly seen in the migration policies outlined in the introduction to this thesis, with student switching policies constructed as a means to access the ‘desirable’ talent pool of locally qualified international student graduates. However, what I am primarily interested in for the purposes of this thesis is how this kind of regulation is actually negotiated by students-turned-migrants. My argument is that students-turned-migrants, who experience a staggered process of entrance into the nation-state, exist in a heightened state of awareness of state regulation, and experience significant amounts of interaction with institutions of the state, more so than many native born, immobile citizens. This is will be addressed in detail in the analysis in Chapters Five and Six, which discuss the way that the entrance and status of students-turned-migrants is regulated, and the way that global power structures determine the value of different passports and thus impact on individuals’ choices.

Conclusions
Theoretically, this research is primarily framed and influenced by the concept of transnationalism as a theoretical lens, and Urry’s (2000b) ‘rules’ of integrating concepts of mobility into sociological method. In addition, I apply notions of the regulation of mobility to explore how macro forces impact on the experience of transnationality. My conceptualisation of transnationality as social practice is based on the assumption that mobility, which can be non-linear, creates transnational connections, such as social and familial relationships, that must be sustained over distance. These connections are sustained through transnational practices, which may include corporeal and virtual mobility. I am interested in the processes of sustaining these connections, and in the complexities of negotiating social practice across vast geographic space, and how aspects of transnational consciousness are prevalent in people’s daily lives and life planning. In addition, while understanding that the condition of transnationality may superficially appear as a space of fluidity, flexibility and flow, I acknowledge the role that states play in limiting and regulating individuals’ mobilities, and that the negotiation of transnational connections may be fraught with tension and compromise.
Chapter Three: Extant Empirical Research

Introduction

This chapter will discuss and review extant empirical literature that is relevant to the themes explored in this thesis. I will firstly focus on the small amount of literature that specifically addresses the experiences of students-turned-migrants, and identify the limitations of the research in this emergent field. Next, as the student-turned-migrant experience encompasses both international education and transnational migration, I will also review and discuss relevant empirical literature on international students, transmigrants and citizenship. This will include identifying gaps in this research as well as drawing on existing findings to frame the themes and questions that will be addressed in the subsequent analysis. This review constitutes a broad overview of the relevant research fields underpinning this thesis; more specific comparison of the literature with my own findings, and the introduction of literature that is more specific to each theme of the analysis, will be integrated throughout Chapters Five to Nine.

Literature on Students-Turned-Migrants

Despite the fact that changes to the skilled migration points test that favoured international students were first implemented in 1998,
academic literature that acknowledges the phenomena of students-turned-migrants remains quite scarce. International policy-based studies such as those by McLaughlin and Salt (2002) and Tremblay (2005) note the capacity for student switching in the migration policies of some receiving countries, including Australia, and determine that international education can be a precursor to more permanent settlement. When I began this thesis, however, there was little acknowledgement of the extent of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon in Australian education and migration research. This is possibly because, as Baas (2005) notes, the education industry has been largely unwilling to admit its awkward relationship with DIMIA. The reality that many international students are on a pathway to residency has remained an implicit yet unmentionable fact within Australian educational institutions, particularly universities. More recently, however, there has been some recognition in Australian academic literature that international students often do not intend to return to their countries of origin upon completion of their degrees.

Demographic studies and policy-based studies make up a significant amount of the Australian research into the student-turned-migrant phenomenon. Primarily, this research deals with the issue of the labour market integration of students-turned-migrants, and often turns a critical gaze upon the effectiveness of student switching policies in easing skills shortages in Australia. In reports for Australia’s professional body for
accountancy, CPA Australia, Birrell (2006a) and Birrell and Rapson (2005) establish that the student switching migration reforms have caused Australian-trained international graduates to become a major source of new entrants into the accounting workforce. However, these reports also reveal that locally trained graduates from non-English speaking source countries often struggle to gain professional level work in the accounting sector. Birrell (2006a) reports that accounting recruiters see low communication standards among this group as the key barrier to employment. As such, he advocates an increase in the number of places for domestic students in accounting courses and steps toward increasing the standard of the technical and language skills of international students applying for PR. Jackling (2007) builds on this previous research, using surveys of international accounting students to establish that a significant majority (84%) were seeking PR, and that eligibility for residency points was a strong factor in their initial choice to study accounting. Jackling (2007) also investigates employers’ perceptions of the employability of international accounting graduates, and concurs with Birrell (2006a) that a lack of English language and communication skills are key concerns.

Another study by Birrell (2006b) gives further evidence of students-turned-migrants’ language deficiencies, using DIMIA data from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to determine that around a third of international students applying for residency in 2005-06 failed to
achieve the Competent Band Six standard. This research is highly critical of the processes by which students without sufficient English skills are able to gain entry to and pass courses, as well as gain PR. Of this cluster of demographic and largely quantitative research, Birrell’s (2006a, 2006b) findings in particular have tended to make their way into the media, accompanied by shock tactic headlines such as ‘New visa may hit wages of locals’ (Hart 2007) and ‘Foreign uni students threaten economy’ (Donovan 2007).

The research outlined above makes some pertinent points about the shortcomings of the regulation of the student-turned-migrant process, and I agree that there are several issues with the labour market integration of students-turned-migrants that need to be addressed by educational institutions, DIMIA, and professional accrediting bodies. However, I would argue that there are several problems and biases inherent in the above research. By using largely quantitative methods, focusing on only a few industries, and giving voice to employers’ perceptions only, this research stereotypes students-turned-migrants as ill-equipped and unemployable. It tends to focus too greatly on the language barrier, and fails to consider other barriers to employment that have been identified in previous research into skilled migration, such as socio-cultural issues, lack of local professional experience, lack of sophisticated and culturally specific job application skills, and implicit discrimination from employers in the form of the ‘accent ceiling’. 
(Hawthorne 1994). The other limitation of this body of research is the tendency to ‘commodify’ students-turned-migrants, by viewing them solely as human capital. This approach results in the excision of their lived experiences outside of the workforce, and the devaluation of their own insights. It has been argued elsewhere that the corporatisation of education commodifies full fee paying international students (Rhee and Sagaria 2004). I would argue that there is a similar tendency to commodify these students when they become migrants, viewing them solely in terms of their labour market potential (or lack thereof). The lives of students-turned-migrants outside of the institutions of the university and the workforce are largely ignored in this literature. This oversight is particularly stark when we consider that Australian migration literature has a rich tradition of analysing the lived experiences of its other migrant groups, such as refugees or more established ethnic communities. Unlike students-turned-migrants, who are largely framed only as a policy problem, these other migrant groups are often studied in terms of their relationship to Australia and their country of origin, in addition to their lived experiences as social actors and communities within Australian society. I believe there is a need for more research that views students-turned-migrants in a wider context than just human capital, particularly in light of the negative stereotyping prevalent in the media.

Baas’s (2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2007) anthropological fieldwork among Indian international students is one of the few thorough examples of
empirical work that addresses this gap by looking at students-turned-migrants through their experiences as a social group. His work confirms the extent of intentions to pursue residency amongst international students in general and Indians in particular, noting that three out of four of the students sampled intended to apply. Baas (2005) also gives some insight into the challenges faced by Indian students on the residency pathway. He notes how rapid changes to in-demand skills can impact on course choices, making concerns about residency prominent in their daily discourses, and how many students work long hours at low paid and low skilled casual jobs to ease their study debts. As such, Baas’s work gives some insight into the way that the regulation of migration, through changing DIMIA policy, can directly impact on students-turned-migrants’ lives. Furthermore, he is largely critical of an education industry that exploits students’ desires for residency by treating them as ‘cash cows’ (2006a), and notes in particular how smaller, low-fee private providers are now actively recruiting lower middle class Indian students from non-English speaking backgrounds who often struggle to meet language and course requirements (2007). In fact, Baas’s 2007 article provides direct critical response to Birrell’s (2006b) attack on English standards, and endeavours to explain some of the complex social context surrounding the controversy. However, one limitation to Baas’s research is that his fieldwork does not follow the subjects beyond graduation, and is thus unable to comment on the significance of the student to resident transition or the nature of their lives as migrants.
Baas’s work is useful in so far as it establishes the impact of Australian educational and migration policy on international students’ intentions, pathways and experiences, but it is not able to show how this correlates to their experience as potential transmigrants.

There is also a small cluster of overseas research that focuses on the student-turned-migrant experience in other sending and receiving countries. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) for example, note the dearth of attention to student migration as a socio-cultural process, and therefore endeavour to explore the connections between the ‘Year Abroad’ (YA) experience and subsequent migration paths for graduates from the University of Sussex. While there are many more studies that examine the impact of the YA experience, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) are among the few who connect the experience to subsequent migration. Using questionnaires, they broadly confirm their hypothesis that YA graduates were more likely to pursue subsequent migration than other graduates. They also report an increased sense of belonging in a ‘European cultural space’ among the YA cohort. This latter finding provides some reflection on transnational themes, by investigating whether, for United Kingdom students, the experience of international education impacts on the development of a European identity or consciousness.

The strength of this work lies in its methodological thoroughness, and in its recognition of the transformative nature of the international education
experience. The use of control groups of students who did not participate in YA and students who were about to embark on YA allow the impact of the international education experience to be comparatively examined, and the authors very comprehensively lay out the possible biases in their sampling and methodology. However, as with most questionnaire and survey based research, the respondents were provided with limited sets of responses. In particular, they were able to cite ‘agree’ ‘disagree’ or ‘not certain’ for blanket statements pertaining to the development of a transnational consciousness, and researchers did not have the opportunity to probe individual responses. I would suggest that more in-depth qualitative research would be required to thoroughly tease out the complexities of this particular issue of identity formation. Furthermore, due to the vast contextual differences between the experience of one year abroad within the EU and a degree program in Australia as a full tuition fee paying international student, we cannot necessarily expect similarity between the experiences of King and Ruiz-Gelices’s (2003) participants and the participants in this study.

The other overseas study worth referring to here is Pang and Appleton’s (2004) exploration of higher education as a migration path for Chinese students and scholars in the United States. This study provides some worthy insight into factors that influence Chinese students to remain in the United States and pursue residency, and the role that higher education plays in the migration process. Pang and Appleton (2004: 
501) take a qualitative approach, wisely noting that “there is a complex mesh of casual factors responsible for human behaviour. The causes for any human behaviour are multiple and interrelated”. The authors not only acknowledge that factors affecting potential migrants’ decisions are meshed and multi-faceted, but also recognise the uniqueness of each participant’s migration narrative. This conceptual framework is similar to the approach of this thesis regarding the student-turned-migrant experience, thus contrasting with the quantitative tendencies in other literature to presuppose responses and construct generalisable conclusions. Pang and Appleton’s (2004) trope of a complex mesh of multiple and interrelated factors will thus be a fundamental concept underpinning the subsequent analysis in this thesis.

However, the usefulness of Pang and Appleton’s (2004) actual findings to the context of this research is limited. For example, while some of the reasons for undertaking international education/migration expressed by their participants were similar to what can be expected from students-turned-migrants in Australia, such as the desire for more education or pursuing a better life, others were ‘push’ factors that were contextually specific to China. These included dissatisfaction with the Chinese political system and a perceived lack of respect for scholars in the Chinese society. Some of the ‘pull’ factors uncovered by Pang and Appleton (2004) were also not relevant to the Australian context. For example, funding opportunities and scholarships in the United States
were a motivational factor for many of their participants. In contrast, government or institutional funding opportunities for international students in Australia are much more limited, and all individuals in the sample for this thesis paid full tuition fees for their degrees. However, Pang and Appleton’s (2004) work is certainly important in that it establishes the complexity of factors influencing the student-turned-migrant experience, and methodologically situates the phenomena as a socio-cultural process of negotiation, tension and change.

The work of Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006) also acknowledges that international students can be potential migrants, also in the context of the United States. Hazen and Alberts use data from focus group interviews (2005) and questionnaires (2006) to provide a straight-forward categorisation of the factors that influence international students to stay in the United States or to return home after they complete their study. Hazen and Alberts’s findings suggest that few students intend to immigrate permanently when they first arrive. Their findings also concur with those of Pang and Appleton (2004), in that they describe a wide variety of professional, societal and personal factors that influence decision-making. In broad terms, they see economic or professional reasons as ‘pull’ factors that prompt them to stay in the United States, while personal and social factors tempt them to return to their home countries. Hazen and Alberts’s (2005, 2006) work is quite important for comparative purposes in this thesis, as it looks closely at how decisions
are made, and also acknowledges transnational connections by addressing the influence of friends and family back home on these decisions. Once again, however, this research looks at intentions only. It fails to follow the participants through the migration process, and is thus limited to showing one aspect of the student-turned-migrant story.

In addition, if they do decide to stay, Hazen and Alberts’s (2005, 2006), as well as Pang and Appleton’s (2004) subjects face a different kind of migration process from that of students-turned-migrants in Australia, as the United States does not have direct student switching policies. While there are several existing visa and work permit streams that provide pathways for international graduates of American universities to remain in the country after graduation, these are not explicitly aimed at international students, nor do they necessarily lead to permanent residency (Tremblay 2001). In fact, it is markedly more difficult for students-turned-migrants to obtain permanent residency in the United States compared to Australia. Most former students would need to spend some time as temporary residents and obtain employee sponsorship before they would be able to apply. As such, while these studies do provide some useful findings on the experiences of international students as potential migrants, they cannot provide much insight into how the student switching process, contextually specific to Australia, is experienced.
As King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 230) point out “standard academic literature on migration pays virtually no attention to students as migrants”. Furthermore, particularly in the Australian context, what little research there is tends to be narrow in focus, positioning students-turned-migrants solely in terms of their integration into the labour market. Often quantitatively based, this research aims to highlight weaknesses in student switching policies. As such, it tends to narrowly position students-turned-migrants as a policy problem and excises their lived experiences in favour of displaying their ineffectiveness as units of human capital. While Baas (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) provides a deeper contribution by exploring the social context of students-turned-migrants, his work also neglects to address experiences post-graduation, looking at the intentions and motivations behind student migration, rather than its ongoing consequences. Furthermore, none of the research discussed here focuses on students-turned-migrants and their potential transnationality. While King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) broadly confirm the possibility of international education developing postnational consciousness, limitations of methodology prevent a thorough analysis of this hypothesis. Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006) allude to the influence of transnational connections, but only in the limited context of the influence of family and friends on decision-making. In addition, Baas (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) and Pang and Appleton’s (2004) studies, while shedding much needed light on the social context of students-turned-migrants, are epistemologically grounded within the host society, and do not
recognise that student-turned-migrant experiences and life-worlds are likely to be situated across multiple geographic sites, and could constitute an ongoing negotiation between here and there.

From the above review of existing literature on the student-turned-migrant phenomenon, a clear gap can be discerned. There is a need for research that thoroughly explores the ongoing social process of international student migration from the perspective of the migrants themselves, and for research that acknowledges the possibility of transnationality within these experiences. This thesis will enhance such understandings and provide clear avenues future research.

**Spaces in the Migration Literature**

While the host of empirical studies into contemporary migrant experiences are far too numerous and varied to discuss in detail here, there are several general gaps in this body of work that need to be identified. Firstly, as Teo (2007) states, private accounts of the lived experiences of migration are often hidden behind official accounts of immigration data and statistics, and this thesis addresses Teo (2007) and Mitchell’s (1997) calls for a re-grounding of theories of transnationalism in qualitative empirical work.

Furthermore, amongst the literature that does address issues of transnational migration both theoretically and empirically, there is a
tendency for research to be clustered both geographically and
demographically, leaving certain regions and subjects under-
represented in the growing body of knowledge. Most early work in
transnational migration focused almost exclusively on the rural to urban
movement of working class migrants from sites in South America and the
Caribbean to the cities of North America. This includes the eminent and
off-cited qualitative work of Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc
such as Ong (1999), Chen (2000) and Waters (2000) have contributed by
addressing transnational issues in relation to economic and skilled
migrants, primarily from Asian source countries to settlement countries in
the West. However, a much greater focus is needed on the Asia Pacific
region as a site of transnational circuits if the comparative scope of the
field is to grow.

Moreover, Yeoh, Willis and Abdul Khader Fakhri (2003) correctly note that
the transnational migration literature tends to research the two class
extremes of contemporary mobility: either the globe-trotting, highly
skilled elites or the disenfranchised and unskilled workers and refugees.
Although far from being a homogenous group, students-turned-migrants
usually fall between the two. Although, as Rizvi (2005) points out, many
international students enjoy considerable class privilege in the home
country, most are positioned in the middle classes of the host country.
Work by Baas (2005, 2006b, 2007) and Deumert et al. (2005) also suggests
that many international students struggle financially due to the debts accumulated by study and the limitations on their right to work. In addition, as the participants in this study were generally at the beginning of their careers, they were not yet part of an elite managerial class. All these factors position students-turned-migrants between the two extremes of mobility: the elite and the disenfranchised. As such, this thesis will answer Yeoh, Willis and Abdul Khader Fakhri’s (2003: 209) call for more research into the ‘middling groups’ of transnational migrants.

Furthermore, despite being one of the world’s leading migrant-receiving nations, there is a dearth of thorough research in Australia that explores the link between skilled migration and transnationalism. While recent work by Voigt-Graf (2004), Baldassar (2001) and Boncompagni (2001) explores the notion of transnational community formation in Australia amongst Indians and Italians, the studies tend to adhere to the preoccupation prevalent in North American research, that is, on the community formation and household transmigrant strategies of a particular ethnic or national group. In addition, most of this research focuses on subjects who arrived through pre-1990s waves of migration. The link between international higher education and skilled migration, which gained significance in the late 1990s, is largely neglected. There have also been very few studies that examine commonalities between migrants, such as students-turned-migrants, who come from different backgrounds but undergo a similar migration process.
**International Students and Transnationality**

As there is so little literature that deals directly with international students as potential migrants, it is also worthwhile discussing some of the broader literature on international students. In recent years, such literature has increased rapidly in both Australia and overseas. However, a great deal of the field is dominated by a few limited areas of exploration. Firstly, market-driven literature deals with either student satisfaction, student spending, or student motivations for choosing particular courses or institutions. This type of research, while broadly addressing certain aspects of student experience, is narrowly framed to assist institutions in improving marketing and recruitment (see, for example, Baldwin and James 2000; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Gomes and Murphy 2003). A second dominant group of literature deals with pedagogy, curriculum and cross-cultural teaching and learning issues. This has included both expounding and deconstructing the stereotype of the passive Asian learner (Renshaw and Volet 1995; Kember 2000), and addressing cultural and linguistic barriers to learning that emerge from the interaction between the international student and the Australian academic environment (Ramsay, Baker and Jones 1999; Treloar 2000; Biggs 2001). While this literature has provided invaluable material to raise awareness and understanding of the academic struggles of international students, it fails to stretch beyond the realm of teaching and learning. Just as the previously discussed literature on students-turned-migrants tends to excise experiences outside of the labour market, the education literature
has also tended to disregard the importance of experiences outside the classroom. The third main element in the literature consists of studies that address the issues of social integration and interaction between local and international students, or, as is the case with most findings, the lack thereof (Neasdale and Todd 1993; Smart, Volet and Ang 2000; Hellisten 2002). This research is undeniably useful in gleaning an understanding of campus social dynamics and social networks that could carry over into life post-study, in addition to revealing a great deal about issues of alienation, loneliness and community formation amongst international students in Australia.

However, of much greater interest to this particular research is the body of literature that deals with international students in terms of their decisions and in terms of the construction of identities and practices that could be termed ‘transnational.’ In addition, any literature that touches on students’ adaptation to and sense of belonging in the host society, or that explores decisions to stay on after the completion of study, is useful in understanding the process of transformation from temporary student to potential migrant. Any research that generally addresses notions of cultural, social or geographic mobility in students’ lives is also significant to the themes of transnationality and mobility which underpin this thesis. There are several qualitative or mixed method studies that explore the development of transnational modes of thinking and behaviour amongst international students to greater and lesser extents. Before a detailed
discussion of the literature, I would like to broadly outline the approaches and findings of a number of key studies, which I will continue to refer to throughout the analysis.

The first of these key studies is Rizvi’s (2005) article on international education and the production of cosmopolitan identities. Based on extensive interviews with students from India and China, both before and after the completion of their education in Australia, Rizvi aims to examine patterns of transnationality and cosmopolitanism in their lives that may have emerged as a result of their international education experience. Rizvi looks at the students’ stories through the theoretical lens of cosmopolitanism, utilising Clifford (1997) and Ong’s (1999) respective notions of ‘travelling cultures’ and ‘flexible identities’ as a metaphorical framework. In contrast to this, Koehne’s (2005) research applies postmodern and poststructuralist analysis to carefully examine the constructions of identity and internal and external subject positionings of international students. Ghosh and Wang (2003) take a distinctive methodological approach, using self-reflexive narratives of their own experiences as international students in Canada to examine the development of transnationalism and identity. Despite the diversity of approaches, central themes for this thesis, namely transnationality, mobility and belonging, all emerge to varying degrees in these studies. This section of the literature review will broadly explore these concepts within the context these key studies, as well as other relevant literature,
and address their relevance to the study of students-turned-migrants in Australia.

**International students and transnational connections**

In the study of international students’ social relationships, most studies focus on the development of relationships within the host society, giving scant attention to transnational connections. As the university or school is generally the main locus of social interaction, these relationships generally concern teaching staff and other international students and local students. This research generally points out difficulties that participants face in socially integrating outside of the international student community (Neasdale and Todd 1993; Smart, Volet and Ang 2000; Hellsten 2002).

The key studies outlined above, however, by Rizvi (2005), Koehne (2005) and Ghosh and Wang (2003) give more time to transnational social connections, although interpretations of their significance are diverse. Rizvi (2005: 83) touches on the importance of transnational communication practices for international students, noting that his subjects “are in touch almost daily with friends and family through telephone and email…They remain engaged with developments at ‘home’ and continue to participate in the decision-making processes relevant to family matters”. Ghosh and Wang (2003) similarly note that in their personal journeys as an international students, technology such as the telephone and the Internet, as well as traditional modes of
communication such as letter writing, formed a regular and frequent part of their daily routines, functioned to “keep us updated on the news of our country...keep tangible connections with our folks back home” (276). The kind of communication described by Rizvi (2005) and Ghosh and Wang (2003) is certainly consistent with Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt’s (1999: 219) definition of transnational lives as created through border-crossing social interactions that are “regular and sustained”. However, the significance of these transnational practices is contested in the different empirical interpretations under discussion here.

Rizvi (2005: 83) interprets this kind of engagement as an indication that “the dislocation and displacement faced by international students has a particularly benign form”. However, as discussed in the previous section, Hazen and Alberts (2005: 147) reveal that in fact, some international students experience significant tension from the constant ‘pulling home’ facilitated through the frequency of communication. They note “family and friends in the home country acted as a strong force drawing them back, and several students expressed the idea that family and friends become more important once you are away from them”. Furthermore, Hazen and Alberts (2005) also identify a sense of unfulfilled obligation or guilt involved with their distance from loved ones. Students in their study expressed concern and guilt about their absence during important family events, such as weddings or parents’ illnesses. Concepts of guilt and obligation as an inherent element of sustaining transnational
contact emerge frequently in broader studies of transnational migration (see, for example, Bailey et al. 2002; Yeoh, Huang and Lam 2005; Voigt-Graf 2005), further suggesting that they may be a significant theme in the narratives of students-turned-migrants.

However, other narratives add yet another contrasting dimension to the multiple meanings associated with physical distance from established familial and social relationships. In Ghosh and Wang (2003: 273), for example, Ghosh cites a sense of freedom emerging through her distance from familial and social obligations, rather than a sense of guilt. This social freedom allowed her to thoroughly address her own identity and develop a stronger sense of self, “having unrestricted movement and few obligations and responsibilities towards others forced me to be with myself and to face the individual now free from the entangled web of relationships - the person and her abilities that I had had little chance to know”. Some of Koehne’s (2005: 115) subjects expressed very similar feelings, viewing the international education experience as an opportunity to ‘reinvent’ the self, and to enjoy the freedom of “being released from familial obligations and expectation”. The social freedom of starting a new life in a new society, and being unbound through distance from the duties and demands of established social relations, is thus a poignant theme that has the potential to both contradict and intersect with the sense of guilt that can emerge from the same distance.
What can be discerned from these different accounts of social disembedding across space is that there are a variety of ways in which displacement from social relations in the home country can affect an individual’s sense of the social world. In terms of the student-turned-migrant process, there are several questions that must be addressed on these themes. Firstly, do sustained and consistent levels of transnational contact continue once the switch has been made to permanent resident? Secondly, what precise role do feelings of guilt and obligation, or conversely emancipation and release, play? Finally, the extent to which these obligations play a role in influencing decisions to stay must be further explored. As Bretell (2000) and Portes (1997) argue, migrants rarely make decisions ‘in a vacuum’, but are rather strongly influenced by the interests and advice of friends and family. In the case of students-turned-migrants, even loved ones who are physically distant may assert a strong influence over these potential migrants and their life choices. This will be thoroughly explored throughout the analysis, and in particular in Chapter Five.

The literature discussed here creates a broad picture of the transnational connections that international students can potentially form. Maintaining contact with friends and family in the home country is the most obvious example, and is the most frequently cited type of transnational practice. As is the case with other migrants, international students can potentially feel a sense of guilt in being so far way from
loved ones, particularly during significant times such as family celebrations or family crises. Yet, a sense of freedom from the obligations of long established social and familial networks may also be a factor for some individuals. What is missing from this literature, and what this thesis will provide, is a deeper understanding of how students-turned-migrants actually maintain their transnational connections, and in particular how different forms of imagined, virtual, and corporeal mobility actually function in their experiences of transnationality.

The significance of technology

The rapidity of modern communication across borders, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is often cited as one of the key features of globalised modernity. As such, engagement with communications technology is one of the central transnational practices under examination in this study. Gupta and Ferguson (1997b: 37) note that the creation of transnational spheres in modernity “has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount”. Urry (2000) has also deeply explored the role and conceptualisation of technology in facilitating the construction of a social world that is no longer bounded by fixed binaries of distance or proximity. Urry (2000) sees technology as not merely a tool that overcomes boundaries, but a complex ontological development with ‘transformative powers’. However, Urry (2000) also acknowledges that virtual mobility cannot fully substitute for corporeal mobility or co-presence. This further establishes
that the transnational practices of students-turned-migrants are likely to entail both virtual mobility through technology and corporal mobility in the form of travel and visits.

There is existing empirical evidence that indicates that communications technology may be particularly relevant to students-turned-migrants. As a relatively young, educated and economically secure migrant group, most students-turned-migrants would have both access to, and knowledge of, communications technology. This assumption is generally supported by the extant literature. Ghosh and Wang (2003), for example, note that the Internet and the telephone were instrumental in keeping them updated on the lives of their loved ones, and Rizvi (2005) also notes that communication with ‘home’ through email and telephone occurred on an almost daily basis for most of the students and graduates that he interviewed.

Furthermore, a 2006 Melbourne-based study into university students’ experiences with technology found that international students were significantly more likely than local students to have access to communication tools such as a portable computer, a wireless Internet connection and a dedicated digital camera (Kennedy et al. 2006). This study also reveals that international students engaged more frequently with online activities and communication technology. While Kennedy et al. (2006) focus their research on how students utilise this technology for
their studies, they also acknowledge that the higher access rates for international students are likely to be linked to their reliance on this technology as a means to keep in touch with friends and family.

Although there will of course be variations depending on the age, financial status and personal preferences of individuals, such research indicates that students-turned-migrants are likely to be, to use Prensky’s (2001) term, “digital natives”. Their familiarity with and access to communications technology is likely to be central to their ability to maintain frequent transnational connections. In addition, journalism and communications-based studies such as those by Sampedro (1998) and Viswanath (1988) foreground the complexities of the role of both national and international mass media in the lives of international students and their relationships to various cultural spaces and societies. The complexities of virtual mobility through both communications technology and the media will be analysed at length in Chapters Seven and Eight, in which the participants’ transnational practices through technology will be described in detail.

**Home, belonging and return**

Ilcan (2002: 2) has aptly construed belonging to a place as “an experience of being connected in and between sites of social relations”. This idea of belonging as firmly situated within the context of a social ‘fitting in’ certainly emerges strongly in the literature, which reveals that the experience of international education greatly transforms individuals’
conceptions of home, particularly when home is viewed through Salih’s (2002) definition as both a physical space and a symbolic conceptualisation of belonging. This transformation becomes most evident through the narratives of return, when students go back to their country to visit or when they complete their study. Perhaps the strongest theme that emerges in these narratives of return is that of occupying the space of the ‘in-between.’ After spending a significant period of time in the host country, returnees begin to feel that they do not fully belong in either space, and their former homes can develop “alien elements” (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 8) in their eyes.

Ghosh and Wang (2003), for example, frame their first return visit home while studying in Canada as one of the meaningful moments in the development of their transnational identities. For Wang, her return visit to China became an opportunity to reconnect with traditions and culture that she felt she had long neglected as a modern, globalised Chinese. However, she also felt a distinct sense of alienation and disconnection, including a lack of common experiences with her old friends, “a feeling of difference that was difficult to admit at the time” (273). Ghosh felt a similar sense of difference on her return to Kolkata, which she tried to suppress, “earnestly trying to prove that I was the same person” (275).

Similar views are expressed by Rizvi’s (2005: 84) subjects. They describe their narratives of return as a state of being “both insiders and outsiders in
both places” in which they discover that “they are more at home in another space that is neither Australia nor their country of origin; a place which they find difficult to name”. This unnameable, intangible ‘space of in-between’ is also clearly reflected in the work of Koehne (2005: 114-115), who defines the hybridity of her subject’s identity transformations as intrinsically linked to “having a sense of alienation and not belonging…it made them a stranger in both their home culture and the culture in which they were studying”. Koehne (2005: 115) notes that occupying what she terms a hybrid space can be reflected both positively and negatively in different individual’s narratives, “(in) the one way of talking, it gave people a feeling of freedom; in the other, a sense of isolation and dislocation.”

As Al-Ali and Koser (2002) note, transmigrants’ concepts of home are dynamic and plural, rather than bounded or singular, and the ‘here’ and ‘there’ can become increasingly blurry as individuals constantly negotiate between the conflicting claims for pluri- or multi-local sites of belonging. In examining the literature, it can be expected that the concept of return is likely to be a complex one in the lives of students-turned-migrants. The literature shows that, for international students, perceptions of home and belonging need to be reconstructed within a new transnational framework, and that their narratives of return often describe crucial moments in which their complex relationships to home and host must be negotiated. The literature also suggests that many
international students consciously or unconsciously occupy a third space of the ‘in-betweens’. While this state can denote an easy, functional fluidity, whereby subjects can aptly switch between different identities depending on the context, there is also the possibility of a sense of dislocation and feeling of not belonging or ‘fitting in’ in either the home or the host society. In this thesis, issues of negotiating belonging, and in particular the impact of participants’ narratives of return, will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

Despite the diversity of the narratives and the variations in interpretation across the studies examined here, it is clear that international students have the potential to become transnational actors. While this literature examines a diverse range of subjects within very different epistemological and methodological frameworks, all the studies discussed in this chapter reveal that the international student experience is often embodied by confusion, contradiction and a sense of occupying, both socially and subjectively, a space of the ‘in-between’. The uneasy relationship between the binaries of insider/outsider, belonging/not-belonging, staying/going, cultural flexibility/cultural uncertainty represents, at different times and for different individuals, both the freedom of multiplicity and the confusion of dislocation. While the experience of international education appears to be as diverse as each individual who encounters it, this constant push-pull across different social, subjective and cultural binaries appears to be the common
thread that links the diverse experiences together. Furthermore, students who contemplate remaining in the host country more permanently must negotiate complex life choices within this framework of disjuncture, with their experiences as students having the potential to be a strong influence on their stay plans. As Appadurai (1996: 44) states, the globalisation of modern life creates a world “in which both points of arrival and points of departure are in cultural flux, and thus the steady points of reference, in which critical life choices are made, can be very difficult”. Negotiating complex decisions about their lives while existing in this state of ‘in-between’, international students may develop a sense of self and a sense of the social world that is variously termed ‘hybrid’ (Koehne 2005), ‘cosmopolitan’ (Rizvi 2005), ‘hyphenated’ (Ghosh and Wang 2003) or ‘transnational’ (Ghosh and Wang 2003).

This raises several questions for the study of international students who become skilled migrants. Most importantly, what happens after individuals make the decision to remain in the host society? Does this sense of living ‘in the in-betweens’ attenuate when their integration into the host society becomes legally and psychologically permanent rather than temporary? Or is it sustained and maintained through imagined, virtual and corporeal mobilities? Does it become easier or more difficult to negotiate different belongings as more roots are put down in the host society at the same time as obligations and connections overseas continue?
It is clear from the extant literature that the experience of studying overseas can have significant effects on people’s social imaginaries and social positioning, particularly in terms of the expansion of social worlds across geographic boundaries and the construction of hybridised identities. However, with increasing numbers of international students choosing to remain in Australia, or in fact arriving with the intention of staying, it is no longer just the process, but the product, of international education that needs to be explored. The educational experience should be seen as one part of a much longer process of changes and decisions in the construction and reconstruction of potentially transnational life-paths. This thesis will utilise the extant literature on international students discussed here to inform and shape its themes, while redressing the gap that exists in the literature by connecting the international student experience to the process of longer-term transmigration.

**Transnationalism and Citizenship**

The previous chapter has examined various discourses surrounding transnationalism and citizenship, as well as the gradual acceptance of different forms of transnational membership into national policy. There is, however, little in-depth empirical research into how emerging forms of multiple national membership actually function in the life plans and strategies of migrants. In the US-dominated research field, issues of
formalised belonging and the significance of citizenship choices are often sidelined in favour of discourses of identity and ethnicity. However, a few researchers have addressed the issues of citizenship, migration and transnationalism. This empirical work, which I will discuss below, can be broadly divided into two categories: studies that privilege instrumental conceptions of citizenship, and studies that also consider subjective motivations.

**Privileging the instrumental**

The view that mobile or transnational migrants, and particularly skilled migrants, have highly instrumental perceptions of citizenship is very common in the extant literature. Massey and Akresh (2006), for example, in their study of recent immigrants to the United States, present a model of citizenship choices in which individuals are very much driven by capitalist desires to maximise earnings. They create a picture of “a fluid and dynamic market for human capital in which the bearers of skills, education and abilities seek to maximize earnings in the short-term while retaining little commitment to any particular society or national labor market over the longer term” (Massey and Akresh 2006: 954). Similarly, Latham (1998) believes that passports are diminishing as symbols or indicators of national loyalty and belonging, and increasingly functioning merely as entitlements to partake in labour markets. In this section, I will look closely at a number of existing empirical studies into migration and citizenship choices, in order to explore precisely how these ideas of instrumentalism are framed.
In the Australian context, Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997) provide a detailed quantitative account of citizenship choices and motivations, focusing on recent Asian immigrants. Basing their exploration on the premise that Asian migrants “come from a very different set of social and philosophical traditions than those underlying Western conceptions of citizenship,” (365) their 1994 to 1995 survey of 1,220 immigrants from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan and the Philippines reveals some interesting trends. Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997) categorise motivations for naturalisation into three broad groups; instrumental, expressive and pluralistic/integrative. Instrumental reasons were those that related directly to the perceived benefits of citizenship, such as the right to vote, passports, political freedom or protection, and economic or educational benefits. Expressive reasons were those that related to either a sense of pride (“proud to be an Australian”) or a positive evaluation of life in Australia (“better place to live”, “like the life in Australia”), while pluralistic/integrative reasons were related to familial or personal connections and a desire to integrate into Australian society. While instrumental reasons were most frequently cited, the study found a significant diversity in responses depending on country of birth, which the researchers explain as dependent on a variety of cultural, legal and political factors. For example, instrumental concerns about political security and protection were paramount for the Hong Kong participants, given the political context of uncertainty surrounding the government
changeover in Hong Kong in July 1997. Additionally, the tendency of the Japanese group not to naturalise is explained by both the fact that Japan does not allow dual citizenship and the fact that the Japanese had the greatest tendency to reside in Australia only temporarily, as students or on business.

While Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997) provide a reasonably detailed overview of the motivations behind citizenship choices in the context of mid-nineties Asian migration, there are several areas in which their research fails to address key issues, or only provides part of the picture. Firstly, their grouping of citizenship motivations into the three categories of instrumental, expressive and pluralistic/integrative is problematic. In particular, the grouping of expressions of national pride ("proud to be an Australian") alongside issues of improved quality of life ("better place to live") is questionable. It could well be argued that the pursuit of a better quality of life is in fact an instrumental choice, particularly if the assessment of a ‘better life’ is specifically tied to issues of higher earning or better educational opportunities. It must be acknowledged that few motivations will be purely instrumental, expressive or integrative, and some may in fact incorporate elements of multiple categories. Furthermore, the nature of the data collection gave participants limited frameworks within which to express their motivations for becoming citizens, and also gave the researchers limited opportunities to probe and question these reasons in-depth. Thus ambiguities in the wording
and categorisation of the reasons becomes a problem, as there is no opportunity for migrants to clearly explain how they understand or interpret reasons such as ‘social integration’ or ‘obligation’. Such concepts may in fact have varied or multiple meanings, depending on the background or experience of each individual.

Essentially, aspects of this research will build on the more quantitatively based work of Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997) in several ways. Firstly, in light of the fact that migration policy changes that favour international students began in 1998, putting students at the forefront of skilled migration issues, this study will focus on their experiences. Secondly, in contrast to Ip, Inglis and Wu’s (1997) primarily quantitative approach, this study will engage more qualitative and in-depth methods, allowing for a greater probing of subjective reasoning and decision-making processes. Finally, Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997) only touch very briefly on the significance of overseas connections as a reason behind naturalisation choices. In contrast, this study will use a transnational perspective to look more closely at how transnational practices and connections play a role in citizenship decisions.

Research from the United States and Canada, nations in a similar position to Australia in terms of both migration history and policy, can also shed light on issues of transmigration and citizenship. A recent study by Nagel and Staeheli (2004) examines both the transnational and local
political and social activities of Arab immigrants in the United States, and their impact on their conceptualisation of citizenship. Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) work is significant in that it empirically supports the argument that belonging and citizenship are not always compatible within personal constructions of identity stating, “it is possible to claim identity as a citizen of a country without claiming an identity as ‘belonging to’ or ‘being of’ that country, thus breaking the assumed congruity between citizenship, state, and nation” (2). The authors cite examples such as a naturalised Arab-American who “clearly separates out a feeling of belonging in a cultural or social sense from legal status…citizenship is related more to legal standing than to some sense of identification with the United States” (Nagel and Staeheli 2004: 25). However, other participants in the study present different views, in which their commitment to political activism in the Arab sphere is tightly enmeshed with a sense of responsibility to position their communities as integrated constituents of the American political and social community. Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) findings also caution against an overemphasis on the transnational aspect of migrants lives. They instead reveal that national and local political and social action can be just as significant, allowing citizenship to be seen as “enacted and imagined at multiple scales” (19).

These findings are certainly of relevance to the study of students-turned-migrants in Australia, despite the contextual and geographic differences.
The idea of citizenship as legal status rather than an affirmation of belonging may be relevant to students-turned-migrants. It may be particularly relevant to those from politically or economically unstable regions, who may view the attainment of an Australian passport as a form of security rather than a symbol of belonging. Methodologically, Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) work is also valuable because it acknowledges the diversity of the group under study. It is not concerned with making grand generalisations, but rather with presenting some of the complex combinations and enmeshments of political identity across source and settlement societies. This thesis takes a similar approach, because it encompasses participants with an even wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I will similarly seek to uncover diversity as well as commonality in the explorations of migrants’ conceptualisations of citizenship, primarily in Chapter Six.

