

**NATIONAL IDENTITY AND YOUNG CHILDREN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF 4<sup>TH</sup> AND 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS IN SINGAPORE AND THE UNITED STATES**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Education)  
in the University of Michigan  
2010

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*“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.”*

**- Kofi Annan**

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## **DEDICATION**

To Ah Ma, my grandmother.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank the chair of my committee and my adviser, Jeff Mirel, for being the best mentor anyone could ask for. His unwavering guidance through the years and utmost faith that this dissertation would get written helped to make not only the writing of this thesis but my entire graduate career a truly wonderful experience. I knew I lucked out when he offered to teach me how to drive in the snow my first winter in Ann Arbor those many, many years ago.

To my committee members, I offer my sincerest gratitude. I always find myself thinking hardest and producing some of my best work when talking with Bob Bain. I will always appreciate the intellectual rigor and high expectations to which he held me. This dissertation—and I—owe a great debt to Ann Lin, whose enthusiasm about my project and insightful comments throughout the writing process helped me through some of my toughest times. And I thank Carla O'Connor for being an inspiring academic—she provided me with the kind of incisive and thoughtful feedback I can only hope to offer my own students in the future.

Although they were not on my dissertation committee, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge several other faculty members in the School of Education who have been vital in my growth as a scholar. Gary Fenstermacher was the person who first inspired me to think about issues of citizenship and national identity in schools. He has since retired and therefore was not able to serve on my committee, but all that I have learned from him will never be far from my mind or my work. Valerie Lee has been a model for the kind of researcher I aspire to be—exact, meticulous, and always with an eye towards issues of equity. I thank her for always taking a keen interest in my personal and professional life, and for all the advice she has so kindly shared over the years. My research skills were developed and refined by working on Susan B. Neuman's literacy projects. She generously supported me with an assistantship for the larger part of my doctoral career and has always shown such care and concern for my overall welfare.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of the teachers and students of the schools at which I conducted my study. They graciously welcomed me into their classrooms and I will be eternally grateful for their patience and time. If only all researchers could be as blessed as I to work with subjects of such candor, warmth, and intellect. Many thanks to the Novi School District and the Ministry of Education in Singapore for facilitating the research process.

I gratefully acknowledge the institutional support that I received while working on this project. Specifically, I thank the Rackham Graduate School and the School of Education for providing me with several grants that covered travel and research-related

expenses, and especially for a generous fellowship that supported me during the last phase of my writing.

I want to thank the good friends that I have made in Michigan for their support and camaraderie throughout my time in graduate school. Sarah Tucker, Julie Dwyer, Tanya Wright, Serena Salloum, Christine Meyer, Anne-Lise Halvorsen, and Deborah Michaels have all in one way or another been a source of friendship, encouragement, intellectual guidance, and inspiration.

I would be lost without the unconditional love of my family. My parents (Dad & Mom), sisters (Sherri and Samantha Koh), and brother-in-law (Foo Piao Zhou) have never let the thousands of miles between us get in the way of concerned phone-calls, long Skype conversations, or lovingly packaged care-boxes. Thank you for believing in me.

And finally, to the two loves of my life- I thank our daughter Sophie for being such a good sleeper which allowed me to do some good writing after her bedtime. She otherwise made no contribution whatsoever to this project, but still deserves thanks for being fabulous and wonderful just the same. And I give my deepest thanks to my husband, Jude Yew, for his love, support, and faith in me and this project. I would not have survived graduate school without him. I am profoundly grateful to him for finding time to read every draft of this dissertation despite working hard on his own. This dissertation would be nothing without him. I would be nothing without him.

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## ABSTRACT

Debates about nationality and identity have particular relevance for multicultural nations such as Singapore and the United States where recent trends in immigration and an increasing multiplicity of identities problematize the notion of citizenship. Given that a nation's schools are where the dominant discourse of nation identity and history are promulgated, we need to study the role of schools in citizenship formation if we are to understand how and why citizens develop commitment to the nation. My study adopts a comparative perspective by looking at the curriculum and students in Singapore and the United States. I propose that Singapore shares with the U.S. the need to conceptualize and clarify what citizenship and citizenship education mean in the face of debates over immigration and multiculturalism.

This study investigates the symbols and strategies children use as they reflect on issues related to nationality. Using a combination of interviews and observations, it also examines whether children embrace the nationalizing function of the school or whether they resist and/or reshape this endeavor to suit their own understandings.