However, despite raising some pertinent themes, Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) work is somewhat limited in its capacity to truly unlock the diversity of substantive and formal citizenship choices. Firstly, all of Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) participants were naturalised full citizens. The study thus neglects to examine the importance of denizenship and dual citizenship. Furthermore, all the subjects of the study were political activists and community leaders who were actively involved with homeland politics and political organisations. This excises the experiences of less politically engaged individuals whose transnational practices may revolve more
around social or kinship ties and who may thus view citizenship in very different terms. Nagel and Staeheli (2004) overemphasise political membership in their discussion of citizenship, and although they purport to address “basic questions relating to the ways in which immigrants themselves perceive, experience and practice citizenship” (4) they in fact do not adequately examine the reasons behind various kinds of citizenship choices and experiences, focusing instead on the meaning of political activism and identity amongst Arab-Americans.

Ong’s (1999) work on citizenship provides a contrast to that of Nagel and Staeheli (2004). In her study of the practices and cultural logics of highly-mobile Chinese subjects, Ong (1999) constructs membership choices as mostly divorced from a sense of political obligation, but rather as a form of capital accumulation, a migration strategy employed to further “their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena”(6). Ong’s term ‘flexible citizenship’ thus refers to a primarily strategic or instrumental conception of state membership. Individuals or families construct citizenship choices across various states in order to gain the greatest material and social advantages possible. Formal membership in any state may thus be divorced from any sense of loyalty or belonging. Ong presents the Chinese flexible citizen as a savvy manipulator of state regulations, who “seems to display an élan for thriving in conditions of political insecurity, as well as in the turbulence of global trade” and who is actively “seeking to both circumvent and
benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work and family relocation” (1 & 112).

Ong’s perception of strategically mobile life-planning among Chinese migrants may certainly apply to some international students who become skilled migrants in Australia. The high costs involved in undertaking a course as a full-fee paying international student indicate that many international students in Australia do come from the elite, wealthy backgrounds apparent in Ong’s study. Moreover, the decision to study and gain residency in Australia may indeed constitute part of a carefully formulated family or individual life strategy, in order to accumulate economic wealth and social status. However, as discussed earlier, research from Baas (2007) and Deumert et al. (2005) argues that in many cases individuals and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds accumulate substantial debt in order to undertake international education. The motivations of these families could also be strategic, but placed within a different socio-economic context from Ong’s highly mobile elites. This could in turn alter the ways in which citizenship is perceived and choices are made.

In the Australian context, Colic-Peisker’s (2006) study of Croatian transmigrants reveals some very similar findings to those of both Nagel and Staeheli (2004) and Ong (1999). While Colic-Peisker contrasts the views of two different generational cohorts of migrants, it is the data on
the second cohort of young, skilled migrants who are demographically most similar to students-turned-migrants. The young, highly skilled Croatians in Colic-Peisker’s (2006) study are similar to some of Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) subjects and Ong’s (1999) ‘flexible citizens’ in that they see citizenship in purely instrumental terms, “the Australian passport, a symbol of citizenship of a stable and prosperous country, was for Croatian professionals a symbol of security and a facilitator of global mobility, rather than a sign of belonging” (222). Colic-Peisker’s (2006) subjects are not cosmopolitans in Nussbaum’s (1996) sense of a moral position as a ‘citizen of the world’. Their cosmopolitanism is rather “an individualistic position of self actualization through accepting global opportunities beyond ethnic and national boundaries and loyalties” (Colic-Peisker 2006: 223). This in turn supports Rizvi’s (2005) view of the cosmopolitan imaginaries of former international students, which he frames as “concerned more with their strategic positioning within the global labor market than with building a moral sense of global solidarity” (77). Colic-Peisker’s (2006) research of young, urban middle-class transmigrants clearly supports the view that such individuals are likely to have highly instrumental approaches to citizenship choices, including a strong awareness of the global hierarchy of different citizenships and the benefits of securing a citizenship of high value. From the literature discussed above, it could be expected that students-turned-migrants will display “a pragmatic need for a citizenship – preferably a safe, Western, globally unproblematic citizenship” (Colic-Peisker 2006: 223).
Considering the subjective

Despite the prevalence of instrumental conceptions of citizenship amongst the empirical literature discussed above, some recent studies in both Australian and overseas contexts reveal a broader picture. A very comprehensive analysis of the influence behind citizenship choices for recent migrants in Australia can be found in Batrouney and Goldlust’s (2005) qualitative study of immigrants, citizenship and identity. Batrouney and Goldlust take a very thorough methodological approach, acknowledging the complex and multi-faceted nature of citizenship choices, and providing a broad range of migrant voices, including refugees, skilled migrants, and students-turned-migrants. Batrouney and Goldlust (2005: 63) identify two approaches to belonging in their sample: an essentialist paradigm that sees identification with ethnic, religious or national groups as “something deep, fixed and unchangeable” and a non-essentialist paradigm that reveals a tendency for overlapping and multiple senses of attachment and belonging. Batrouney and Goldlust (2005) also document a multiplicity of motivations behind choices to naturalise or not to naturalise. They note that pragmatic reasons and emotional attachments are often co-present in decision-making, and while pragmatic incentives alone can sometimes be sufficient impetus, they often also act to reinforce a primarily emotive rationale. However, Batrouney and Goldlust’s subjects are similar to those in the studies previously discussed, in that they also clearly demonstrate an awareness of a global hierarchy of citizenship, and the increased options for
mobility and security that a ‘high value’ Western citizenship can provide. It could be expected that the participants of this research would express some similar views to those of Batrouney and Goldlust’s sample, because both studies deal with migrants from a wide variety of source countries, and use similar methodologies. However, Batrouney and Goldlust’s (2005) sample also vary considerably in terms of their migration process, while the sample in this thesis all entered through the student switching scheme. In Chapter Six, I will therefore compare some of my findings about students-turned-migrants’ motivations for naturalisation with these findings. I hope to also expand on Batrouney and Goldlust’s (2005) very thorough research by investigating migrant decision-making through a transnational lens, which will shed more light on how transnational connections and interactions may impact on citizenship choices.

Waters (2003) Canadian based study of Chinese transmigrants also explores the limitations of the instrumental model of citizenship to explain contemporary transmigrants’ choices and perspectives. She essentially provides an opposing view to Ong (1999) with regard to economic Chinese immigrants, believing that many researchers of the transnational Chinese overemphasise the instrumental nature of their citizenship strategies. Waters’s (2003) qualitative examination of ‘astronaut families’ in Vancouver reveals that citizenship is not always purely instrumental for Chinese transmigrants. Even if their initial migration decisions are based on strategies for the accumulation of social, cultural or mobility capital,
ultimately a level of acculturation occurs over the course of the immigration process, which changes conceptions of the meaning of citizenship. Although strategies for flexibility, mobility and economic gain may be the initial aim, place and settlement assert influence over time.

In focusing part of her study on high-school age ‘satellite kids’, Waters (2003) also touches on the acculturation and adjustment processes that are facilitated through the formal educational environment. Many of Waters’s (2003) subjects initially view their time in Canada as constructed by the strategising of their parents: as merely a means to an end. However, throughout their studies, they gradually develop social networks, put down roots and express a preference for the Canadian way of life. Thus the ultimate goal of acquiring Canadian citizenship potentially becomes suffused with meaning beyond a purely instrumental goal of capital accumulation.

This study suggests that the process of migration, particularly when it involves a fairly long temporary period of residence prior to naturalisation, (as is the case with students-turned-migrants), can facilitate a gradual shift from viewing citizenship instrumentally to viewing it subjectively. Waters’s (2003) study, however, while successfully opening up the issue of transformation in citizenship strategising, neglects to fully reveal what new meanings of citizenship and belonging actually develop for her participants. While Waters (2003: 229) conjectures that
“the ‘satellite’ experience has involved a sense of personal transformation, perhaps related to a newly emerging sense of citizenship” she does not provide any empirical evidence of what constitutes this ‘new sense’, as she does not seem to directly address the issue of citizenship choices with her subjects.

This study will further develop Waters’s (2003) considerations by addressing the issues of citizenship and migration choices more thoroughly and directly through the ascribed meanings and decision-making processes of students-turned-migrants. These issues will be approached with the perception that such choices are dynamic and subject to transformation over time, and that instrumental strategies may combine with the influences of settlement and acculturation. This may produce decisions based on multi-layered considerations that cut across both the pragmatic and the intangible. Furthermore, both Ong (1999) and Waters (2003) focus solely on the experiences of Chinese migrants. By focusing on participants from a broad range of backgrounds, this study will, in contrast, examine a range of different social and cultural experiences and perhaps reveal through comparison how they influence perceptions of citizenship.

This study will examine the real-world states of formal and informal belonging of students-turned-migrants in Australia, through the theoretical lenses of transnationalism and mobilities. As Australia is yet to
fully accept multiple modes of belonging as anything but “abnormal and problematic” (Castles 2001), there may be disjunctures between how migrants view their belonging and membership and the extent to which these perceptions can actually be formally or legally reflected. These disjunctures may mean migrants have to make complex decisions about gaining and relinquishing citizenship and trying to maintain different types of membership across different nations. Thus, the realm of membership that lies between the two extremes of alien and citizen will likely be of importance to these migrants, and the untangling of the myriad meanings attached to temporary and permanent residency, denizenship, and partial participation will be facilitated through the voices and experiences of the migrants themselves.

A majority of the empirical literature dealing with similar migrant cohorts has revealed that instrumental strategies are paramount to citizenship decisions, and that a global citizenship hierarchy may place high instrumental value on Australian citizenship as an unproblematic Western citizenship. However, research from Batrouney and Goldlust (2005) and Waters (2003) also reveals that subjective and emotive motivations can also have a decided impact on migrant decision-making, and that attitudes to citizenship can transform over time. As such, in Chapters Five and Six, the roles of both the functional and the metaphoric in how students-turned-migrants perceive the acquisition of formal modes of national belonging (residency and citizenship) will be explored, as well as
their perceptions of the benefits, functions and pitfalls of membership across dual or multiple states. Whether they feel there are inherent meanings of belonging, solidarity and allegiance in citizenship, or whether it functions merely as a type of capital accumulation will also be addressed. This study will thus unpack some of the current theories of flexible or transnational membership and belonging as they relate directly to the lived experiences and perceptions of students-turned-migrants, focusing on the precise decision-making processes and influences that surround their choices. However, these choices will be viewed as firmly embedded with the political and legal contexts of both Australia and their country of origin. In particular, the possibility of a transformation of sentiments, decisions and motivations during the course of their residency will be examined. One premise of this investigation is that membership only has meaning beyond political rights and responsibilities if the individual perceives it to have meaning. Whether or not citizenship is ‘just a passport’ ultimately depends on how the holder of the citizenship personally conceptualises its significance within the framework of their own identity and life-plan.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have discussed relevant empirical literature on students-turned-migrants, international students, transmigration, and citizenship in order to gain an understanding of what perspectives could be expected from students-turned-migrants in this study. The existing literature on
students-turned-migrants is fairly limited in scope, focusing mostly on the problematic integration of students-turned-migrants into the labour market. Qualitative studies such as those by Baas (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) and Pang and Appleton (2004) give a broader picture, but still tend to be focused on decision-making, rather than looking in-depth at the lives of these migrants in the post-study phase of their migration experience. In addition, the literature discussed grounds the experiences of its participants firmly within the host society, and does not consider transnational perspectives.

While some of the international student literature provides better insight into transnational themes, taken as a whole, this body of work raises more questions that it answers. One prominent question is whether the experience of international education is characterised by highly instrumental ideas of mobility, and another is what precise role corporeal, virtual and imagined mobility actually play in transnational lives. The citizenship literature also raises questions about instrumentalism in student-turned-migrant choices, and reveals that these subjects could have potential for multiple national memberships and dynamic conceptions of the meaning of citizenship. These diverse themes will be carefully explored and compared to the literature in the analysis. In sum, with students-turned-migrants growing rapidly as a migrant group in Australia, I believe there is a need for holistic empirical work that explores
their migration experience in detail and acknowledges their potential as transnational subjects.
Chapter Four: Methodology

*Introduction*

This chapter will describe and justify the research methods that were selected for this study, organised in terms of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) five-phase approach to the qualitative research process, namely: the researcher; interpretive paradigms; strategies of inquiry; methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials; and the art and politics of interpretation and evaluation. I will outline the rationale underpinning each methodological choice, and then discuss the limitations and challenges of the research approach. With a firm belief in research as an accumulative learning process (Rossman and Rallis 1998), I will also continually reflect upon the evolution of the research design as the project progressed and upon my own development as a researcher.

*The Researcher*

In the spirit of Denzin and Lincoln’s (1998: 24) claim that, “the age of value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over”, I will begin by reflecting on my own background and motivations in undertaking this project. Contrary to traditional positivist assumptions regarding the nature of research, it is now often accepted within the social sciences that “objective social research” is a contradiction in terms. Rather,
knowledge and truth are seen as social constructs, with both the researcher and the researched influencing the interpretation of social reality. Furthermore, as Hall (1996) notes, it is vital for every writer to recognise the location of their own experiences and culture in their writing, and to note that they are speaking from a specific place. This involves making explicit the social, cultural and political context of the researcher. Fetterman (1998) also argues that while researchers should enter the field with a non-judgmental and open mind, they cannot be completely neutral, and must from the outset acknowledge their own personal beliefs, tastes and biases. In light of this, in this section I will describe my own personal biography, and examine any biases that may be inherent in my position. This is not in an attempt to gain neutrality, but rather to gain a full understanding of how my own situatedness as a researcher could impact on the interpretations produced in the research.

My own positioning in terms of the phenomena of students-turned-migrants has a number of facets. Firstly, I have one migrant parent, from India, and one ‘Australian’ (in the sense of Anglo-Celtic, convict heritage) parent. I do not have first-hand migration experience, but it is entrenched quite firmly in one side of my immediate family’s history. Also, although I do not identity as ‘Indian’ or ‘a migrant’ I am physically identifiable by others as such. Although I looked rather similar to my Indian and Sri Lankan participants, I didn’t operate from the same
cultural context. However, my ethnic heritage does assist me in navigating in intercultural contexts, and predispose me to feel empathy for those who are positioned as ethnically different in Australian society. Politically, I am also in favour of multiculturalism and relatively open migration policy.

Secondly, I have my own experience with international education, as I studied as an exchange student in Germany during my undergraduate degree. Despite the vastly different context, including the fact that permanent migration was never a consideration, there were still many aspects of my participants’ stories that I could relate to. The challenges of studying in one’s second language, negotiating the bureaucracy of a foreign university and trying to understand the pedagogical and cultural differences of the academic environment were all familiar to me. While I ultimately found my exchange experience to be very fulfilling, I could also relate to experiences of homesickness, the challenges of living independently overseas and the difficulty in integrating socially with local students. I felt this experience was in some ways a boon to the research, in that relating my own international education story to participants seemed in many cases to establish a positive sense of rapport and mutual understanding. In terms of bias, I have tended towards empathy in terms of understanding the international education experience as a difficult and often stressful one.
However, as an educator, I’m also generally uncomfortable with perceptions of education as a means to a narrowly instrumental end (such as migration), rather than seeing knowledge and understanding as an end in itself. When I was a teacher of international students, I often found it a challenge to engage students when they saw their courses as a pathway to PR, more than a process of learning. Throughout the project, I tried to alleviate these biases by remembering how inherently different my own educational experience, and in particular my exchange experience, was to the international education experiences of my participants. I did not have to pay thousands of dollars to study overseas, nor did I have to spend years away from my family. Furthermore, I was not escaping from a developing country, or a country that was politically unstable, or a country that offered me fewer career prospects. Nor did I have the expectations and futures of family members riding on my academic success. I was thus able to acknowledge that for many of my participants, much more was at stake when they left home to study abroad. As such, I was better able to understand why their perspectives on the experience may have been different.

As discussed in Chapter One, my professional work as a teacher of international students provided the inspiration for this project. My years of work in this field also provided me with skills and competencies that I believe aided my ability to communicate effectively with my
participants, including familiarity with cross-cultural communication contexts. I did, however, have certain preconceptions about the student-turned-migrant process, based on this prior contact with my students. I noted these in my research diary at the beginning of the project, as a means to remain aware of what I thought I knew from anecdotal evidence and informal conversations. However, I was equally prepared to have these preconceptions confirmed or overturned during the research.

**Interpretive Paradigms**

As the primary focus of the research questions is the beliefs, thoughts, opinions and experiences of the participants, an interpretivist-constructivist theoretical framework was the most appropriate methodological choice. In Crotty’s (1998: 42) terms, a constructivist paradigm entails “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”. Therefore, a constructivist paradigm does not attempt objectivism, and is critical of the possibility of research without bias. The multiple possible interpretations of social reality that come from constructivist research are not seen as uncontested truths, but rather as collaborative creations that are influenced by the situatedness of both the researcher and their subjects. Furthermore, as Patton (2002: 268)
states, constructivists “are more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular context than in hypothesizing about generalizations. Indeed, they are suspicious of causal explanations and empirical generalizations applied to complex human interactions and cultural systems”.

I further felt that constructivist concepts of multiple, situated realities were particularly appropriate to this study, as I was dealing with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and from backgrounds and cultures that were variously similar to and different from my own. Essentially, the goal of this research was not to construct broad generalizations of all students-turned-migrants as a unified social group, but rather to create a deep understanding of the participants’ lives as individual cases within the broader context of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon. The epistemological privileging of context and co-construction was thus essential in recognizing the varied nature of each research encounter and each participant’s narrative.

Furthermore, in constructivist research, data collection is a process of discovery, and themes and theories can be emergent from the data itself. Rather than following the positivist tradition of first establishing and then testing hypotheses, questions and theories emerge from the data, and can change as the research progresses. Interview schedules can be restructured and reworded, as each engagement with the
researched alters the emergent themes and the researcher’s perspectives. This study was thus also influenced by grounded approaches, in that the aim was not to verify hypotheses, but to emphasise the fit between data and theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and to expand or reframe existing knowledge from the extant literature. This philosophy was fundamental to the way in which the research was designed and implemented.

**Strategies of Inquiry**

This research, while not ethnographic in the traditional sense, borrows various techniques and strategies from ethnographic methods. It adopts the techniques of close contact with the subjects studied, a broad set of methods, and an emphasis on conceptual phenomena such as ideas, ways of thinking, and symbols or meanings (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000), as well as a focus on ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973). This research also remains true to the fundamental epistemological and ontological underpinnings of ethnographic research, in that it takes a holistic approach to real life experience; provides a qualitative description of human social phenomena; studies a few individuals in detail; and allows meanings to emerge from the data, without prescribed hypotheses or models.
However, ethnography often looks at a single cultural group, and is closely aligned with anthropological field study. This research takes a more sociological approach, in terms of Giddens’s (1976: 19) assertion of sociology as addressing “the meanings people place on their experiences”. This study does not focus on a particular cultural group or community, but rather on a set of individuals from varied cultural backgrounds who share a particular experience. This research is essentially an exploration of the process of a particular life experience: the student-turned-migrant journey. As with the study of a cultural group, there will be on the one hand certain shared experiences and perspectives, and on the other hand there will also be aspects that are unique to the individual case. This research thus attempts to provide an overview of the nature of the shared experience, as well as an insight into individual variations.

Another divergence from traditional ethnography in this study is that the traditional ethnographic method of participant observation was not used, for a number of pertinent reasons. Firstly, the cohort I was studying did not belong to a single or bounded group or community. I could not gain access to an organisation or community to observe people’s interactions, as no such community or organisation for students-turned-migrants exists. In order to observe my participants ‘in the field’, I would have had to enter various workplaces, private homes and universities.
The fieldwork could have involved three or four different geographic sites for each participant. This would not only have been logistically complex, but also unnecessarily intrusive. I instead chose to use cultural probes as a means of ‘observation without intrusion’. This gave me glimpses into the everyday lives of the participants, while I gathered the bulk of my data through interviews. In choosing these strategies of inquiry, I also acknowledge the postmodern critique of ethnographic methods, which challenges their ability to provide a privileged representation of the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson 1998). This research attempts to maintain an awareness that “all methods are cultural and personal constructs…research can only offer a socially constructed view of the world” (Brewer 2000: 23-24).

**Methods of Collecting and Analysing Empirical Materials**

This project involved the triangulation of data from three collection techniques: cultural probe packages that were given to participants several weeks prior to their interviews, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a research diary in which I recorded my self-observations during the research process. These methods were chosen because they aligned with the constructivist paradigm and quasi-ethnographic strategies of the research design. The combination of the probes with the in-depth interviews allowed a rich and detailed data set that privileged the
experiences of the participants and allowed them to give voice to the meanings that they placed on these experiences. The research diary ensured that the project remained reflexive in that I could enhance awareness of my own role in the interpretative process.

**Cultural probes**

Cultural probes are a relatively new method of data collection. They have been most often utilised in design-based research since their initial development by Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti in 1999. Based on notions of “uncertainty, play, exploration and subjective interpretation” (Gaver, Boucher, Pennington and Walker 2004), cultural probes are essentially purposefully designed packages of mixed media materials, such as disposable cameras, diaries, photo albums, postcards and tape recorders, that are 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 and daily lives. Data from cultural probes has traditionally been used by designers to assess and evaluate the needs of a group or community prior to undertaking a community design project. Probes have since been adapted by researchers in a variety of scenarios, from being used as exploratory devices in care settings (Hemmings, Crabtree and Rodden 2003) to attempting to gain a holistic understanding of people who exercise for wellbeing (Mattelmäki and Battarbee 2002). This study
aimed to embed the method of cultural probes within a wholly sociological study, and to utilise this relatively new method alongside the more conventional technique of interviewing, in order to enhance both the depth and breadth of data and analysis. I have discussed the evolution of the probes method and its specific challenges and limitations in this project in more detail elsewhere (Robertson 2008); the following section constitutes a briefer summary of their implementation and the rationale behind their use.

In this study, cultural probe packages were distributed to participants approximately one month prior to the interviews. The probe packages in this project consisted of four main elements: maps with accompanying labels; disposable cameras; postcards; and communication log books. These all included instructions and suggestions for use, and were packaged and presented in an engaging and visually appealing fashion. For photographs of the probe packages and their contents, see Appendix Two. Two pilot probes were created, which were trialled on one male and one female participant. Feedback from the pilot probes was generally positive, yet a few small elements were changed in the final probes as per suggestions from the pilot participants. These were practical suggestions related to ease of use, such as making the instructions on the camera clearer and including larger stickers for the maps. Each probe was returned before the scheduled interview, so that I could become familiar with the completed materials and adjust the
individual interview schedule to accommodate a discussion of the probe data. If requested, participants were able to keep any of the completed probe materials that they wished, after copies had been made for research purposes.

The disposable cameras were repackaged to visually match the other elements of the package and included instructions for use and suggestions for the themes of photos on the casing of the camera itself. In this way, the camera could be removed and carried separately from the rest of the package with the references for use intact. The prompts for photographs asked participants to visually capture sites and objects of significance to their personal migration journey, such as the site of a memorable event in Australia or an object that reminded them of their country of origin. For a full list of the suggestions for photos, see Appendix Three, and for a selection of the images the participants’ returned, see Appendix Four. I utilised photographs created by the participants in this research because visual research methodologies consider photographs taken by the participants to reflect the participants' views and open a world that the researcher might not otherwise have access to or consider important (Warren and Karner, 2005). Rather than being independently analysed, however, the photos were used in Harrison’s (2002: 861) terms, as “a kind of fieldnote that (requires) the collaboration of the participants to ‘translate’ its meaning”. The significance and personal meanings of the photographs were
discussed at length in the interviews, allowing the meaning to be constructed in a collaborative fashion between interviewer and interviewee.

The maps were designed to allow participants to construct a visual representation of their networks and connections overseas. This task was connected to the key research question concerning the significance of transnational interactions and the themes of mobility and belonging. The probe contained a basic world map, along with several different coloured labels and a key to determine what each colour represented. The key included ‘places I have lived’, ‘places where I have family’, ‘places where I have friends’, ‘places I have visited,’ and ‘places I would like to live in the future.’ The labels were small enough for several to be placed on one location, as single locations could represent multiple categories. As an example, I included a completed map depicting my own transnational connections in each probe. This functioned as a model to help participants complete their own map, yet also allowed the process of engagement between researcher and participant to be two-way. By giving them some information about myself, I was able to establish a connection with the participants, and similar travel experiences often created good initial rapport in interviews.

The maps not only gave a visual representation of individuals’ networks, but also facilitated prompting in the interviews, particularly with regard to
the emotional significance of the various places. They provided a visual focus when discussing the extent and significance of networks. In general, the maps produced much denser and more complex networks of places than I had anticipated. They also provided a kind of chart of the individuals’ past, present and future, in terms of where they had been, where they were, and where they wanted to go. As such, they became a unique means to follow the life story of each participant throughout the analysis process.

The log books were used by participants as a daily record of any communication which they had with friends, family or other associates overseas. They recorded the date, time, purpose of communication and method of communication (such as phone call, text message, email or letter). Alongside these pragmatic records, participants were also encouraged to briefly record how specific communications made them feel or react. As De Longis, Hemphill and Lehman (1992) note, diaries are useful as a methodological tool in that they allow participants to record responses to events immediately, without the element of retrospective reflection inherent to interviews. This advantage was particularly apparent in the context of this research, as people’s immediate emotional responses to telephone calls or letters from loved ones were often very powerful. The log books also allowed multiple communications over the month to be recorded. It would have been impossible to replicate this in an interview setting through memory alone,
and similarly unfeasible to achieve this volume of data through participant observation. Not only did the log books give an overall view of the frequency of overseas contact, and the methods most often used to maintain contact, they also allowed a comparison of how different modes of technology functioned in the development and maintenance of transnational connections. Furthermore, it has been established that diaries enable research participants to reflect on their experiences daily, which allows them to enter any subsequent collaborative sessions prepared to discuss and analyse what they have recorded (Sanders 2002). The log books were thus an essential prompt for discussion during the interviews, particularly in exploring family relationships enacted over distance.

The postcards were an element of the probes that used both a visual and a written prompt to encourage participants to express feelings regarding significant events in their migration journey. Each postcard displayed an image, and an unfinished sentence for participants to complete. The sentences fell into three types. Type A questions, such as ‘I feel homesick when...’ provided an emotive prompt and required participants to access a memory or situation that correlated with the emotion. In contrast, Type B questions, such as ‘When I visit my country I feel...’ provided a situational context and required participants to provide the corresponding emotion. Type C prompts were open-ended, and required descriptive answers, for example, ‘Studying here was....’ A
roughly equal spread of Type A, B and C prompts were included in order to vary the type of response, and thus to enhance the diversity of engagement with the probes. For a full list the postcard prompts, see Appendix Five.

The images on the cards were one of the biggest challenges of the probe design. They needed to be visually appealing, without providing overly specific images that could unduly influence the user’s response. Furthermore, as my study deals with participants from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, the design also had take into account the need to present images that would not alienate or exclude participants through cultural bias. The initial intention was to depict figures that were ageless, genderless and racially neutral: a universal figure upon which all participants could project their individual experiences. This turned out to be a formidable task, as most neutral figures seemed aesthetically bland or overly simplistic. Ultimately, Gaver et al.’s (1999: 25) original aesthetic was informative. They described their probes as “delightful, but not condescending or childish … the aesthetics were somewhat abstract and alien in order to encourage from participants a slightly detached attitude”.

I thus chose to incorporate artwork that was contemporary and somewhat whimsical, depicting a variety of human-like figures surrounded by shapes and patterns suggestive of urban and natural
environments. The scenes depicted were dream-like and indefinite. As their connection to Australia was the common factor in all the migrants’ experiences, there were one or two whimsically vague symbols of Australiana, such as a sheep and a hill’s hoist, but the intention was to keep the symbolism light and playful. Whether participants recognised these cultural symbols or not was immaterial. Each image did not connect directly to the written prompt, but rather served to amuse and inspire the user in a more ambiguous way.

I believe the use of cultural probes has enhanced the outcomes of my research in several ways. Firstly, the collection of data through two complementary methods allows for a triangulation of data; a practice often cited by qualitative theorists as a technique that can enhance a study’s credibility (Rapley 2004), one of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness. The cross-validation of the data fragments gathered by the cultural probes with the interview data ultimately strengthens the credibility of this study. While the probes were not used to collect the bulk of the data, they supplement and enhance the core data gleaned from the interview process by providing material that can be cross-referenced, including data in non-verbal forms.

The inclusion of these non-verbal elements was one of the most important functions of the probes. They allowed participants to represent their experiences in non-verbal ways using the maps and cameras, and
to respond to non-verbal prompts using the postcards. This was significant because one of the limits to creativity in social science methodology is undoubtedly a disciplinary obsession with the textual and the verbal. Emmison and Smith (2000), in discussing the privileging of text over image in academic publishing, even go so far as to state that “whilst texts are associated with reason and higher mental facilities, images are seen as subversive, dangerous and visceral” (14), and that visual researchers have been “ghettoized” (2). While this is a somewhat extreme stance, a great deal of qualitative inquiry does tend to revolve around the conversion of the verbal (interviews) or the visual (observation) into the textual (transcripts and field notes). Interpretation and analysis is also almost solely undertaken through written forms, and, as Chaplin (1994) suggests, images such as photographs are almost always ‘textualised’ with a caption or explanation, thus further privileging the ‘meaning-making’ ability of the textual over the visual. Moreover, social researchers tend to be skilled in verbal and written modes of interpretation and communication, which sometimes leads us to neglect the fact that the subjects we are studying may not be so, and that the production and analysis of text and talk may in fact be a narrow way of interacting with the people we hope to understand. For example, in their exploration of exercise for wellbeing, Mattelmäki and Battarbee (2002: 3) found that “using ambiguous stimuli for users to respond to and allowing expression verbally, visually and through action also allows the participants to express their emotions easier (sic).” This observation that
emotional responses are more readily obtained through a variety of means of expression was an instrumental influence in the design of the probes for this study. Pink (2001: 18) makes note of “the sensory nature of human knowledge and experience,” and the probes utilise images and objects in order to tap into the possibility of a sensory element, beyond written or spoken communication.

However, as Holm (2008) notes, visual data, although able to vastly enrich social research, should not conversely be privileged over verbal forms, as it too has limitations. Holm (2008) recognises in particular the difficulty in analysing visual material without any accompanying context, and thus argues that the two modes can best function in combination. In my case, the probes allowed some extension of my interaction with participants into non-verbal and non-textual forms, yet the visual data created by participants, such as the maps and the photographs, were most effectively interpreted with the collaboration of the participants during the interviews. Their verbal explanations of the visual materials created an integrated approach to interpreting the data, in which visual and verbal methods operated in concert.

The next key benefit of the probes, as stated by Crabtree, Hemmings and Rodden (2003: 4) is that they are essentially “provocative resources” which are designed “to overcome some of the distance between researchers and users.” This sense of ‘distance’ is in some ways bridged
by the probes in that the completed materials served to give me some clear ideas about the experiences and thoughts of each particular participant prior to the interview. This allowed me to adjust the interview schedule and my manner to better suit the needs and specific context of each particular participant. In my experience, this resulted in a deeper and more quickly established rapport and sense of understanding between the interviewer and interviewee, ultimately producing more fruitful data.

Moreover, the concept of bridging distance that is raised by Crabtree, Hemmings and Rodden (2003) could also be applied to the way in which the probes function to overcome some of the initial distance between the users and the research itself, particularly the topics and research questions. In feedback sessions, many of my participants agreed that the probes allowed them valuable prior reflection, making them feel less apprehensive about what to expect from the interview. It is therefore clear that the probes allowed for ‘groundwork’ before the interview, providing opportunities for both the researcher to engage with the subject and for the subject to engage with the material of the investigation.

In addition, the official regalia surrounding the beginning of research participation, such as consent forms, plain language statements and business cards, although ethically necessary, are unlikely to inspire or
enthuse participants. In fact, the official nature of such documents may even be intimidating for some. Presenting participants with probes alongside the official documents goes some way towards framing the research in a more creative and inspirational way. This was another comment that came through in feedback, with participants noting that the playful nature of the probes allowed them to feel more relaxed about participating in the research. For participants, the probes established early on that there were no ‘right or wrong’ responses, and that their subjective experiences were of core value to the study.

Aside from the benefits that the completed probes created in the collection of data, I personally found that the actual design and construction of the probes was useful to my own development as a researcher. In considering the content of the probes, I was required to think laterally about the issues and the research questions. Sourcing the material for the probes, thinking about the content, and constructing the packages was physically and mentally a very different kind of process than typing out an interview schedule. The creation of the probes required a real immersion into the themes of the research, in a fairly abstract and innovative way, which I found was very productive in terms of the generation of new ideas and previously unconsidered perspectives. For example, in constructing the maps and creating my own map of transnational connections, it became very apparent to me that factors such as travel, international education and family migration
history can stretch an individual’s transnational links beyond a limited two-way engagement between home and host countries and into multiple, scattered locations. This helped me to realise that two-way transnational paradigms that only focus on the home/host dialectic were perhaps too narrow for this study. This idea became quite important in the analysis, and might not have emerged until much later if I had not spent time constructing the probes.

There are also some distinctly pragmatic reasons why the probes were a useful data collection tool for this particular investigation. Data such as the complexity of transnational networks across space are not easy to depict verbally or to record simply using words. Likewise, recording the frequency and nature of multiple overseas communications would be tedious and time-consuming in an interview, and would require participants to access their memories (not always the most reliable of instruments) to dictate when, where and how the communications occurred. By using the log books and maps instead, complex, detailed or repetitive data was easily recorded and represented by the participants themselves, and then referred to during the interviews as a means of focusing or prompting discussion. This left more time in the interview for exploring meanings, rather than just recording facts.

Another element that the probes brought to this study is the ability of participants to contribute to data away from the gaze of the researcher
and the artificial environment of the interview room. As Mattelmäki and Battarbee (2002: 1) attest, probes are “given to the potential users to document their private lives, contexts and experiences”. Probes thus give the researcher a glimpse into the private worlds of the participants, without having to physically intrude into these environments to observe them. While the fragments of data gathered by the probes obviously could not reveal the whole scope of the participants’ experiences, they provided a certain amount of access to the private realm that cannot be replicated in an artificial research setting, where the gaze of the researcher is always apparent.

Despite their effectiveness, the probes, like any method, had certain drawbacks. The most prominent drawback in this case was the return rates. In the original research design, all the participants were to complete probes. However, after the first round of field work, I found that some participants did not complete their probes packages, citing factors such as a lack of time or a lack of engagement with the materials. I also felt that the added time commitment that the probes required was hampering me from sourcing a wider sample of participants. From then on, I allowed participants the choice of participating with a probe and an interview, or a longer interview and no probe. Ultimately, about 50% of participants fully completed the probes, with a further 20% completing some elements only.
The main problem that this presented was a possible discrepancy in the depth and quantity of data from different participants. As my study consisted of a relatively small number of participants, I was concerned that my analysis would be skewed to give more precedence to the experiences of the individuals who had completed the probes, simply because I had more data about them. I tried to remedy this through extending the interviews with the ‘non-probe’ participants, and using follow-up phone calls to check or add to their set of data. Ultimately, however, as the probes were designed to provide fragments and background, rather than answer key questions, it was still possible to get sufficient data in this way.

**In-depth interviews**

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect the bulk of the qualitative data needed to address the key research questions. Participants participated in one digitally-recorded interview of approximately one to two hours in length. All interviews were one-on-one, with one exception, in which Hannah spontaneously brought her friend Ivy to the interview. This was a gesture of goodwill from Hannah, who knew I was eager for more participants, and I felt it would have seemed impolite to demand a separate interview with Ivy when they were both clearly keen to participate together. I felt this joint interview worked very well, as Hannah and Ivy often created their own rich collaborative dialogue,
expanding on, reaffirming and questioning each other’s ideas. However, I made a point of clarifying some individual points with each woman separately over the phone later, especially regarding issues where I perceived a lack of consensus in their views.

A pilot interview was conducted with one of the volunteers who completed a pilot probe, which allowed me to test the effectiveness of the probe artefacts as prompts and the flow of the interview schedule. In the pilot interview and in the initial fieldwork, a semi-structured interview schedule was used, in which the interview topics were pre-specified and listed, but the sequencing and exact wording of the items were flexible (see Appendix Six). However, as the fieldwork progressed, and the key research themes became more firmly embedded in my own mind, I hardly needed to refer to the schedule, and allowed the interviews to become more reflexive. The interview topics were generally structured chronologically, first discussing when and why participants first decided to study in Australia, moving through their descriptions of student life to their applications for residency, their present life, and finally their plans for the future. Interviews thus typically consisted of participants telling their story, with a few divergences along the way to address particular topics and themes in more detail. I found that, although prompting was sometimes necessary, the prescribed topics would often emerge naturally in the course of conversing about the

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3 In quotes from this interview in the analysis, Hannah is identified as Respondent 1 (R1) and Ivy as Respondent 2 (R2).
student-turned-migrant journey. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note, however, non-directive questioning and active listening are not always sufficient in an ethnographic interview, particularly when the conversation diverges too far from relevance to the research questions, or when further clarification or detail is needed. As such, I did use non-directive ‘steering’ or directive questions when conversations were veering too far from the research themes.

Most interviews were conducted in offices or meeting rooms at RMIT University, but some were, at the request of participants, conducted in the less formal environment of nearby cafes. I generally offered participants something to drink and tried to establish the atmosphere of an informal chat. Many of the participants were around my age, and many had also completed or were completing postgraduate studies. In many cases, I believe I was thus viewed more as a ‘peer’ than as an ‘expert’, which facilitated the informal nature of the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in English. Although all the participants spoke fluent English, for most it was a second language. I tried to remain sensitive to this fact by avoiding colloquial language and idiom, and speaking fairly slowly and clearly, without sounding condescending. Fortunately, my English teaching experience allowed this to happen fairly naturally. All participants were thanked by letter or email within two weeks of the interview.
While social researchers such as Patton (2002: 380) find audio recording to be ‘indispensable’ to accurate data collection, others argue that using recording devices in interviews can be intrusive, and have an undue effect on participant responses (see, for example, Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Bryman 1988; Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1996). However, as Warren et al. (2003: 94) argue, “the use and technology of tape recording in interviews is historically and situationally contextual, with respondents’ reactions to it varying accordingly”. In this case, I found the benefits in audio recording to far surpass any limitations. The digital device that I used was small and silent, and did not require any attention after being briefly tested and switched on. As such, it was fairly unobtrusive. Furthermore, the participants were all familiar with digital technology. Many had even used similar devices in their own work or research, and seemed comfortable with its presence. In fact, a discussion comparing the best recording devices and software sometimes preceded the interview itself. I actually found that note-taking was far more intrusive than the recording device. While I had initially intended to take notes during interviews, particularly in recording non-verbal signals, I realized quickly that as soon as I picked up my pen, the participants’ eyes would swivel nervously or curiously to what I was writing, and they would become distracted. I thus only took notes when I felt it was absolutely necessary. I tried instead to mentally record body language and impressions and write them down in point form after the participant had left.
There was only one occasion in which a participant requested that certain statements be made ‘off the record.’ In this instance, the participant was happy for the recording to continue, but as requested I purged the statements in question from the transcription and did not refer to them at all in the analysis.

**Research diary**

In this project, I attempted to be as reflexive as possible. I wanted an awareness of self as a researcher to permeate the research process, particularly during data collection and analysis. Maintaining a detailed research journal of self-observations allowed me to record and remain aware of my own values, beliefs and biases and the way they influenced what data was collected and how it was interpreted.