Analyses reveal a master narrative that characterizes national identity in each country- in general, children in Singapore talk about national identity in material terms while American children evoke more abstract ideas. However, these opinions vary interestingly by cultural groupings such as ethnicity and immigrant status. I also show that children do not merely passively react to and accept the social and political world

that is presented to them, but instead consciously struggle with the tensions of identity in multicultural societies. Results from this study speak to the discursiveness of national identity formation, the agency that children exercise in identity construction, and the important role of schools in this process. This dissertation proposes that in order for citizenship education to instill in children informed allegiance to their nations, teachers, curriculum planners, and teacher-educators need to know more about how children think about these issues. It also provides insights about when it is appropriate to teach children to think critically about issues of diversity and nationality, and has implications for curriculum and policy related to citizenship education in multicultural nations.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

It has long been recognized that a person's identification with nation begins to take root in childhood. Childhood experience is commonly taken to be the bedrock upon which self-identity is built, and national consciousness is regarded by many as a key foundation of a modern persons' identity. Childhood is conventionally seen as a time of 'structured becoming',<sup>1</sup> a time defined as preparatory to the values and preoccupations of the adult world. National feeling, too, is often seen as something barely conscious that seeps into one's core being as one grows and develops. Ernest Gellner asserts that 'the culture in which one has been *taught* to communicate becomes the core of one's identity.'<sup>2</sup> (italics in original) Such a view defines childhood as the primal ground in which national cultures take root. In turn, this reflects the idea that national feeling is not natural or instinctive in children but is consciously cultivated in them by adults, hence, the assumption that a nation's schools are places where dominant discourses of national identity and history are promulgated. As Rudolf de Cillia and colleagues argue:

It is to a large extent through its schools and education system that the state shapes those forms of perception, categorization, interpretation and memory that serve to determine the orchestration of the habitus which are in turn constitutive basis for a kind of national commonsense.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Jenks, *Childhood*. (London: Routledge, 2005), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 61

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities." *Discourse Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 156.

All this suggests that a consideration of children should be central to the study of national feeling, place-belonging, and citizenship. And yet, we do not know a great deal about how school-age children actually do relate to the idea of nation. In recent decades, we have seen a growing interest in the constructedness of national identities and childhoods.<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Eley and Ronald Suny note, with respect to nations, that the “need to constitute nations discursively, through processes of imaginative ideological labor—that is, the novelty of national culture, its manufactured or invented character, as opposed to its deep historical rootedness—is probably the most important point to emerge from the recent literature.”<sup>5</sup> I argue that understanding how children undergo this “imaginative ideological labor” is something that has yet to be fully explored empirically.

Further, amid the current unprecedented global transmigration, the nationalization process of individuals has become a growing concern. Many countries are becoming increasingly multicultural and are wrestling with the tension between ethnic autonomy and national cohesion. Set against this backdrop, related discussions of national identity have intensified; however these have conventionally been confined to how national identity has been conceptualized and the various ways in which individuals and groups express their sense of national identity. What has been systematically overlooked in research on national identity is the means by which national identity is acquired and the mechanisms that aid in this process. We are not born hardwired as citizens and there is a process by which we transition from an egocentric conception of the self to a more socio-

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<sup>4</sup> See Allison James, Chris Jenks, Alan Prout. *Theorizing Childhood* (London: Polity Press, 1998). Chris Jenks, ed. *Sociology of Childhood: Essential Readings* (London: Batsford, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds. *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996), 8.



centric notion of being members of a larger social and political entity.<sup>6</sup> And yet, despite an implicit acknowledgement among scholars that people's attachment to nation first takes root in childhood which then forms the foundation for future and potentially permanent allegiance, there are few studies that interrogate just how childhood and national identity formation are intertwined. In what ways do children think of themselves as citizens of a nation? What symbols and strategies do they use to articulate notions of national membership?

This dissertation focuses on the role of education in shaping children's constructions of citizenship and national identity in multicultural nations. Lacking a common religion or ethnic heritage that constituted earlier organizing principles of nations, multicultural nations such as the United States and Singapore must realize national identity via commitment to a set of common institutions and political rights. Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an "imagined community" is useful here because it emphasizes the constructedness of national identity.<sup>7</sup> Both culturally homogenous and multicultural societies are in a sense invented, to some degree, social constructions based on intentional and purposeful belief in a shared set of political and social values. However, multicultural nations face a greater challenge because of the plurality of potentially contesting identities. As such, a national identity becomes even more important as the binding element that holds this diversity together. According to Feinberg, national identity in multicultural societies involves the understandings that

(1) citizenship in the national community is shared by members of different cultural groups; (2) members of this national community are

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene L. Horowitz, "Some Aspects of the Development of Patriotism in Children" *Sociometry*, 3, no. 4. (1940): 329-341.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991).

expected to be morally partial to it and, under certain conditions, to their co-members regardless of cultural affiliation; and (3) culturally different citizens are to be partial to one another (in certain kinds of situations) even if this involves distancing themselves from culturally similar citizens of a different nation-state.<sup>8</sup>

This strengthens the need to study children's construction of national identity in multicultural nations because of the special cultural allegiances they may often hold in conjunction with national ones. I posit that these children possess a complex conceptual map about nationhood that involves delicately balancing a set of personal, cultural, and national obligations. And it is the intention of this dissertation to explore the various values, symbols and actions that children evoke while doing so

My study also examines the ideas children have with regards to schools as agents of national identity formation. This research arises out of my interest in citizenship education at the primary level and my belief that in order for citizenship education to be successful, teachers, curriculum planners, policy makers, and teacher educators need greater insight into how children think about these issues. Apart from pedagogical reasons, this also stems from the understanding that education for citizenship is a process that must be informed by the civic virtues it seeks to develop and that engaging children in a dialogue about identity is part of that process.<sup>9</sup> By speaking to children themselves, I seek to understand how they comprehend, experience, identify with, potentially resist and reshape nationalist projects of which they are often primary objects.

This study adopts a comparative perspective by looking at two countries, Singapore and the United States. It investigates how children in these nations similarly

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<sup>8</sup> Feinberg, *Common Schools/uncommon Identities*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Fionnuala Waldron and Susan Pike. "What Does it Mean to be Irish? Children's Construction of National Identity." *Irish Educational Studies* 25, no. 2 (2006): 232.

and/or differentially develop an attachment to the nation and the ways in which schools have been engaged to bring together children from different backgrounds through a commitment to a shared national identity. Singapore and the U.S. are multicultural countries with two different sets of political philosophies and cultural perspectives, and they hold distinct ideas about the individual's position *vis-à-vis* the larger community and the nation. Consequently, the similarities and differences in children's responses will offer particularly interesting insights into the degree to which children's opinions about national identity and the place of schools are universal or culture-specific. Furthermore, the models of citizenship education implemented in each country differ in interesting ways, providing me with a rich opportunity to explore the role of education in this process, and the manner in which children respond to the nationalizing project of the school.

Two overarching frameworks structure this study: first, I argue that national identity is a story—a narrative-- we tell ourselves to make sense of who we are. Therefore, I ask, what kind of stories do children tell themselves and each other about how they feel about their place as citizens? Children below the age of twelve have conventionally been considered intellectually naïve with regards to issues of civic participation and national responsibility. I contend, however, that the relatively unschooled nature of children's opinions and intuitions presents a rich opportunity for exploring the more affective and elemental components of national membership. Furthermore, I contend that it is essential that we consider their narratives within the context of the school. Ernest Gellner, arguably one of the most prominent theorists of nationalism as fundamental to the *modern* conception of the self, asserts, “the culture in

which one has been *taught* to communicate becomes the core of one's identity."<sup>10</sup> [italics in original] Such a view not only establishes childhood as the primal ground in which national identity takes root, it also reflects the idea that a sense of national attachment is not natural or instinctive in children but is consciously cultivated in them. Hence, there is the assumption that a nation's schools are places where dominant discourses of national identity and history are promulgated.

My second framework is based on theories emerging from the "new" sociology of childhood. This new sociological perspective of studying children sees children as competent and active participants in all kinds of social scenarios, such as making social distinctions, expressing or withholding judgment, drawing and redrawing boundaries between here/there, self/other, and so forth.<sup>11</sup> This paradigm of understanding children and childhood is validated by an emerging body of largely qualitative sociological studies that have analyzed children as active social beings.<sup>12</sup>

My work seeks to fill several gaps in the study of education and national identity formation. First, the two theoretical frameworks that inform my study have yet to be

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<sup>10</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies, *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and Locality in Middle Childhood*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 27.