The structure of the diary itself was relatively ‘free-form’ and included unstructured notes on my thoughts, feelings, opinions, doubts and self-observations throughout the research process. Each entry was dated and I updated the diary frequently. Detailed entries were written as soon as possible after each interview, while impressions were still fresh, and post-interview diary entries included expansion from any notes I had made during the interview. I also recorded external factors that may have effected my reactions and interpretations on that particular day, if I was tired, or stressed, or particularly enthusiastic. I also noted in the diary any new themes that had emerged that day and any subsequent
changes to the interview schedule, and used it to record notes about or copies of any follow up telephone calls or emails with participants. In terms of its relevance to the analysis, this approach may be closest to what Van Maanen (1988) terms ‘confessionalism’, in which self-examination and recording of the researcher’s reactions are utilised in an attempt to minimise distortions and subjectivity. However, I acknowledge that it is not possible to completely expel subjectivity with this (or any) method. The aim of the diary as an analytical tool was merely to maintain as much critical self-awareness as possible.

However, aside from its critical and analytic function, the diary also functioned as a methodological record and a learning tool. The constructivist paradigm privileges research as a fluid process that can be subject to change, through frequent reflection and re-examination of goals and questions. The process of collection and analysis can thus be non-linear and potentially chaotic, as methodological techniques are tested and readapted throughout. In order to make sense of this ongoing process, and to leave credible record of my choices and adaptations, the diary left a clear ‘research trail.’ It served to record both how the research design evolved over time, and how I developed as a researcher.

**Analysis techniques**

The analysis of the interview data involved three main steps: listening to the recorded data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and coding
the transcripts using NVivo software. Although I had most of the interviews professionally transcribed, I listened to the recordings themselves several times. This served the dual purpose of checking for transcription errors (particularly important in the cases in which participants had strong accents or there had been some background noise) and allowing me to check and make notes on the significance of paralanguage (the non-linguistic parts of speech, or vocal clues) within the interviews. The NVivo coding reflected the emerging themes and questions of the research. I began with a fairly basic set of thematic codes to which I then added new concepts and sub-themes as the analysis progressed, and checked for negative cases. The coded data was linked to memos that developed reflections on the theoretical and methodological issues. Before coding each transcript, I also checked relevant entries in the research diary, and highlighted any significant points. These were added into the NVivo system as memos, so I could continually refer back to them during analysis.

While I began the interview coding at the end of the fieldwork, the analysis of the probe data was ongoing, and continued throughout the different stages of data collection. A preliminary analysis of each probe was made prior to the corresponding interview, in which I made extensive notes and used the probe material to readjust my interview schedule. At this stage I tried not to project a great deal of interpretive meaning into the artefacts, but instead noted the elements that I
wanted to further explore and discuss in the interviews. This also began to build empathetic links before the interview. Small details, such as the fact that a participant liked a certain type of music, or had a cat, became knowledge that positively influenced the level of engagement in the interviews. As more probes and interviews were completed, I began to compare some aspects of different probes, again using notes or by making copies of different elements from the probes and filing them according to different themes or concepts. I kept each original probe with all four elements complete, and I found that, when coding transcripts, it was a good memory trigger and analytic tool to keep the probe materials for that particular participant on hand, allowing me to easily cross-reference different kinds of data.

Ultimately, however, because the probes were used so extensively as tools to prompt communication during the interviews, the two methods were very much integrated. Explanations and discussions of images and words from the probe material are apparent throughout the interview transcripts, making the cross-validation of the data quite holistic and to a certain extent built in to the analysis of the transcripts. As the data grew, I entered the written elements of the probes, such as the log book entries and the postcard text, into the NVivo program, to be coded alongside the interview data. However, the original material was kept and referred to continually during analysis. Even small visual elements, such as the way someone’s handwriting changed, or the doodles and symbols they
drew, all provided tiny pieces of the overall picture of the participants’ experiences.

**Access and sampling**

Access and sampling proved to be one of the biggest challenges of this research. I knew from anecdotal evidence and statistical reports concerning international students and migrant settlement that there were a relatively large number of students-turned-migrants living in Melbourne at the time. However, the challenge lay in how to access this population. There was no single, unified organisation that represented this particular profile of migrant, and due to privacy laws DIMIA could not release contact information of any kind on visa holders in the overseas student sub-category.

It was thus necessary to adopt a multi-pronged approach to recruitment, by targeting various organisations and groups. I placed advertisements for participants in university alumni and staff online newsletters, on notice boards around university campuses, and on the staff message boards of 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. The traditional access technique of finding gate-keepers also proved difficult, once again due to the fact that the population under study was not a unified group or community. As such, the response rates for the
initial recruitment were low. Successive participants were sourced using a snowball sampling technique. I only obtained any contact details once the individual’s express consent had been given for me to obtain this information.

I should also note that although there were some potential candidates in my classes, I did not ask current students to participate in the study due to the power disjuncture inherent in the student/teacher relationship. However, two former students, Hannah and Ivy, did participate in the study. As it had been several years since they had been in my class, and we had kept in touch on a casual basis since then, I felt we had moved on sufficiently from the student/teacher dynamic.

The following table displays the participants and some of their significant demographic characteristics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>FAMILY STATUS</th>
<th>CURRENT CAREER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caryn</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Postgraduate Student (Education Leadership &amp; Management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devendra</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Postgraduate Student (Business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayesh</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>M-3 children</td>
<td>Academic (Geosciences)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 For a more detailed table of participant characteristics, including their qualifications, location of their immediate families, membership statuses and intentions, see Appendix One.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>M +1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hualing</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>M+1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolene</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>DF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueng</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>USA via NZ</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahti</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>DF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shui</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>M+ expecting 1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunee</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>M+2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takahiro</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariq</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While obtaining a sample perfectly balanced by gender and nationality was simply not possible in the context of the sourcing difficulties, I did manage to find a good range of source countries (13 in total) and an approximately equal number of males and females (11 females and nine males). About three quarters of the participants were from Asian or South Asian source countries, which is broadly reflective of the wider population of international students in Australia. In addition, seven of the top 10 source countries for international students were present in the sample (Brazil, Indonesia and Korea were not present). In essence, however, 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, the population is more diverse than is often assumed, and that individuals from Europe and North and South America also go through the student-turned-migrant experience.

Most participants were in their late twenties to early thirties, slightly older than most university graduates in Australia. This was because many of the participants were pursuing or had pursued postgraduate studies in Australia, and also because very few had arrived in Australia as high school graduates. Several had already completed a degree or been in the workforce for a number of years before arrival. As Australia does not
recognise many foreign qualifications, many students who already held a Bachelor’s degree from their home country had to complete an Australian Bachelor’s degree before they could apply for migration or postgraduate study.

Of the sample, eight were single at the time of the interviews, while 12 were married or co-habiting in a de facto relationship. Of these 12 who were partnered, five had or were expecting children. Shui, Rahti and Jaime had partners or spouses who were Australian nationals, while Miguel’s partner was an international student living in Australia. Tariq, Sunee, Madeleine, Gayesh and Penny had arrived in Australia with their spouse or partner, and in Sunee and Gayesh’s case, also with their children. Hannah and Hualing had both left their husbands and children back home. Ivy and Tina had both become engaged long distance, and had returned briefly to China to marry. These four women were hoping that their spouses and children could one day join them in Australia.

There is also a disproportionate number of individuals in the sample who were postgraduate students or academics. This is due to several factors. Firstly, my own networks were largely university based. Secondly, despite my willingness to set up interviews after hours and on weekends, professionals had less flexible schedules than postgraduates and academics, who could quite easily meet me on campus for interviews.
Furthermore, I think in general fellow postgraduates and academics were more sympathetic to my plight as a research student, and thus more likely to volunteer.

The primary goal of this research was to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the specific individuals studied. In sampling, I have aimed to find a diversity of contexts and experiences, rather than a sample that can be deemed representative of the population as a whole.

**The Art and Politics of Interpretation and Evaluation**

There is a significant amount of debate surrounding what constitutes good practice in qualitative research. While some authors cite the use of traditional positivist and post-positivist criteria such as validity, reliability and objectivity to evaluate qualitative inquiry, others, such as Hammersley (1995), maintain that qualitative works require their own set of evaluative criteria. Various authors have created various schemata to represent good practice in qualitative evaluation, which Patton (2002) summarises into four categories: social construction and constructivist criteria; artistic and evocative criteria; critical change criteria; and evaluation standards and practices. In terms of positioning this research within this debate, I would fundamentally agree with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003: 420) assertion that, “the criteria for evaluating research are now relative”. The value of the research is inherent in the boundaries
and goals of its own research design, and the analysis of the data should reflect the aims of the individual project and researcher.

As such, in interpreting and presenting my data, it was necessary to adopt a practice framework that was congruent with my aim of providing a detailed analytic ‘snapshot’ of the lives of students-turned-migrants in Australia, and that reflected the subjectivist epistemology and relativist ontology of the constructivist paradigm. In particular, I placed the relativist concepts of “the value of plurality, multiplicity, the acceptance and celebration of difference” (Smith and Deemer 2003: 454) at the forefront of the interpretive practice. This is in accordance with Patton’s (2002: 268) assertion that particularity (doing justice to the integrity of unique cases) is one of the evaluative criteria for constructivist research. Throughout the interpretation of the data, therefore, I have not sought to dismiss divergent responses as insignificant outliers, instead exploring why divergent perspectives exist and weaving this into the overall exploration of the theme. Throughout the analysis, experiences and perspectives that diverge from the norm will be acknowledged and explored, rather than brushed aside.

Another important technique in the interpretation and presentation of this work is the traditional ethnographic method of using verbatim quotations quite extensively. Verbatim quotations undoubtedly “contain surface and deep imbedded meanings about the person’s life”
(Fetterman 1998: 124), and give the reader vital insight into the raw data. I have not altered quotes significantly. Although at times they have been condensed for readability, I have not edited out grammatical errors or paralanguage, as I wanted the distinct speech patterns and voices of each participant to be apparent in the presentation of the research. I have also attributed each quote specifically to the participant in question, allowing the ‘multiple realities’ of each individual narrative to be further present in the text.

Another influence on my mode of interpretation is Richardson’s (2003) work on writing as a mode of inquiry. Rather than viewing ‘writing up’ as a separate phase, distinct from the analysis, I instead framed the writing process as a research practice that included discovery and analysis. I wrote extensively while fieldwork was still underway, both in the research diary and in preliminary analytic drafts that were then edited, built on or discarded as the data grew. Adopting Richardson’s approach also required a close reflexive engagement with language, in which I analysed my ‘wording of the world’ closely (Rose 1992). This was particularly pertinent in the theoretical context of transnationalism as a broad field of scholarship that employs a wide variety of metaphors to describe and analyse social realities. Sociological terms and metaphors used in this research were thus chosen purposefully and cautiously, with the acknowledgement that terms have multiple meanings and
inferences. Most of the definitional issues and reflection on the choice of language has been discussed in Chapter Two.

The inclusion of reflections from the research diary is also a significant part of framing the interpretation and presentation in a constructivist way. However, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 242) point out, if this reflection is too dominant in the study, “it easily slips into self-absorption and leaves limited room for other people’s views- which are only interesting in so far as they affect the author.” The reflections in the research diary were thus an important point of cross-reference during interpretation. However, my own views and self-reflections were a tool for checking credibility, and I did not want them to dominate or obscure the views and perspectives of the participants, which were the true focus of the project. I have thus quoted from the diary fairly sparingly in the analysis, although I referred to it quite often during the writing process.

**Challenges and Limitations**

Several factors limited the study’s design and the ultimate conclusions that were able to be drawn. Firstly, although this study is based around the lived experience of a process over time (the student-turned-migrant journey), the research was constrained by time and could not be longitudinal. I acknowledge that the attitudes and opinions of participants are likely to change over time, and that a longitudinal study may better address the changes and the ongoing processes of
migration, and would give a better depth of understanding about how their transnationality develops. In contrast, this study aims only to provide an analysis of the current situation of each participant.

In addition, elements of the study are exploratory, because little previous qualitative research has been done with this specific group. This naturally limits the depth of understanding that can be reached and breadth of topics that can be addressed. I hope, however, that this study will be able to form a basis for further, deeper study of the themes that emerge, and provide pertinent background information for researchers hoping to probe or test the emergent issues and conclusions further.

Furthermore, some strategic compromises in the research were made along the way. These have been discussed above, including the difficulties of obtaining a balanced sample and the compromise of making the probes optional rather than compulsory. While every effort was made to ensure that these compromises did not unduly affect the research, they do represent a divergence from the initial design, and as such, they have been disclosed and acknowledged.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, 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 the novel method of
probe research with more traditional strategies, many of which have
been borrowed from the field of ethnography. In-depth, semi-structured
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.
Analysis Part One: Acquiring Memberships

Chapter Five: Residency Decisions and Processes

“The essence of the state’s sovereignty (is) not the monopoly to coerce and rule, but the monopoly to decide” (Schmitt 1985: 13).

Introduction

As has been established in the introduction in Chapter One, student-switching policies are the pathway through which students-turned-migrants gain permanent residency, and thus make the shift from temporary student to permanent migrant. Despite the fact that they may have already been living in Australia for a number of years, the acquisition of PR constitutes the formal right to pursue more than a transient relationship with the nation. Using Hammar’s (1990) framework, this is the movement from the first gate of the regulation of entrance, into the second gate of the regulation of residency or denizenship. Whether or not becoming a denizen actually develops into permanent settlement in the traditional sense depends on the individual migrant. However, applying for and gaining PR is a significant moment in the student-turned-migrant experience, and in this chapter I will examine several aspects of this process.
The main focus of this chapter is on the actual process of membership acquisition, rather than decision-making. However, in order to provide some context concerning individuals’ choices, and to introduce the participants and their motivations, in the first section I will briefly contextualise how the students-turned-migrants in the sample made the decision to stay in Australia, and in particular what motivated them to apply for residency. This involves dividing the sample into two groups: those who had intentions to apply for PR before arriving in Australia, and those who decided to apply during their study. This analysis will reveal that student-turned-migrant decision-making is perhaps more complex than the extant literature suggests, and that an interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic personal, social, economic and political factors influence students’ decisions to stay. In the second section, which constitutes the main focus of the chapter, I will examine in more detail how participants experienced the process of acquiring residency, and how the processes of application impacted on both their social positioning within Australia, and on their transnational connections. This second section will build on the concepts outlined in Chapter Two, specifically on how the regulation of mobility impacts directly on individual social experience, drawing on notions of governmentality to describe interactions between the individual migrant and the state as gatekeeper.

**PR Intentions and Motivations**
Although other research samples point more strongly to the possibility of residency as a key motivation to commence study in Australia (Baas 2006), less than half of my participants had firm intentions to pursue residency when they first arrived on student visas. Of the 20 participants studied here, 11 had no intentions to pursue residency when they first arrived in Australia, and were planning to return home on the completion of their studies. Generally, these participants were not aware of student switching policies at the time of their arrival. A further two participants were aware of the option to stay, but not yet certain whether they would pursue it. The remaining seven participants had reasonably firm intentions to pursue migration when they first arrived. Hazen and Alberts (2005) rightly note that international students are uniquely placed among professional migrants, because they have already experienced living in the country long-term before having to make decisions about migration. Even the participants in the sample who had intentions to migrate from the start did not have to make any formal commitment until after they had lived onshore for several years on their student visa. Hazen and Alberts (2005) also describe the paradox in this migration pathway: while students-turned-migrants have the advantage of being familiar with the host society and having established social connections there, this can tend to complicate, rather than simplify, the decision to stay or return. They must carefully weigh up their connections, obligations and desires in the context of two societies, and as such, the
decision to apply for PR is made within the framework of transnational consciousness.

In conceptualising student-turned-migrant decision-making, two bodies of literature are significant. Firstly, the literature that deals with the decision-making of international students, in terms of why they choose to study overseas, and secondly, the literature that deals with migrant decision-making. Student desires to study overseas are often framed in terms of the accumulation of social and cultural capital (Ong 1999; Waters 2006), whereby the accumulation of a Western degree becomes a status marker and a means for social and professional mobility. The literature on migrant decision-making, in contrast, often denotes sets of push and pull factors to do with economic and social conditions in the sending and receiving countries. However, the decision-making of the participants in this study were far more complex than this literature suggests. There was a degree of strategic thinking present, particularly for the students-turned-migrants who did have prior intentions to apply for PR. However, as their time in Australia progressed, strategies became muddied by complex sets of often competing professional and personal desires. Strategic frameworks of decision-making have often failed to address how decision-making is contingent on “people’s subjectivities and the riven and shifting nature of the subject” (Raghuram 2008: 20). In my participants’ narratives, “the impulsive, the chaotic, the contingent, the conditional, the coercive”(20) blended with instrumental thinking to
create complex webs of factors that influenced decisions to stay, with intentions and motivations often transforming over time. The following table summarises the key pull and push factors identified in the interview data. However, the factors influencing decision-making varied considerably in each individual case, and in the context of further research, are thus likely to be fairly specific to specific samples of student-turned-migrants. What this table shows is that motivations can be quite multi-faceted, and that the social and cultural context of the individual migrant will be quite significant in determining which factors will be of most importance. The ensuing analysis will tease out the nature of these factors in the context of two groups of participants: those who had firm intentions to pursue PR upon arrival in Australia, and those who did not.
Table 2. Factors influencing student-turned-migrant residency decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PUSH FACTORS</th>
<th>PULL FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLITICAL</strong></td>
<td>Political insecurity or instability in source country</td>
<td>Political stability and preferred political atmosphere in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problematic relationships with family in the source country</td>
<td>Cultural preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling of ‘not belonging’/not conforming to source culture or society</td>
<td>Lifestyle factors (e.g., less poverty, pollution, corruption, crime, overcrowding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of peers (ubiquitousness of PR pathway)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships with Australian residents or other international students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acculturation of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL/INTERPERSONAL</strong></td>
<td>Economic instability or poor quality of life in the source country</td>
<td>Desire for Western work experience/skills accumulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic instability or poor quality of life in the source country</td>
<td>Long-term family migration strategies (i.e., future opportunities for spouses, siblings or children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of job opportunities or good salaries in the home country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PUSH FACTORS: Factors that push students to migrate; PULL FACTORS: Factors that pull students to migrate.
Participants with firm prior intentions to stay

Of the participants who did have firm intentions to pursue migration, the reasons for choosing to come to Australia were much less to do with the quality of education or the courses on offer, but rather to do with what the Australian lifestyle could offer them in the longer term. Madeleine’s narrative, for example, revealed the complex interplay of professional, personal and social factors that she and her partner, Anaïs, negotiated when initially deciding to come to Australia from France:

Um, personal reason, because I really liked the country, and I showed the country to Anaïs she also really liked it (...) then there is a professional reason too, which Anaïs was done with her PhD, and she had to do a post-doc overseas. So we had many options, almost any country. (...) The other options were well, Italy, which was slightly too conservative at the time, um northern countries, there was Sweden, um I didn’t speak the language, and nor does Anaïs, so that one was wiped off, and then there was America, which is the obvious one that everyone wanted to go to, and she just didn’t want to, because of the quality of life. So Australia seemed to be the right compromise (...). We also wanted to have space between us and our families, me because my family is very possessive, Anaïs because hers is pretty aggressive, because when she came out people didn’t like it.

While Madeleine and Anaïs were prompted to leave France by the requirements of Anaïs’s career, a complex interplay of professional and social factors, both strategic and subjective, influenced their choice of
country. These included Madeleine’s prior favourable impressions of the country, the elimination of other countries due to linguistic and social factors, and family tensions which created desires to travel far from Europe. Through this example, we can see that student-turned-migrant decision-making is often multi-faceted. Furthermore, this also demonstrates that, as Bretell (2000) and Portes (1997) note, family, friends and partners can have a strong influence, both positive and negative, on decision-making processes.

Another significant theme amongst those who did have prior intentions to migrate was the desire for a better life, particularly in terms of moving from a developing or unstable region to an affluent Western nation:

I came ’cause I knew life would be a lot better. Hell of a lot better, yeah. And I was fortunate enough to be educated to know that there’s places where things are better. I had been to cities where things work better and run efficiently. It’s a social thing. Venezuela is - is known for its corruption and its crime and the violence and all - all the negative factors of society (Rafael).

It’s common in Bangladesh. I think because life is easier, because the situation there is getting worse, if you can afford to go overseas, you go. A lot of my friends left also. There were four of us together on the plane (Tariq).

It’s too stressful. It’s like if you want to go in business it’s like you need to know a lot of politicians, police, liars, any trouble -they need to have some people - so many troubles down there and all this stuff. (...) Everywhere. Even you need to
get a passport you need to bribe. I don’t want to have to do business like that.

No way. (...) I just hate those things. Really I hate those things (Devendra).

For these participants, a better quality of life seemed to be a primary incentive both of coming to Australia as a student and of applying for residency. Rafael had parents in the diplomatic core, and had thus spent his childhood and adolescence in Canada, Mexico, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia and Germany. Like many other participants who had travelled before coming to Australia, this previous mobility revealed the possibilities of different and better places, where life and work would be easier, because of a lack of poverty, corruption and crime. Participant responses here were not necessarily connected to economic incentives such as better job opportunities or higher earning capacity, but rather to issues of social infrastructure and quality of life. In fact, some participants noted that, in terms of relative income, they would be in a stronger economic position if they remained in the home country. This was mostly due to two factors. Firstly, the higher cost of living in Australia, and secondly, the fact that their qualifications and work experience were not as highly valued in Australia, meaning many participants had to start career-building from scratch. For these students-turned-migrants, the quality of life afforded by a stable, ordered society trumped direct economic benefits. This is in significant contrast to the students studied by Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006), for whom economic and professional incentives encouraged them to stay in the US, while social factors tended to draw them back to their home countries.
There were several participants, like Madeleine, who had prior exposure to Australia as tourists, which influenced their intentions to use study as a migration pathway. Takahiro, for example, was attracted to Australia by initial visits as a backpacker, as well as exposure to Australian culture while at university in Japan. Ultimately, Takahiro’s attraction to Australia was not the desire to accumulate capital through foreign education, but rather the cultural appeal of the country:

It was actually a long time ago, 1993, yeah when I was studying at university in Japan. I was studying foreign cultures, especially American, and I was originally interested in what Western cultures, especially the music. And I came across friends from Australia when I was in Japan, because our university had an exchange program. And in ’94 I came here for the first time as a backpacker, using the working holiday visa and I travelled around. Yeah I really liked Australia, freedom, compared with Japan’s strong conformity in society.

Specifically, Takahiro was drawn to Australia by his interest in Western popular culture, particularly music, and also by what he perceived as a different set of social values: Australian individualism in contrast to Japanese conformism. He is perhaps best categorised in Fujita’s (2006) terms as a ‘cultural migrant’, as his decision to study and then apply for residency in Australia was primarily motivated by the desire to stay on after the end of his working holiday visa, so that he could further pursue cultural interests and experiences.
Several of the participants who had prior intentions to apply for PR were also motivated strongly by subjective reasons, often tied to a sense of not belonging or feeling unhappy in the home society. In Takahiro’s case, alongside the cultural pull of the West, was the fact that he had always felt like an outsider in his family and in Japan:

I’ve been always a black sheep in the family. Japan everybody is expected to be in the same shell, I couldn’t fit. But here like as everywhere there’s people from all over the world, all different backgrounds.

For participants like Shui and Rafael, this concept of not-belonging was intensified by prior experiences overseas. Shui, originally from Malaysia, was a ‘serial international student’ who had completed her undergraduate degree in Canada and her Masters degree in the United Kingdom. Although she had returned to Malaysia for 18 months to work, she never felt that she could completely assimilate back into the social and professional culture. Thus, when she decided to do her PhD, she knew immediately that she would once again go overseas. She chose Melbourne after visiting family who were studying there, and this time had the firm intention of staying on after completing her Doctorate. Similarly, Rafael, although nominally Venezuelan, had spent most of his formative years in various other countries as a ‘third culture kid’. When his family eventually returned to Venezuela, he felt social and culturally disconnected, and, like Shui, was eager to live overseas again:

I never really got along, I never really got along with the people that I met, and never really got along with the general culture of - of the place. ‘Cause I didn’t
grow up in - in Venezuela, so I didn’t quite get along with the people. (...) And yeah, well, that created different problems, because people expected me to behave like they did. 'Cause they knew I was Venezuelan, and eventually people would know, or my family or friends knew that I was Venezuelan, but I certainly didn’t behave like one or speak like one.

It is also worth noting that only two of these participants who had prior intentions to stay specifically chose an undergraduate course based on the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL).\textsuperscript{5} Ivy had done a degree in Marketing in China, but enrolled in a Bachelors of Accounting in Australia because she knew it would provide migration points. Takahiro struggled through a hairdressing course, one of the cheapest and shortest courses available that would boost his chances of gaining residency. The rest of the participants who had prior intentions to apply for PR were less strategic in terms of choosing their first course based solely on the migration points it would provide, although some participants cited that extra points were an incentive to go on to postgraduate studies. To borrow from Jackling’s (2007) categorisations of course choice, most chose their course of study for intrinsic reasons such as personal interest, or extrinsic reasons such as good opportunities and salaries. Many had also studied or worked professionally before

\textsuperscript{5} The Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) lists those occupations and specialisations identified by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) that are in short supply. Applicants for permanent residency who nominate occupations on the list receive extra points in the migration points test. The MODL can change up to twice a year in accord with labour market changes.
coming to Australia, so their study choices were often based in an industry or field they had chosen before deciding to go overseas.

**Participants without firm prior intentions to stay**

Most of these participants arrived in Australia with little knowledge of their options for extending their stay after study. While two were aware of the options, they were undecided on arrival as to whether they would return after graduation. However, several factors transformed these participants’ intentions over time, and led them to consider PR. Most decided to apply for residency towards the end of their period of study, and became aware of the option and the processes of applying through peers at university. Hannah’s response was quite typical of this group:

I:  Were you thinking about PR when you first planned to come to Australia?

R1:  No. For me, 100% no. Actually I could apply PR in China you know, but when they told me I could apply for PR in China, I said. No, I don’t need it; I only go there for study, when I finish study I’ll go back immediately. But when I stay here longer and longer, you know, and people study accounting here and most of them just want to live here. So just when I graduated, I think, maybe PR is better.

I:  And why did you change your mind? What was it that made you start thinking that you wanted to get PR?

R1:  Ah, I’m not very sure, just like my classmates and my friends always said it’s better for you future. Especially you have a son, it’s better for his future. Yeah, at first I don’t know exactly what kind of benefits it would
be you know? I just say, ok, I have a choice. If I can get it, I’ll just get it.
Like that. But now, I think it’s better. I want to live here longer, and now I
have some knowledge of Australian policy, and the environment here, I
think it’s better.

Many participants, like Hannah, were influenced by their peers, often
initially learning about student switching policies and residency
opportunities from other international students. This perhaps extends
Jackling’s (2007) assertions that peers can have a significant impact on
international students’ study choices, by establishing that they can also
impact on subsequent migration decisions. It also very much
corroborates with Baas’s (2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2007) findings, discussed in
Chapter Three, that posit a strong community of international students,
within which discourses of migration are intrinsic to social interactions.

Furthermore, Hannah’s narrative also suggests that long-term strategies
for family mobility were important, with residency in Australia signifying
future options for the participant’s family members. Hein and Plesch
(2008), who studied the return decisions of students from developing
countries in Germany, point out that people are likely to want to remain
close to spouses and children. While this was certainly true, some
participants, such as Hannah and Hualing, saw a separation from their
spouses and children as ultimately benefiting the family unit in the long-
term. In this instance, the psychological cost (Hein and Plesch 2008) of
being separated from family was weighed up against future advantages
for the family as a whole. For these participants, securing residency and then possibly citizenship meant that their children could have increased options for mobility and education in the future. Furthermore, participants who had arrived with their children, such as Sunee and Gayesh, often preferred to stay in Australia in order to avoid uprooting their children, who had largely settled into the host country while their parent was completing their study:

So that's how I decide, yeah, okay, if this is best for me, my husband can keep in what he like doing and my children they don't need to adjust themselves, they're here already since they were a toddler, so they don't need to adjust things, they can keep doing, you know, what they enjoy doing already. Yeah. And for me, I mean, it doesn't matter, I mean, I'm not fussy, you know, anything, anything (Sunee).

Both the presence and absence of spouses and children in Australia added complexity to decision-making, as the individual had to negotiate their own transnational desires and goals alongside the desires and goals of their partners and children. In some cases, gaining PR became part of a long-term family migration strategy, in which sustained periods of separation were the cost of building a mobile future for the family as a whole. In contexts where the family was present however, the integration of the children into the host community had to be considered as a reason not to return.
In some cases, the decision to apply for residency was also based on fears about political instability in source countries. When they first applied for residency, both Gayesh and Caryn were not planning to live permanently in Australia. However, Caryn’s parents were worried about the effects of political tensions between Taiwan and China, while Gayesh was concerned about the increasing civil instability in Sri Lanka:

I finished my PhD in 2002, and by that time what happened I was very much used to here and then more particularly, that things are not good in Sri Lanka because things - because of the whole war and everything going on there in the North Eastern part. So what I decide, and I will apply for permanent residency and get a chance so then I will be having a sort of insurance, so if I - at that time I was a bit determined to go back and I will get the permanent residency as a sort of insurance and if something goes wrong I will be able to come back rather than stuck in - the whole sort of bad things. Security, yeah, that’s how it started actually.

For these participants, permanent residency was a kind of ‘insurance policy’, a back-up option in case conditions continued to deteriorate at home. Notably, PR here would not necessarily translate into permanent settlement, but rather operated as a safety net. These findings largely support international literature which reveals that return decisions are not only based on personal factors, but also the political and economic situation in the country of origin (Bartsberg 1995; Hein and Plesch 2008). This literature also supports the fact that these issues are more prominent
for students coming from the developing world or politically unstable areas.

Several other participants similarly felt that applying for residency did not necessarily signify a commitment to live permanently in Australia. They rather saw it as a chance to extend their stay beyond graduation, gain valuable work experience, and continue to develop their language skills. Essentially, it was a chance to gain more social and cultural capital on top of their degree. These participants saw PR as an avenue to spend time in Australia in which they could build their skills as professionals, and felt these skills would be an asset to their employability and careers when they eventually returned to home:

I just wasn’t ready to go back and I wanted to improve my English because I realised it wasn’t enough at the time, and I wanted to get some experience, overseas experience in education. So just by staying, by staying another six months I sort of started the process for immigration for, yeah, to get the resident visa, and therefore the professional job, be able to apply for a professional job. (...) I’ve got to prepare myself better, because if you really can speak English and if you really can work let’s say in an international school you get a better - much better money in Colombia (Miguel).

I didn’t know anything about PR, until I was in my final semester of my Master. People talked about PR among the students. (...) But to be honest with you, at that time I wasn’t very interested in living in Australia. I just – my intention was to study and go back to Thailand to live and work there. (...) The points that changed my mind, was the fact that I found about the PR thing, and then I
worked closely with the Australian Embassy at that time as well. (...) They encourage me. They said, “Nueng, why don’t you try to apply for the PR, if you are into the academic work, sort of work. Because the nature of your academic work will be very fantastic, if you get some work experience (...) if you get work with the university in Australia, in the future you can pursue any other works that you want to do.” So I said for – for career sake - “It worth trying.” So I lodged application (Nueng).

The concept of international education as the accumulation of social and cultural capital is well established in the literature (Ong 1999; Waters 2006). In the student-turned-migrant context, we can see that permanent residency can become another capital add-on, with the assumption that if a foreign degree provides better professional opportunities, then a foreign degree combined with foreign work experience provides even more. Many participants saw permanent residency as a way to maximise on their intellectual capital and increase their chances for career advancement as globalised knowledge workers.

For yet another group of participants, professional, political and economic reasons were far less important than personal factors in their decision to stay on in Australia and apply for PR. The influence of family on decision-making was particularly significant. This was one area in which some contradictions were apparent, both between different studies in the extant literature, and between the literature and my own
findings. For example, Jackling (2007) and Ong (1999) suggest that both international education itself, and subsequent decisions to apply for residency, are often linked to satisfying parental preferences for social mobility. In turn research by Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006) distinctly points to family as a strong factor in drawing students back to the country of origin. While both these situations were apparent in the sample for this research, several participants actually desired distance from their families, or defied the wishes of parents by staying on after graduation:

And I first wanted to stay here because I wasn’t getting along - the first time I thought I wanted to stay was about four years ago, but I wasn’t getting along with my mum. We were fighting really, really bad, and I didn’t want to go home to Penang, ’cause of that. They wanted me to go back and work and I just wasn’t ready. So um, so my first decision to stay here was because I didn’t want to go home to my mother. Now my decision to stay here is because - this is best for me now (Rahti).

Another personal factor that is surprisingly neglected in the literature was the establishment of relationships with Australian residents, or with other international students in Australia. While Hein and Plesch (2008) and Hazen and Alberts (2006) note that strong social connections within the host society increase the likelihood of staying, they do not directly address the significance of romantic relationships established within the host society. Considering the lack of attention this has gained in the literature, this was quite significant within the sample, with six of the
twenty participants citing a romantic relationship with an Australian resident or fellow international student as a factor in their decision to stay. This again reiterates the fact that students-turned-migrants, although they often arrive in Australia as individuals, have to negotiate the claims and obligations of various local and transnational social relationships in their decision-making.

From this brief introduction to student-turned-migrant decision-making and motivations, we can see the diversity of ways in which the student-turned-migrant experience is framed. For some participants, studying in Australia was, from the beginning, an explicit pathway to migration. However, economic or professional interests were not always the motivations behind undertaking this pathway, with complex desires to escape difficult political or personal situations in the home country emerging strongly as a factor. For a larger group, however, the decision to apply for PR was something that happened along the way, while they were studying. These participants were strongly influenced by the ‘discourse of PR’ present in their peer group, their desires to be present or absent from family members, and their strategies for future mobility and opportunity for both themselves and their families.

We can see from this introductory analysis the diverse contexts and desires of the sample, who could variously be conceived of as cultural migrants, multiple migrants, economic migrants, or political migrants.
Some were motivated mostly by their own desires and goals, while others negotiated their decisions in the context of the desires and goals of their families and partners. Their motivations were often a complex blending of the strategic and the subjective, and were often mutable over time. This exploration of decision-making has set the scene for what is to come in the rest of the analysis: an exploration of the complexity of negotiating transnationality in the student-turned-migrant experience.

**Residency Processes**

The preceding section has established how students decide to become residents, and I will now closely examine the process of obtaining residency. When I originally designed the proposal for this research, I did not anticipate the extent to which the actual process of residency application would loom large in participants’ migration narratives. However, it soon became apparent that this process was in most cases a truly pivotal moment. Even before the interviews, the probe data hinted strongly at the significance of the residency process in participants’ narratives. Participants were asked, for example, to note a highly significant moment in their time in Australia, and the granting of PR was cited far more often than other key events such as arriving in Australia or graduating from university. One postcard in the probe packages also asked participants how they felt when they received PR. There was a great deal of emotion behind the answers to this question, and the
responses also alluded to the drawn out and stressful nature of the process:

...like I deserved to get it! About time!!! (Rahti).

....relieved…it was a long and frustrating process (Penny).

...incredibly relieved. I was relieved of the fear of having to leave Australia, my life here -friends, home, work (Jolene).

In the interviews, participants also spent a great deal of time relaying their experiences with the application process: their ongoing and frustrating encounters with DIMIA, the stress of waiting for their applications to be processed, and the way their lives became structured around awaiting this confirmation or rejection of their membership. The lack of literature that reflected these stories led me to consider how actual encounters with the immigration regime constitute the untold part of migration narratives, particularly Australian ones. In this section, I am therefore interested in addressing how individuals experience the bureaucratic processes of application, in that the granting or denying of visas involves “the interface between government and individual body” (Salter 2006: 167). I will explore how individuals’ interactions with governmentality (the power relations with the state as gatekeeper) have impacted on their experiences.
As discussed in Chapter Two, Urry’s (2000) ‘new rules’ for mobile theorising emphasise the role of the state in regulating mobilities, and the diverse consequences of this regulation. He notes how social regulation in modernity is enacted by increased monitoring and surveillance, and how the states regulative functions are made possible by the ability to store, access and audit vast amounts of data through computer systems. However, Urry’s (2000: 189) theorisations are very broad, with a macro-political focus on the changing nature of the state’s control of internal and external flows of capital, people, information and objects. In contrast, I would like to examine one micro aspect of the regulation of mobility, by focusing specifically on the entrance of students-turned-migrants into membership of the state as permanent residents. This mobility encompasses the movement of individuals from a temporary to a permanent status, into the ‘second gate’ of belonging (Hammar 1990), where their status as denizens is confirmed.

In this section, I wish to focus on how this shift from transience to permanence is regulated by the state, and how this regulation impacts on individuals’ social relations, including their transnational connections. I will thus first briefly describe the nature of the application process, and what is required by DIMIA for international students to become migrants. I will also briefly address the small amount of literature that deals with migrant encounters with the immigration regime. I will then analyse the migrants’ narratives on two levels. Firstly, I will provide an analysis of the
participants’ impressions of, attitudes towards, and experiences with the institutional regime, embodied by DIMIA and its officers. Secondly, I will analyse how the process of acquiring residency impacted on their attitudes to Australia, their social relations within Australia, and their transnational connections.

The application process

Depending on their particular circumstances and visa subclass, potential students-turned-migrants must meet several requirements in order to lodge their application for PR. They must first meet the educational requirements for their Australian tertiary qualification. They may also have to apply to a relevant assessing authority for a skills assessment of their nominated occupation, or sit an English test. All applicants and secondary applicants such as partners and dependants must undergo health examinations at Health Services Australia, and apply to the Australian Federal Police for a criminal records check if they are over 16 years of age. The fees charged for the visa application are usually about $AU2000, but can more than double for each additional dependent. Health checks, police checks and the translation of documents into English are additional costs that the applicant must pay separately. At various times during processing, applicants may be asked to provide additional information, or attend interviews at DIMIA. The processing of the application can take between six and twelve months.
As such, acquiring residency involves frequent and sustained interactions with the mechanisms of regulatory bodies. Salter (2006: 170) asserts that the bordering processes that regulate entrance into a body politic are “constituted by the decision to include/exclude... a dialogue between body and body politic requiring the confession of all manner of bodily, economic and social information”. While Salter is referring to the process of entering a country from an outside territory, it is apparent that the process of internally applying to shift one’s status from temporary to permanent similarly constitutes a bordering process. International students who apply for PR are essentially requesting that they be allowed to re-enter the body politic as partial members (denizens) rather than sojourners. This involves the administrative bodies of the sovereign state configuring the mobile subject “in terms of health, wealth, labor/leisure and risk...the visa application...attempts to render the position of the applicant in terms of state, educational, health and police institutions” (Salter 2006: 176). Throughout the following analysis, I shall analyse how this dialogue is played out from the perspective of the migrants, and examine how the process impacts on their social relations locally and transnationally.

**Literature on the regulation of residency and belonging**

As has been established in Chapters Two and Three, transnational literature can be inclined to marginalise the political and legal constraints on human mobility (Mountz et al. 2002; Wright 2004). While a
great many of these constraints originate from the nation-state’s regulation of its borders through immigration policy, there is very scare empirical research into how potential migrants actually interact with the immigration regime of the source country, and how the negotiation of these bureaucratic hurdles to belonging actually impact on the migrant experience. There are two key divisions in the extant literature that need to be addressed. First of all, migration literature in general tends to be divided in that research either explores policy and legislation or lived experiences, but seldom looks at the interconnections between the two, neither how migrants interact with bureaucracy nor what impact the boundaries placed upon them by the regime have on their social experiences. Secondly, empirical transnational migration literature is also, as previously discussed in Chapter Three, largely divided into the two class extremes of mobile agents: the disenfranchised and undocumented, or the globetrotting professional elites. In terms of the significance of governmentality, these two bodies of literature tend to reveal opposite trends. Literature that concerns the mobile elites tends to assume that, with their cache of social and cultural capital, they are largely able to circumvent and manipulate regulatory powers (Bauman 1998; Burawoy et al. 2000; Sklair 2001). In contrast, the literature that deals with asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants reveals quite the opposite: the processes of interaction with the mobility regime are revealed as high stakes, high risk encounters, in which the migrant is almost wholly subject to the power of the state, and their decision to
include or exclude (Mountz et al. 2002; Johnston 2008). As discussed in Chapter Three, this thesis therefore attempts to explore some of the middle ground between these two extremes, in exploring the regulation of the mobility of a group of migrants who fall in between these two categories.

In the student-turned-migrant literature, only Pang and Appleton (2004) address the issue of regulation and state power, and only in a minimal context. However, their participants’ responses certainly support my own findings, as they describe the immigration process as “long, difficult and stressful” and involving “many difficulties and hardships, including financial, emotional, social and academic” (Pang and Appleton 2004: 500). The actual logistical process of applying for residency was similarly identified by all participants in my study as a significant and often negative aspect of their time in Australia. As the subsequent analysis will show, although the time spent in applying for PR and waiting for acceptance was generally only a small portion of the total time individuals had spent in the country, it was a pivotal moment in their narratives, and was uniformly characterised by uncertainty, instability, stress and fear.

In the wider migration literature, Mountz et al. (2002) provide one of the most comprehensive analyses of how governmentality actually impacts of the lived experiences of migrants. Looking at Salvadoran asylum
applicants in the United States, this study addresses how immigration laws and practices shape a renegotiation of applicants’ identities. While the subjects of my research differ from those of Mountz et al. (2002) in terms of both their visa status (international student as opposed to asylum seeker) and their subsequent social positioning and resources available to them, my approach is very similar, in that I am attempting to frame migrant experiences in terms of state power, and to address “the workings of government and the effects they produce” (Mountz et al. 2002: 339) for individual visa applicants. However, Mountz et al. (2002) tend to focus their analysis on the effects on identity formation, while I will attempt to look more closely at the effects on local and transnational social connections, and on applicants’ perceptions of the role and power of the state institutions to which they are subject.

Johnston (2008) also foregrounds migrant interactions with the state in her discourse analysis of visa interviews for permanent residency in the United States. She notes the high emotion on the part of applicants, the perceived opaqueness of the bureaucratic process, and the vast power differentials between the migrant and the immigration officer as gatekeeper. However, Johnston (2008) is primarily interested in the interactions between gatekeepers and applicants within the singular event of the final face-to-face interview. She does not explore how the broader process of application affects migrants, or how the uncertainty and strain of the process impacts on their wider social experience.
Perceptions of and experiences with the immigration regime

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the experiences of my participants while at university reflected those described by Baas (2005, 2006), in that talking about the immigration regime with their peers became an intrinsic part of their university experience. As Jaime stated, PR is the ‘holy grail’ for many international students, and as such they very quickly become expert in DIMIA’s bureaucratic procedures and rhetoric. Students keep up to date with policy changes, particularly changes to the points test and the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL), and share stories and advice about how to apply. The awareness that their plans are so closely intertwined with the decisions of the regulatory body is ever present. Thus the student-turned-migrant experience very much reflects the fact that “distinctions between micro and macro, or personal and political, can be made only for analytical purposes; in the lives of real people, these realms intersect and interact constantly” (George and Ramkissoon 1998: 107). Within this intersection is a constant undercurrent of anxiety that policy change will negatively impact on carefully laid plans, “I was also always worried. ‘Cos in my last year of study I heard a lot of agents say, or other people say, they will change the policy, then maybe I can’t get my PR” (Ivy).

As students approach graduation, the actual application process usually begins. Responses were almost unanimous that this was a tense and difficult time. The application process itself was frequently described as
time consuming, expensive and stressful, while the immigration authorities themselves were seen as arrogant, intolerant, unfriendly, discriminatory and incompetent:

It is stressful in the sense that you have a lot of questions to answer; you have a lot of documents to hand in. And if you miss out on few things, then it'll get stuck half way. But you - you keep getting stuck, you know, or they're asking for paper or paperwork's not done right. Yes, I have friends who also stress out because of that. We're here, we're uncertain um, whether another visa's coming in. We can't find work because we don't have the visa, and we're stuck here in Australia. And we have to um, pay rent. So all that really accumulates (...) So that is quite tough, it takes a lot of um, I guess, perseverance and endurance (Jolene).

Immigration is not a very friendly organisation to work with. We get a lot of trouble (...) I had to get a decision, whether it’s right or wrong I had to get a decision, and every day that I spent without a decision, it’s a cost, it’s a financial cost and it's a big headache (Gayesh).

I do think that at the best of times, like, the Australian Immigration Department have an inflated sense of how good they are. And I like this country, but they have an inflated sense of how great they are. I guess if it wasn't so restricted in what I can and cannot do, and if the - if the visa - if the PR application or selection criteria wasn't so um, isolating - very difficult and expensive. And if they make the process easier and less um, pain in the arse, I guess - and I think it would've been - it would have been better (Rahti).
I felt that the – all the paperwork and the uncertainties actually discouraged me from staying. It’s like – I mean, if – to a point that I felt, okay, if the government doesn’t want me, that’s fine. Okay. But I actually did have the frustration because it just – it getting really really – just a lot of problems, a lot of paperwork and all this (Vincent).

I am wary of drawing too strong a comparison between the student-turned-migrant experience and the experiences of the stateless and undocumented migrants that are often addressed in the literature. While students-turned-migrants have quite significant emotional and financial investment in their application for residency, the consequences of rejection are obviously much direr for asylum seekers. It could be argued that the power wielded by the state, most specifically the power to decide, takes on a different intensity in the asylum seeker context. However, there are some parallels between the two experiences, particularly in the way in which the regime is characterised, and the way in which it is contrasted with life in the host country in general. Gow (2005) for example, writing about refugees in Sydney, notes that his subjects are happy to be in Australia, but resentful of the immigration authorities, and Mountz et al. (2002: 388) note that the nation-state is viewed as “an elusive, uneven, manipulative entity”. Although the contexts and consequences for the subjects in this literature are quite different, we can see that some of their perceptions regarding the opaqueness and malevolence of the regime are similar to those of the students-turned-migrants in this study.
A prominent aspect of the process in the students-turned-migrants’ narratives was the waiting period: a time of uncertainty when they were unsure if their applications would be successful and they could stay, or if they would be forced to leave. George and Ramkissoon (1998) have previously established the high levels of stress and anxiety that can be inherent in the wait for residency to be approved, which is often exacerbated by the fact that migrants are trying to settle into the host country and establish a life without knowing if their stay will be permanent or temporary. In the student-turned-migrant context, this anxiety is skewed slightly differently, as students-turned-migrants have already been residing in the country for several years, and have to an extent already established themselves and put down roots. As such, their anxiety is related to the thought of having to uproot themselves and start again in their country of origin. For those who were particularly anxious not to go back, the wait to see if their applications would be accepted was a time of quite intense psychological stress, due to this fear of their life being disrupted. What these narratives reveal is the nature of the power between the migrant as the object of regulation, and the immigration authority as the regulator and judge of admission. DIMIA’s power to decide seems absolute and threatening:

That was the most unsettling thing. It was just the fear of having my life broken up and not knowing whether things would continue as they were and having to deal with the reality of going back to a country where I personally don’t feel
that I belong to anyway. It was just too much to deal with. I couldn’t deal with it (Rafael).

You worry that your whole life is going to be turned upside down again, because I remember at one stage one of the visas I was applying for, I was going to have to leave the country in order to be granted it. And I thought Jesus, I said to them “How the heck am I going to do that, I work full time?” “Oh you’ll be given a week’s notice.” Oh brilliant. I did have the thought, a bit paranoid really, “Oh God, what if for some reason I can’t get back in?” But it’s like they’ve got you over a barrel haven’t they? (Penny).

In addition, while there were many general causes of tension like this inherent in the application process, several participants also described specific interactions with the regime that caused them acute anxiety and distress. Madeleine had to file a formal complaint after a migration official made inappropriate and “very sleazy” references to her sexual orientation during her interview. Sunee was refused the refund of a significant sum of money after paying for an application that DIMIA then refused to process, and had difficulty arranging permission to leave the country to attend a family funeral. Shui felt that she was not given clear advice on the change of her tax status when she became a resident, and ended up with an unexpected tax debt. Penny felt an uncomfortable sense of privilege with her status as a white, English speaking migrant:
I think I'm lucky that I'm English speaking (...) I went and had a medical and I think I was about the only white face there, do you know what I mean? And it’s like they look at you, almost like I don’t know, you’re not treated differently, but you just get a feeling. (...) I’d hate to see anybody without English or any other difficulties being disadvantaged, that would be terrible.

Thus, the intricacies of the regulation of mobility can have impacts that are economic, social and emotional. Intimate spheres of individuals’ lives, such as personal finances, sexual identification, or the desire for co-presence at important family events have to be brought before the gaze of the authority. Some people experienced a heightened awareness of the potentially racialised and class stratified nature of the regulation. Many participants felt that they had been treated unjustly or inappropriately at some point by the regime, either through incompetence and misinformation, or through discrimination that was either outright or implied. However, in these instances, participants were sometimes able to exercise their own agency, through the official auditing processes that were in place. Some, like Madeleine, filed official complaints, while others, like Sunee, were able to have errors rectified by the regime through a process of negotiation. As mobile transnational actors in the ‘middling’ sphere of experience, the participants in this study were not entirely powerless, and were sometimes able to use formal or informal channels to assert their rights.
What was also apparent, however, was that in discussing these experiences of conflict with the regime, participants tended to have one of two distinct reactions. Many read the regime, and its officials, as without empathy, if not malicious, and felt that they had been dehumanised throughout the process. Sunee, for example, pondered how officials would react if it were their own families in the migrants’ position:

It’s very upsetting. (…) They don’t seem to be tolerant, you know. But I don’t think if that person, you know, the - what do you call, the immigration officer, you know, at that time if it happened to his or her family, you know, just say, ‘No, no, you can’t do this’.

This can be linked in some ways to Johnston’s (2008) theories about a dual alignment within the role of immigration officers as gatekeepers: the two poles of service and enforcement. Johnston notes that gatekeepers act along a continuum marked at the extremes by their dual roles as an advocate for and judge of the migrant. Participants such as Sunee, however, only read the role of judgement/enforcement in their encounters with the regime, and felt that the ‘human connection’ (Johnston 2008: 22) was missing. For these migrants, the discipline of regulation was apparent, but not any aspects of service or advocacy.

The second reaction was to justify the actions of the regime within the discourses of neo-liberal governmentality, and to intellectually rationalise
the difficulties they faced as an innate part of a nation-state’s regulation of its population:

It was just that I had a shitty officer. (...) Once they gave me someone competent it came through. I had – look, it was tough, but it was straightforward, it was fair, it was expedited and it was the law and somebody enforced the law and that’s fair enough. They can’t let everyone in (Jaime).

When Anaïs got frustrated with immigration she would almost automatically say “I don’t see why we would want to stay in a country which is so, where administration is so…not bad, but so hard”. Um, I think I was more thinking of long-term, and from an economic point of view, because it’s my background. So thinking it follows certain logic, you need to filter immigration, and try to avoid all humanist thought; there shouldn’t be any borders and all this sort of stuff. So no, I didn’t think that. I tried not to take it too personally (Madeleine).

Jaime and Madeleine consciously tried to be accepting of the rationalist ideological underpinnings of the migration regime. They tempered their emotional reactions to their difficulties by internalising the rationalised discourses of filtering over borderlessness. In this way, they looked at their experience from the point of view of the regime, as a means to better understand and justify why they were being subjected to regulation.

It is also worth noting that some narratives contained a subtle subversion of the state’s attempts to control and regulate its population of skilled workers through student switching policies. Caryn, for example, applied for residency with no intention of living and working permanently in
Australia, but rather planned to return home immediately after acquiring citizenship:

    When I finished the degree (...) my parents say just apply it, don’t waste it. I think that time the situation between China and Taiwan is quite difficult and my mum was saying like get the different, how do you say that, if another country is passport for that will be easier if there’s something happening in the future (Caryn).

As we have seen in the previous section, permanent residency for Caryn was a kind of ‘insurance policy’, against political instability at home. At the time of the interview she was remaining in Australia only to fulfil the time requirements so that she could apply for citizenship, and gain the added security of an Australian passport. This represents a disjuncture between the intentions of the state and the intentions of the migrant. In terms of theories of governmentality, this reminds us that “the governed are free in that they are actors, i.e. it is possible for them to act and think in a variety of ways, and sometimes in ways that are not foreseen by authorities” (Dean 1999: 13). The Australian government crafted student switching policies largely in order to gain skilled migrants who would stay permanently and boost the Australian workforce. Caryn is circumventing the expectations of the state in using these policies to acquire Australian citizenship as a safety net and then leave. Here, we see shades of Ong’s (1999) ‘flexible citizen’, circumventing and manipulating the regulation of states to their own advantage. However, Caryn’s actions also
involved quite high personal cost, in that she had to spend several years away from her family while waiting for her citizenship, and was unable to settle down professionally and personally in Australia, because she knew her time there was transient. This is thus not a fluid and devious manipulation of the regime, but rather a careful consideration of risks with substantial in-built cost.

Takahiro’s journey to PR is worth discussing in some detail because it was similarly marked by a non-alignment between his wants and desires, and the expectations or requirements of the state. As discussed previously, when his working holiday visa was due to expire, he was desperate to find a way to stay in Australia. Takahiro thus found himself training as a hairdresser, the shortest and cheapest course of study that would give him the required points for PR, although he had absolutely no interest whatsoever in the trade:

I had to study one year and a half. I had to do, yeah, and this is my last chance, my money is running out, my time is running out, I’m getting older. I got to do it now. And yeah somehow I did it. Of course I had lots of trouble. Tests for customer service and lots tests with actual clients. I once swore to the customer and kicked the wall and I made a big hole to the student salon. I almost kicked out of the school, but the principal, yeah I went to the principal, like “It will never happen again”. Yeah I told my situation and why I am so stressed and they understood. Of course as a matter of fact they had been getting lots of overseas students who just wanted residency and they were actually making money.
There are several key points to be noted in Takahiro’s narrative. Firstly, Takahiro’s story gives a glimpse into the way in which education-migration pathways have become an industry in Australia, with education providers fully aware of the money that can be made from those seeking quick and cheap qualifications that will grant them the required number of points (Baas 2007). Takahiro noted how his experience was in no way unique and how the school, although sympathetic to his dilemma, were ultimately making a profit from hopeful students-turned-migrants. There are also further theoretical parallels here to Dean’s (1999) assertions that despite the power of governmentality to decide who is excluded or included, individuals actors can still assert their power by acting in ways that undermine the intentions of the regime. Takahiro circumvented the expectations of the state by training as a hairdresser (a MODL occupation) without intending to practice once he received his residency. However, like Caryn, Takahiro found that a manipulation of state power had fairly large costs alongside the benefits, primarily through the time, money and stress required to study and pass a course in which he had no interest.

**Impact on social experiences**

In his exploration of a multicultural community in Sydney, Gow (2005: 397) notes that newly arrived migrants and refugees must “experience and negotiate social lives while engaging with layers of governmentality,” which can include police, strata management and child protection.
authorities as well as immigration officials. While Gow (2005) sees a negotiation in how his participants manage social lives alongside encounters with governmentality, I would argue that, for my participants, social life and governmentality were not just coexistent, but were in fact interlinked strands of their experience of the transition from student to migrant. In fact, their social interactions, both local and transnational, were directly affected in a number of ways by the constraints of governmentality.

For example, Gayesh was on a bridging visa\(^6\) when his mother became seriously ill, and had trouble gaining permission to leave the country to visit her. Upon his return, he found that DIMIA had, in error, cancelled his right to work. This caused considerable stress because he had to support his family and make the required monthly health insurance payments. Furthermore, even when his right to work was reinstated, the stigma of the bridging visa as an uncertain status directly affected his social and professional positioning within Australian society:

> They spend one year - a whole one year, and that - even that, they made a big mistake at some stage. Because I had to go to Sri Lanka, because my mother was sick, so I had to visit her and then - and then I was in a bridging visa, that it's not allowed to go out. So then I asked them if I could go to Sri Lanka to see my mother and when they changed the visa they made some mistake and they

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\(^6\) When individuals apply for the 880 subclass PR visa (Independent Overseas Student in Australia category), they are automatically granted a Bridging Visa A after their student visa expires and before a decision is made on their PR application. This Bridging Visa allows full-time work, but does not permit travel outside of Australia.
took my working right off, which is not the right thing. (...) During that time it's really hard. I had to pay the rent, living and in addition to that the insurance, so I have to do - I did some actual work in the university and at the same time I work in the farm for some time actually. I still hate that job because I never used to do that kind of work in Sri Lanka. And I had a good academic background but still I had to do it, I just picked the eggs in the farm. I don’t mind that work. But the way that people are treating that kind of person is terrible and I believe that I’m not a person to go to that kind of process. (...) I learned that there are a lot of uneducated people and so they really are not the way that I proceed. Talking all the sort of low quality things. And I don’t like it, but still I had to, for the survival I did the job with such unpleasant things.

Gayesh’s narrative reveals how the regulatory constraints placed on him by the state during his transition from student to migrant impacted on both his transnational connections and his experience within the host society. Firstly, Gayesh had to try to fulfil his transnational kinship obligations to his sick mother within the constraints of his visa. The fact that Gayesh had to seek permission from DIMIA in order to visit his mother emphasises again how governmental regulation impacts on the most intimate social spheres. Secondly, Gayesh’s bridging visa prevented him from finding full time professional work. He thus had to provide for his family on a low income, and socially negotiate a class and cultural dynamic in the work place that was completely foreign to him. Gayesh emphasised that it was not the farm work in itself that was a problem, but the way in which he was socially perceived and his discomfort in being forced to interact and be positioned with a class of people who, in
comparison, were far less educated. These struggles were all either caused or exacerbated by the restraints placed upon him by the immigration regime.

In Rahti’s case, her social positioning and social interactions within intimate spheres were also negatively affected by the demands of the immigration regime:

R: Like you need someone to put up a $3000 bond and say that if you do anything, like take out any social security (...) go and get the dole, then your financial assuror becomes responsible for you when they have to pay the government back. (...) And it was awkward - and they need to be an Australian citizen, not a - I know lots of permanent residents, I don't know that many citizens. I mean I do, but it was a very awkward thing to ask people.

I: Who did you ask in the end?

R: Um, Dino (her boyfriend). And that’s why we had that - and then it became awkward for him, 'cause then everyone thought I was using him, you know. And I asked a lot of friends, and it was awkward for some, because they didn’t want to do it, and they were like, "Mmmm". And it was - and the people who did want to get involved were the ones who didn’t have enough money to do it for me. So it was - it's not a nice thing to do. And it’s not a nice thing to ask.

I: Who thought you were using him?

R: His friends and family. All of them. (...) Yeah, first thing they all said was, "Make sure she’s not using you for the visa or the money". And that was not nice to hear.
As an international student with no family contacts in the country, and 
most of her networks comprising other students or permanent residents,
Rahti noted how hard was to find an Australian citizen to be her assuror,
as required by DIMIA. This can be linked back to the literature from
Koehne (2005), who establishes the prevalence of communities of
international students. Rahti’s ‘community’ was also primarily other
students-turned-migrants, similarly bonded by common experience.
Making the request of friends from outside this community created
tension and awkwardness, and her boyfriend’s family’s negative
responses also reveal how her official status impacted on her
acceptance into intimate social networks.

Takahiro also noted that, until his residency was confirmed, he was in a
kind of social limbo, unable to commit to relationships within Australia
because of the uncertainty over whether he would be able to stay or
have to go back:

And at that time I was waiting I was in a different band, but it was an unstable
situation, I couldn’t continue the band too, because once visa expired I had to
go back. And nothing is sure, that sort of visa status. I’m here, but I can’t
commit to something here - the band, or even partners or friends.

Takahiro’s comment “I’m here, but I can’t commit to something here”
embodies the experience of ‘waiting’ for residency: as a space of
situatedness without certainty; of the desire to settle and connect
socially contrasted with the fear of being uprooted. Such experiences broadly confirm the findings of Mountz et al. (2002), who find that government policies that ascribe people an extended temporary status tend to make daily lived experiences inherently tenuous. As such, individuals have to undergo complex processes of identity negotiation while their lives remain ‘in limbo’.

Madeleine’s narrative also attests that the bureaucratic process can severely impact on very intimate social relationships, as she believed that the protracted and stressful process of encounters with immigration actually contributed to the breakdown of her relationship:

From the moment that we were in that position, you know it was a really, really painful process, and I think it also played a lot in us breaking up. (...) I think it made things really, really difficult. And I think we’re not the only ones, we’ve heard of other people. (...) The process of my application took a bit of time. Um, just to collect all the papers, is very difficult, and I had a medical condition when it happened, and immigration, even though it wasn’t an ongoing condition, it was just something quite minor, and they just made me do all the medical tests over and over again. So it just became at the end really, really tiring. For me, for her, and for us as a couple.

Furthermore, it was not just the process of acquiring residency that impacted on social dynamics, nor was it only relationships and connections within Australia that were affected. Several participants
also noted how the final achievement of residency impacted on both their relationships in Australia and their transnational connections:

And um, to get PR member - my relationship with Dino changed dramatically, ’cause now it's serious. And now, you know, I made the choice to stay, and he understands that if I stay then we have to take this somewhere. ’Cause I’ll kick his arse if it didn’t happen! And it changed how my parents saw me. ’Cause now I make the decision, I’m not a little girl any more. (...) The dynamics have changed everywhere. Within my family, with my friends, with my relationships (Rahti).

My family, I think, now I got it- they’re not waiting for me to come back anymore. They know my focus is here in this country (Devendra).

In general, gaining PR could mark independence from family in the source country, as well as impacting significantly on social dynamics within Australia. For several participants, like Rahti, it signalled an increased commitment to relationships within Australia. As their legal membership moved from officially transient to officially permanent, so their social relationships were adjusted to align with this status.

For other participants, while receiving residency similarly seemed to mark a step towards commitment to Australia, and a step away from their transnational connections, this was not necessarily a positive consequence. This was particularly the case for those who were waiting for citizenship before they could reunite with family:
And I don’t remember what they said, when they called me and said ‘you got your permanent residency, you need to go to immigration’ I just feel to myself ‘oh my God, another two years, oh God!’ (laughs). Yeah, I’m not really excited. Yeah, actually my friends, they were so excited, they said ‘oh it’s good, it’s very good, you got your permanent residency so early’, so I just said ‘oh, I don’t know I just feel lost.’ And I applied permanent residency for the whole family you know, I’m sure my husband and son were not coming soon, you know, so that means I need to stay here alone for another two years waiting for the citizenship. I thought, not good. (...) And I called to my Mum, I said ‘I want to go home’ (Hannah).

For participants like Hannah, receiving residency signified a further distancing from family back in the home country. As discussed in the previous section, Hannah’s migration was part of a long-term family strategy to achieve greater mobility and the chance to live in both China and Australia, clearly a form of the “strategies for accumulation and mobility” within which “the family is distributed over a longer distance or a wider expanse of space” (Ong 1999: 93). While Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006) see family back in the home country largely as a force that draws international students back, in situations such as Hannah’s and Caryn’s, paradoxically the family acts as both a push and a pull. Her desire to secure citizenship for her son and husband’s future urges Hannah to stay, yet her longing to be with them urges her to return home. Once again, the costs involved in accumulating capacities for mobility, sometimes seemed too great a sacrifice. Thus, for Hannah,
gaining PR was not a positive reinforcement of her belonging in Australian society, but a sense of a loss of identity, and a furthering distance between herself and her loved ones.

**Conclusions**

The acquisition of residency forms part of the transition from student to migrant. Two key aspects of this acquisition have been discussed in this chapter: the decision-making process, and the actual process of acquisition. Essentially, my data reveals that student-turned-migrant decision-making is often far messier and more complex than the previous literature posits. Social and personal factors can intertwine with economic and professional motivations, and influencing conditions in the source and host countries can be cultural, political and economic. I believe that the diversity of the sample has illuminated of a wide variety of factors on decision-making, as my participants came from a range of diverse backgrounds, and were also dissimilar in terms of age, career, and family status.

Several key themes have emerged in this chapter’s analysis of residency decisions. Firstly, people who had firm intentions to pursue PR on arrival were often driven by untenable conditions in the source country. These could be broad social and political issues related to a lack of infrastructure and stability, or far more intrinsic subjective issues such as a sense of not-belonging within communities or families. Many who were
determined to leave home on a more permanent basis felt themselves to be outsiders in the home society, and this subjectivity was often intensified by prior mobility, with participants who had previously lived overseas finding it hard to reinsert themselves into the home culture. Prior mobility was also an important factor in that many of the group who did have prior intentions to gain PR had already experienced Australia as tourists, and thus had a clearer idea of the culture and the lifestyle than those who arrived for the first time as students. Notably, while these participants certainly viewed their education as a pathway to migration, most did not choose their course solely as a migration strategy, but were rather influenced by prior education and professional experience, personal interest, and perceptions of good career opportunities and salaries. However, for these participants, in making the decision to come to Australia and pursue residency, direct economic incentives such as career opportunities and earning potential were clearly secondary to broader desires for quality of life and a subjective sense of security and belonging.

For participants who did not have prior intentions towards PR, family and personal relationships played a key role in decision-making, but this role varied considerably from case to case. Family back home were not always, as the literature often posits, a factor pulling students back. Instead, tense relationships with family (particularly parents) could be a strong incentive to stay far from home, while separation from spouses
and children was often framed as the inherent cost of a long-term strategy for building mobility options for the family as a whole. Similarly, those who arrived in Australia with their families had to consider the desires of their spouses and children when deciding whether to stay or return. The concept of PR as an ‘insurance policy’ against unstable political or economic conditions at home was also significant for this group. These participants did not necessarily desire to stay in Australia indefinitely, but wanted to have the option of residency in the case of deteriorating conditions in the home country. Participants who decided to apply for PR during or after their study in Australia also often expressed strategic professional reasons for staying. These participants felt that their value as knowledge workers would be increased by Australian work experience, which would function as another aspect of capital-building on top of their degree. For these participants, like those seeking PR as an ‘insurance policy,’ settling in Australia permanently was not always the desired goal. Instead, these individuals wished to use PR as a means to gain valuable work experience, which could result in better career opportunities when they chose to return home.

The second significant part of the acquisition of residency discussed in this chapter was the actual process of PR acquisition. Encounters with DIMIA as an authority of governmentality were highly significant to the participants’ narratives. The effect of state power on individuals throughout the move from transience to permanence was varied and
profound. While participants consistently felt that interactions with the regime were difficult and stressful, some justified the actions of the authority by internalising its rationalist logic, while others were affronted by the perceived lack of empathy from those wielding the power to decide.

Both confirmations and rejections from the authority also had a huge impact on participants’ social positioning. While waiting for their applications to be processed, DIMIA confined and impacted on their sociality, both their localised relationships and their transnational relationships. Transnational kinship obligations such as attending funerals and visiting sick parents had to be negotiated through the authority of the regime. Finances were strained and participants had to complete unfulfilling and frustrating jobs and courses. It was difficult to commit to social relationships during this time, and romantic partnerships were often put under pressure by the stress of application and the uncertainty of waiting. For most, finally gaining PR was a moment of relief and a signification of freedom. However, for others it was merely one step on the journey, and they had to then look forward to the next bureaucratic hurdle, such as getting partners and children to Australia or waiting to apply for citizenship. It is clear that during the process of applying for residency, students-turned-migrants are subject to quite specific and intense forms of regulation. However, while they are largely subject to the regime, they still have some agency and can subvert the
expectations of the state in a number of ways. For example, they can manipulate the regime through their educational choices or through gaining residency as a means to achieve ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1999). However, the enactment of this agency always involves a negotiation of risk and cost. The exertion of power over migrants’ lives by the auspices of governmentality during this time have varied and far reaching social, economic and psychological consequences. In understanding the student-turned-migrant experience, it is thus vital to understand that “the state still matters…states are flexible actors with a powerful role in individual and collective processes of identity formation” (Mountz et al. 2002: 336).
Chapter Six: Citizenship Decisions

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)

Introduction

The last chapter has revealed how Australia as a nation-state regulates the processes of acquiring membership through residency, and how students-turned-migrants have experienced this process of sustained interactions of power with regulatory agencies such as DIMIA. In this chapter, I shall move onto the third and final gate of belonging for students-turned-migrants: citizenship through naturalisation. This involves examining how students-turned-migrants negotiate their transnationality through their legal status, that is, the formalised, official relationship between the migrant and the various nation-states within their transnational networks. We shall see, in congruence with the last chapter, how international regimes of mobility regulation can impact on the process of deciding about citizenship. In general, however, this chapter will focus less on the actual process of acquiring citizenship, and more on the decisions, intentions and motivations of the participants. This is firstly because most participants had not yet naturalised at the time
of the interviews, and secondly because, in comparison to applying for PR, naturalisation is a fairly simple process. It involves filling in an application form (which can be completed online) and paying an AU$ 250 fee. Attending a citizenship conferring ceremony is optional. In October 2007, after completion of the fieldwork for this thesis, a mandatory citizenship test was introduced, adding a step to the process. While this test has posed difficulties for migrants who are not proficient in English, and especially for refugees, it would not prove difficult for students-turned-migrants. Government reports in 2008 cite a 99% pass rate amongst skilled stream candidates (DIAC 2008).

Moving from denizen to citizen is a less regulated process than moving from transient to denizen, and there will thus be less discussion here, in comparison to the previous chapter, of interactions with the regulatory regime. The process of making decisions about naturalisation, however, still involves a careful negotiation of risks, costs, and benefits for transnational actors, and it is this process that I shall attempt to unravel here. In this chapter, I will firstly, with reference to the discussion in Chapter Three, state my position within current scholarly theories of citizenship. Secondly, I will describe the sample of participants with regard to their citizenship eligibility and intentions. Finally, I will closely analyse the interview data to establish the four central forms of motivation for participants’ various decisions about citizenship: subjective
desires, desires for security, desires for political participation, and desires for mobility.

I have used Hammar’s (1990) model of the three gates of entrance to describe how students-turned-migrants move from transient, to resident, and then to citizen. However, 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, and thus preserve their denizen 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 the linear model of migrant membership construct a type of dual state membership, which allows individuals to maintain rights, duties and belonging across two states. Therefore, it is worth looking more closely at how relevant ideas of dual state membership are framed in the current literature.

As discussed in Chapter Two, 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 (Tambini 2001; Appadurai 2003). Some further suggest that
the power of the nation-state as the boundary unit of analysis for membership is weakening (Soysal 1994; Castles and Davidson 2000; Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2002). Bloemraad (2004: 400) summarises certain theoretical tendencies towards the weakening of singular 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, such claims will not be the epistemological standpoint taken in this thesis. The comical interchange by Zierhofer (2004) which introduces this chapter pointedly illustrates how, despite the rhetoric of ‘postnational identities’, legal status is still paramount in terms of the ways in which it impacts on the ability of individuals to maintain their transnationality. In particular, it is highly important with regard to aspects of transnational capital, such as the ability to maintain mobility across borders and to maintain 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 of ‘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”. Furthermore, as Ong (1999: 2) states, mobile or transnational actors often retain multiple memberships as a means to balance the disjuncture between the identities they prescribe themselves and the identities that are prescribed by states, “the multiple passport holder … embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets”. Thus, it is apparent that legal status, made tangible in the form of visas 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.

However, although legal status remains as important as ever, multiple forms of membership are becoming increasingly possible. Bloemraad (2004: 393) states that traditional concepts of immigrants and citizenship view the process as an “either/or proposition,” involving a decision to either commit to membership to the host country, or retain to the original membership. Bloemraad (2004), along with other scholars discussed in Chapter Two such as Soysal (1994) and Faist (2000), has contested this traditional position, usually arguing that dual citizenship, supranational citizenship (such as EU citizenship) and the presence of supranational human rights organisations represent a shift away from nationally-bounded citizenship models. Other research however, most notably Hammar’s (1990) analysis of foreign citizens in Western Europe, and
Castles and Davidson’s (2000) discussion of new forms of political belonging, also considers denizenship as an alternative means to maintain multiple memberships across different nation-states. Both dual citizenship and denizenship are significant options for students-turned-migrants in maintaining forms of transnational belonging.

**The Sample**

As discussed in Chapter Two, a migrant’s eligibility for dual citizenship in Australia is determined by the laws of the country of origin. Such laws vary greatly from country to country, with different nations offering different forms of dual membership. For the purposes of this study, participants who are eligible for dual citizenship are considered to be those whose source countries allow their citizens to retain their passport and most of their citizenship rights when they naturalise in Australia. The following tables thus illustrate which of the participants’ source countries allow this, how many participants have eligibility, and what their citizenship intentions are.
### Table 3. Dual citizenship rules of participants’ source countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROHIBIT DUAL CITIZENSHIP</th>
<th>ALLOW DUAL CITIZENSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India(^7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka(^8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4. Citizenship intentions and eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELIGIBLE FOR DUAL CITIZENSHIP</th>
<th>INELIGIBLE FOR DUAL CITIZENSHIP</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATURALISED</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTENDING TO NATURALISE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT INTENDING TO NATURALISE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDECIDED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\)India has provisions for Indian citizens who take out citizenship of another country to become Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs). However, this status does not constitute dual citizenship in its fullest sense, because it does not allow holders full Indian citizenship rights, such as an Indian passport.

\(^8\)Sri Lanka does allow ex-citizens or citizens applying for overseas citizenship to resume or retain their Sri Lankan citizenship, but only in particular circumstances. The application process for dual citizenship is complicated and it is generally only granted to those who can prove they have contributed to Sri Lanka’s socio-economic development, through either assets in Sri Lanka worth more than Rs. 2.5 million or fixed deposits in a Sri Lankan bank of US$ 25 000. As these conditions exclude many, including the Sri Lankan participant in this study, I have included Sri Lanka in the ‘prohibit’ column.
At the time of the fieldwork, of the 20 participants, 18 were denizens, holding permanent residency along with their original citizenship. One participant, Tariq, was already a dual citizen, while another, Tina, had applied for residency but was awaiting official confirmation. Most who were intending to naturalise were waiting until they had fulfilled the residency time requirement before applying, while Gayesh had already begun the application process. Only one person (Vincent) who was eligible for dual citizenship was not intending to naturalise. Four people (Hannah, Ivy, Tina and Sunee) were as yet undecided as to whether they would naturalise or not.9

Although the sample here is obviously too small to make generalisations, it is evident that for this group, eligibility for dual citizenship shows some correlation with intentions to naturalise. 80% of the respondents who were eligible for dual citizenship intended to naturalise or had already, while only 20% of those who would have to give up their home citizenship intended to naturalise or had already. In general, the pattern in Table Four is consistent with the literature on citizenship, which suggests that eligibility for dual citizenship can be a strong incentive to naturalise. Kelley and Mcallister (1982: 429), for example, note that dual citizenship makes the disadvantages of naturalisation “non-existent,” while several German studies in the 1980s reveal that more immigrants would consider taking up German citizenship if dual citizenship were available (Hammar

9 For an individual summary of each participant’s current membership status, intentions to naturalise and eligibility for dual citizenship, see the table of participant characteristics in Appendix 1.
In the Australian context, Batrouney and Goldlust (2005) also note that a lack of rights to dual citizenship discouraged many of their participants from naturalising.

**Subjective Desires: Obligation, Attachment and Belonging**

In this chapter, I define ‘subjective motivations’ as motivations relating to perceptions of obligation, emotional attachment and a sense of belonging. These can be seen in opposition to more direct and tangible social, legal or economic benefits of citizenship. Unravelling the complexity of the subjective meanings that students-turned-migrants ascribed to legal membership and how this impacted on their choices involves exploring both their attachment to their original citizenship, as well as any subjective reasons for taking up Australian citizenship. In other words, this means addressing motivations for citizenship choices that stretch beyond the more instrumental formula of perceived advantages and disadvantages put forward by scholars such as Kelley and McAllister (1982).

In their comprehensive analysis of the links between migration, citizenship and identity in Australia, Batrouney and Goldlust (2005) identify several subjective reasons behind citizenship choices in their sample. Reasons
for taking up Australian citizenship included feelings of attachment to Australia; a sense of duty and obligation; and a desire to fully participate as a citizen. My participants’ subjective responses generally supported these categories. However, Batrouney and Goldlust’s (2005) list of reasons for not taking up Australian citizenship included strong emotional ties to their country of origin; feelings of exclusion from Australian society; and a rejection of symbols of Australian nationhood. For my participants, only the first of these was relevant. In addition, there were also other patterns with regard to subjective motivations for citizenship choices that were not foreseen through the literature. These included taking up Australian citizenship as a statement of rejection of the source country’s culture and values, and a lack of desire to naturalise despite a strong sense of attachment to Australia.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, there is tendency in the literature towards instrumental conceptions of citizenship for modern mobile subjects (Kelley and Mcallister 1982; Latham 1998; Ong 1999; Nagel and Staeheli 2004; Massey and Akresh 2006). This is often due to the use of methodologies that either select a sample of migrants who are inclined towards instrumentalism (Ong 1999; Nagel and Staeheli 2004) or through quantitative methods that provide a limited choice of responses for participants to express their motivations (Ip, Inglis and Wu 1997; Massey and Akresh 2006). Massey and Akresh (2006) for example, determine that satisfaction with the United States is the key determinant for
naturalisation, and that satisfaction is in turn determined primarily by the objective circumstances that migrants encounter after their arrival. My research, in contrast, found that emotive or subjective reasons were much more prevalent, although such reasons often existed alongside instrumental ones. 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 let go of 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’.

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 pride, 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 was 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 perquisites, 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 were both cases in point. They 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) terms, they demonstrated 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 belongingness, 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 Australian?

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, the need for status and belonging through legal status had attenuated over time. After putting down strong personal roots in the country, particularly through her marriage to an Australian, Shui no longer felt that her sense of identity and her position in Australia needed to be officially validated:

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.

Interestingly, what we see here is an opposite process to other participants, such as Gayesh, who felt a stronger desire for naturalisation the longer they stayed in the country. This is also the reverse of patterns of acculturation and naturalisation commonly described in the literature.
Faist’s (2000) models, for example, as discussed in Chapter Two, purport that strong social ties and acculturation in the host society would lead to the relinquishing of the original citizenship. Similarly Waters’s (2003) empirical investigations, discussed in Chapter Three, maintain that the more people ‘put down roots’, the more they view naturalisation as an important part of their sense of belonging. As such we would expect the significance of citizenship as a marker of subjective belonging usually to increase, rather than decrease, over time.

Migrants such as Shui and Vincent, however, digress from this trend because they feel their belonging in the host society is validated in ways other than gaining citizenship, namely through their relationships and their social positioning. Legal status does not have subjective meaning for them, as their sense of belonging comes from their close personal ties, networks and professed membership to the community. If individuals do not perceive a subjective meaning behind citizenship, and furthermore do not perceive any instrumental advantages to naturalisation, then they will perhaps by default remain a denizen.