<sup>12</sup> See Paul Connolly, "In Search of Authenticity: Researching Young Children's Perspectives." In *Children and Their Curriculum*, edited by Andrew Pollard, Dennis Thiessen and Ann Filer. London: Falmer Press, 1997;

William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1997);

Jens Qvortrup, Marjatta Bardy, Giovanni Sgritta and Helmut Wintersberger, *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994);

Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993);

Pia Christensen and Alan Prout, "Researching Children and Childhood." In *Researching Children's Experiences: Approaches and Methods*, edited by Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (London: Sage, 2005);

Sue Howard and Judith Gill, "It's Like We're a Normal Way and Everyone Else is Different': Australian Children's Constructions of Citizenship and National Identity." *Educational Studies*, 27, no. 1 (2001): 87-103;

Scourfield *et al*, *Children, Place and Identity*.

Waldron & Pike, "What does it mean to be Irish?"

empirically tested. Specifically, I integrate theoretical work in political science and civic/citizenship education. Civic/citizenship education has been described as a continuum from a minimal to a maximal model.<sup>13</sup> The minimal model--*civic* education-- is characterized by a narrow definition of citizenship that is knowledge-based and primarily about the transmission of information about a country's history, geography, and politics. The maximal model—*citizenship* education-- takes a broader view and includes the content and knowledge components of civics education, but also encourages active and sometimes critical interrogation and interpretation of this knowledge. By comparing the ways in which children from two multicultural nations respond to the nationalizing function of schools, my dissertation seeks to situate the model of civic/citizenship education practiced by each country along this continuum.

This analysis is bolstered by theoretical work in political science. It is argued that Western modernity is founded on the transmission of national sentiment.<sup>14</sup> Through the vehicle of state-administered systems of mass education, populations are imbued with an allegiance to each nation-state. According to this theory, the maintenance of the cultural/linguistic medium of the nation is the central function of the educational system. However, this theory has yet to be empirically tested. It describes national identity through particular definitions and categories and yet how citizens themselves relate to the form and meaning of these categories remains unexplored. My dissertation expands on this theory by focusing on children and comparing the language and narratives they use in describing themselves in relation to each country.

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<sup>13</sup> Terence McLaughlin and Palmira Juceviciene. "Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity," in *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship*, edited by David Bridges. New York, Routledge, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Gellner, 1983.

Second, much research on national identity and education has focused on civic and citizenship education with adolescents and young adults while children below the age of twelve have been conventionally considered intellectually naïve with regards to these issues.<sup>15</sup> I argue, however, that the relatively ingenuous nature of children’s opinions and intuitions presents a rich opportunity for exploring the components of national membership. Recent sociological perspectives contend that children should not be seen as passive receptors of adult instruction but as active agents who effectively negotiate with and evaluate their social world. Such a perspective contends, “the immaturity of children is a biological fact but the ways in which that immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the conventional view of childhood as an Other of adulthood has prevented us from seeing children as competent, social actors, worthy of study on their own terms. Furthermore, while early work in this area suggested that young children are not able to identify with communities larger than their immediate local geography,<sup>17</sup> I contend that this view is flawed.<sup>18</sup> As Marc Jans suggests, “Children seem to possess the ability to identify themselves with larger social groups and communities. Whether they do this is strongly connected to the accessibility of symbols,

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Torney-Purta, John Schwille, & Jo-Ann Amadeo. *Civic Education Across Countries: Twenty-Four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project* (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Allison James and Alan Prout, eds., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Subscribing to this theory, the Progressive educators in the early half of the twentieth century believed in teaching Social Studies beginning in the primary grades with a study of environments familiar to the student and moving outward in concentric circles from the individual to the family to the neighborhood and to the community.

<sup>18</sup> See Jean Piaget, and Anne-Marie Weil. “The Development in Children of the Idea of the Homeland and of Relations with Other Countries.” *International Social Science Bulletin* 3 (1951): 561-578.

Gustav Jahoda. “Children's Concepts of Nationality: A Critical Study of Piaget's Stages.” *Child Development* 35, no. 4 (1964): 1081-1092.

Gustav Jahoda. “The Development of Children’s Ideas about Country and Nationality.” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 33, no. 2 (1963): 143-153.

values and norms going with such an identity.”<sup>19</sup> My study will contribute to this argument by demonstrating just what some of these “symbols, values and norms” of national identity are, and how children come to relate to them.