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

R: 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: So it’s going to be emotionally significant for you when you get that chance?

R: Big time. Yeah, my first break it is going to be very, very significant because of that and I’ll embrace it so, I have a burn my Columbian passport party. (...) And also easier for travel and all those I call them perks of citizenship, but they are really secondary to being Australian. You see I want to be able to tell them when people hear my accent, so ‘Where are you from?’ and to say ‘I’m Australian’.

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. His conceptualisation of citizenship was that it is “more than a legal status; it is a shared understanding of behaviours, obligations and values” (Lucas and Purkayastha 2007: 243). 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. Although at the time of the interview he maintained his Indian citizenship because he still had assets in India, 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.” For Jaime and Devendra, naturalisation was doubly symbolic. It represented not only their commitment and attachment to Australia, but also their rejection of their countries of origin. Naturalisation thus becomes a symbolic statement of not belonging to the source country as well as a statement of belonging to Australia. Batrouney and Goldlust (2005) have described how feelings of social exclusion and a rejection of the symbols of Australian nationhood can be disincentives to naturalise. Conversely, it is also apparent that a rejection of the source country and a strong desire for social inclusion in Australia can be incentives.

For another set of participants, the subjective attachment to citizenship was connected primarily to their original citizenship. Those who were not able to gain dual citizenship simply did not want to lose their original citizenship through naturalisation. For this group, giving up the citizenship of their country of origin would involve a sense of loss. Such attitudes generally support the literature on immigrant naturalisation. Brown (2002: 71), for example, asserts that relinquishing the original citizenship through
naturalisation “excels a psychological cost on immigrants who may have strong sentimental ties to their native country, and might feel disloyal exchanging one national identity for another”. However, although the attachment to their original citizenship was a common motivation for maintaining denizenship, each individual framed this attachment in slightly different terms. Rahti, for example, didn’t yet feel ready to give up her Malaysian citizenship, but did not discount that she may change her mind in the future, “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 yet. We’ll see what happens down the track.”

Jolene, in contrast, saw denizenship as more permanent, and was certain that she would never relinquish her Malaysian citizenship:

I will never give up my Malaysian citizenship. Why? Proud to be a Malaysian. And on top of that it’s very hard to get back, you know, Malaysian citizenship. So that’s the two main reasons I wouldn’t give up to be an Australian. But I’m quite happy to hold onto your permanent residency.

Penny was similarly planning to maintain her US citizenship with her Australian residency. From her perspective, the motivations comprised of a sense of allegiance to the country of her birth alongside the desire to maintain options for mobility:

I don’t want to lose it because you never know where you’re going to be. You might want to go work there, but the other thing I suppose, she said, looking
around, 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.

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. In Brown’s (2002) terms, the ‘psychological cost’ of naturalisation was too great, 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 Status**

One of the strongest themes in the data, and one that is largely not anticipated in the literature, was a sense amongst participants of insecurity; many expressed 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 (Zappalà and Castles 2000; Batrouney and Goldlust 2005).
Security and the removal of the threat of deportation are generally only mentioned as advantages in the case of stateless persons (Keely and Mcallister 1982; Batrouney and Goldlust 2005) or as merely a “minor advantage” of citizenship (Betts and Birrell 2007: 48). However, despite the relatively secure bundle of rights granted to permanent residents under Australia law, there was a strong perception amongst participants 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.

In particular, participants felt that the status of permanent residents could change quickly. Many expressed predictions that the position of permanent residents could erode in the future, and almost every participant expressed some concerns about the need to secure their position in Australia. Devendra, for example, expressed strong subjective motivations to naturalise. However, his final comment on the issue was “but the final thing is, watch your back. Once you’re secure, then you can enjoy the country.” It is not unreasonable to conclude that the contrast in the national and global political climate between earlier studies and my fieldwork from 2005-2007 plays an important role in this disjuncture between the extant literature and the perceptions of participants in this study. I will address in some detail in Chapter Eight how the mediated experience of specific global events affected participants’ perceptions and choices concerning security and
citizenship. However, it is worth noting here how other well-publicised controversies over immigration issues in Australia also 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 detained at a detention centre as an illegal immigrant for ten months in 2004 and 2005 (Palmer 2005), and Indian national Mohamed Haneef, who in 2007 had his working visa cancelled without a hearing on ‘character grounds’ after links to suspected terrorists were alleged (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), media reports of deportations and abuses seem to have contributed to making the status of non-citizens seem less secure.

Furthermore, at the time of the fieldwork, policy changes were looming, such as the new temporary residence laws in July 2007 and the introduction of a citizenship test in October. As discussed in Chapter Five, DIMIA 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 this thesis. 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, Poynting 2002; White 2002; Noble 2005). Alberts (2007) also specifically analyses the increased border security post September 11th as a concern of international students in the United 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. As could be expected, within my sample, the individuals who expressed strong emotional connections to Australia also expressed strong fears over the security of their status.

For some participants, the lack of security within permanent residency was characterised by a vague sense that ‘anything can happen,’ that it was better to secure options for the future ‘just in case.’ Sunee, for example, stated that “I would like to keep my options open. That’s the thing because you don’t know what changes, changes come so quickly, you know, no warning, nothing, you know.” For others, the sense of insecurity was more directly connected to the current political climate. Gayesh, who, like Devendra, expressed strong subjective claims to Australian citizenship, felt that his decision to naturalise had also been influenced by the current political atmosphere. This was 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.

While Devendra, Jaime and Gayesh expressed the desire for security alongside strong subjective arguments for naturalisation, other participants, such as Rafael, saw security as the only advantage of citizenship and did not connect naturalisation to ideas of belonging and identity:

The only reason why I think about citizenship is for security reasons, not really because I feel like I need to belong to the citizenry of this country. I don’t think I need to identify myself as an Australian. Even if I do obtain citizenship in Australia I don’t think I’ll start calling myself an Australian anyway.

For Rafael, the choice to naturalise was more clearly defined as an instrumental one. He felt no attachment to his Venezuelan citizenship, and unlike most of the other participants, Rafael saw identity and citizenship as distinct from one another, thus demonstrating Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004: 2) claim that “it is possible to claim identity as a citizen of
a country without claiming an identity as ‘belonging to’ or ‘being of’ that country”. Rafael felt comfortable claiming citizenship as legal status for security reasons, without identifying as belonging to Australia or being Australian, most likely because his past hyper-mobility made him generally sceptical about the subjective significance of citizenship overall. While this supports some of Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) findings, it also contradicts claims from Betts and Birrell (2007: 48) that “Australian citizenship is now largely symbolic, since almost all the material benefits of citizenship ... are available to permanent residents”. For many of the participants, the perceived security was a clear material benefit, and for some, naturalisation was largely devoid of symbolism.

Madeleine also expressed a definite 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 its 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 Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) changing or points test pass marks shifting, 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 those on temporary visas as pathways to residency, even minor changes to points requirements can have a significant effect on their plans. Once again, such concerns were not prevalent in the literature for any migrants apart from refugees. It could well be argued that the staggered entrance process undergone by students-turned-migrants, characterised by the durations of uncertainty and the frequent and often drawn out struggles to gain permanent residency discussed in the previous chapter, have made students-turned-migrants particularly wary of the potential threat of policy change on their status.

**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) felt that there were many alternatives to suffrage that could enable them to express a political voice without having full political citizenship rights, including collective action, community involvement, and participating in public political discourse:

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).
These perspectives are particularly relevant in terms of recent theoretical scholarship on transnational political membership. There is a broader conception of citizenship within this literature as encompassing, as well as the classic set of rights and obligations, “the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights” (Siemiatycki and Isin 1997: 73). The literature thus often conceptualises a broad range of practices, enacted by both citizens and non-citizens, as ‘citizenship’. However, to maintain a clear distinction between citizenship as legal membership and citizenship as practice, I shall refer to such practices as political participation, rather than citizenship.

There are obviously many forms of political participation other than electoral politics. In the transmigration literature, research into residents enacting political participation through collective action generally falls into two categories. The first category involves discussion of the struggle of undocumented or ‘non-status’ migrants in the campaign for legal recognition and rights expansion. This is most often focused on the sans papier movement in Europe (McNevin 2006) or South and Central American undocumented workers and asylum seekers in the United States (Mountz et al. 2002; McNevin 2007). The second category, which is often referred to as the study of ‘transnational citizenship,’ involves migrants who remain politically active in the source country while
resident abroad, and who, collectively, act as agents for political change in their homelands (Itzigsohn 2000; Smith 2000).

In my sample, however, the context is vastly different, and thus the conception of transmigrant political activity is also different. The political participation of the non-citizens in my sample was not focused on the expansion of their right as non-citizens, nor on acting as agents for political change in the source country. Rather, their political engagement focused on speaking out about local political issues within the host country. These were issues that also concerned many citizens, such as Australia’s health care policy (Crook and Pakulski 1995) or involvement with the war in Iraq (Brander and Hornsey 2006).

What this demonstrates is something quite different from the political participation often discussed in the literature. Rather than using collective action as a means to gain recognition and rights as non-citizens, my data instead revealed individual denizen’s desires to find means for political participation and discourse on a range of local and national issues that are of concern to them as members of Australian society. Rather than the exclusively ‘migrant’ politics that are often the focus of research into migrants and political agency (Fitzgerald 2000; Itzigsohn 2000) my data rather revealed a broader engagement with national and global issues. This engagement in itself does not necessarily consist of border-crossing practices. As such, can it still be considered to
be part of the social processes of transnational negotiation under discussion in this thesis? I would suggest that such practices are embedded within the process of the negotiation of transnationality; in as 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 their source country. Madeleine asserted her membership of a community through her solidarity with other concerned Australians when she marched in protests against Australian foreign policy. Yet at the same time, she did not relinquish her right to express her political voice at the ballot box in France. We therefore see, once again, a compromise in the student-turned-migrant desire to somehow straddle both worlds, to negotiate a political space that encompasses both here and there.

The difference in context is obviously also significant to this departure from the literature. Firstly, the students-turned-migrants in this sample were not enacting ‘transnational citizenship’ in the sense of maintaining collective political influence in the source country. These migrants, while maintaining transnational practices on an individual level, mostly did not partake in transnational community formation. While some made citizenship choices based on their desire to maintain suffrage in the source country, they did not demonstrate the direct transnational political agency that is often fore grounded in the literature.
Secondly, my participants also differ considerably from the resident aliens discussed in the literature on ‘non-status’ migrants, who are usually denied the right to naturalisation as well as other basic social rights. The denial of these rights results in collective action, with an impetus to influence policy regarding their rights and status. In contrast, my participants, as denizens rather than aliens, receive a much broader range of social rights and social inclusion, and furthermore, have either chosen not to naturalise or are waiting to be eligible to naturalise. For them, forms of political participation, such as Penny’s option of joining local councils, or Madeleine’s participation in public demonstrations, is less about collectively promoting the expansion of their rights as non-citizens, and more a means to have a political voice on specific issues without having the vote. These findings largely support those of Nagel and Staeheli (2004), discussed in Chapter Three, in that localised citizenship practices can be as significant as those enacted transnationally.

However, this kind of participation was consistently framed as an alternative to, rather than a substitute for, suffrage. These participants still saw voting as desirable, and from this group, all of those intending to naturalise saw the right to vote as one of the key advantages. Madeleine connected this attitude to her French identity, framing it as a direct result of France’s strong democratic heritage:
To participate, cos you think, that’s one of the problems of migrants. Just keep their PR, don’t get citizenship and never vote. I think that’s being French. That it’s a responsibility. It’s not for the fine issues. That’s how you end up with dictature and people like Hitler or Mussolini, it’s just not watching out.

Devendra, also eagerly awaiting the time when he could vote, had already conceptualised key issues and platforms that would influence his voting choices:

I - it’s really important - yeah, I just want to bring the one (government) which maximises the economy, good for people, not selling some crap, like what they’re doing now (...). I don’t know what these guys do, talk rubbish all the time. There’s no need for bringing the Industrial Relations law.

Penny, who was not intending to naturalise because it would entail giving up her US citizenship, was quite incensed by the lack of voting rights for long-term residents, especially in terms of the economic and social contributions that she felt she was equally making:

It’s pretty stupid, I think why not, why are they denying you that courtesy, that right, what’s the point? The thing is I’m paying just as much taxes as anybody else and working just as hard to make this world a better place so to speak, so why aren’t I allowed to vote, especially as they have mandatory voting here. What’s the deal? (...) You are denied really what is quite a basic right and for what reason?
In these discussions of political participation, two key issues emerge as important. Firstly, it was quite apparent during the interviews that, for the individuals who identified themselves as politically engaged, the right to vote was a strong factor in their citizenship choices. Secondly, these same 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 by 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”. Ivy was not even aware that suffrage was a main benefit of citizenship, and when I explained this, she and Hannah expressed a decided ambivalence about this issue:

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)
Understandably, Hannah and Ivy, coming from a one-party political system in China, found the idea of compulsory voting and penalties for not voting almost absurd.

Vincent, despite his strong level of social and community engagement in Australia, was also largely ambivalent about the right to vote:

I: And what about the right to vote? Is that an issue at all for you?
R: Another issue here is, beside footy, politics is another place where you haven’t seen people of Asian heritage. It’s still the place where not many Asians can really get involved in. Maybe they just don’t want to get involved and I – that one I’m – for that particular issue I don’t know, but for me, back to the question, I think having a right to vote at this point doesn’t seem to matter that much. Especially with - the Liberal Party and the Labor Party seems to be pretty much the same.

Vincent’s answer contains some significant points. Firstly, there is the fact that he did not see politics as an area in which Asians participate. He seemed unsure whether this is because they are excluded by the Anglo majority or because they willingly self-exclude. As I reflected at the time in my research journal, it was easy to see truth in Vincent’s observations. It is extremely common to encounter people of Asian heritage in the streets and the workplaces of cosmopolitan Melbourne, yet it is still extremely rare to see individuals of Asian heritage in positions of political power. This is supported in the literature by Jupp (1989), who notes the low rates of political participation amongst many minorities in Australia.
There is thus an interesting social demarcation in Vincent’s perceptions of Australian society. While he felt a sense of belonging within the social and professional spheres in which he participates in Australia, he saw that, as an Asian, he is excluded from certain clearly demarcated social realms, such as ‘footy’ and politics. Vincent seemed to accept the racialised boundaries around these social spheres with little sense of injustice. He had little personal interest in participating in these activities, and thus was ambivalent about the racialised exclusion.

Furthermore, Vincent was put off by the centralised and partisan nature of Australian political parties. He believed his lack of a right to vote ‘doesn’t seem to matter much’ in a two-party system with a minimal ideological and policy gap between the two major parties. From the literature, however, these attitudes are similarly prevalent amongst young Australian citizens. Edwards (2006), for example, finds that perceptions about the lack of choice within Australia’s effectively two-party system, and the idea that individual votes ‘don’t matter’ were key reasons why young Australians were ambivalent about registering to vote. It could be argued, therefore, that two separate factors are at play in unpacking Vincent’s political ambivalence. There is the racialised exclusion of minority groups from political representation, identified by Jupp (1984, 1989), yet this is also undercut by the presence of a generalised apathy, shared with many local young people, about
the effectiveness of individual participation in Australia’s democratic process (Edwards 2006).

Finally, political participation as a benefit of citizenship was an issue in which the country of origin of the participants could at times be seen to impact on their views and choices. The Chinese participants, for example, who had minimal experience with democratic processes and ideals in the home country, were very much ambivalent about the political process, while for Madeleine, the exercise of democratic rights and the value of democracy were entrenched into her French identity. Very generally speaking, East Asian and South East Asian participants were less interested in political participation and voting than participants from countries with stronger democratic traditions, such as France, India and the USA. Due to the small yet diverse sample under discussion, however, I would be wary of making any further distinctions concerning citizenship choices based on cultural backgrounds.

**The Desire for Mobility: Flexibility and Return**

The level of mobility that particular passports afforded was often cited by participants as a motivation behind citizenship choices, and is often mentioned in the literature as one of the purely pragmatic or instrumental motivations behind citizenship choices. In terms of this particular sample of migrants, the concept of mobility can be loosely divided into three categories. Two of these are quite well covered in the
literature: the desire for ease of overseas travel beyond the countries of origin and settlement, and the desire for ease of temporary or permanent return to the country of origin. The third, under-examined, aspect of mobility concerns the desire to maintain relatively equal rights to entrance, exit, work and residency in both countries, a distinctly transnational framework.

One of the key motivations behind citizenship choices that could be classed as ‘purely’ instrumental 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 purpose of leisure travel. This was particularly important for the younger participants, especially those without spouses and children. As Neumayer (2006) and Cunningham (2004) note, modern transnational mobility is characterised by highly unequal access to foreign spaces, with passport holders from privileged 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:

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 four countries\(^{10}\) - 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 are referring in some way to how global power
structures shape their access to mobility. These perceptions hold up the
claims of prior research by Ong (1999), Batrouney and Goldlust (2005)
and Colic-Peisker (2006) about the desirability of unproblematic, Western
passports. Furthermore, they can also be linked to the discussion in
Chapter Five of the impact of macro-level regulatory mechanisms on
individual lives. While we have seen how individuals’ experiences are
framed and constrained by DIMIA regulations as they shift from student
to migrant in Chapter Five, we can also see here how more global
regulatory frameworks of mobility also impact on individuals’ citizenship
choices. Essentially, uneven power differentials between their source
countries as part of developing or unstable regions and the coalition of

\(^{10}\) 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 are based 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.
wealthy Western countries have created barriers to their individual mobility. Thus, in the context of global mobility, these migrants primarily see Australian citizenship in Rafael’s terms: as a tool that will practicably enhance social capital through increased mobility.

However, in contrast to common arguments in the literature, the Australian passport did not always provide greater mobility capital. In the experiences of participants from more developed economies, the source country membership 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:

You know, South East Asian countries - you can travel around Asia without a visa, easy. Up to 90 days depending on the country. So if I wanted - you know, things like, "Oh let's go to Cambodia for the week" - "Oh, let's go". You don't have to get a visa. I didn't have to get a visa to go to Czech Republic, I just walked through. You know, Americans and Australians - they need visas to get into eastern Europe, I didn't, I just waltzed - I don't need a visa to get into EU. Getting a visa to Middle Eastern countries is a breeze, you know, and there's a perk being part of the - part of the Non-Alignment Movement. So it's very easy to travel. Like the places I want to go, it's easy to go. And maybe the only place that - which is quite difficult is the US. And I'm not really interested (Rahti).

When it comes to having Australian passport - there isn't much benefit in getting one, because holding Malaysian passport you can get to any country as well,
and you don’t need visas in Asia like Australians do. Well, except Israel, we’re not allowed to go in there. But that’s no big deal for me (Jolene).

Rahti and Jolene’s Malaysian passports provide them access to the areas they are most interested in travelling to. They thus negotiate their belonging based on their specific desires for global mobility, and weigh up their mobility options based on personal preferences. For example, Jolene is not interested in Israel, and Rahti is not interested in the United States. These preferences cancel out any limitations of the Malaysian passport as a functional means to their 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 is underpinned by the instrumental practicalities of mobility. This shows a divergence from the literature, discussed in Chapter Three, which frames Western passports as uniformly more beneficial than non-Western passports. As Rahti and Jolene’s narratives reveal, being part of the Non-Aligned Movement can also be advantageous to mobility.

The imagination of return as a key element in the social negotiation of transnationality will be discussed at length in Chapter Nine, but the possibility of 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. For participants such as Devendra and Gayesh, this was less of an issue, as countries like India and Sri Lanka allow former citizens to regain their citizenship relatively easily. For others, however, regaining their former citizenship would be very difficult. As such, keeping the option of long-term return became a strong incentive for these individuals to remain denizens. 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 is a significant incentive to remain a denizen, as is the possibility of 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 settlement 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 lifescape. 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, and is perhaps the best example in the data of Ong’s (1999) conceptualisation of ‘flexible citizenship.’ For Miguel, this kind of flexible, dually territorialised existence is 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 see themselves as the gatekeepers of mobility options for their families. For Hannah, Sunee and Gayesh, who already had spouses and children, citizenship decisions were described as a family negotiation, wherein the preferences and options for spouses and dependents needed to be considered. While Gayesh was adamant that his family should all have the same passport for security reasons, Hannah saw maintaining a different citizenship to her husband 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 supports Ley and Kobayashi’s (2005: 113) conception of transmigrant travel plans as “continuous, not finite”. 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. In some instances, this data also contradicts Massey and Akresh’s (2006) findings, which determine a very strong correlation between intentions to naturalise and intentions to remain permanently in the host country. In some circumstances, such as access to dual citizenship or a discrepancy
between the mobility value of source country and Australian citizenships, naturalisation was a means to increase future mobility, rather than establish permanence in the host country. However, although shades of Ong’s (1999) ‘flexible citizens’ could be seen in the desire of some participants to remain mobile, the need to return to fulfil family obligations or the desire to travel for leisure were more prevalent than desires for strategic capital building through work or investment.

Conclusions

Let us return to Hammar’s (1990) model of the three gates in order to summarise some of the patterns that have emerged in the data. The student-turned-migrant process, legally, consists of three gates, entrance (as a student), denizenship (as a permanent resident) and finally full citizenship (through dual citizenship or renouncing the original citizenship). In this sample, whether an individual intended to continue to gate three usually depended on a combination of many factors. These included:

- eligibility for dual citizenship;
- a desire to reject or disengage with the source country or to embrace and engage with Australia;
- a desire for greater security or protection of status in Australia;
- the desire for political voice through voting;
- the need or desire to be able to return easily to the country of origin;
• the desire to increase international mobility; and
• the strength of emotional attachment to the original citizenship.

First of all, individuals who envision return, whether temporary or permanent, will choose the best available option that keeps residency, work, and entrance and exit options open across the two countries. Additionally, people who value future mobility beyond the dual territories of source and settlement countries will choose the membership that offers them the best opportunities for travel, usually based on where they most desire to go. In terms of mobility, there was also strong evidence in this sample that the current political climate can impact 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 one of the key legal distinctions between PR and citizenship 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 is very different in both form and context to the transnational citizenship practices often discussed in the literature, it still represents a strategic
negotiation in order to maintain some level of political participation across two nation-states.

Thirdly, 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 compromise in the decision. As Ip, Inglis and Wu (1997: 372) note, when dual citizenship is available, the decision to naturalise “does not necessarily require such a critical or decisive reorientation”. 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. Furthermore, for almost all the individuals interviewed in this study, dual citizenship was the ‘ideal’ model of membership. Regardless of their motivations or perceptions of the meaning of citizenship, the dual membership model would provide them with everything they required: flexibility, security, political belonging and the formal acknowledgement of their subjective belonging to two states. There were however, notable exceptions. These included the participants who had the weakest transnational connections and desired a rejection of their source country membership, and those for whom PR was enough to complete a sense of belonging within Australia.

However, the option for what Fox (2005) would consider to be ‘full’ transnational membership in the form of dual citizenship was only
available to a very limited number of the sample, and many of those who were ineligible were, for a variety of reasons, reluctant to relinquish their original citizenship. Thus, in looking at the lived experiences of the students-turned-migrants in this study, we can see that a majority will spend an extended period of time living in Australia as denizens, and that many further perceive their denizenship as their long-term state of legal belonging. This reiterates the trope of students-turned-migrants falling in between standard categorisations, in this case of belonging and not-belonging in both legal and subjective senses.

There are several specific arguments that can be gleaned from the data regarding denizenship. It can be a contradictory space: feeling politically engaged without the right to vote, or identifying as belonging 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 their perceptions of the political climate. Most notable were impressions of increased regulation of migration, cases of discrimination against non-citizens, and rapid legislation changes. I have argued that this represents another example of wider political forces, in
particular regulatory 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.

Furthermore, a great deal of the participants’ narratives tend to contradict the literature that presents membership choices primarily as a form of capital accumulation and as divorced from a sense of political or social obligation (Latham 1998; Ong 1999; Massey and Akresh 2006). To some extent, the accumulation of social and financial capital is important, but for these migrants, prestige and financial reward are not the prime aims behind this accumulation. They rather wish to acquire mobility for their families, including a comfortable environment for their children, and reassurance for family members in the source country that they can return if they are needed. They also tend to desire a sense of security and a sense of belonging within the host society.

In sum, the motivations behind the citizenship choices made by my participants were complex, and the multi-faceted interlinkages of motivations in each individual migration story reveal the limitations to overly quantitative methodological approaches to migrant decision-making. Generally, motivations comprised of a blending of subjective desires to gain new or retain existing forms of belonging, and the practical needs for the benefits of security, mobility and political voice.
The data also strongly supports Sassen’s (2003) arguments that not only does citizenship have multiple meanings, but that individuals, in their social practices and decisions, can move between these different meanings. As such, citizenship can be a tool, a marker of identity, a statement of shared values in the host community and a rejection of the values of the source country. Ultimately, making decisions about legal membership was often framed by participants 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.
Analysis Part 2: Maintaining Mobilities

Chapter Seven: Virtual Mobility through Mediated Personal Communication

“Virtual travel produces a kind of strange and uncanny life on the screen, a life that is near and far, present and absent, live and dead...people can feel proximate while still distant” (Urry 2002: 267).

Introduction

The section of Melbourne’s CBD surrounding the northern half of Swanston Street has, in recent years, become a hub for the city’s large international student population. Encompassing both the RMIT and Melbourne University campuses, this section of the city contains increasing numbers of high-rise apartment accommodation, inhabited almost exclusively by international students. Real estate boards for rental accommodation spruik ‘high speed broadband access’ or ‘wireless Internet’ as selling points. The notice boards on the university campuses are plastered with ‘Going Home Sale’ flyers, many of which advertise second-hand laptop computers, web cameras and mobile phones. The streets surrounding the campuses contain several late night Internet cafes, and every magazine stand and convenience store displays brightly coloured advertisements for cheap long distance phone cards. Some of these advertisements use script in different languages or images of national flags to attract customers of particular nationalities. Within
these commercial signals lies the supposition that technologically mediated modes of communication are accessible, cheap and convenient for students who are far from home. They give some sense of the extent to which the city’s international student population is exposed to and reliant on mediated communications technology.

Moreover, the students that roam the campuses and the surrounding Asian eateries of Swanston and La Trobe Streets seem to conform to the ‘digital native’ mould. USB drives and tiny mobile phones are often slung around their necks on lanyards, along with the ubiquitous MP3 ear buds. Many students in the campus libraries, courtyards and cafes can be seen working wirelessly on their laptops. Observations of the environment of international student life reveal that communications technology often plays a key role in their positioning as consumers, scholars and socialisers.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the literature also reveals that discussions of mediated communication are likely to be particularly important in the context of international students. The sociological studies of international students by Rizvi (2005) and Ghosh and Wang (2003), for example, which were discussed at length in the literature review, note the importance of mediated personal communication in the transnational interactions of international students. Furthermore, studies of transmigrants by Wilding (2006) and Horst (2006) analyse the impact of Internet and mobile technologies on the maintenance of kinship across borders. As such, we
can expect that students-turned-migrants, who effectively represent a hybrid of the international student and transmigrant experience, will similarly interact with communications technology as a means to maintain transnational connections between the home and host societies. This chapter will address the significance of mediated communication to the research question concerning student-turned-migrants patterns of transnational connectedness. In particular, this chapter will address the precise ways in which students-turned-migrants keep in touch with friends and family in their country of origin and throughout the world.

In this chapter, I will firstly extend the discussion from Chapter Three on the prevalence and significance of communications technology in the extant theoretical and empirical literature, to establish a framework for understanding mediated personal communication as a transnational practice. I will then outline the specific ‘technoscapes’ that characterise the life-worlds of my participants; that is, I will describe in general the various types of communications technology that they use, and briefly establish their general attitudes and approaches to this technology. In the main analysis, I will group the different modes of communication into the broad categories of voice (traditional long distance calls), text (letters, text messaging, email and online messaging) and voice and visuality (videoconferencing through web cameras). I will present fragments of discussion from the interviews as well as pieces of material
from the probes in order to highlight some of the key themes that emerged from the data in terms of the role that communications technology plays in the lives of the participants as a means of maintaining transnational connectedness.

**Mediated Personal Communication as Transnational Practice**

The development of border-crossing consciousness, the compression of space-time and the reconfiguration of the global-local nexus are often cited as distinct characteristics of late modernity (Giddens 1990; Appadurai; 1996; Urry 2000). Technology, in particular high speed electronic communication tools such as the Internet, is seen as a key facilitator of these processes of modernity. Indeed, the mediated nature of personal communication through new technologies such as cheap long distance phone calls, email, fax and online and text messaging have opened up the ability for individuals to communicate with each other through increasingly cheap and rapid modes of delivery. Appadurai’s (1996, 2002) now classic trope the ‘technoscape’ is often used to characterise these phenomena. This concept has been particularly pertinent to ethnographic and sociological studies of modern migration, with technoscapes becoming frameworks through
which transmigrant and diasporic communities create and sustain social and familial relationships, as well as interact in extended political or religious networks. While Appadurai (2002: 51) broadly defines the technoscape as “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries,” migration scholars have concentrated in particular on how information and communications technologies (ICTs) have impacted on migrant transnationality, practices that I shall refer to as ‘mediated personal communication’. Although the function of this mediated communication varies considerably depending on the context of the particular migrant group, it is generally seen to function as a tool through which migrants sustain interaction with their ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991).

While the literature review in Chapter Three has generally established that communications technology is a significant factor in the lives of transnational students and migrants, there are some further qualitative studies that look more closely at how they function. There is an increasing amount of literature on diasporic virtual space, usually focusing on quite politicised online communities (see, for example, Skrbiš 2001; Romano 2002; Law 2003; Bernal 2006). However, none of the participants in this research were involved in broad diasporic community formation, but instead used communications technology in order to
maintain direct social and kinship networks. Unlike in a great deal of the
diasporic literature, my participants did not interact or form relationships
with people or groups that they met in mediated space, nor did they use
mediated space as a platform for political activism. They rather used
mediated communication to continue relationships over distance with
people they already knew. Thus, of far greater relevance to this
research are the studies that have focused on transmigrants’ use of
mediated communication as an everyday social practice that keeps
them connected within relatively intimate familial and social networks.

Most notably, Wilding (2006) has explored the use of ICT among
transnational families and kinship networks in Australia, Ireland, Italy, the
Netherlands, Iran, Singapore and New Zealand. In addition, Horst (2006)
focuses on how mobile phones have impacted on the transnational
social fields of rural Jamaicans, primarily through connecting them to
relatives and partners overseas. From such literature, we can expect
that students-turned-migrants will regularly use various forms of
communication in their transnational interactions; that the different forms
will function in different ways; and that these practices will be firmly
embedded into the specific social and cultural contexts of both the
migrants and their distant family and friends. Wilding (2006) and Horst
(2006) are also both notably ambivalent about the transformative power
of communications technology as a transnational practice. While they
acknowledge that technology does impact on the way migrants keep in
touch, they are hesitant to view it as radically altering existing practices and relationships. They also reject the idea that technology consistently emancipates migrants from the tyranny of distance, noting instead that it can carry both “blessings and burdens” (Horst 2006).

In light of these themes in the extant literature, in the following analysis I will highlight how the participants perceived the advantages and disadvantages of mediated communication, focusing on the particular communicative challenges involved in mediating relationships across transnational social space. Throughout the analysis, I will also refer back to pertinent points in the literature, in order to highlight similarities and differences between the extant empirical knowledge base and this current study.

**Student-Turned-Migrant Technoscapes**

Every participant in this study spoke to family or friends overseas at least once a week. All participants regularly used at least one form of mediated communication, while most used several. The communication log books in the probe packages revealed that participants used long distance calling cards, regular long distance calls, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) calls, web cameras, email, text messaging and online messaging to communicate with distant loved ones. They were without exception comfortable with this technology, were all owners of computers and mobile phones, and all seemed eager to embrace
emerging technology such as VOIP, which had very recently become available in Australia at the time of this fieldwork. However, several participants noted that their use of technology for transnational communication could be limited by a lack of know-how or access on the part of family members in their countries of origin. This corroborates with both Wilding (2006) and Horst’s (2006) findings in their studies of transmigrants’ use of ICTs; both studies concur that how “kin maintain contact across time and space” (Wilding 2006: 125) is often contingent on their access to different types of technology.

However, all the participants agreed that mediated communication played a vital role in their transnational relationships. Some participants in fact felt that the technology was crucial to the survival of certain relationships. Tina, for example, who had become engaged long distance and had returned only briefly to China to marry her fiancé, felt quite strongly that her long distance relationship may not have survived without technology like online messaging and web cameras:

In part I think it’s a crucial way for me and my husband, before is boyfriend, to keep in touch. If we did not have this advanced technology, we can lose touch, yeah, and we will, maybe we will break up.

Participants also contrasted experiences in the past, when mediated communications technology was less accessible or more expensive, noting that it had significantly impacted on their ability to sustain
transnational connections. Participants with prior experiences of mobility could often recall the days before email and text messaging, while, in a testament to how rapidly the communications context is changing, some also noted the decreasing costs and increasing ease of communication since their arrival in Australia as students:

When we left the States it was ’69, there was no email or anything like that. If you made an international call it was a major deal, now everyone picks up the phone or sends an email or sends a text. So unfortunately we have lost a fair bit of contact with a lot of our American relatives (Penny).

Because - like it’s not very expensive now. It is expensive when I first came, and it was hard at the time to keep in touch. Like in $10 you could have spoken 20 minutes. Now we can speak 200 minutes, 300 minutes (Tariq).

All the participants thus agreed to some degree that communications technology was a cheap and convenient means to sustain their relationships across vast space. However, as the following analysis will reveal, many also felt it could, at times, be intrusive, alienating, disappointing or annoying. In many ways, the use of technology reshaped the way they communicated and negotiated social obligations, sometimes making their transnational lives easier, and sometimes more problematic.

**Voice: Long Distance Telephone Calls**
Despite the prevalence of digital modes of communication, telephoning remained the most popular means of transnational communication for the participants in this study, particularly in terms of maintaining contact with family members. Vertovec’s (2002) research confirms the importance of cheap long distance calls to transmigrants globally: “one of the most significant (yet under-researched) modes of transnational practice affecting migrants’ lives is the enhanced ability to telephone family members.... the communications allowed by cheap telephone calls serve as a kind of social glue connecting small scale social formations across the globe” (220). The data was also extremely consistent in that all participants cited the telephone as the best way to keep in touch with family, while email and online messaging were considered a more convenient way to catch up with friends. This was sometimes associated with the fact that parents were not as comfortable with using technology, but a majority of participants also felt that the phone was a more intimate or personal way to communicate. In addition, all participants noted that the lowering cost of long distance calling was a distinct advantage, and most used long distance calling cards to get the best possible deals.

Phone conversations with family, and in particular parents, tended to focus on aspects of daily life and news from home. Devendra’s description of the information relayed by his father on the phone was fairly typical, “he tells me something what’s happening there, cousin got
married and all this stuff. We are doing some kind of house restructuring and all that stuff, and work, somebody’s dead, somebody’s born.” Family and community news like this were frequent topics, as well as fielding their parents’ questions about work, study and health. Jolene saw a distinct divide in the conversational topics between her mother and her father:

With dad, sometimes we talk about politics and about how the country’s doing, how’s the situation back home, you know, is it getting any better, is the country progressing. Social issues. So with that I’m more open and topic of discussion is wider. Whereas mum, it’s more of health issues, like you know, ‘How are you? Are you keeping well? Eating well?’

However, for most other participants with two parents, the discussions were similar with their mothers and fathers.

Despite the popularity of phone calls, the participants did outline several drawbacks to this mode of communication. For example, several participants discussed the limitations of telephone conversations in terms of dealing with their parents’ health issues. For Penny and Gayesh, the problems were more practical, as both Penny’s father and Gayesh’s mother became too elderly to effectively communicate via telephone. Penny managed to substitute by writing her father regular letters and using her sister as a secondary source through which to gain news of his health and well-being. For Gayesh, however, when his mother was in the final stages of dementia, physical proximity would have been his only
opportunity to attempt any kind of communication with her. It was at this time that he most acutely felt the impossibility of “conquering the tyranny of distance” (Brown 2002: 73). This resonates with similar situations in Wilding’s (2006) work. She reflects that illnesses such as dementia, by preventing people from using technology, can destroy the illusion of imagined proximity. This can sometimes be quite painful for the kin who had grown to rely on technology as a transnational practice. Gayesh’s experiences are also very much reflective of Urry’s (2002) assertion that there are certain levels of social obligation that demand physical co-presence, and virtual or imagined presence cannot substitute.

Rahti and Jolene’s mothers, while not yet elderly, both suffered from ongoing health complaints. The phone calls to and from her mother that Rahti recorded in her journal were often suffused with guilt, as her mother frequently called to complain about various things, or because she was “bored and lonely”. Rahti wrote that while she tries to support her mother over the phone, “I feel bad I’m not there to make her happy” and reiterated this in the interview “sometimes I feel really guilty when she calls me”. Jolene also felt strongly that calling was no substitute for actually being there when her mother was unwell, reflecting that “distance does play a part, like you wish you could be there, but you can’t. And all you have, all you can do is just talk over the phone and say words of comfort, and encouragement and stuff, and support”. For
Rahti and Jolene, although the telephone was cost effective and convenient, it was also very ineffectual in situations in which authentic intimacy was required, when true closeness and comfort would require physical proximity. This corroborates strongly with the research of Hazen and Alberts (2005) and also of Wilding (2006: 134), who finds that “although ‘connected presence’ gives the appearance of the annihilation of distance, it can also result in increased guilt and anxiety…. In some circumstances, a telephone call or an email is simply not sufficient to show care for kin in need”. As Vertovec (2004: 223) notes, “telephone calls can only provide a kind of punctuated sociality that can heighten emotional strain as well as alleviate it. This mode of intermittent communication cannot bridge all the gaps of information and expression endemic to long distance separation”.

Not only was telephoning limited in its capacity to provide authentic intimacy, it was also sometimes framed as an obligation or intrusion in their lives. Although Madeleine usually spoke to her family twice a week, she began to avoid their calls after a slightly fraught family holiday:

But since I’ve been back from France I’ve just been avoiding them. So I’ve spoken to my Dad maybe twice in the last two months. (...) I just need a break. I spent ten days with them non-stop, and I just had enough. (...) And sometimes they just talk to talk? So it’s not that interesting. And my life is, I guess, so different, so yeah, no, I don’t call.
The intensity of corporeal co-presence was something that Madeleine needed to ‘recover’ from, and she still needed ‘space’ from her family even though she was now physically thousands of miles away. She also felt a lack of connection in her conversations with them, and a lack of meaningful interaction, and she implied that it was difficult for them to understand her life and experiences in Australia.

**Text: Letters, Text Messaging, Emails and Online Messaging**

**Letters**

While this chapter primarily describes the use of technologically mediated communication, it should be noted that the traditional mode of letter writing was still important for some participants. Penny wrote regular letters to her elderly father, “he’s 84, so he comes from that era where you write letters and he really, really likes getting letters, so I write letters”. This is consistent with Ghosh and Wang’s (2003) finding about family members’ access to and familiarity with technology as a key factor in how transnational practices can be operationalised. Ivy, on the other hand, wrote regularly to her fiancé despite being in daily contact through telephone, text messaging, web camera and online messaging. Ivy reasoned that the one-way nature of letter writing allowed her to fully express her thoughts and feelings without the interactive interruptions of a two-way dialogue:
For my boyfriend, almost three or four letters a week (...) I write a lot! (laughs) I’ve got a lot to say! I can just, you know, tell him everything I’m feeling, describe these things ... even if I talk to him on the phone that day, that’s more asking questions, you know?