Third, my work highlights emerging research in political science that argues for the discursive nature of national identity formation. New research in the topic of nationalism is beginning to signal a rethinking of this phenomenon, from the “bottom up” and the “inside out.”<sup>20</sup> As described by Sharon Stephens, until fairly recently, the study of nationalism was left to political scientists and macro-sociologists. In recent years however, the topic of nationalism has become of interest to anthropologists, literacy theorists, historians, feminist researchers and others concerned with “understanding connections between political ideologies and public actions, on the one hand, and people’s everyday practices and forms of consciousness, on the other.”<sup>21</sup> This paradigm contends that national identity is a narrative we construct to make sense of who we are and therefore it is not completely stable or immutable. Rather, it is a fluid construction generated and expressed differently by different individuals in various contexts. The goal of my study is to uncover these narrative(s) as it is created by children. This dissertation will show children hold on to their country’s discourse of national identity—that has been created by the state, through history, or perpetuated through a collective sense of national memory—with great tenacity. They have internalized its tropes, its main players, its significant events; and yet, as this dissertation will show, children are also able to create

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<sup>19</sup> Marc Jans, “Children as Citizens: Towards a Contemporary Notion of Child Participation.” *Childhood* 11, no. 1 (2004): 27-44.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Thompson, “Nations, National Identities and Human Agency: Putting People Back Into Nations.” *The Sociological Review* 49, no. 1 (2001): 18-32; R. De Cillia, M. Reisigl and R. Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities.” *Discourse Society*, 10, no. 2 (1999): 170.

<sup>21</sup> Sharon Stephens, “Editorial Introduction: Children and Nationalism” *Childhood* 4 No. 5 (1997): 7.

their own stories about national identity. Drawing from this master narrative and using the cultural resources available to them, children renegotiate, reconstruct, and recreate what national belonging and citizenship means to them. As Rogers Smith argues, “No structural feature can by itself form a conception or story of political peoplehood that can sustain a shared sense of ‘imagined community’, in Benedict Anderson’s famous phrase. People have to compose such stories, partly inspired and constrained by their structural (and cultural) contexts.”<sup>22</sup>

Today, in the face of massive global transmigration, as borders between nations become more permeable and as countries become increasingly multicultural, discussions of citizenship, national identity and belonging as articulated by the person- or child- on the street become increasingly urgent. In many circumstances these days, national membership is no longer based on blood or ancestry, but on the acceptance of certain institutions and practices.<sup>23</sup> In multicultural societies in particular, there is no single-- nor easy-- test of identity, no prototypical American or Singaporean. In fact, one of the touchstones of citizenship in a consciously multicultural society is that there can be no such single example. This dissertation presents the inter-connected web of responsibilities, rights and obligations that children possess, or are in the process of acquiring, as they come to recognize themselves as members of one particular nation. It investigates the extent to which the public school is an important instrument for doing so, and more importantly, it seeks to validate the meaning-making that children undertake as they experience this process.

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<sup>22</sup> Roger M. Smith, “Citizenship and the Politics of People-Building” *Citizenship Studies* 5, no. 1, (2001): 74.

<sup>23</sup> This has often been framed as the difference between *civic* versus *ethnic* nationalism. See Michael Ignatieff. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys Into the New Nationalism*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993.



I present my dissertation in six major chapters using a combination comparative/thematic framework. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two surveys the literature on the role of schools in national identity development and highlights why it is important to focus our attention on children and the connection between children and national identity formation. I discuss theoretical advances in childhood studies and political science that see citizens in general, and children in particular, as active interpreters and creators of meaning, rather than simply absorbing the meaning adults construct for them. Chapter Three presents the methodology behind my study- its comparative framework, the theoretical underpinnings of my method, and the specific processes associated with research design, data collection, and analysis. It describes the axes of similarities between Singapore and the United States as immigrant, multicultural nations and why this makes a compelling comparative study of national identity development.

Chapters Four and Five form a thematic and analytic pairing and are structured according to different categories of national identity markers in each country. Chapter Four discusses the findings from Singapore where I show the tensions and challenges facing an education system trying to educate students in ways that will develop and promote a cohesive national identity while also trying to teach students to be more cosmopolitan and global in their outlook and skills. I argue that these might be counter identities instead of complementary ones, and in trying to promote the development of both, Singapore's state-run education system has instead engendered a persistent master discourse of materialism and pragmatism that permeates all markers of national identity evoked by Singaporean children. Chapter Five presents my findings from the United

States where the narrative is more ideological and creedal; I show how children tell a story about America that is steeped in the political values of freedom, independence, individual liberty, and equality, and discuss the role of schooling in producing these dispositions and the extent to which they align with the established objectives of schooling in the United States. In Chapter Six, I show ways in which children from different cultural groups deviate from the master narratives of each country. I present data to demonstrate that master narratives of national identity are in some sense open to active and continued interpretation, negotiation, re-negotiations, and reconstruction by children based on the resources available to them. Sometimes these stories overlap, sometimes they contradict, or they may simply co-exist side by side; but most importantly, they are always tethered in one way or another on the larger discourse of national identity fundamental to their specific country. I conclude the dissertation in Chapter Seven by summarizing key findings of my study and by showing how they inform my theory of what national identity development is to young children. Implications of my research to schooling and citizenship education will also be discussed.

These chapters tell the story of how young children have much to share about how national belonging and an attachment to place develops. To look at how they make sense of what it means to be a citizen, and to do so in the specific context of the school recognizes three things at once: that childhood is the crucible within which children's sensibilities about national belonging are conjured and formed; that children have valuable insights to this process that can inform our understanding of national identity development as a whole; and that schools are vital sites of national identity formation, brimming with the potential to produce thoughtful, active, *and* patriotic citizens.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Existing research on schools and national identity development

This chapter surveys existing literature on national identity development, the role of schools in that process, and how children are situated in relation to both these topics. I show how these bodies of work have hitherto been established as three separate lines of inquiry that in fact have significant overlaps. Focused primarily on adolescents,<sup>1</sup> scholars who study schools and national identity formation have largely overlooked the nexus of education, citizenship, and childhood. I hope to broaden and deepen our understanding of national identity development by synthesizing these three areas into an inter-disciplinary framework to guide my study. These are also the three general sections into which this chapter will be divided: i) the discursive nature of national identity development in political science, ii) the “new” sociology of childhood in childhood studies, and iii) the nationalizing function of schools.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Joseph Kahne & Ellen Middaugh, “Is Patriotism Good for Democracy? A Study of High School Seniors’ Patriotic Commitments,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87 no. 8 (2006): 600-607; Judith Torney-Purta, John Schwille, & Jo-Ann Amadeo, *Civic education across countries: Twenty-four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project* (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 1999); The Intercollegiate Studies Institute’s National Civic Literacy Board, *The Coming Crisis in Citizenship: Higher Education’s Failure to Teach America’s History and Institutions* (Wilmington, DE.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006).

First, emerging research in political science argues for the discursive nature of national identity formation. This paradigm contends that national identity is a narrative we construct to make sense of who we are and therefore not completely stable or immutable; it is a fluid construction generated and expressed differently by different individuals in various contexts.

Second, this focus on an individual's fluid construction identity aligns tightly with recent sociological perspective for studying children that considers children active participants in a variety of social scenarios. This view contends that children should not be seen as passive receptors of adult instruction but as active agents who effectively negotiate with and evaluate their social world.

And third, we know that schools have always been charged with-- among other things-- producing good citizens. What is more controversial, however, is what citizenship and national identity represent in a multicultural society, and the obligations of the public school in this regard. Recent scholarship has highlighted the debate about whether it is possible-- or even desirable-- for schools to advance a single common national identity in the face of a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural.

### *2.1. The Discursive Nature of National Identity Development*

In spite of the fact that national identity is a relative newcomer to the various social identities constructed by the individual in society, it has gained enough prominence such that in *National Identity*, Anthony Smith felt confident enough to proclaim that:

Today national identity is the main form of collective identification. Whatever the feelings of individuals, it provides the dominant criterion of culture and identity, the sole principle of government and the chief focus of social and economic activity.<sup>2</sup>

These claims are supported by Liah Greenfeld who remarks that:

In the modern world, national identity represents what may be called the 'fundamental identity', the one that is believed to define the very essence of the individual, which the other identities may modify but slightly, and to which they are consequently considered secondary.<sup>3</sup>

Although these claims may clarify the status of national identity, they do not define its nature or origins. Before I discuss the discursive nature of national identity and how that figures in my larger framework, it is necessary to first survey how national identity has been conceptualized in existing literature. Notably, Smith puts shape to this rather amorphous concept by explicitly listing its fundamental features: possessing a historic territory, or homeland; the existence of common myths and historical memories; a common mass public culture; common legal rights and duties for all members; and a common economy with territorial mobility for members.<sup>4</sup> David Miller has his own list of five features: in *On Nationality*, he writes that in order to distinguish national identity from other collective sources of personal identity, a community ought to be “(1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (2) extended in history, (3) active in character, (4) connected to a particular territory, and (5) marked off from other

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 70.