Jolene was another participant who mentioned traditional mail. She wrote in her journal about a package and letter sent from a friend:

Was thrilled to get mail as I seldom do (only receive bills) - it made my day. In the electronic age we’re losing touch with writing to one another. Letters have a more personal touch to it. That made me feel special.

These examples show that although technological communication dominated the transnational practices of the students-turned-migrants in this study, more traditional modes of communication could still play a distinct role in particular contexts, and could predicate a certain kind of closeness not attained through technological modes.

Text messaging

In some ways, the medium of text messaging functioned similarly to that of telephoning. Rather than only being a function for sending short messages, most participants described using text messaging for extended ‘chats’. Jolene wrote in her probe for example, that she “texted with a friend for half an hour”, demonstrating how the medium is used for back and forth dialogues. In discussing text messaging, many participants expressed similar frustrations to those described above by
Madeleine. Like Madeleine, Rahti sometimes felt barraged with unnecessary and intrusive messages that she felt obligated to reply to:

But not so handy with my dad. (...) He just barrages me with SMS's (text messages). Once he figured out to SMS, that was the end of it for me. I get SMS's literally every day. I don’t write some of it down in the journal ’cause I just run out of ink. It gets annoying sometimes. If I don’t reply, he’ll go, “Why don’t you reply?” I’m like, ‘Dad, relax’. And you know, if you say something like, “Oh, okay, I’m gonna go to the bank and sort out your loan”, my dad will say, “Okay”. And if I don’t reply back, “Okay”, he’ll say - You know - when people’s quotes come out through the SMS’s it’s a bit annoying. Same like my brother who will write a whole essay. I have to read it.

Like many of the other participants, Rahti’s experiences demonstrate that the downfall of instantaneous contact is that it demands instantaneous reply. This space-time compression through mobile technology has been dubbed ‘perpetual contact’ by Katz and Aakhus (2002), and it creates “a sense of presence at a-distance that allows the traveller to be always available, and therefore always under surveillance” (Molz 2006, as cited in Urry 2007: 223). This creates constant demands on time and continuing obligations to respond immediately. For participants like Rahti and Madeleine, mediated personal communication sometimes became intrusive, and despite their physical distance from their families, it often afforded them little emotional space.
Email and online messaging

Across all participants, virtual modes of communication such as email and online messaging tended to function more as a means to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances than to mediate closer relationships with partners or immediate family. Many participants felt that these modes of online communication also enhanced their capacity to be transnationally mobile. The ease with which they could sustain contact with their many friends and relatives around the world through email and online messaging meant that future travel to various destinations would be much easier:

And if I were to travel, I would probably have friends that I can stay with (…) all round the world. (…) So that's very good to have, keeping the network of friends, you know, together, friendship going. Even if it's just "Hi" over the MSN (a popular online messaging service) or - you know... You just have that contact (Jolene).

As Jolene states here, technology like email and online messaging can function as a kind of transnational social networking tool, maintaining larger numbers of widespread contacts than would be feasible or time efficient with more traditional modes of communication. Looking at the maps that participants completed in their probes, I could see precisely how diverse and widespread their friendship networks were. Jolene, for example, had friends throughout South-East Asia as well as in Sweden, the Netherlands and New Zealand, while Rahti had connections in Italy,
the United Kingdom, North Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia. Many of these contacts were university alumni, supporting Rizvi’s (2005: 79) observation of how the “global ‘scattering’” of international students post-graduation facilitates extensive international networks and “aspirations of mobility”.

Participants also noted how the distinctly instantaneous nature of online messaging, as well as its capacity for people to chat in groups, allowed a drastic compression of space-time in their social networking:

“It’s all global, and you know, everyone around the world - you get on it and it’s like, ‘Where are you?’ You know, instant chat. It’s as if you are here in front of me, but you are overseas (Jolene).

I like how you say “Hi” and someone will say “Hi” back to you straight away. And it doesn’t cost you the world to do it. (...) It’s cheap, and I don’t have to spend a lot of money, and you can sort of keep in contact and know everything. It’s handy, it’s really, really handy when you talk to friends (Rahti).

For Rahti and Jolene, online messaging allowed them to maintain numerous and widespread transnational connections, through communication that is cheap, instantaneous and also simultaneous. While the communication in such cases is seldom in-depth, and usually constitutes just saying ‘hi’ and briefly ‘catching up’, these relationships are still significant in that they constitute a global social network that can facilitate future mobility. This is a feature of transnationality that is
relatively specific to the student-turned-migrants experience. Their internationalised alumni networks possibly create much broader webs of transnational connections than those of other migrant groups, and their high level of education and cultural competency grant them the possibility of utilising these networks for future travel and professional experience overseas. This displays how, for this particular migrant group, virtual mobility and corporeal mobility mutually impact on each other, with virtual modes of mobility allowing the maintenance of contacts that can facilitate corporeal mobility.

However, online communication did not function in the same way for all the participants. Shui and Rafael are two examples that provide an interesting contrast to the experiences discussed above. Rafael and Shui had both lived highly mobile lives before coming to Australia, Rafael as a ‘third culture kid’, and Shui through completing her undergraduate studies in Canada and Masters Degree in the United Kingdom. As such, their transnational networks were even larger and more widespread than those of participants such as Jolene and Rahti. However, neither of these participants maintained transnational social connections to a significant degree. Rafael stated that despite the available technology, he found it virtually impossible to keep in touch with friends from the many countries in which he had lived, and although Shui said that she sends and receives the odd email, she was not in regular contact with her various alumni networks.
Furthermore, participants with children, such as Sunee and Gayesh, stated that they had very little available leisure time to maintain a transnational social network, despite the convenience and instantaneousness of the technology. By necessity, their transnational connections were generally limited to immediate family and a few professional contacts. Similarly, participants who had spouses, partners or children overseas, such as Hannah, Ivy, Tina and Hualing, tended to concentrate their transnational contact on their immediate families and significant others, rather than on wider friendship networks. It would therefore seem that there is a limit to the extent to which technology can maintain transnational social networks. In some cases, such as Shui and Rafael’s, the participants’ high levels of past mobility meant that their transnational networks had become too complex and dense to be fully and consistently maintained. For other participants, more intimate relationships took priority over more general social networks, and these relationships were generally mediated through the telephone or web camera, rather than email or online messaging. These were all issues of time, necessity and intimacy that even the drastic compression of space-time afforded by online communication could not overcome.

Furthermore, in contrast to the generally positive experiences of Rahti and Jolene, some participants were openly sceptical about the ability of online communication to sustain genuine or meaningful relationships.
While Hannah couldn’t pinpoint exactly why she didn’t like to use email and online messaging: “I don’t know why, we just like talking. Talking on the phone’s better,” other participants had distinct reasons as to why online modes of communication didn’t meet their needs:

They move on with their life. They got work and we kind of still talk to each others on MSN (a popular online messaging program) – I check programs, all this stuff, but not a very strong connection there. (...) It’s not the most fantastic way but it is something that keeps your friendship alive, basically. But to actually get to know what’s going on with their life is just quite essential and how they feel, which cannot be explained in words on the Internet. I would prefer to call them up (Vincent).

It’s horrible. The virtuality of it. See my – it is horrible that I go to Australia on the twentieth day of October 2003 and my life before that has been erased from me. Nobody that I know in Australia saw me grow up or saw me through uni or with pressures or without glasses so I was – I feel as if I was born again and there is this really deep sense of destitution. I feel really destitute and again my friends that I met in England, that I had in England I’ve lost them as well. Yeah my mate has come twice, a doctor and probably twice or three times or four times a year but he only—in reality he’s only a voice on the other end of the phone now, or a couple of characters on a computer screen, that is what he is. It doesn’t take me anywhere, I can’t have a beer with him or he can’t help me pack boxes tomorrow (when I move house) and this is in regard to all my friends from uni, my friends that have just passed. Then again it puts a lot of pressure on my relationship with Kate (my wife) because then she has to become the friend, the mate (Jaime).
These responses very much support Urry’s (2003) hypothesis that relationships require ‘meetingness’, as trust and commitment have to be performed through corporeal presence. These participants are acutely aware of this in their mediated actions. Friendships that lack actual acts of corporeal co-presence such as doing things together, going for beers, helping each other, and talking face-to-face, never seem really fulfilling.

Amongst the participants in this study, increased mobility and increased time away from home seemed to increase this inability to sustain genuine friendships through technology. Shui and Rafael, for example, who had experienced multiple migrations before coming to Australia, found it almost impossible to sustain their vast and dispersed social networks. In addition, the participants who had been in Australia for the least amount of time, such as Tina, showed significantly closer contact with friends at home than those, such as Vincent, who had been living in Australia for an extended period. While some participants were fairly ambivalent about the difficulties of maintaining friendship through virtual presence, seeing it simply as an inherent and unavoidable cost of their mobility, others, like Jaime, spoke of the loss of friendships through the limitations of virtuality with a real sense of distress, noting how distance had effectively destroyed connections to their past lives.

Other participants saw similar drawbacks to online communication, which were also connected in some way to its ‘distanciating’ effect.
Issues of obligation, reciprocity and disappointment were often raised with regard to email, particularly among friends:

Where I do get a bit hurt is where a couple of my girlfriends, I sometimes email them two or three times before I actually get an email back. And you just sort of think “Well, come on, hey, you know, ouch!” But then people are busy. People are busy and I guess they don’t always have time. But no, I don’t feel too bad; in fact my husband says to me “You do far more than they do and when does anyone do the same for you?” (Penny).

So I’m really bad in replying. It normally takes me either more than one day or one week to reply. So, even though I still keep in touch with people, but I don’t really have this high expectation on technology. Yeah, I like to use it, I think it’s convenient, but I don’t really get disappointed. Maybe I disappoint other people! (Shui).

What I’m trying to avoid is, I hate to disappoint people. And I think, most people I know, are used to how I function, which is, I think, like I wrote in here (the probe), when I’m here I’m here, and when I’m not here I’m not here. I just, like, couldn’t…it would be totally impossible to keep in touch with people. So if I reply to an email, then I have one back. And since I could probably receive, like, six or seven emails in a week (from family and friends), it’s just crazy (...). And that’s why I say, ok, when I am in Australia I live my Australian life. When I’m in France, I’ll go to the other side of the city, I’ll go to the next country to visit you, but if I’m not here, I’m not here. (...) And I keep very...usually I have very personal interactions with people, so group email wouldn’t work, and I wouldn’t want that. So a blog don’t work either, because I just like the individual interaction, I’m not interested in general stuff (Madeleine).
Reciprocity is the main issue raised here. The medium of email, for all its convenience and ease, also makes it easier for a sender to be ignored by a receiver. Replies can easily be postponed and then forgotten. Like any communication, it requires the two-way participation of the sender and the receiver for a dialogue to be created, and people can feel hurt when efforts to keep in touch are ignored. Although the technology of late modernity inherently ‘saves time’, people are increasingly ‘time poor’, and in some cases still too busy to respond. They thus don’t always fulfil their obligations in the unspoken two-way agreement inherent in keeping in touch.

To combat this, participants like Madeleine prefer to leave friendships dormant until they are corporeally there and able to spend time with people face-to-face, finding the instantaneous ‘back-and-forth’ of virtual contact to be too frustrating and distracting when they are immersed in life in Australia. This is yet another means by which students-turned-migrants must negotiate their transnationality – constructing choices about how they commit to and value different modes of virtual and corporeal presence.

**Voice and Visuality: Web Cameras**

In this study, the term ‘web camera’ or ‘web cam’ is used to describe the small digital video cameras that are commonly used with VOIP software such as Skype for real time videoconferencing over the Internet.
Web cameras signify a fairly unique communication process, because they allow the users to see each other; to combine a conversation with a visual element. Urry (2002: 259) writes of how co-presence requires visuality, particularly the visual communication of eye contact and facial expressions, which “enables the establishment of intimacy and trust,” while Panagakos and Horst (2006: 113) also note more specifically that teleconferencing “has the potential to amplify emotional connections difficult to express in other venues and adds another significant layer of connectivity for relatives living across distances”. Web cameras are thus a type of virtual co-presence that simulates the intimacy of face-to-face corporeal co-presence by providing these images of faces and gestures. For the participants in this study, they were used exclusively to talk to immediate family and spouses or partners, rather than to communicate with friends. Ivy, for example, used the web camera to allow her the intimacy of seeing her family’s faces, but also to give her a window into her their home, and a glimpse into their daily lives. She described, for example, her father displaying the family’s dinner for her to see:

I like it. Just talk directly, really easy and fast….because talking on the phone, we can’t see each others’ face. But the web cam, we can talk and see the face. And I can see everything in the house, see everybody! And my father always shows; we are eating this one, that one! Look! (laughs)
Connecting with her family through the web camera allowed Ivy to feel part of the daily ritual of family dinner, to connect visually with the environment of her family home and the faces of her family members.

Other participants seemed to use web cameras in specific instances where a visual image was of paramount importance. One example of this was the arrival of babies into the extended family. Vincent and Caryn used the web camera to see images of their siblings’ new babies. Shui, who was pregnant at the time of her interview, emailed several months later explaining how instrumental the web camera had become after the birth of her child, as it allowed her parents direct, real-time visual access to their new grandchild.

R: I use that [web camera] with my family once a week. Yes, once a week because I can see the baby. I think they are trying to help with the baby to know who I am. For them it’s quite important. My dad thinks it’s quite important for the baby to know there is someone else in the family. So we use the web cam every week.

I: And how old is the baby now?

R: One year.

I: Do you think that’s important?

R: Yes, I think he will remember because when I call his name I can see the reaction and then yes, I think will help. If you not doing anything then he has no idea who are you (Caryn).

The desire and obligation to see the baby was thus fulfilled through the technology, although all participants agreed that it could never fully
substitute for true physical proximity. In both cases, trips overseas to really see the baby were also considered eventually essential. Vincent in fact implied that his sister was disappointed that he was yet to meet his nephew face-to-face. Seeing the baby seemed to be the kind of social obligation that Urry (2002) considers to demand actual co-presence. The virtual co-presence afforded by the web camera could only offer a substitute in the meantime.

Hannah and Hualing were the only participants who were separated from their children, and thus also valued the web camera as a chance to interact visually with them. Basic parenting practices were often able to be conducted over the web camera, as Hannah could sing songs with her toddler, and Hualing could help her teenage daughter with homework. However, both mothers noted the limitations of this technology in its simulation of co-presence:

R1: Because you know he feels that with web cam when I call him sometimes it’s not very clear, and sometimes we are a little far away. So my son prefers telephone, not Internet.

I: Ok. So sometimes it can make you feel like there’s more distance?

R1: Yeah. Yeah, like far away from us. Basically we use telephone, and even though I can’t see him I feel more closer like that (Hannah).

I: What do you like about using the camera?

R: I think sometimes it lets me missing them very strong. Of course sometimes I want to give them a hug. And I can’t (Hualing).
While one would assume that a real-time video image of a loved one would increase a sense of proximity and closeness, the limitations of the technology mean that it can in fact serve to create a greater sense of distance. Although the web camera simulates corporeal co-presence by providing a visual image of the users, the lack of aural clarity and the time lags inherent in this method of communication mean that any kind of authentic co-presence cannot be adequately replicated. In addition, it can even intensify the longing for co-presence and physical touch.

Tina felt a similar sense of distance in web camera conversations with her husband in China. While she acknowledged the benefit of the visual image in simulating a type of corporeal proximity “you can see the guy and imagine that he’s just beside you”, she felt that a truer emotional intimacy was available through talking on the phone:

But if he talk - talk to him over the phone, I mean - a different feeling. It would be more - I think it’s more romantic to talk through the phone. (...) When you have phone call - and my voice - I can see that my voice tend to be very, very gentle. Oh yeah. That’s two different feelings, yeah. More romantic on the phone, more close.

In mediating close, one-on-one relationships, such as that of Hannah and Hualing and their children, or Tina and her husband, it would seem that, despite the advantages of a visual interaction, the web cameras
only manage to simulate physical proximity, rather than an authentic emotional closeness.

**Conclusions**

This chapter reveals that technologically mediated communication does in fact play a distinct role in the lives of students-turned-migrants, particularly in terms of maintaining contacts with family members and friends overseas. However, although all participants felt that technology offered a cheap and convenient means to keep in touch, many also acknowledged its limitations or disadvantages. Many found either that forms of ‘mediated intimacy’ (Kjeldskov et al. 2004) are generally a poor substitute for real-world interaction, or that the technology itself raised new and problematic communicative and relational challenges.

Analysis of the interview and probe data also revealed that students-turned-migrants utilised different modes of communication to mediate different types of relationships (familial, spousal, and more casual friendship networks), as well as different kinds of conversations or messages. Phone calls were still by far the most frequently used, and considered by the participants to be the most effective and intimate way to mediate close long distance relationships, particularly with family. Phone calls were also the one mode of communication that was used regularly and consistently by all participants. However, in some cases, particularly involving parents and their health issues, telephoning was
seen as an ineffectual substitute for being there. This often resulted in phone conversations being connected to a sense of guilt. In some cases, phone calls and text messages from family members also felt intrusive, with participants sometimes feeling persistent instantaneous communication from their families became frustrating in its frequency and less meaningful in its content.

Email and online messaging, on the other hand, were generally used for social contact with globally dispersed friendship networks. This kind of communication was usually described as just ‘chit-chat’ and ‘catching up,’ in-depth or detailed conversations were usually left for phone calls. While some participants valued this kind of communication as a means to maintain transnational social networks and thus potentially maintain their mobility, others found it to be superficial and unfulfilling. Email also seemed to create an interesting set of communicative challenges. While Szersynski and Urry (2006: 117) have described the “new writing cultures” of email and text messages as “fast, frictionless and connective,” we have seen from the empirical data here that they can in fact create friction and disconnection in social relationships. Despite its instantaneous nature, email seemed to be the mode through which people could most often neglect their obligations or feel neglected themselves.
Web cameras were important to maintain closer, more intimate relationships, with family or spouses and partners. They uniquely provided visuality, allowing individuals access to environments like the family home and a means to fulfil visual obligations like seeing the baby. However, for intimate face-to-face communication, the web camera tended to simulate the visuality of co-presence, but not its actual intimacy.

Mediated communication obviously played a very key role in all of the participants’ lives, and in many ways it made the maintenance of a variety of transnational connections relatively cheap and convenient, particularly when compared with more traditional modes of interaction. Advancements such as online messaging and web cameras also provided particular unique functions, such as the ability to group chat or to have the addition of visuality in long distance communication. However, there is certainly a paradox inherent in transnational engagement through mediated communication, which both Urry (2002) and Rantanen (2005) have noted: while the convenience and instantaneousness of mediated communication is making people more and more accessible to each other across vast distances of time and space, the limitations of this technology can, at times, also heighten emotional strain or a sense of distance between individuals. Ultimately, although these modes of communication function as substitutes for corporeal presence, they can never fully emulate the “most complete
reciprocity” of face-to-face contact (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997: 112).

As Caryn succinctly stated, in good times and bad, mediated communication was often a weak substitute for real proximity:

R: Like if you want to talk to them right away you realise though there’s no one. Like sometimes you can’t just, you don’t want to talk on the phone and you don’t want to like type on the Internet, you just want to talk to them face by face. That’s the difficult parts.

I: Is that usually if something - if you’ve got a problem or having a bad day?

R: Yes or like something happen very exciting, you know, happy? Yes, you realise oh, there’s no one.

While Urry’s (2000) claim that virtual mobility is a weak substitute for corporeal co-presence holds true in the data examined here, it would seem that, in the case of these migrants, his claim to ontological transformation through technology, discussed in Chapter Two, is perhaps overstated. In the experiences of the students-turned-migrants studied here, technology did not ultimately transform the basic dynamics of human interactions. In this context, there seems to be a great deal of sense in Wilding’s (2006: 126) wariness of grand narratives of the transformative or radical power of technologically mediated social interaction, and a great deal of truth in her assertion that “new information and communications technologies have been incorporated…into the familiar, ongoing patterns of everyday social life”. Children still felt the need to be at their parents’ side when they were ill,
and parents still desired physical closeness with their children. Traditional familial obligations still needed to be fulfilled. People still at times felt crowded and intruded on by the demands of family members despite the enacting of these demands across vast geographical space, and friendships still required genuine reciprocity and the investment of time to really flourish.

However, although the use of mediated personal communication is not broadly transformative, the experiences of the students-turned-migrants in this study also reveal that the contemporary digital environment is changing the migrant experience, particularly by altering the ways in which migrants can remain transnationally connected. There is very little literature on these new forms of transnational connections by young, educated and techno-savvy migrants, who will, in the context of the knowledge economy, grow exponentially as a migrant group in the decades to come. Students-turned-migrants represent exemplary examples of this growing wave of digitally connected and highly mobile individuals, and their experiences shed a great deal of light on the complex negotiations inherent in sustaining virtual mobilities across transnational space.
Chapter Eight: Virtual Mobility through the Mass Media

“So here is one of the paradoxes of mediated globalisation: at the same time as it connects people, it also distanciates them” (Rantanen 2005: 10).

Introduction

The increasing interconnectivity of global modernity has not only been facilitated through communications technology but also through globalised media forms, including television, radio, print media and the Internet. Mass media has been significant to transmigration scholarship as a means by which migrants can keep abreast of economic, social and political developments in their source countries. In this context, Appadurai’s (1996, 2002) landscapes of the global cultural economy are again significant, this time with regard to the trope of the ‘mediascape’. Appadurai (2002) conceives the mediascape as encompassing not only the electronic dissemination of newspapers, magazines, films and television programs, but also the complex nature of the images of the world produced by these media. Edited collections of literature such as Karim’s The Media of Diaspora (2003) or Cunningham and Sinclair’s Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas (2000) give a sense of the great range of migrant mediascapes operating in modernity, and the diversity of research that examines their operation.
Two key themes emerge in recent literature on migrants’ engagement with mass media. Firstly, the recent shift from what we might call ‘local ethnic’ to ‘diasporic global’ media networks (Karim 1998; Cunningham and Sinclair 2000); and secondly, the role that mass media plays in cross-border community and identity formations (Morley and Robins 1995). However, studies in this area have tended to focus on particular diasporic ethnic groups, and often on the media consumption practices of established migrant communities (see, for example, Siew-Peng 2001; Hage 2002; Shi 2005). I believe the analysis of student-turned-migrant media engagement will add a new dimension to this knowledge, firstly because the experiences of recent economic or skilled migrants have received little attention, and secondly because there are few studies that examine how recent migrants individually integrate the messages of mainstream mass media into their own construction of a transnationality.

This chapter will show that the media can play a variety of exceptionally complex roles in the construction of transnational lives. A close examination of the interview data revealed certain surprising and contradictory themes with regard to media engagement, and in this chapter, I will address the issue of students-turned-migrants and their interactions with mass media through a framework of three broad categories. I have termed these categories ‘media shy’, ‘globally engaged’ and ‘media wary.’ However, it is worth noting that not every
participant fitted neatly into one category, and that individuals could respond to different forms of media and different message contexts in different ways. Before the three categories of media consumption are analysed in detail, I will outline the general nature of the participants’ mediascapes. This will involve describing how they access the media, and contrasting their context with previously studied migrant groups.

**Student-Turned-Migrant Mediascapes**

Most participants greatly preferred online news sites and television news to traditional forms of print media, such as newspapers and magazines. They also did not make any use of the variety of ethnic and foreign-language newspapers available in Melbourne, nor did they engage with Australia’s relatively accessible television and radio ethnic broadcasting. One participant watched the news on SBS, Australia’s multicultural broadcaster, but the others relied solely on the Internet to provide them with news from their home country, or engaged with mainstream commercial national broadcasting for international news. Generally, participants did not read printed newspapers at all, but relied solely on digital news. This is in itself a very contemporary phenomenon. Viswanath’s (1988) study provides an interesting contrast here. In the context of the late 1980s, international students had to rely on the slightly out-of-date foreign newspapers in the university library for news from their countries of origin. This resulted in a kind of temporal displacement, in which individuals were always a little behind on the news from home. In
contrast, the participants in this study were able to use the Internet to gain instantaneous access to events at home and throughout the world, demonstrating how technological advancements are impacting significantly on modes of transnational media engagement. The ability to access news online has clearly compressed time, with geographical distance no longer creating temporal barriers to finding out about happenings in the world.

The data also suggests that students-turned-migrants are operating in different mediascapes from more established diasporic or migrant communities. Literature on the relationship between migrants and the media in Australia has in the past been focused on diasporas or ethnic communities and their consumption of exclusively ‘ethnic’ media (see, for example, Cunningham and Nguyen 1999; Cottle 2000). Students-turned-migrants, however, are largely not consumers of locally-produced ethnic media. There are several convergent possible explanations to account for this difference. First, the lack of engagement with ethnic media could be connected to generational differences, as ethnic media in Australia appears to be more directed towards older, first-generation migrants within established ethnic communities (Bell 1991). Second, the relatively short period of time that students-turned-migrants have been in the host society could be a factor, and over time they may engage more intensively with local ethnic media, although there was no indication of this among participants in this study. Third, students-turned-
migrants have greater access to and more experience with information and communications technology, and thus prefer online access to global outlets rather than locally-produced foreign-language newspapers. In addition, the fact that students-turned-migrants maintain frequent communication with family and friends back home and frequently travel back to their countries of origin could contribute to a decreased need for engagement with their ethnic community within Australia.

Participants from countries in which the media is routinely censored, such as China, encountered a radically different mediascape upon their arrival in Australia, in terms of both information available and the opinions presented. Even for those who came from countries with free access to global media, Australian national news providers often gave an altered slant on issues, and the different cultural images and messages provided by Australian content on television also provided a distinct shift in their mediascape. Thus, despite the rhetoric of ‘globalised media’, it is apparent that as migrants shift between societies, the nature and content of their media access shifts too. The following analysis will tease out some of these key themes, using the categorisations of ‘media shy’, ‘media wary’ and ‘globally engaged’ to examine the diverse ways in which students-turned-migrants were engaged with and influenced by the mass media.
Media Shy: Indifference and Disempowerment

A number of participants were not especially interested in keeping up with the news media from their countries of origin. Devendra gave up on reading or watching Indian news after his first two years in Australia, feeling strongly that there was little point in maintaining this kind of contact when he had no intention to return, “after that I lost interest. (...) I mean, I’m not going to go back. So why take something and put it inside of head and grind it which we don’t have to?” Shui’s standpoint was similar; she stated that while she used to check the Malaysian news online when she first arrived, she now finds herself “too busy” and less interested with keeping up to date with it than she was in the past.

Other participants, while more likely to occasionally engage with Internet or television news, were similarly ambivalent about the value of this engagement:

Yeah, I often watch SBS Journal. That I like. I just put it on and sometimes watch part of it as I’m having breakfast or checking my emails. Just in the background. (...) But it sort of follows the same logic as for friends. Like, a little bit is ok, but I don’t like it to take over (Madeleine).

Miguel similarly avoided an intense engagement with the Colombia media, finding the lack of progress in politics and internal security to be ‘depressing.’ Miguel’s perceptions of his powerlessness to change these negative situations manifest themselves in apathy and avoidance:
We can’t get newspapers here, so just on the Internet, yeah, now and then I check. And mostly with my hobbies, not really with a political situation or security or anything like that, because if - I think if I can not really do anything about it, why bother. I do care but, yeah, it’s just sort of depressing to get to know this kind of thing.

For the participants I have categorised as ‘media shy’, exposure to transnational media was not a significant aspect of their transnational practices. Although they were all aware of the various channels (print, virtual and TV) by which they could access information about issues and events in their countries of origin, they were all, for varying reasons, ambivalent about the role this kind of exposure could play in their lives.

For all of these ‘media shy’ participants, the media did not play a very significant role in the construction of their transnationality or mobility. However, their reasons for avoiding media from their countries of origin, despite its accessibility, are telling in themselves. All filter their exposure to media to varying degrees. To differing extents, they made conscious decisions to avoid the barrage of mediated knowledge available to them through the global media. Rather than being a convenient link to the familiar, media engagement seemed to add unnecessary intrusions to their lives, and in some cases made them feel powerless to facilitate change, depressed or overtaken. This by no means signifies a rejection of transnationality or a desire to assimilate, but rather a sense of
detachment from mediated events. Elsewhere in their interviews, these participants also expressed a strong sense of retaining their cultural and national identities, but it would seem that mass media engagement was not an integral part of this identity maintenance.

**Media Wary**

**Censorship and truth**

For other participants, however, the role of the media became a subject for much passionate discussion, in which complex issues of identity, exclusion, censorship, fear and truth were raised. Interestingly, for some, it was not only media messages from ‘home’ that were significant. The role of mainstream Australian media and the way in which it portrayed the participants’ countries of origins were also of paramount importance. It could be conjectured that these migrants, unlike the more established diasporic subjects often examined in the Australian literature (Cunningham and Sinclair 2000; Hage 2002), are still in the process of negotiating their identities in relation to the two countries. As they are negotiating the complex process of deciding where ‘home’ really is, they are concerned with how their two societies perceive and portray each other in the mainstream media.

For Jolene, for example, engagement with the media was a very complex transnational practice. Unlike the ‘media shy’ participants described above, keeping in touch with politics and current events in
Malaysia was a high priority for Jolene. However, Jolene had to look beyond commercial media to access the depth of information she needed. As mainstream Malaysian media sources are quite heavily censored and controlled, Jolene described accessing alternative voices online:

R: The political parties are not moving ahead. So it's a bit hard. (...) Nowadays there are blogs online, and more and more the younger generation - they're coming up and voicing out their opinions, even the younger politicians. (...) So it's - it's good um, insight to what exactly - and I think that's good, because a newspaper - online newspaper used to publish opinions, you know, talking about issues and criticising the government. But it actually shut it down. Because of that. And now they find different avenues to go about, you know, putting out - Putting information out. (...) In Malaysia (the media) is very controlled. All the papers are all held by the dominant party, which is called Barisan Nasional, and they control everything in the newspaper in the media. So what - what you get is just a one-sided opinion really.

I: So you think the blogs are quite a good way to hear the voices of other people, other people's opinions on what's happening?

R: Yes, and also the other side of the story, yeah. Most of the time we were fed news, and kind of like brainwashed as well, into believing that, oh okay, this is how it is, it'll never change. But once you read the opposite side and other people's opinion, you kind of think, "Oh, why didn't I think of that?" So I find that a good thing.

Jolene found that flows of information circulated across borders often remain entrenched in the political limitations set by the country in which
the information originates. Thus, mainstream sources of media do not always produce transparent or trustworthy messages. To combat this, she tapped into an alternative community of dissenting voices through the Internet. Jolene felt that these alternative sources opened her mind to new possibilities for progress, rather than the alternative apathy of believing that “it’ll never change.” Jolene’s ability to connect with voices of dissent is fundamentally enabled through the technological innovations of modernity, in that the advent of the Internet has allowed the totality of media control in Malaysia to shrink as “the public sphere opens inexorably to many previously suppressed opinions and kinds of information” (Clarke 2004: 4).

This element of participatory freedom through online dissent is, within the region, fairly specific to the Malaysian context. While other South-East Asian governments, such as those in Singapore, Vietnam and China, have restricted civil access to Internet space, the Malaysian government has deferred from restrictions because they do not wish to deter foreign investment (Gomez and Gan 2004: xix). As such, we can see that Jolene’s access to online voices of political dissent is mediated through several facets of globalisation, including the global flows of capital and investment and the globalising interconnectedness enabled by web-based technology. Jolene also linked her media consumption to her personal transnational connections, as she mentioned how she often discusses and debates political issues and the country’s progress during
phone calls with her father. Jolene’s interactions with globalised media are not passive, but actively critical and analytical, and they form a key mode through which she remains engaged with her country of origin.

An interesting contrast emerged in the context of these issues with two of the Chinese participants, Hannah and Ivy. When Hannah and Ivy discussed their engagement with the media in both China and in Australia, the strongest theme that emerged was that of truth and censorship. However, it emerged in a very different form than in my previous interview with Jolene. Hannah and Ivy both acknowledged that it was only after they had arrived in Australia and spoken with other Chinese nationals living here that they realised the level of censorship in the news media that they had consumed in China. They were surprised to learn that other Chinese nationals preferred, like Jolene, to use non-state sanctioned, unofficial web pages to gain a fuller picture of current events at home:

R2: Yes, you can get the news, but sometimes they just make the news, like fake news, or they just make it not true. You can’t know the truth.

R1: But you get, you know, when I was in China I didn’t realise it. I read the news, just news, I thought it was real news. But when I came here, lots of people just find another way for the Chinese news. They said, just like, not real exactly happened. You know, when we were in China, we can’t find things, we just read it from newspaper and get it from TV, we don’t know what exactly happened.
Hannah and Ivy’s experiences of the Chinese media are consistent with understandings of media policies in the country. Although since the mid-1980s, China’s media has been increasingly driven by the economic necessities of the emerging open market, the Communist Party has still “consistently maintained the importance of the media as its promotional tool, prohibiting dissenting views, requiring support and explanation of Party policies and laying down strict codes of journalistic practice” (Latham 2000: 634).

However, unlike Jolene, Hannah and Ivy expressed little concern about this realisation of media censorship, and were largely uncritical of the Party’s policies. When I asked if they had felt shocked or betrayed when they realised the level of censorship they seemed surprised. They seemed to accept it as a normal part of Chinese systems of governance, and they stressed that they admired the other achievements of their government, over and above what were, for them, relatively inconsequential concerns:

R1: Even China has some problems; even the government has some problems. But I think, we realise, we love this Party, we love this.

R2: They’ve done a lot. Economy, everything’s improving.

R1: For every party of every country there are problems, not only Chinese.
I recorded in my Research Journal after this interview my surprise at how unperturbed Hannah and Ivy had seemed by their discovery of media censorship, and tried to analyse why this concerned me:

I would have felt so resentful, that I’d been lied to for so many years, so shocked and angry. This reminds me of when I was living in Berlin in 2001, and a friend from Texas saw news coverage for the first time of the huge anti-Iraq war protests that had happened around the world. And she was so shocked because the coverage in the States had been so minimal; she’d pretty much been unaware of the public outcry elsewhere. She was just so shaken by the idea that the media coverage she’s been absorbing in good faith wasn’t giving her the full picture. So at first, it was hard for me to accept that Hannah and Ivy were so blasé about this revelation. But I suppose my Texan friend and I were coming from the very Western democratic standpoint. To be brought up with the ideologies of freedom of the press and freedom of information, and then to have them revealed as an illusion, would be shattering. But I guess to grow up in a context in which these values were never paraded and where the cultural assumption is that the government will do what they think is best, perhaps that realisation isn’t so disillusioning. And I think, in hindsight, that Hannah and Ivy sensed my feelings, and were thus at pains to defend their government, to not have me think negatively about China and the Party (Research Journal September 2006).

In analysing my reaction to this issue compared to Hannah and Ivy’s, it seems that we were encountering the “incompatible notions of truth” (Latham 2000:634) that bolster Chinese and Western perceptions of news media. Latham (2000) uses Foucault’s troupe of ‘regimes of truth’ to
analyse this fundamental incompatibility that still exists despite the increasing influence of commercialisation on the production of Chinese news. While Hannah and Ivy can accept a “socialist notion of truth” (Latham 2000:634) that includes a degree of politically motivated censorship, I was still holding fast to Western notions of the paramountcy of freedom of the press and freedom of information. Taylor (1984: 176) reminds us that truth is regime-relative, and this became even more apparent in my continuing discussions with Hannah and Ivy:

While Hannah and Ivy were relatively indifferent to the media censorship they experienced while living in China, there were certain issues in which they felt passionately that China was misrepresented in media constructions in Australia. Both women expressed their shock and disgust at seeing promotional newspapers about Chinese human rights abuses against controversial sectarian group Falun Gong being handed out on Melbourne’s streets, and Hannah was further upset to find similar views aired on Australian television:

R1: I just remember last time in Parliament Station, you know, I just saw the paper about you know, Falun Gong?

R2: Oh, I really hate this.

R1: Actually he showed this and this newspaper to people, you know, when he give to me, I say, ‘What exactly happened with this newspaper?’ He said ‘I just work for them for money’. I said ‘This is lies, they just make up stories and that’s not true’.

R2: Yes, that’s right.
I: Oh, ok. So a lot of the information here about Falun Gong isn’t true?

R1: It’s not true.

R2: They’re all fake, because…

R1: Because, at that moment, we were in China, we know what exactly happened. But when we read in newspaper we just feel so awful. They make up a lot of stories. I just remember, like, last vacation we were in Canberra, you know, and I found some people, they just started, people who come from Asia, they just look Chinese, they just came to them with this newspaper. And I found on the TV a channel, just like some, just controlled by this kind of group. I just really feel so awful.

I: So you think it’s just the wrong information?

R1: Wrong information.

R2: Yeah. Because, it’s like some people, they want to using these people, using these things, to get the power for themselves. Against the government.

R2: That’s the person, that one…Li…the name, name of that person, Li Huangshu…

I: The leader?

R1&R2: Yeah. The leader.

R2: He just organize everything, so everyone just listens to him. He said Chinese government did really bad things to people, they burn people in the Tian An Men Square.

R1: No, it’s not like that. They burnt by themselves. I heard they just convinced by this group, you know, just like show people they have suffered so much like that, you know.

R2: They’re just using these people against our government.

Again, Hannah and Ivy were at pains to defend the Chinese government from criticism. For them, the claims of Falun Gong
supporters in Australia have no legitimacy, and the propagation of their views through media sources make them feel ‘so awful’ because it constitutes a disparagement of their government and their nation within their host society. Once again, this discourse left me feeling confused. I was again hitting up against that wall of misunderstanding inherent in the different ‘regime of truths’ within which I was operating in comparison to Hannah and Ivy. Claims of human rights abuses of the Chinese government against members of Falun Gong are widely accepted as truth in the Western media and social imagination, but for Hannah and Ivy, they were nothing short of slanderous. Another issue which held a similar reaction was the portrayal in the Australia media of the events of 1989 in Tian An Men Square:

R1: I remember in 1989, I don’t know if you know this or not?
I: Tian An Men Square?
R1: Yeah. Actually it’s not all students who like protested by the government, there’s another story you know? I just remember 2004 I read in the newspaper about Tian An Men Square and I find this, just another story, not exactly happened.
R2: They changed everything.
R1: Maybe they just pick up, a few, one picture, but make it to a whole story, like that.
R2: They do it in PhotoShop!
I: There’s always one photo that we see of Tian An Men Square. With the tank?
R1: Yeah, even that I saw a few days before. But maybe, just in every country they have some bad things. And we acknowledge this. But
maybe this whole thing cannot be seen in just one picture. They cannot expand this thing to the whole of China. Yeah, actually the Party in China is the main Party, I think they have already done lots of things. China is already developed so much. It’s good.

In this dialogue, Hannah and Ivy state how the modern media can deceive through exclusion and the utilisation of technologies such as PhotoShop. The events in Tian An Men Square in 1989 have been captured in the news memory of a generation of people in the West, and these mediated images have become heavy with symbolism about China and Chinese communism. There is little doubt in the imagination of the majority of Western viewers that the events played out more or less as they were portrayed on our television screen and newspapers. But once again, from Hannah and Ivy’s perspectives, these assumptions are reversed. As Morley and Robins (1995: 133) remind us, “we are all largely dependent on the media for our images of non-local people, places and events, and the further the ‘event’ from our own direct experience, the more we depend on media images for the totality of our knowledge.”