<sup>3</sup> Liah Greenfeld, “Nationalism and Modernity,” *Social Research* 63 (1996): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 14.

communities by its distinct public culture.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, national identity is a way of relating to the nation; it is a feeling of inextricably- and on different dimensions- being a part of this larger entity. National identity, then, is primarily *a sense of attachment*. As Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny remind us, national identity/identification is a matter of “sensitivity”:

...something transmitted from the past and secured as a collective belonging, something reproduced in myriad imperceptible ways, grounded in everydayness and mundane experience... A common memory of belonging, borne by habits, customs, dialects, song, dance, pastimes, shared geography, superstition, and so on, but also fears, anxieties, antipathies, hurts, resentments, is the indistinct but indispensable condition of possibility.<sup>6</sup>

National identity, however, is not a monolithic entity. Michael Ignatieff offers a compelling heuristic in the conceptualization of national identity by suggesting two models: a civic model and an ethnic model.<sup>7</sup> According to Ignatieff, civic nationalism is one where the country is conceived of as a community of “equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values.”<sup>8</sup> Most Western nation-states today define their nationhood in terms of this model of common citizenship. On prominent exception is Germany, that in contrast, practices a more ethnically-based form of nationalism. In this ethnic model, what unites the nation are shared ethnic characteristics such as language, religion, customs, and traditions. Ethnic nationalism claims that an individual’s deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen as in

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<sup>5</sup> David Miller, *On Nationality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds. *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys Into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

the civic model of nationalism. This distinction can be traced back to that between *political* and *cultural* nationalism advocated by Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder respectively in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, in Ignatieff's civic model (akin to Rousseau's political nationalism), national identity can be fully retained as long as there is commitment to a set of common institutions and political rights; here, a shared genealogical lineage is not necessary. On the other hand, in the ethnic category (much like Herder's cultural nationalism), national identity is based on blood ties and common descent, and is exclusive. Depending on which form of national identity is being evoked, state infrastructures such as schools take on radically different functions.<sup>9</sup> In other words, in Ignatieff's framework, multicultural nations face potentially two challenges, to not only inculcate civic identity but also quell—or reshape-- competing claims of ethnic allegiances.

Moving from “what” to “how”, Michael Billig offers an interesting perspective on the manner in which people experience national identity. Perhaps because nationalism is frequently evoked only with occasions of great social and political upheaval- wars, natural disasters, national tragedies- traditional theorizing has tended to focus on more passionate expressions of national identity. But in so doing, we overlook the “many little sociological processes through which nations and national identities are more routinely sustained.”<sup>10</sup> Billig turns his attention to the everyday- and so less visible forms of national identity that are deeply ingrained in contemporary consciousness. He argues that nationalism is omnipresent- even if unexpressed, and shows how “forgotten reminders”

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<sup>9</sup> This will be further discussed in a later section.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Thompson. “Nations, National Identities and Human Agency: Putting People Back Into Nations” *The Sociological Review* 49, no. 1 (2001): 18-32.

operate mindlessly beyond the level of conscious awareness. He terms this “banal nationalism”:

In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.<sup>11</sup>

His focus is on the routine and familiar forms of nationhood- those “habits of social life” such as thinking and using language, and symbols “flagged” by the media. In other words, far from being on the decline, nationalism as he conceives it is very much alive, simmering just beneath our consciousness, pervading our actions and decisions. I contend that what may seem banal and routine to adults may not necessarily so for the youngest of our citizens. Billig’s argument is that daily symbols of national identity such as the flag and the ways in which we speak have been taken for granted and therefore forgotten as vivid reminders of our national identity; and yet for children, it is precisely these symbols that some of them are only becoming aware of. It is therefore important to ask children about the meanings to which they attach to these taken-for-granted symbols as they are in the process of being acquired and retained.

As we examine the role of the school in promoting national identity, we must first consider how prevailing scholarship conceives of the inception of national identity. Questions related to where this feeling of belonging comes from, and how it takes root become particularly pertinent. Specifically, one can ask whether these sentiments of national belonging are disseminated top-down through systematic structures of the

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 8.



nation-state (such as national education systems), or are passed on from adult to child through more informal cultural resources. Benedict Anderson conceives of feelings of national belonging as a deeply elemental force and better classed with kinship or religion since it is perceived as destiny rather than choice.<sup>12</sup> His notion of the nation as an *imagined community* carries with it several layers of meaning, all of which can be related to the origins of national identity and the school's important task of nation-building. For Anderson, nations are imagined because:

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically—as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship...<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, what Anderson suggests is that these feelings of mutual identification based on nationality are not formed via face-to-face interaction, hence *imagined*; and as potent as these feelings can be, their imagined nature as defined by Anderson almost makes them fragile. Although he does not make it explicit, the implication of his argument is that some mechanism must be mobilized to make this imagined bond tangible, to enable the perpetuation of these deep ties of national kinship from one generation to the next. This mechanism—I posit—is that of the school.

Ernest Gellner's work in *Nations and Nationalism* attributes the founding of Western modernity to the promulgation of national sentiment. He argues that through the vehicle of state-administered systems of mass education throughout Europe, populations

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

were imbued with an allegiance to each nation-state. According to this theory, it was the overarching administrative system of the modern nation-state that successfully incorporated citizens into feelings of nationalistic sentiment.<sup>14</sup> Writing about the nation as the product of the modern industrial age, Gellner writes:

The nation is now supremely important, thanks both to the erosion of sub-groupings and the vastly increased importance of a shared, literacy-dependent culture... The educational system becomes a very crucial part of it, and the maintenance of the cultural/linguistic medium now becomes the central role of education. The citizens can only breathe conceptually and operate within that medium, which is co-extensive with the territory of the state and its educational and cultural apparatus, and which needs to be protected, sustained and cherished.<sup>15</sup>

For Gellner, as well as others, the modern nationalist evokes past ‘folk’ or oral cultures and selects or simply invents ‘traditions’ to offer people as evidence of the nation’s unique and long-lived identity.<sup>16</sup>

Anthony Smith on the other hand, has a different approach to understanding the origins of national belonging. While he agrees that modern populations have come to hold strong attachments to the nation, he diverges from Gellner insofar as he does not believe that such commitment can be manufactured by nationalist discourse propagated in the state education system.<sup>17</sup> Instead, he contends that the sentiments of national attachment are not based on state-arranged manipulation but on its connections with real and pre-existing ethnic traditions, customs, ties and symbols. For Smith, national identity

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies. *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 63-4.

<sup>16</sup> see Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

<sup>17</sup> See Anthony Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979); and Anthony Smith “History and Modernity: Reflections on the Theory of Nationalism.” In *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, edited by (London: Routledge, 1999).

has its roots in the “names, memories, territories, cultures, identities” that resonate with “national traditions and experiences that often draw on long histories of ethnic memories, myths, symbols and values.”<sup>18</sup> As such, instead of a state-administered education system, Smith puts his faith in the public intelligentsia who he considers key agents in any nation-building effort. He calls them “educator- intellectuals” whose role is to use history and the putative golden ages to promote national sensibilities.<sup>19</sup> They mobilize a formerly passive community into forming a nation around the vernacular historical culture that it has rediscovered. Note that the assumption here is that there pre-exists a national identity of sorts that requires continuous revival and re-discovery; for Smith, national identity cannot be created because by definition, it is latent, or what he terms “the inner voice of a purified community.”<sup>20</sup>

How do children figure in both Gellner and Smith’s thesis? This debate has profound implications for understanding how childhood and nationalism are intertwined; both writers acknowledge if not explicitly, then implicitly, that one’s attachment to the nation first takes root in childhood. I position my study in the center of this debate although it does not set out to resolve it definitively. To what extent is Gellner accurate in positing that children are socialized into a top-down, constructed notion of national identity through formal schooling? Or perhaps children are acculturated into a sense of national affiliation through more informal practices as Smith argues. Might there be a middle ground where nation-states mobilize the very cultural resources already latent in a

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 77.