Hannah and Ivy were both roughly the same age as me, and despite growing up in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, it was clearly apparent that our assumed knowledges about mediated events were not homogenous, but distinctly specific to our national contexts. The globalisation of mass media made the distant event of
Tian An Men Square ‘familiar’ to those outside China, but it by no means made it transparent. Although their interpretation of events is also questionable, Hannah and Ivy saw themselves, as locals, as having a privileged knowledge of “what exactly happened.”

It is also worth noting the stark contrast between Hannah and Ivy’s interpretations of Tian An Men Square with the discussions of the same event in Pang and Appleton’s (2004) study of Chinese scholars-turned-migrants in the United States. Some of the participants in this study were older academics, who participated first hand in the Tian An Men Square protests, and had friends who were killed or injured. There is thus a clear disjuncture between the generation who experienced this event first hand, and Hannah and Ivy’s generation, who only experienced Tian An Men through the lens of state-controlled media.

Hannah and Ivy’s experiences demonstrate how the flow of information across borders through the global media is not free, unfettered, or objective, but rather inherently able to deceive and distort. Although they conceded that Chinese news is censored, they ultimately placed more trust and legitimacy in it than in the media they consume in Australia. They perceived the Western media as relating images and messages about China that are distorted and untruthful, particularly in the context of the globally mediated human rights issues of Falun Gong persecution and the Tian An Men Square massacre. Giddens (1991) has
noted this phenomenon as the “the appropriation of mediated information.” According to Giddens (1991: 188), when exposed to globalised mediascapes, people filter and reduce information in order to “exclude, or reinterpret, potentially disturbing knowledge. From a negative point of view, such closure might be regarded as prejudice, the refusal seriously to entertain views and ideas divergent from those an individual already holds; yet, from another angle avoidance of dissonance forms part of the protective cocoon of ontological security.” As such, we could interpret Hannah and Ivy’s rejection of the images and messages in the Australia media as a distinct kind of transnational practice that enabled them to avoid a serious and possibly traumatic reassessment of China and the values and knowledge they had internalised all their lives.

**Mediated exclusion**

Similar to Hannah and Ivy’s concerns about the portrayal of Chinese human rights issues in the Australian media, Rahti also felt a sense of frustration at Australian media portrayals of issues in South East Asia. More specifically, she was frustrated about the ways in which Australians sometimes responded to her as a result of these media portrayals. In social situations, Rahti sometimes found herself placed in the position of having to defend government policies in her region. The two examples that most upset her had to do with two events that had recently received intense amounts of media coverage, some of it quite sensationalist, in the Australian media. These were the prosecution of the
Bali bombers in 2003 and 2004, and the sentencing of Australian Schapelle Corby for drug trafficking in Bali in 2005:

My favourite one was, ‘Where are you from?’, ‘Malaysia’, ‘What do you think about Schapelle Corby?’ I said, ‘I don’t know, she’s in Indonesia’. (...) And they think that we have no sense of justice. And the thing with that - and that’s the thing that always comes up whenever I say, you know, ‘I’m Malaysian’, and - they always ask me - all Dino’s friends always ask me, ‘What do you think about the Bali bombers?’ ‘Isn’t that so screwed up? Indonesian justice is so bad’. And they got really angry with that. (...) It’s quite bizarre ‘cause they - they sort of - some people sort of relate you to a region...Not a country. They think it’s the same.

Rahti’s frustration here stems from the fact that when she identifies her nationality to Australians, she is immediately interrogated about the most prominent media depictions of her region. This is comparable to Dolby’s (2005) study of American undergraduates in Australia, in relation to globalisation and identity as elements of the Study Abroad experience. Dolby’s (2005: 107) subjects often found themselves having to “either defend or disparage United States foreign policy,” which would at times create “a defensive sense of national self”. This was in part due to the significant amount of media coverage that United States politics receives in Australia, and was thus an experience that was not reciprocated by their Australian counterparts studying in America, who were more likely to encounter relative ignorance of their nation’s political identity and activities. Rahti’s experience is thus not unique to her
nationality, ethnicity or status as a student-turned-migrant, but comparable to other mobile groups whose countries of origin have undergone negative scrutiny in the Australian public imagination.

Due to the Australian media scrutiny of her region, Rahti encountered attitudes that were heavily coloured by Western perceptions of injustice within South-Asian legal systems. Australians she encountered expected her to conform to their opinions and to concur with the negative media depictions of Indonesian law. However, Rahti steadfastly refused to validate their assumptions, instead trying to explain that the vastly different economic and social context of her region precipitates different conceptions of justice:

I: So how do you respond to things like that, when people start haranguing you about politics?

R: Oh, I just go, 'Look' - I explain it is inhuman and I don't agree with things like capital punishment. But I understand why they're there. And I say things like, "You do not have the same problems as other countries do, you are not a hub for drug trafficking, you do not have these other drug problems that Asia has, you have facilities to treat here, we do not have the money". And you just say things like that, and they go, "Yeah, yeah, but you know, it's human life". And they just look at - everything's relative (...) and that's the general thing I said, "If they weren't Australians you would not have cared at all - at all. If it's so humanitarian, why didn't you campaign for those years ago? Why didn't you care when - you know, a Malaysian gets caught, and why didn't you care when a Chinese person gets caught? You only care now because, you know..."
I: It’s an Australian?

R: Yeah. Exactly. (...) And you know, when the Bali bombing happened, lots of Indonesians died. All it is is only, “Oh this many Australians are dead and this many Australians injured.”

Rahti’s final statement echoes the type of media headlines that are prevalent in Australia whenever a natural disaster or terrorist act in which Australians are involved occurs overseas. Rahti saw inherent nationalism and unconscious racism in the headlines that number and mourn the Australians dead or injured, while shifting the local people affected into the murky background of the insignificant ‘other.’

Appadurai (2002: 54) notes how mediascapes “help to constitute narratives of the Other”, and in the context of migration, this can mean that migrants see their own ethnicities reflected as the other in media representations in the host country. The ‘othering’ of ethnic minorities in Australia through mainstream media representations has been addressed previously by Teo (2000) and Pickering (2001). However, this literature addresses media representations of ethnic groups within Australia. Teo (2000) examines the racism inherent in news discourse on ethnic crime in the context of Vietnamese gangs, and Pickering (2001) addresses how media representations construct asylum seekers as a ‘problem’ population. For the participants in this research, however, the representation in the Australian media of events and political issues within their source countries had a greater impact on their perceptions
of self and their social positioning. This indicates, in general, a stronger
connection to and identification with the source country than with the
ethnic community in the host country, and again reiterates that students-
turned-migrants are operating with a transnational frame of reference, in
which images and narratives flow between the home and host countries.

Furthermore, Stam (1983) writes of how national television news creates a
sense of community for its viewers, through what he terms ‘the regime of
the fictive We’. This is based on the concurrent construction of the
excluded ‘Them’: whoever lies outside the constructed boundaries of the
mediated imagined community. For participants like Rahti, the
Australian media consistently reiterated their not-belonging, through their
exclusion from the regime of the fictive We. In Rahti’s case this occurred
through the foregrounding of Australian lives as more valuable and more
newsworthy than non-Australian lives, a sentiment that was, sub-
consciously, absorbed and then echoed in the opinions of her Australian
friends. Thus, as a non-Australian, she was subconsciously identified as
the insignificant and less worthy ‘other.’

Since the rise of global media outlets and the digitalisation of news
media, there has been great deal of idealistic discourse that portends
the global media as instrumental in the emergence of a ‘global civil
society’, creating a sense of cosmopolitanism, shared experience, and
shared responsibility for global issues. Morley and Robins (1995: 12) refer
to this idealism as the ‘mythology of global media’, essentially a myth that the new media order of modernity means that “experiences shared on a global scale…will help us to transcend the differences between cultures and societies”. Experiences like Rahti’s seem to debunk this mythology. In her experience, the national media in Australia, although it may source its images and information from global news outlets, does not present its messages in a ‘transnational’ or cosmopolitan way. Rather, global events are consistently presented through a lens that privileges the Australian. For Rahti, maintaining her transnationality becomes ever more complicated through the portrayals of her region in the Australian media. Global issues like terrorism and drug smuggling become mediated events for which she is, to an extent, held accountable, and asked to justify the actions and policies of governments. Furthermore, in Australia, she is constantly exposed to media messages that privilege Australian over non-Australian lives, which in turn affects her acceptance into Australian society as a non-Australian.

My interview with Vincent similarly raised issues about how media representations can exclude migrants socially. In Vincent’s case, it was popular culture in the media, rather than current events, which sometimes exacerbated a sense of non-belonging:

I: So is this maybe one part of Australian culture that you don’t quite feel comfortable with?
R: Yeah. And the others are just – just the culture created by the media, like Big Brother (a popular reality television show), for example. Of course there are people against it and there are people for it, and you just – I don’t like the program and I don’t like a number of programs– there might be a few that I don’t quite enjoy. But it seems that the people here don’t have any problem with it. It’s, okay, just another show. Of course, having said that, there are people who are against it, like John Howard (then Australian Prime Minister) didn’t like it anyway.

I: What is it about Big Brother that bothers you?

R: The way they portray sex. I mean I don’t have anything against it, but the fact is you will never find a show like this in Asia. Never. And – okay, don’t use Big Brother. It may be a bit too extreme because there are a lot of people who against Big Brother, okay? A lot of people who don’t like it. But say – keep it like simple, like singing contests?

I: Yeah? Australian Idol (a television singing contest)?

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So these programs, they do have it in overseas but to actually – to actually bring that contest in to such an extent, like the propensity seems to – to put it simply, there’s a great deal of individualism there. I don’t mean that you can’t express yourself. I’m expressing myself when I’m talking to you, but to portray yourself as a model for people to follow and it seems that – it seems that everyone accustomed to it. For example, like, everybody expressing – as I said just now, people here are more expressive. They’re more expressive. So you can see that, okay, people like in Asia, people are not that expressive. They might find it difficult to – to adjust to a show like that.

The mediated messages of social and cultural values that emerge through the popular media seemed to remind Vincent that he does not fully comprehend the host culture, despite having functioned socially,
academically and professionally in Australian society for several years. Having lived with an Australian host family, and having a large circle of Australian friends, Vincent generally felt he had successfully integrated himself socially. However, the social values inherent in reality television shows such as *Big Brother* and *Australian Idol* were one cultural barrier that Vincent felt uneasy crossing. He particularly noted the acceptance of what he feels is an excess of public ‘expressiveness’ and liberal attitudes to sexual content. Levine (1992) has previously noted that television viewing can be highly selective, and individuals tend to reject characters and situations that do not conform to group values. According to Levine (1992: 1381), audiences are never passive, but rather “complex amalgams of cultures, tastes, and ideologies. They come to popular culture with a past, with ideas, with values, with expectations, with a sense of how things are and should be.” As such, Vincent rejects the programs that do not conform with his entrenched cultural values. During this conversation, Vincent seemed almost apologetic for his dislike of these immensely popular shows, his lack of acceptance seeming to represent the most ingrained values of ‘Asian-ness’ that he was not prepared to let go.

**Globally Engaged**

**Mediated insecurity**

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Six, media images and narratives were significant in some participants’ discussions of their reasons for applying
for citizenship. This shows quite explicitly how processes of membership acquisition, as discussed in Part One of the analysis, are not distinct from the transnational practices discussed here in Part Two. The two are rather closely interconnected elements of the student-turned-migrant experience. Shortly prior to fieldwork, the 2006 Israel/Lebanon war had been frequently reported in the Australian media. The focus was often on the evacuation of Australian nationals and Australian-Lebanese dual citizens from the area. Despite their lack of personal connections to the Middle East, both Devendra and Gayesh made mention of these news stories, unprompted and independently, whilst we were discussing their reasons for choosing Australian citizenship. Devendra cited the Lebanese evacuations as an example of why he considered Australian citizenship to offer more benefits than Indian citizenship, and also as a reason why full citizenship was preferable to PR:

I: So why would you choose to become a citizen and not just remain permanent resident?
R: Security. That's the only reason. When - the same - Indians - for Australian citizens and Indians that got caught in Lebanon. None of the Indian citizens would be evacuated.
I: You saw that on the news?
R: Yeah.
I: So does that make you a little bit worried that as a permanent resident it's not a strong position?
R: Yeah. It does.
For Gayesh, the mediated images flowing to Australia from Lebanon were also a key factor in his decision to naturalise. However, Gayesh’s response to the images was much more emotive, and his focus was on the tragedy of the people left behind or separated from their families due to differing national status:

So here with Australian citizenship there are a lot of changes happening all the time so I thought I better apply. (...) Because one thing when I - I like to get, there are advantages of having it actually, one thing I was thinking, if you see the Lebanon war, there are a lot of issues involved (...) Because now at least legally we are equal (...) And even that story, they had some pictures, they had to take the mother away and they had to leave the children. And sort of heartbreaking scene. (...) Scary scene and so we thought - we all get the citizenship.

Despite being enacted in a region of the world both geographically and politically distant from both Gayesh’s home and host communities, the events in Lebanon still resonated strongly in the context of his own choices for himself and his family. This increased his sense of insecurity and fear in the possible tenuousness of his transnational belonging. Gayesh’s engagement with these scenes contradicts Tomlinson’s (1995: 228) assertion that although global media can bring instantaneous representations of distant events into our living rooms, they are still, “for the most part...distant from the practical contexts of daily life”. On the contrary, Gayesh’s engagement with these mediated images of suffering was immediate, personal, and directly connected to the
concerns of his own family. As such, they had a significant impact on his choices. It is possible that Gayesh was most affected by these images, firstly because of his identification with the suffering as a parent, and secondly because of the civil unrest and threat of war that was present in his home country.

**Cosmopolitan outlooks**

While the questions in the interview tended to focus on the consumption of mass media in terms of connecting with ‘home’, some participants had a much broader outlook in terms of their media consumption:

> I actually go to a couple of other websites ninenews.com.au, The Age or whatever here. I prefer those newspapers that talk a little bit about everything. (...) But, yeah, I’m really involved in it because I maybe – maybe it’s to do with area that I study, environmental study, you do study a lot environmental politics which extend to areas like, you know, UN or whatever. Then you – now we are talking about planning. I’m studying planning. And you really have to keep yourself updated with what’s happening in other places as well. (...) Other than that, I feel compassionate about what’s happening in Middle East as well and what they’re doing there. I mean, if you read – if you care. (...) There are people who care and it doesn’t seem to be – it’s not to do with whether you’re overseas student or not, it’s more personal position (Vincent).

Vincent accessed media to keep up-to-date with global events and issues, and expressed concern for situations of political unrest and conflict in zones which were beyond the realms of his own transnational connections. He framed some of this interest in global events in terms of
keeping abreast of developments in his field. Yet he also expressed personal empathy, he ‘cares’ about humanitarian and political issues in the world. Vincent’s perspective here provides an interesting comparison to Rizvi’s (2005) findings concerning international education and the development of cosmopolitan identities. As discussed in Chapter Three, while Rizvi (2005: 77) found that his participants certainly developed cosmopolitan identities through their experience with international education, these identities were “linked more to their strategic interests within the emergent global economy and culture than to any broader moral conception”.

Many of my participants, however, especially the younger cohort, displayed both a desire to be globally informed professionally, and a moral sense of ‘cosmopolitan compassion.’ This outlook is perhaps more theoretically aligned with Nussbaum’s (1999) conception of cosmopolitans as individuals who, although they do not reject or neglect the importance of local affiliation, still consider their obligations to humanity in its entirety as ‘citizens of the world’. Notably, although Rizvi (2005) views the development of a cosmopolitan world view as the product of the international education experience, Vincent is adamant that his concern for world affairs does not stem from his positioning as an international student, but rather as a personal choice.

**Conclusions**
The chapter has shown that mass media can facilitate diverse forms of transnational consciousness. Some of the key themes emerging from this data, however, have gone largely ignored or unrecognised by recent literature on transmigrants and their engagement with global mediascapes. Firstly, some participants maintained only a loose connection with their countries of origin through the media, and for various reasons avoided a deeper engagement. In similar ways to the discussion of the frustrations of communication discussed in the previous chapter, mediated messages from home could be perceived as an unnecessary intrusion into participants’ daily lives in Australia.

Others, however, were significantly engaged, and in fact did not limit their consumption of mediated events to the dialectic sites of home and host countries. While the role of the media is often described as a tool by which transmigrants or diasporic groups facilitate the “maintenance and negotiation of an original home and a newly acquired host culture” (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 5), these participants consumed media through a global lens, and revealed how distant, global events could have a distinct impact on their personal and localised worlds. For these migrants, the dichotomy of home and host was subsumed within a globally mediated frame of reference. This reveals that, not only are transnational consciousnesses evident through a negotiation between home and host cultures and identities (as described in the literature on international students discussed in Chapter Three), but also that the
home/host dichotomy can extend into a broader, global or cosmopolitan consciousness.

Furthermore, the data reveals how the concepts of home, host and beyond can become complexly intertwined through media engagement. For example, media images of the dangers of transnational belonging in completely separate regions influenced students-turned-migrants’ negotiations of their own membership choices. Media portrayals of human rights and justice issues in the Asia-Pacific region also affected student-turned-migrants on a social and identity basis within the host society. In addition, it is not only media portrayals of current events that can facilitate a sense of social exclusion, but also the mediated portrayals of social values that emerge through the seemingly innocuous lens of popular television programming. It would seem that Szerszynski and Urry (2006: 116) are correct when in stating that “TVs des-sever local, national and global worlds”, yet the ways in which this des-severance functions in the life worlds of individuals in this study was multi-faceted and complex.

For some participants, forms of mediated knowledge also represented powerlessness or suspect truths. The concepts of truth and censorship were particularly central for the participants from countries in which mediascapes are controlled and restricted by the state. Different forms of media could seem untrustworthy, and the mediascapes available in
the home and host countries were markedly different in their content and perspective. However, participants responded to the control of media in their home country in different ways. Hannah and Ivy presented the intriguing paradox of being angered by what they perceived as false portrayals of the Chinese government in the Australian media, yet relatively unperturbed by the realisation, enabled through their mobility, that the national media they had consumed all their lives in China was heavily censored. Jolene, on the other hand, sidestepped Malaysian print and broadcast media censorship by engaging with the cyberactivism of political blogs. This was an avenue to dissenting voices, and to hope for eventual political change.

Essentially, this chapter has revealed that, for students-turned-migrants, mediated events can become intrinsically linked to the personal and the everyday. Mediated images and messages impact on their sense of identity and belonging as well as their sense of fear and uncertainty as transnational subjects in Australian society. Knowledge and truth in this media engagement become unfixed, and students-turned-migrants have to negotiate the various representations of their values and identities through the lens of the media. While the mass media functions to facilitate transnational consciousness, constructing this consciousness is once again a balancing act: a negotiation of the complexities of transnationality.
Chapter Nine: Corporeal Mobility and Narratives of Return

“Visiting can be a risky business” (Mason 2004: 427).

Introduction

It has been clearly established in previous chapters that the students-turned-migrants in this study value the possibilities opened up by mobility, including the possibility of onward mobility and/or return to their country of origin. In Chapter Six, for example, I have noted how the desire to keep options for return open is a factor in their decisions about citizenship. Moreover, Chapter Seven has shown that certain events and social obligations demand co-presence; that the virtual presence afforded by mediated communication is insufficient to fully maintain intimate transnational connections. Furthermore, from the key empirical literature on international students discussed in Chapter Three, it is apparent that the experience of return can be a pivotal moment in which students reflect on their sense of belonging to different places, often developing a sense of hybridisation or ‘in-between-ness.’

From these empirical findings and engagement with the existing literature, it can be assumed that returning to the country of origin will be an important aspect of student-turned-migrant transnationality. As is the case with access to communications technology, the fairly strong
economic position of students-turned-migrants plays a part in their ability to return. They have the resources to travel back to their countries of origin relatively frequently, and the fact that all the participants in this study left behind immediate family (in some cases including children and spouses) means it can be assumed that their motivation to travel back will be high. Furthermore, as transmigrants, they do not always consider their migration to Australia to be a permanent move. As the analysis in previous chapters has revealed, many retain their original citizenship and sustain strong connections to home. Thus, most of the participants in this study also considered an eventual, more permanent return to the country of origin to be a future possibility.

We can therefore frame the concept of return for these migrants in two ways. Firstly, as what Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2000: 34) have dubbed the ‘visit-journey’, a relatively brief sojourn in which “the immigrant crosses boundaries to visit his/her native place and returns to the new society after a fixed period of time”. This type of return has garnered fairly scant attention in the literature. Much more thoroughly researched is the second framing of return as more permanent, in the sense of ‘return migration’. This has been thoroughly explored in both theoretical and empirical research (see, for example Gmelch 1980; Thomas-Hope 1999; Tsuda 2003; Ley and Kobayashi 2005). The concept of return migration is significant for the migrants in this study as almost all

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11 For an individual summary of the location of each participant’s immediate family members, as well as their intentions to return, see the table of participant characteristics in Appendix 1.
of them can envision likely personal or professional circumstances under which they would want or need to move back to their countries of origin more permanently. Furthermore, Duval (2004) and Baldassar (2001) have theoretically linked the two concepts of the visit-journey and the permanent return, arguing that return visits can ultimately facilitate social reintegration upon permanent return. We can thus surmise that frequent return visits could function as a precursor to return migration for students-turned-migrants.

The extant qualitative literature discussed in Chapter Three, which focuses on international student narratives of return, uniformly notes that return visits are a moment of realisation and reflection, a time in which returnees are confronted with the consequences of change. We could expect from the literature that this reflection could encompass both an appraisal of personal changes and a critical gaze upon the cultural and social constructs of the two societies between which students-turned-migrants are moving. The dialectic of familiarity and alienation also seems likely to be paramount in their experiences of re-entering the old space. The analysis of the narratives of students-turned-migrants in this study will further illuminate some of these extant themes, and also raise some new emergent issues.

This chapter will firstly draw on some existing literature on migrant narratives of return to frame the analysis, and then generally establish the
significance of return in the student-turned-migrant context. It will then use the interview data to explore the participants’ narratives of return from their own perspectives, including both the lived realities of visits and the imaginary of permanent return. It will address the significance of return as part of the functioning of their transnationality, and frame the role of return within the broader student-turned-migrant experience. In addition, in the conclusions, I will briefly explore some of the general implications of these experiences for emerging policies in sending countries that focus on minimising the negative consequences of the student-turned-migrant ‘brain drain’ on developing economies.

**Migrant Narratives of Return in the Literature**

While the narratives of return in the international student literature have been discussed at length in the literature review, both similar and disparate themes emerge in broader migration studies. Firstly, Mason’s (2004) work on Pakistani migrants’ visits home from the United Kingdom foregrounds visiting as a transnational practice. More specifically, Mason (2004) interprets the return visit as a highly symbolic element in the negotiation of kinship over distance, involving “complex and sometimes sensitive sets of negotiations and practices” (427). Mason’s (2004) findings support those discussed in Chapter Three, which similarly established that the visit is a critical moment in the negotiation of international student transnationality.
Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) study of Russian migrants returning from Israel is also very useful because the demographic characteristics of the subjects are closest to those of this thesis, namely young immigrants who initially left to pursue tertiary study abroad, and who arrived in the host country about four or five years prior to the research. Like Ghosh and Wang’s (2003), experiences, which I discussed in Chapter Three, Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) subjects felt an uncanny tension between familiarity and alienation upon their return visits, including a distinct sense of difference between the ‘old self’ who existed prior to their migration, and the ‘new self,’ who had been changed in various ways by the experience of living overseas. However, unlike Ghosh and Wang (2003) in their self-reflexive narratives of return, the Russian Jewish migrants were more likely to also turn a critical eye upon their society of origin, and to frame the visit as “a site of criticism, judgement and reinterpretation” (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2005: 41) of their country of origin.

It is also worth noting that such experiences of return are not limited to contemporary mobilities. One such example is Hammerton’s (2004) study of post war British migrants to Australia and Canada. In this study, return journeys were often enacted many years after the initial departure; the migrants’ narratives thus taking on a more ‘epic’ sense of struggle and loss. These narratives are seen as more closely tied to typical nineteenth century migration stories of hardship than to modern
conceptualisations of transnational adaptability and flow (Hammerton 2004). However, similar to their contemporary counterparts, the eventual visit-journeys back to the United Kingdom after many years of absence held complex, intersecting senses of nostalgia, personal reflection, and a critical appraisal of the two places and the consequences of the migration experience. This chapter will draw on the literature on international student narratives of return, as discussed in Chapter Three, but will also draw on these broader studies of migrant return in order to frame the analysis.

In particular, the following analysis will adopt and adapt Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) thematic framework, which identifies three interlinked practices in the re-encountering of the home country during return visits: linking up with the familiar; distancing from the old home; and appraising personal growth in the new place. However, I will further expand this framework to include the participants’ reflections on the possibility of return migration, and also to include the narratives of the two participants who had not, at the time of the interviews, ever made the journey back to their country of origin. Although Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2005) note that 35% of their sample had not yet made a return visit, they failed to probe why this was the case. This seems to be the major limitation in their otherwise thorough study. For the full complexity of transmigrants’ negotiations of mobility and belonging to be
understood, I believe the lack of desire to return should be analysed in parallel with the desire to return.

The Significance of Return in the Student-Turned-Migrant Context

The interviews and the probes revealed, in accordance with the literature discussed in Chapter Three, that narratives of return formed a significant part of the student-turned-migrant experience. All but two of the participants in this study had returned home to visit at least once, and most had been back several times. In fact, approximately three quarters of the participants travelled back home on a regular basis, at least once or twice a year, and planned to continue to return regularly in the future. This was significantly higher than incidences of visits home among broader migrant populations in Australia. For example, O’Flaherty, Skrbis and Tranter (2007) use longitudinal survey data to surmise that only about 11% of migrants in Australia return home regularly. There are a number of possible reasons why students-turned-migrants demonstrate higher rates of return. These include their financial status as skilled migrants; the fact that international travel is cheaper and quicker now than it was for earlier migrants who would never have been able to establish a pattern of regular trips; and the fact that many students-turned-migrants in the sample came from Asian source countries, which are easily accessible from Australia. However, I believe another key reason is that international students often migrate as
individuals, and are generally not a part of family migration chains. As such, they largely do not have extended or immediate family already in the host country, and, as we have seen in Chapter Seven, they often leave immediate family members behind. These intimate transnational connections, which create strong incentives and obligations to return, combined with their material resources and access to travel, contribute to a high propensity to return.

While Gayesh had returned for an extended period to live and work, and Rahti and Sunee had taken short trips to complete research for their postgraduate projects, the general trend was towards brief visits with the primary aim of seeing family and friends. Cultural and religious festivals, such as the Chinese New Year or Christmas, were often cited as reasons to return, alongside family events such as birthdays, Christenings and reunions. It is also worth noting the greater opportunities for travel afforded by studying rather than working, as students could travel home during semester breaks. The subjects who had already begun working full time found slightly less opportunity for visits. No participants stated that they were unable to travel back home when they wished, finances did not seem to be a constraint. For the younger participants, parents were often happy to contribute to airfares. Madeleine’s response was fairly typical of the sample:

I normally go back twice a year. So Christmas, and I would go sometimes in summer. And, I have to say that I would go back whenever I feel like going
back. Because I can. I mean, financially, if I get organised with work just ... So I would say I go back whenever I want, twice a year is usually enough.

Most of the participants had this luxury of returning at will, and many saw it as a distinct advantage in maintaining their transnationality. Tariq, for example, found the value of seeing his family and friends to be more than worth the economic cost of travel, “you spend like $1500 for the ticket. But you get reward I think more than that.” He also noted that homesickness and nostalgia were not a great problem because of the ease of back and forth mobility “we can always go back - back to the country and come back, so it’s not really missing too much”. Others, however, found visits home to be fraught with tension, as their growing sense of distance and disconnection from their country of origin was acutely felt, or the social and cultural obligations of the trip became oppressive. Devendra, for example, stated that during his first and only trip back to India, he was “just waiting for the day when I can come back because I felt really alienated there, like I’m feeling it’s not my place”.

The vast majority of participant experiences of return contained both positive and negative elements. They relished the opportunity to return and spend time with family and friends, and to “experience the unconditional love and trust of home and relive the sensual feelings of childhood,” (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2005: 41). Yet they also at times struggled to reinsert themselves culturally, and to reconcile their
new personal attributes and their new experiences with the expectations of their families and communities. This sometimes resulted in individuals turning a critical eye upon their cultures of origin, and in many cases strengthening their desire to remain living in Australia. In terms of more permanent return, all but three of the participants had considered this or felt they would consider it in the future. However, their perceptions of the circumstances or likelihood of a permanent return varied greatly from case to case.

**Linking Up with the Familiar**

Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) research, along with the work of Baldassar (2001) and Ghosh and Wang (2003), often foregrounds the reconnection with place in migrant narratives of return. The sensory immersion into the sights and sounds of the subjects’ old homes; the visiting of sites of personal and historic importance; and the desire to walk the streets of their home towns or cities were important tropes in these narratives. However, in the interviews with my participants, the importance of kinship, in visiting and spending time with family, emerged as much more significant than themes of physical place. The students-turned-migrants’ narratives were much more focused on visiting friends and relatives than on seeking out favourite restaurants, museums or shopping strips in their home towns and cities. In this sense, the participants had more in common with Mason’s (2004) subjects, who similarly placed co-presence with kin at the centre of the meanings
surrounding the visit-journey. Some participants, like Ivy, even stated that their families were the only reason for return visits, “the most reason, making me want to go back, because my family all in China. First of all, (if) my family (came) here, I would stay here, I wouldn’t go back to China”. Apart from the few trips that involved work or research, all participants cited seeing family and friends as the main reason for return visits, and their memories of return visits were focused almost exclusively on social or familial interactions.

A few participants also valued the opportunity to reconnect culturally. Gayesh felt regular return visits were particularly important for his family, as he didn’t want his young children to grow up without exposure to Sri Lankan culture. Food also played an especially significant role in the narratives of return of the participants whose visits usually coincided with traditional feasts and celebrations such as the Spring Festival. The participants from China, Thailand and Malaysia also often noted that while their ethnic food is widely available in Australia, it is never quite the same as what they encounter at home:

They cater to the Western taste buds here. So you don’t get all that spicy - you don’t get all the authentic ingredients in it. That’s what I think I’m looking forward when I go back, it’s having all the local dishes I grew up with (Jolene).
However, for some participants, particularly those from major cities, the globalised nature of life ‘back home’ meant that they sometimes did not feel a great distinction of place on their return:

I normally maybe stay in Bangkok and, you know, it’s like Melbourne. Yeah, very global, and the stuff you are doing here is exactly the same and - yes, not like before. Before is different, like 10 years ago I think is different. I think it's changed a lot. Yes, it's influence a lot, you know, globalisation in terms of the activities, attitudes and the daily life (Sunee).

Sunee saw modern Bangkok and Melbourne as global cities with a very similar pace and style of life. As such, her return visits didn’t hold the sense of returning and absorbing herself in something culturally distinct. While she conceded that this was a more recent phenomenon, that ten years ago it was ‘different’, she didn’t feel a great deal of nostalgia for the ‘old Thailand’ of her childhood. Considering the themes of longing and nostalgia inherent in the narratives in the extant literature cited here, this is an interesting divergent response. Sunee’s experiences also provide an interesting contrast to those of Wang on her return to China (Ghosh and Wang 2003). Despite seeing a similar globalised homogeneity in Shanghai, Wang went out of her way to seek out “the traditions and heritage...another side of the city, a city full of cultural sensibilities, hidden under the conspicuous processes of modernisation” (272). Sunee, however, did not seek out this reflective reconnection with the past and with tradition. She seemed ambivalent about the
globalisation of Bangkok, and the merging of her two localities into ‘exactly the same’ routine of everyday life.

While nostalgia for home and a desire to reconnect with the culturally familiar were certainly apparent in the stories and experiences of the students-turned-migrants in this study, they were perhaps not as pronounced as that of the subjects described in some of the recent literature. In fact, most of the participants framed their longing for familiarity primarily around family and friends. In contrast to the preoccupation with place and space that is often used to characterise stories of migration and mobility in modernity, the participants of this study seemed far more preoccupied with a return to familiar people. There could be several reasons for this disjuncture with the literature. Firstly, all the subjects of this study had moved to a highly multicultural setting, in which many of the cultural products of their countries of origin are widely available. Despite Jolene’s point about a lack of authenticity in Australian versions of Malaysian food, it cannot be denied that Melbourne, as a multicultural city, provides ample opportunities for migrants to engage with their cultures of origin through food, music, religion, festivals and a vast array of other consumer products, “we can get everything here, see Chinese movie at the Chinatown cinema, go to Chinese supermarket for cooking together. Most things we can find. It’s lucky, in Melbourne we have this, Sydney too I think” (Ivy). This
availability of the familiar within the host society might serve to alleviate the longing and nostalgia for place.

Furthermore, all the participants in this study had frequent opportunities for social contact with other students or migrants from their countries of origin, and thus could speak their native languages, practice religious ceremonies and cook traditional food together with groups of friends:

Sometimes we just get together, with the other Thai families, go to temple. It’s nice to do, good for the kids I think, to speak Thai one whole day (Sunee).

We have a lot of friends here now from Bangladesh, and now the wives have arrived too, so my wife is happy, we can be together with them, eating and things. It’s easier for her to not feel as homesick (Tariq).

A stark contrast is apparent here with regard to some of the experiences described in the literature. In Ghosh and Wang (2003) for example, Ghosh knew no Bengalis in Toronto, and thus longed intensely for her language and the customary rituals of her region, which then became central to her narrative of return. For the migrants in this study, however, the ability to enact social and cultural practices from the country of origin while in Australia meant that a reconnection with these practices became less essential to their narratives of return.
**Distancing from the Old Home**

The critical reappraisal of the old home through the lens of new experiences was a central theme in the narratives of return in the literature. Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) cohort, for example, were highly critical of the poor conditions of daily life in Russia, as well as of the less tangible social mores and attitudes, of the enacting of “Russianness” in both the public and private spheres. Such criticism or reinterpretation of the ‘old home’ was similarly important in the narratives of my participants, and in many cases, it was revealed through some degree of tension or conflict between the returning student-turned-migrant and members of the source community. Duval (2004: 63) states that “the return visit is perhaps best conceptualised as a process of identity negotiation between former residents and current residents of a particular community,” and Mason’s (2004: 427) study of migrant visits home similarly notes “face-to-face co-presence (...) can emphasise difference as much as generate shared understanding (...) ‘fitting in’ was something that had to be negotiated during the visit itself”. This was clearly apparent in the narratives of my participants. In most cases, this identity negotiation was encapsulated by some form of clash of opinions or values between the returning migrant and family, friends or colleagues.

For students-turned-migrants from less developed countries, physical and environmental factors such as overcrowding, traffic congestion, safety
and pollution were often a shock to the system upon return. Furthermore, as Hannah stated, this recognition of comparative differences was not always well received by family and friends, “I always said, ah, here’s dirty, here’s noisy. (...) So I just said, I can’t breathe properly, like that. And my sister said, ‘you know, you complain a lot.’ I didn’t realise (laughs)”

However, issues of environment and infrastructure such as these were less prominent than the distancing discussed in terms of social and cultural values. Shui, in fact, directly connected the environmental pollution in Malaysia to peoples’ attitudes and behaviour:

I really hate a lot of issues in Malaysia including the corruption and pollution and I will criticise why people have to drive from this and that distance, they can walk. And I will criticise why people throw rubbish on the floor and these are the things that other people find as normal. (...) The things that I exposed to have really gave me a different perspective on the way to live and what I think is appropriate and inappropriate.

Shui no longer found the same behaviours ‘normal’ as other Malaysians, and found that on return visits, she would become openly critical of certain behaviours. She reflected that her different set of life experiences had transformed her values. As such, her criticism sets her apart from the community.
Hannah had a similar experience in addressing the high expectations and pressure placed upon her son with the Chinese school system. Hannah felt that the workload placed upon her son in his kindergarten class was too great. While on a return visit, she suggested to the teacher that he should be allowed to ‘relax’, at which the teacher told her “you will regret it in the future.” When I asked Hannah if she thought that her attitude had come from living in Australia, she laughed and said, “Yeah, yeah, I think I’m lazier than before.” Although she uses the word ‘lazy’, it was apparent that Hannah did not think her more laid back attitude to be necessarily negative. In our discussion, she framed this new attitude as resulting from two sources. Firstly, she had witnessed and grown to appreciate the more relaxed cultural attitude towards education, and the greater value placed on leisure time, in Australia culture. Secondly, she noted that the experience of being so far away from her family, and of sacrificing so much to gain her Masters and her permanent residency, had caused her to reassess her priorities for her son, and to note that “life is more important (than career)...here is better for life.” Hannah’s clash of values with her son’s teacher was a moment of reflection in which she began to see Australia as the best place for her family’s future. Furthermore, experiences like Shui’s and Hannah’s highlight the ways in which the experience of mobility creates “shifts of consciousness, perceptions and values” (Duarte 2005: 328), thus causing the return visit to be constructed as a moment in which the homeland becomes subject to the migrants’ critical gaze.
Some participants experienced their identity negotiation on a broader, community level. Having lived in Australia without being surrounded by a traditional community and its requisite obligations, many students felt the pressure of returning to an environment where, in Devendra’s words, “everything’s too inter-related, you have to conform.” This was particularly significant for the participants who were returning to small villages or towns, close-knit ethnic communities or large extended families. After the relative anonymity of city life in Melbourne, their sense of distance from the old home was often linked with ideas of being judged, criticised or watched by the community. Rahti commented in her probe that she often feels nervous about returning to Penang. Her explanation of this in the interview encapsulated these themes:

Everyone wants to know what you’re doing with your life. It’s about the size of Melbourne CBD, it’s such a small place! And it’s so - it’s still very grounded in very traditional things. Like “You’ve been overseas, you must make something big of yourself”. And that’s why I feel nervous, ‘cause I’m still studying, and they go, “You don’t want to work, is it?”, and I hate getting that, I really hate getting it. That and my weight. God, ever from the first year I’ve been back, “Oh, you gained weight” or “You lose weight, ooh.” “Who’s your boyfriend? How did you meet him? How much does he earn? When are you getting married?” Especially the Chinese, and you get this. (…) I get a bit stressful when I think about all that stuff. (…) I don’t like being probed that way. (…) I don’t like to be judged that way. (…). But I like being home ’cause my mum is there and my dad’s there. They fuss over me. My brother’s there and my dogs are there.
Rahti’s narrative of return reveals a tension that was apparent in many of the participants’ stories: the tension between the desire to be with family, and the sense of distance from the wider community. Like many of the participants, Rahti critically reappraised her source community as overly traditional and parochial, and felt stressed by the expectations of people in the community. However, as the last line of the above quote reveals, despite the tensions inherent in return, it is still valued as a chance to reconnect and experience face-to-face co-presence with loved ones – in Rahti’s case her family and her pets.

**Appraisal of Personal Transformation**

For the Russian students in Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport’s (2005) study, the visit-journey back to Russia became a moment in which they were able to evaluate and assess how the experience of migrating had changed them, to “measure their new selves against the old” (47). This was also a significant theme in the narratives of return of the students-turned-migrants in this study, and they also, like their Russian Jewish counterparts, generally attributed these changes to either their coming-of-age and maturity, or to the process of cultural transition. For many, the extent to which they had changed did not become apparent until their return visit, as Hannah very aptly summarised, “when we stay here we don’t realise, but when we go back we just find out we’ve learnt lots
of things". In fact, it was often family members or friends who would react to or comment on how participants had changed, thus sparking them to reflect on these changes.

However, personal changes were framed by the participants in a variety of different ways. Some of the students, particularly the younger, Asian participants, had not lived independently prior to coming to Australia. They all mentioned the general qualities of greater independence and self-sufficiency, domestic skills of cooking, cleaning and managing finances, and their ability to communicate and connect with a more diverse range of people:

For me, I think, my mum just told me I’m nicer, nicer than before and more polite. And mature. Because before, when I was home, I was bad, really, really bad. And always do nothing at home, and always ask the parents to do everything for me. And after I go home, I always say, ‘ok, I will cook, today I will wash the dish.’(...) Yeah, mature. My mum said, my mind, and the way I’m doing is better, better than before. (…) Because when you’re just left at home, live alone here. And you have to deal with different people and working and studying. So, you learn a lot (Ivy).

While Ivy’s mother saw her changes as very positive, other participants felt that, in order to be accepted on their return, they needed to try and conceal the ways in which they had changed. This is reflected in the literature in Ghosh’s (2003: 275) reluctance to use Canadian slang or wear Western clothes when she returned to India, in fear that she would
be “negatively judged by ‘my people’”. Some participants, such as Shui, felt this tension between the ‘old self,’ which was familiar to and readily accepted by the source community, and the ‘new self’, which could cause tension or confusion:

The longer I stay the longer I felt I’m going back to the old me, because I changed quite a lot in the past ten years since I left home. And every time I go back for a little bit too long I felt that I’m becoming my old self again, where I was very submissive, quiet and afraid of a lot of things and not very sociable and very closed. (...) I felt that the longer I stayed, maybe that’s the way that people treat me or see me. (...) And if I become too assertive or outgoing or sociable they would be a little bit confused and somehow not able to accept that.

For Shui, ‘becoming her old self again’ is a regression, a withdrawal from the self-confidence she has gained in the ten years since she left Malaysia; a denial of the personal growth that has come from her experiences overseas. However, it is her ‘old’ submissive and quiet self that people expect on her return. The lens through which they see and treat her is that of the ‘old Shui,’ and if she stays for too long, that is who she begins to become. For Shui, this was a dangerous prospect. There is thus a distinct tension in the experience of return: individuals simultaneously want to be accepted, yet do not want to go back to who they once were. It is through the experience of return that these tensions between old and new selves, an uncomfortable polarity of pre- and post migration identities, emerge.
Gayesh’s narrative of return is also particularly interesting. His experience is unique amongst the sample, as he was the only participant who had already attempted a permanent return. As discussed in Chapter Five, after completing his PhD in Australia, Gayesh gained PR for himself and his family as a kind of ‘insurance policy’ against the civil instability in Sri Lanka. However, it had always been his intention to return as soon as possible, with the firm belief that he had an ethical responsibility to contribute to positive change in his homeland. Thus, Gayesh’s narrative of return included his repositioning in terms of the workforce, as well as the experiences of his wife and two children in readjusting after several years in Australia. While Gayesh returned with the firm intent to work and contribute to Sri Lanka’s prosperity, his plans slowly began to unravel, in the most part because of tensions within the realisation of change. Firstly, his eldest daughter, who had spent most of her life in Australia, had to begin school and had trouble coping. Secondly, Gayesh found himself becoming increasingly disillusioned with his job, feeling that he was unappreciated by colleagues and the company. He began to realise that his expectations and aims were no longer aligned with those of the people around him, and he felt quite strongly that, not only had he changed, but so had the professional culture of the country, in his opinion to a negative degree:

I have a lot of high expectation there once I go back - I’m not the person who came from because I have changed academically and personally in my
maturity and my duty and I have been a sort of different person actually. So I didn't expect anything much different but I expect a fair go, I feel - once I go after five years now I feel that Sri Lanka has changed rather in a negative way then what I came when I left. (...) I have been changed in a very positive way with a lot of experience so I can see the things and I wanted to make a contribution. (...) But once I go there what I realised was that the place were I work has changed, not in the positive direction, it's in the negative direction, so I start thinking can I make a difference?

There are a number of things in Gayesh’s statements here that are particularly interesting. Firstly, he used he quintessentially Australian ideal of the ‘fair go’ to typify his expectations of the work environment. This implied that his time studying in Australia had given him certain cultural expectations of how he would be treated in the workplace that were not met in the Sri Lankan context. Secondly, although he was eager to make a contribution, he began to question whether, within this context of what he perceived to be a ‘changed Sri Lanka’, his contribution could really be of value. After struggling with the dilemma of whether or not his values were still compatible with those of the community, Gayesh decided that it would be better for his family if they returned to Australia. In Gayesh’s narrative, we see much higher stakes than just trying to reinsert oneself into family and peer groups during short visits. Gayesh had to try and reintegrate himself and his family back into Sri Lanka, within the context of what he perceived to be fundamental changes in both himself, and his community or country of origin.
Some participants appraised the personal changes they witnessed in their return visits from an alternative angle. They did not see change as linear, and did not view shifts in their behaviour and attitudes as something new being replaced with something old. Rather, they saw their transnational experiences as awakening or strengthening already existing aspects of their character. These participants framed themselves as closet non-conformists. Rahti, for example, stated that it was through the critical judgement from her peers back in Malaysia that she realised the aspects of herself that she had previously suppressed. While her Malaysian friends simply thought that she had become ‘so Aussie’, Rahti saw this as a false perception:

> And they say, “Oh, you’re so Aussie”, I say, “I’m not”, and I always used to think that, “Oh my God, I am becoming an Aussie”. Then after I just realise that no, that’s always just been me. And it’s just that I wasn’t encouraged when I was home, but now that I’m over here I feel more comfortable. In my heart if I think I’m right about something, I will say it.

The ways in which the process of becoming independent and operating without support networks in a new society leads to a greater assertiveness and sense of self is corroborated in the literature. Hammerton’s (2004) subjects also noted that they had become more assertive after their migration experience, and that these changes were brought to their attention when they returned to visit the United Kingdom. As one subject stated, “they’d said I’d become much more
assertive and outspoken. (…) I said ‘When you go out somewhere that’s so far away from home. And you’re on your own, you haven’t got anybody to, to stand up and speak for you’” (Hammerton 2004: 280).

Furthermore, the experiences described here can in some ways be connected to the psychosocial research into the re-entry of sojourners such as international students and international business people into the home community. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001), for example, note that returnees often experience strong expectations for conformity from their peers, which can be a source of distress for the returnee. Furthermore, this research also notes that interpersonal concerns were highly significant during re-entry, and although family relationships were usually experienced positively, renegotiating relationships with peers and was generally more difficult.

In the context of their narratives of return visits, students-turned-migrants thus display many similar perceptions and experiences to other migrant cohorts which have been previously identified in the extant literature. However, they are distinct amongst the broader population of Australian migrants via their high propensity for regular and frequent return, which is facilitated through their socio-economic positioning, access to mobility, and their strong transnational connections to immediate family members. Return visits are framed by students-turned-migrants as both a desire and an obligation, and they encounter both positive and
negative experiences within the renegotiation of their identities and reappraisal of where they are from.

The Question of Ultimate Return

There is a great deal of literature that deals with the concept of return migration, which has also been termed reflux migration, homeward migration, remigration, return flow, second-time migration or repatriation (Gmelch 1980). Most of this literature takes an economic perspective, and notes either how returning migrants impact on the economies of source countries (Olesen 2002; Ammassari 2003), or how economic factors influence migrants’ decisions to return (Galor and Stark 1990; Lindstrom 1996; Dustmann 2003). In this research, however, in all cases except Gayesh’s, we are looking at imagined, rather than actual return, and the influence of economic factors was minimal in the participants’ discussion. This was very much in accordance with the findings of Gmelch (1980) and Hazen and Alberts (2006), that show non-economic reasons, particularly social and personal, as more important than economic reasons in return decisions.

For all but three of the participants (Devendra, Jaime and Rafael), ‘going back’ permanently or semi-permanently was a future possibility. In the interviews I asked the participants about the likelihood of returning to live long-term in their source countries, and asked them about the circumstances under which they felt they would be most likely to return.
For almost all participants, the primary reason for return was family. Many participants felt that they would return if compelled by the needs of their family, with the illness or ageing of parents being the most common concern. Takahiro, for example, outlined the complexity of the obligations in his family relationships, which were a strong indication that he may have to return to Japan:

I may have to, because my parents are both getting weak and my younger brother got married and now looking after wife’s parents and actually wife’s father already died recently. So all the more he needs to take care of that family. My sister has got actually a bit of mental problem. Yeah and my parents are looking after her, she can’t go out. And my father has got cancer last year and he’s got a big operation, he got about four fifths of his stomach eliminated. (…) But in my family he’s the only one that can work, because my mother used to work at the supermarket deli, but she’s looking after my sister. Yeah my father is pushing his body, so if something happens probably I will have to go back.

Most other participants’ families were in a stronger economic position than Takahiro’s, and had more support from siblings or extended family, yet they also generally felt that they would have a duty to return to support their families if they were needed.

Many female participants also stated that they would consider return when they were ready to have children, because they would want to be closer to their own extended family during this time. For the participants who already had children with them in Australia, however, the opposite
was true: Sunee and Gayesh both felt that their children’s happiness and well-being were key reasons for staying in Australia. This took priority over economic factors, such as earning power or job opportunities, “I think if I didn’t have children I probably, you know, go back. We decided - we try to come up with what best suit us at the moment. The family. What best suit us, not just economic reason” (Sunee). Furthermore, for participants who had left regions of political instability, any significant improvement in political conditions and safety in their source countries was also cited as a possible incentive for return.

A majority of the participants felt reasonably settled in Australia, and while the prospect of further travel and work abroad was primary to many discussions of their future, a permanent return to their country of origin was generally framed in a vague ‘maybe one day’ kind of imagining. However, they were also keenly aware of any bureaucratic or logistic challenges that returning would incur. Madeleine, for example, elaborated on the interplay of intuition and practicality that would be inherent in any decision to return:

I don’t know what would take me back to France. I think it would be just a desire to live in Paris, um, or in a city like that. I don’t know. I think it really - coming here came from the heart, and going back to France will come from the heart as well. (…) Although, with work, I don’t know how that would work. I’d probably wait until I’d got my, even though it’s only going to be in two or three years, my Australian citizenship. I would, I don’t think I would leave Australia with only a PR.
While Madeleine asserts that returning to France would come ‘from the heart’, she also notes the practical and logistical issues that would accompany the decision. Her concerns about leaving Australia ‘with only a PR,’ as discussed in Chapter Six, were also a key factor. Several participants, in fact, would not consider a permanent move back without first securing Australian citizenship, thus revealing the intrinsic links between their negotiations of memberships and their negotiations of mobility. Furthermore, for most of the participants the imagined return did not constitute a severing of ties with Australia, and would not negate the possibility of coming back to Australia in the future. As discussed in Chapter Six, the desire for continuing mobility between the two countries was often central to participants’ imaginings of the future:

So there could be a job in Colombia that I really like to do. (…) A situation where I go for a while, then come back. Do whatever I want and probably at the time have two citizenships and try to bring the two cultures together. Then when it’s time for kids or whatever, so see then what’s happening with work, I can decide to stay or go back when I want.

This reflects Ley and Kobayashi’s (2005: 113) assertion that “transnationalism invokes a travel plan that is continuous, not finite,” and further establishes how an ease of mobility and freedom of choice between the two countries is of high importance to many of the students-turned-migrants studied.
However, once again, it is apparent that tropes of fluidity across borders represent ideals rather than realities. Like Madeleine, other participants also reflected on the practical challenges of return. Penny, for example, considered the logistics of being able to retire back in New Zealand:

Maybe it just depends on things like our financial situation, because once upon a time I never thought about this kind of thing, but things like where are you going to have the most dollars in superannuation, medical care when you’re older, are you going to go on hospital waiting lists and you might have to wait for months to see a specialist. You want to be where things are going to be comfortable for you. The lifestyle in Melbourne is pretty good, I think it would be hard to go back from that, but I don’t know, I don’t know where I’m going to be when I grow up!

Penny noted how she has to consider the financial practicalities of her mobility, and to assess the costs and benefits of where she wants to be later in life. However, the future is still open and uncertain because, as she wryly stated, she is still not certain where she wants to be ‘when she grows up’.

As these vignettes from the participants’ imaginings of return illustrate, the concept of a more permanent return is seldom fixed or fully decided, but will be negotiated over time, and is contingent on a wide variety of factors. Interestingly, economic opportunity and career advancement did not feature very prominently as incentives to return. The obligation to children who had been raised in Australia, to parents ageing in the
source country and to the siblings left to take care of them, were all much stronger influences in these imagined returns. In addition, the practical implications of shifting jobs internationally, considering visa status and considering accumulated financial benefits were also important. Lastly, but by no means least significantly, the desire to return ‘from the heart’, was also a strong feature in these imaginings.

**Lack of Desire to Return**

Notably, two participants fell outside of the trend of regular return visits. Rafael, in his unique positioning as a former ‘third culture kid,’ had not returned to Venezuela, but had made several visits to Holland, which is where his parents had been posted shortly after he moved to Australia, “I do go back home and I was going back home, but my home at that stage was Holland. So I went back to Holland four or five times in four or five years”. Rafael embodies the fact that a transnational life-world can stretch beyond the boundaries of the countries of origin and settlement. For Rafael, it was the reconnection with his parents that was most important, he represents fact that for the highly mobile “the return visit as a means of solidifying transnational relationships can just as easily incorporate other localities and destinations that are not the individual’s external homeland” (Duval 2004: 64). In fact, for Rafael, the very concept of a homeland is problematic. Home is not a single place, but wherever his parents are. Concepts of nostalgia for home and the longing for the ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1990) of familiar places
and cultural constructs assume a singular and uncomplicated notion of ‘home’ and ‘culture.’ Rafael’s prior hyper-mobility and intercultural upbringing negate these assumptions.

Vincent had also never returned to Hong Kong, despite having lived in Australia for a number of years, a fact that he implied was causing some tension in his relationship with his family. Vincent’s reasoning, however, was clear. He explained that if, as a student, he had returned to Hong Kong during each semester break and summer holiday, he would have missed out on valuable social experiences in Australia. Vincent preferred to use his time off to travel around Australia, and to solidify social connections with local students. He said that he had observed many of his international peers returning home at every opportunity, and thus never having the chance to engage with the local people and culture, a fact that increased their sense of alienation during semester. Now that he was working, Vincent still felt the same way. He did not want to use his limited amount of leave on visits back to Hong Kong, when he could use it to enrich his experience in Australia. In negotiating the duality of place inherent to his transnationality, Vincent privileged the place of settlement, and was not willing to sacrifice time and experiences there to visit his country of origin. However, the corporeal co-presence with family that was such a significant element of other participants’ narratives of return was still important to him. He was, at the time of the interview, in the process of arranging for his family to come and visit him.
in Melbourne, so that they could “really get to know my life here”. Vincent was thus, in many ways, bypassing the challenges of the return, such as appraising personal change and distancing from the old home. He was hoping instead to increase a sense of understanding in his transnational relationships by showing his family his new life.

Conclusions

This analysis of student-turned-migrant narratives of return has encompassed three different facets of the concept of return: the visit-journey, the more permanent return; and the absence of return. Through this analysis, we can see that the concept of return is extremely significant in the negotiation of student-turned-migrant transnationality. The visit-journey is a transnational practice that maintains and sustains transnational connections, particularly familial relationships. However, it also contains more complex elements of self-reflection and appraisal, as “return visits help decipher the degree to which migrants position themselves in their own personal post-migration environment” (Duval 2004: 63). The return visit can often become a critical moment, in which individuals recognise and assess personal change, and distance themselves from the source community by viewing it through the lens of the new self. This sometimes impacts on migrants’ decisions, as the
critical and reflective experience of return can confirm their desires to live in Australia.

The possibility of more permanent return was also a key factor in participants’ imaginings of the future. While many imagined such a return as the fulfilment of familial duty, there were several other changing circumstances, personal, familial and global, that participants felt would also impact on their decisions. Economic factors seemed a secondary consideration to the happiness of family and a personal, emotive desire to return, yet the pragmatic challenges of return in terms of bureaucratic and financial issues were never far from their minds. Even the participants who had never returned revealed significant themes. They reconfirmed the fact that transnational connections can exist outside the geographic duality of origin and settlement countries, and established the idea that frequent return can be seen to encompass a sacrifice of engagement with the host community. Essentially, the concept of return played a diverse and highly significant role in the lives of students-turned-migrants, and their constructions of mobility and transnationality.

There are also implications within this analysis for broader issues, namely the ‘brain drain’ of skilled migrants from developing countries. The effects on sending countries of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon are beginning to be addressed in policy research. Gribble (2008) has noted that the trend for international students to stay on after the
completion of their studies is causing sending countries to consider how they can minimise the negative consequences of losing their skilled graduates through these pathways. Their focus is usually either on retaining students onshore, encouraging them to return after studying overseas, or engaging with student-turned-migrant populations and encouraging them to contribute to development from offshore. If other cohorts of students-turned-migrants have similar perspectives to the small group studied here, then the message may be that where citizenship and connections to the home country are able to be retained, most students-turned-migrants will travel back and forth regularly and move between countries to suit their personal circumstances, life stage and career plans. As such, policies of engaging with the student-turned-migrant diaspora, and allowing flexibilities within memberships, may have positive outcomes for sending countries.
Chapter Ten: Conclusions

This thesis has explored the experiences of students-turned-migrants as a unique and rapidly growing migrant group in Australia, using a transnational epistemological framework. The central research questions concerned finding out how students-turned-migrants experience the shift from student to migrant, what patterns of connectedness they maintain outside Australia, and how they negotiate formal and informal memberships across different nation-states. In exploring these questions, I have uncovered how the migration process students-turned-migrants undergo consists of a staggered entrance into Australian society; as a student, a resident and then potentially as a citizen. I have shown how individuals negotiate their obligations across different national contexts and how their desires for both belonging and mobility impact on their decisions about acquiring these different memberships. I have also shown that these migrants sustain strong interpersonal connections overseas, negotiated through diverse forms of virtual and corporeal mobility.

As an explorative study, this research does not provide any direct recommendations or policy outcomes. However, this final chapter will discuss the central themes of the thesis, and consider their implications for current knowledge and future research. I will begin with a thematic summary of the findings and implications of the research, which involves establishing the key features of the student-turned-migrant experience.
will then discuss issues and avenues for further research into students-turned-migrants, and finish with some speculation on the broader implications of this phenomenon to Australia’s future as a nation of immigrants.

**Main Findings and Implications**

**Students-turned-migrants as a diverse, yet distinct migrant group**

Perhaps the strongest outcome of this study is a clear demonstration that students-turned-migrants are not a homogenous group. Even within the relatively small sample examined here, we can see that not only do students-turned-migrants vary in terms of country of origin and ethnicity, but they are also an exemplary illustration of Castles’s (2002: 1143) assertion that migration theory is undergoing a “blurring of boundaries between different categories of migrants”.

The research has revealed that the motivations and intentions of students-turned-migrants are far messier and more diverse than the previous literature suggests. Some could be described as economic migrants, as they are migrating for better employment opportunities, while others fit much better into Fujita’s (2006) model of cultural migrants, who are seeking cultural and creative opportunities. Others, who plan to use their PR only as a means to gather a few years of international work experience (the ‘permanent’ in permanent resident thus becoming
something of a misnomer) could be more accurately described as ‘sojourners’.

In fact, a majority of students-turned-migrants seem to cut across many, if not all, of these categories, with various complex economic, social, cultural, personal and political considerations impacting on their choices. Some arrive as students with the full intention to utilise their education as a pathway to migration. Others come certain they will return, but face evolving circumstances, such as meeting Australian partners or becoming enamoured with the Australian lifestyle. Some envision return as possible, some as inevitable, others vow they will never go back. Some begin their experience with instrumental motivations and intentions, yet, as their experiences progress, develop inherently subjective desires for belonging.

However, despite the diversity of experiences described above, this thesis has identified a number of key commonalities in the student-turned-migrant experience, which positions them as a distinct group of contemporary migrants. There are several factors which I argue set them apart from other migrant groups in Australia.

The experience of negotiated transnationality

Firstly, a key feature of student-turned-migrant experiences is that they fall somewhere in between two common tropes in transnational scholarship. The first trope is that of the globe-trotting, skilled elites, who
are able to successfully and strategically navigate mobile lives and multiple memberships. The second is of the disempowered labour migrants moving from the developing to the developed world, who face exploitation and struggle to gain civic and political voice. The students-turned-migrants in this study fall in between these extremes. Although they undoubtedly possess skills and resources, they often struggle to gain the outcomes that they desire from their mobility, and often make sacrifices and compromises along the way.

There are many examples of this in the data, and many of these are connected to the distinctly staggered migration process that students-turned-migrants undergo. For example, narratives in the analysis have revealed students struggling to complete courses to gain migration points; graduates taking low-skilled jobs to survive while waiting for residency to be confirmed; and students-turned-migrants being separated from their spouses and children for extended periods in order to reap the long-term rewards of membership acquisition. The uncertainty of their status and their future before they apply for residency, and while they wait for residency to be confirmed, means that they must constantly renegotiate their relationships to here and there throughout their migration process.

As transnational subjects, students-turned-migrants are undoubtedly strategic in the construction and acquisition of memberships and
mobilities. However, there is always a great deal of negotiation, risk and compromise built in to these constructions of transnationality. In studying students-turned-migrants, I have borrowed concepts from empirical studies of both ‘flexible citizens’ and vulnerable labour migrants, yet I have also needed to create new frameworks and theories with which to describe more ‘middling’ experiences. I believe the framing concept of ‘negotiated transnationality’ provides a good starting point for understanding the complex interplays of strategising, obligation, desire, and uncertainty that shape such experiences of ‘middling’ mobility.

The impact of national and global regulatory regimes on life choices and social positioning

Ong’s (1999) assertion that everyday practices need to be considered as embedded in specific frameworks of power encapsulates another powerful source of the commonalities between the students-turned-migrants in this study. Before I commenced fieldwork for this research, I vastly underestimated the regulatory effects of particular institutions and regimes, and their power to “shape people’s motivations, desires and struggles and make them particular kinds of subjects in the world” (Ong 1999: 5-6). While anecdotally I was aware that acquiring residency could be a difficult process, I had no idea how intimately the regulation of individuals’ identities and mobilities would impact on their local and transnational sociality.
However, although the experiences described in Chapter Five show how “from the perspective of those who seek to govern, human conduct is conceived as something that can be regulated, controlled, shaped and turned to specific ends” (Dean 1999: 11), they also show that people won’t always respond to regulation in expected ways, and that they can at times circumvent the controls placed upon them. In this thesis, I have noted examples of students-turned-migrants in some ways manipulating student switching policies to gain mobility or security, without the contribution to the labour force or the long-term commitment to Australia that is the expected policy outcome. However, such manipulations always consist of inherent costs, compromises or sacrifices. In addition, it was not only national regimes of regulation that impacted on student-turned-migrant decisions and experiences. More abstract, globalised, systems, such as the ‘mobility values’ assigned to different national passports, also affected choices through desires for unproblematic memberships.

A reliance on virtual mobilities to remain transnationally connected

The students-turned-migrants in this study also all depended on technology as a means of maintaining their transnational connections. However, as a transnational practice, engagement with technology was often problematic. In Chapter Seven, I have noted the diverse ways in which virtual mobilities function in student-turned-migrant lives, and established that their patterns of engagement with technology are a
distinct aspect of their positioning as young, highly-educated migrants. However, although increasingly cheap and seemingly convenient, mediated communication creates its own sets of relational challenges. For example, the obligations of perpetual contact can put stress on relationships, and the “general sustaining of family life ‘at-a-distance’” (Urry 2007: 226) contains complex negotiations of presence, absence, guilt and frustration.

More significantly, different modes of mediated interaction seemed to function in distinct ways: they were used to mediate different kinds of relationships and fulfil different kinds of obligations. For example, web cameras were used to ‘see the baby’, while instant messaging was used to quickly chat and ‘catch up’ with globally scattered groups of friends. However, this research has confirmed that “electronically mediated interaction is phenomenologically quite different from in-person interaction” (O’Flaherty, Skrbiš and Tranter 2007), and that it is often a poor substitute for corporeal co-presence. As such, the intersections of presence and absence, and the maintenance of intimate relationships at a distance have to be carefully negotiated by students-turned-migrants as transnational subjects. However, despite these specific challenges, I do not believe that virtual mobilities transform social practices entirely, but rather reconfigure more traditional practices by placing them into a context that is often spatially and temporally disembedded.
Furthermore, Chapter Eight revealed that virtual mobility also stretches the influence of the regimes of global and national mass media from the screen and into intimate spheres of individual lives. Students-turned-migrants displayed distinct qualities within this media engagement. Rather than the focus on local ethnic media or exclusively diasporic media issues which is apparent in much of the literature on migrants and the media, students-turned-migrants were often globally engaged, and concerned with how mediated representations of world events impacted on their choices and their positioning within Australian society.

This connects the theme of virtual mobilities with the theme of regimes of power, because, while not directly regulatory, national and global media regimes create complex discourses of regime-relative truths that impact on participants’ perceptions of self, knowledge and belonging. The transnational subject finds, for example, their decisions about citizenship radically altered by television images of evacuations in a far-off war, or their inclusion and acceptance into social groups curbed by the host country media’s portrayals of ‘injustice’ in their home region. Contrary to theories that suggest global media consumption is passive and distanciated from daily life, the participants demonstrated that a transnational consciousness of issues and events in the world can actually have direct connections to daily lives, perceptions and choices.
Corporeal mobility as a central desire and value

The data also revealed that virtual co-presence could not fully substitute for corporeal co-presence, and as such, the participants highly valued corporeally mobility as a transnational practice. The maps submitted with the probe packages showed both extensive travels in the past and extensive desires for travel in the future. While visits and possible returns to the country of origin were the focus of discussion in Chapter Nine, participants’ decisions about membership further revealed the desire to maintain mobility both within and beyond the countries of origin and of settlement. However, as discussed above, mobility is not easily acquired or unproblematically enacted. Students-turned-migrants are transnational subjects who desire to move, but are constrained, firstly by regulation, and secondly by their own attachments, resources, obligations and competing allegiances and desires. Membership is strongly linked to corporeal mobility, as different combinations of memberships allow individuals different rights to move freely and to participate across different societies. Choices about membership thus also become a strategic negotiation, a complex balancing of instrumental and subjective desires. This involves the need to honour belongings and commitments to varied spaces alongside the need to keep options for further mobility open. Thus, metaphors of fluidity, globe-trotting and ‘savvy manipulation’ perhaps need to be reframed under the umbrella of ‘negotiated transnationality’, in which individuals
balance ‘quasi-memberships,’ such as denizenship, as well as forms of multiple citizenship.

**Considerations for Further Research**

Since I completed the fieldwork on this project, a number of changes have occurred that provide pointers for further research. First of all, international enrolments in the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia have increased significantly in the past few years. Recent data from Australian Education International (2007) shows that VET enrolments increased by 45.5% from 2006 to 2007. The data further reveals that VET enrolments now constitute 29% of all international enrolments, with 73% of these students enrolled in private VET providers. This coincides with a significant number of trade occupations on the MODL list, with Birrell (2007) noting that overseas student enrolments in cooking and hairdressing courses almost tripled from 2004 and 2006.

Due to the nature of the sampling for this thesis, however, almost all of the participants were higher education graduates, only one (Takahiro) came through the vocational sector. Anecdotal evidence and emerging research suggests that the VET sector is utilised by groups of potential students-turned-migrants with quite different socio-economic characteristics to most of the subjects examined in this thesis. VET courses are generally much cheaper and quicker than degree programs, and have lower English language requirements. It has been
suggested that they are therefore attracting students from a lower socio-economic bracket in the source countries (Baas 2007). These potential students-turned-migrants could be more vulnerable than the subjects studied here: they have often accrued substantial debt to study overseas and are possibly more likely to be exploited by private education providers, landlords and employers (Baas 2007). I would therefore suggest that further research into the student-turned-migrant phenomenon should focus on the experiences of students from VET pathways, and carefully consider how class differentials may impact on the experience.

A second significant change has been the introduction of the new temporary residency policies in 2007. As mentioned in Chapter One, these policies mean that many students-turned-migrants must now gain work experience in their field on a temporary visa before they can be granted permanent residency. None of my participants, who had already secured or applied for residency, were directly affected by these changes. Yet I believe the impact of these changes on students-turned-migrants will be great. I have used the model of the ‘three gates’ to describe student-turned-migrant entrance into Australian society; the new TR laws have now essentially added a fourth gate. This is significant because the period of waiting, uncertainty and tenuousness discussed in Chapter Five will now be significantly extended. Students-turned-migrants will also be required to practice in their field for at least some
length of time, which will alter the options for migrants like Takahiro, who used their training solely as a migration pathway. Student switching, in its purest sense as a direct shift from student to resident, is no longer possible for many students-turned-migrants. Further research therefore needs to address how the ‘fourth gate’ of temporary residency transforms the student-turned-migrant experience, and analyse how the regulation of temporary residency impacts on individuals’ choices.

Finally, in November 2007, Australia witnessed the end of 11 years of neo-conservative Liberal Party governance. The victory of Kevin Rudd’s Labor Party has been heralded by many as a new political era, and in particular an end to Howard era social conservativism and economic rationalism (BBC News 2007; Manne 2008). The Rudd government has already made some significant steps within immigration policy. They seem committed to increasing the skilled stream, announcing in May 2008 that the permanent skilled migration program (which includes the primary pathways for students-turned-migrants) would be increased by an additional 31,000 migrants, representing a 30% increase on 2007-08 figures under Howard (Evans 2008a). In April, DIAC also announced that it would streamline visa arrangements to allow international students the automatic right to work up to 20 hours per week, when permission to work had previously required a separate application (Evans 2008b).
These policy changes seem to suggest that Australia will remain open to fostering student-turned-migrant pathways. It is also likely that paradigms of multiculturalism and social inclusion will be in some way refigured by Rudd policy in the near future. While it remains to be seen what precise effects the new government may have, this thesis has clearly shown that both micro and macro policy decisions can have a dramatic impact on the lives and choices of individual students-turned-migrants. Future research thus needs to carefully consider changing policy contexts as it examines the experiences of future student-turned-migrant cohorts.

Several other general points need to be considered for future research of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon. Firstly, as discussed above, the diversity of experiences examined in this thesis points to a need for further research that could tease out some of the sub-categories of students-turned-migrants that I have identified. Isolating and thoroughly comparing the experiences of students-turned-migrants with children, for example, or students-turned-migrants who found partners in the host country while studying, were beyond the scope of this study, due to its exploratory nature. Yet I believe looking comparatively at students-turned-migrants from different backgrounds and in different circumstances could be highly illuminating and could build on some of the themes that I have uncovered.
Secondly, interdisciplinary research, particularly between international education researchers and migration researchers, would be a boon to the field. The tendency to see students and migrants as distinct categories needs to be redressed, so that there can be recognition of the possibility that they can in fact be two stages in a single process. In particular, I believe longitudinal studies, which could, for example, follow subjects before study right through to naturalisation, would benefit greatly from collaboration between education researchers and migration researchers. Such studies could provide a much fuller and richer exploration of the experience in its entirety than was possible here. Finally, comparative research across migrant receiving nations could also be extremely valuable. New Zealand and Canada, for example, have adopted very similar student switching policies to Australia, while the United States and the United Kingdom have other less explicit pathways and schemes for international students to become migrants. Comparative research that illuminates the experience within different cultural and policy contexts would also create the kind of broader international perspective that was far beyond the scope of this thesis.

The Social Implications of the Student-Turned-Migrant Phenomenon

In closing, I would like to reflect on the broader social implications of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon. While, as discussed above, students-turned-migrants are certainly a diverse population, they do
constitute a distinct group or ‘wave’ of Australian migration, with distinct characteristics that set them apart from other groups of migrants. As such, they have the ability to significantly transform particular sociological frameworks. While the sample presented here is small, and the student-turned-migrant phenomenon still in its early stages, it is worth speculating on what kind of impact this new group of migrants may have on understandings of Australia as a nation of immigrants.

Rather than the past models of multicultural cities, made up of ethnic communities which have been largely built by chains of family migration, Australia may instead see far more globalised cities, containing large numbers of transnational and highly mobile individuals who are corporeally and virtually connected to many different parts of the world. This is, in effect, the ‘good news’ scenario of the student-turned-migrant phenomenon, which could have far reaching positive consequences for Australia’s integration into the region and to the flow of skills across borders.

However, this research has also shown that there are some inherently problematic aspects of the student-turned-migrant experience, most notably in the difficulties and uncertainties that individuals face in establishing themselves in Australia, particularly in terms of gaining residency and finding work in their desired occupations. While the poor labour market outcomes discussed in Chapter Three have encouraged a
tightening of the regulation of PR through the new temporary residency laws, the evidence in Chapter Five suggests that creating more hurdles to residency risks further alienating potential students-turned-migrants. This not only means that Australia could lose skills to other countries with less rigid policies, but also that the tenuousness, uncertainty and stress of the student-turned-migrant experience will be protracted. This could lead to significant social problems amongst the groups of potential migrants operating in ‘status limbo’, uncertain of whether they will be able to stay or go.

While either, or both, of these scenarios may be the outcome of the continuing phenomenon of students-turned-migrants, a definitive answer is beyond the scope of this present research. This thesis instead set out to provide a detailed snapshot of the emergent social phenomenon of students-turned-migrants and their potential transnationality. Through the individual narratives of participants, I have unravelled some of the complex layers of the student-turned-migrant experience, and revealed their rich potential as empirical subjects in the study of the complexities of modern memberships and mobilities in an increasingly globalised world. I hope that this study will lead to an increased acknowledgement of students-turned-migrants as a distinct migrant group, both in Australia and in other nations that have adopted variations of student switching policies. I hope, also, that future research into students-turned-migrants can use this research as a springboard from which to create better
understandings of how our migration and education policies shape the lives of these individuals, and how we can structure our institutions and policies to create better outcomes for all.
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## Appendix 1. Participant Characteristics

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<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family status</th>
<th>Location of immediate family</th>
<th>Current career</th>
<th>Status at time of interview</th>
<th>Intending to naturalise</th>
<th>Eligible for dual citizenship</th>
<th>Intending to return permanently</th>
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Appendix 2. Probe Packages and Contents

The probe package

The camera (front)

The log book

The postcards
Appendix 3. *Camera Prompts*

Take a photo of:

- Something that reminds you of home
- Something about Australia that you love
- Something in your house that’s really important to you
- Your favourite meal
- Your favourite gadget
- A place where you feel relaxed
- Something that’s a part of your culture
- Something that you’re proud of
- Something beautiful
- Something boring
- Something that causes you stress
- A place where you spend a lot of time
- Anything else you’d like to!!
Appendix 4. *Selection of Participant Photos*
Appendix 5. *Postcard Prompts*

- I feel like I really belong when...
- My most memorable moment so far in Australia was...
- I feel homesick when...
- When I visit my country I feel...
- When I finished my Australian degree I felt...
- When I received PR I felt...
- Studying here was...
- Living in Australia is...
Appendix 6. Interview Protocol

Studying in Australia and Deciding to Stay

• Did you see study here as a pathway to migration? Did you decide to apply for PR before or after you commencing studying here?

• Tell me a bit about studying in Australia. Did your expectations of life here change while you were studying? Did this effect your decision to stay?

• What kind of friendships did you form at university? Are you still in touch with friends that you made there?

• Do you think studying here made the transition to permanent resident easier? Do you think it helped prepare you for life here?

• Did you encounter any difficulties or problems when you made the change from student to permanent resident?

• Why did you decide to stay?

Ties and Connections Overseas

• How many times have you been back to your country? How many times do you think you’ll go back over the next few years?

• What the main purpose of these visits? Do you go for family or business reasons? Do you go alone or do you take friends or family with you?
• How does it feel when you go back?
• How much contact do you have with friends or associates overseas? How important are these contacts to you?
• Do you belong to any international associations or networks?
• How often do you phone and email friends and family in your country?
• How do you feel about keeping in touch with people at home?
• Do you have any contact with migrant/ethnic groups or organisations in Australia and to what extent are you involved with them?

Membership and Belonging
• Do you think you’ll always live in Australia? Where else do you think you might live in the future?
• Do you think of Australia as ‘home’ or of yourself as Australian?
• Have you become a citizen or do you intend to? Why/why not?
• Do you think citizenship is important or significant? What kind of feelings do you ascribe to it?
• What do you think about dual citizenship?
• Do you think political engagement with the Australian community is important?
• What kinds of duties and responsibilities do you feel to Australia and to your own country?
• Do you think the residency and citizenship laws and regulations in
Australia and your country allow you to have the level of formal
belonging in each country that you really want?
Appendix 7. Plain Language Statement

Dear

My name is Shanthi Robertson. I am undertaking a PhD in International Studies at RMIT University. The title of my research is “From International Student to Skilled Migrant in Victoria: Transnational Connections, Mobility and Belonging.”

You are invited to participate in this research project. This letter describes the project in straightforward language, or ‘plain English’. Please read this letter carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators. This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, and is funded by a scholarship from the Australian Postgraduate Awards scheme.

This project is about international students who become skilled migrants in Victoria. In particular, it will examine the kinds of ties that these migrants maintain overseas and in Australia, and how they feel about them, and also how studying in Australia affected their decision to migrate and experiences of migration. Data on these topics will be gained through interviews with between 12 and 20 migrants in Victoria who have gained Australian permanent residency (PR) in the last 7 years and who completed a degree at an Australian tertiary institution prior to gaining PR.

The primary research question is: What is the significance of and relationship between study, residency, belonging and transnational ties for international students who become skilled migrants? There are also several subsidiary questions, all tied to this main question.

You have been approached because you have responded to an advertisement calling for participants, or because your name has been passed on to us as someone who fits the criteria for participation and may be interested in the themes of the project. Your contact details have not been passed on to me, unless you have already given your express consent for them to be passed on.
If you agree to participate, you will first be required to complete some brief tasks at home using a package of materials such as a camera, postcards, a log book and a map, to record your experiences and thoughts. The activity should take no more than around 2-3 hours in total but it may be spread over 3 to 4 weeks. You will then be required to participate in a tape-recorded informal interview, approximately two hours in length. You will be asked various questions about your thoughts, feelings, opinions and experiences of studying in Australia, applying for PR and maintaining contact with your country of origin. As far as possible, the time and RMIT campus venue of your interview will be arranged to be convenient for you. If you would like to examine a list of the interview topics and questions before you decide to participate you are most welcome. At your request you will also be able to examine the analysis of the data from your interview and remove any data before the research is submitted for assessment or published.

Participation in this study involves no perceived risks outside your normal day-to-day activities. If you are unduly concerned about your responses to any of the questions or if you find participation in the project distressing, you should contact Dr Christopher Ziguras as soon as convenient. Dr Ziguras will discuss your concerns with you confidentially and suggest appropriate follow-up, if necessary.

Your identity will remain confidential at all times. As the principal researcher, only I will see data in which you are identified by name. The results of the research will be published in the form of a thesis, in which pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Parts of the research may be published in journal articles, books or conference papers, but again pseudonyms will be used so that participants are not identified. The research data will be kept securely at RMIT for a period of 5 years before being destroyed.

As a participant, your rights are as follows:
- The right to withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice.
- The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

While there are no direct benefits associated with participation in the project, the research will give voice to your experiences in Australia as an international student and skilled migrant, and give you an opportunity to contribute to social research in this area.

If you have any questions, please contact me on (03) 9925 1764 or 0439 638 509 or my Senior Supervisor Dr. Chris Ziguras on (03) 9925 2501 or email christopher.ziguras@rmit.edu.au

Yours Sincerely

Shanthi Robertson BA (Hons)

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745.
Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec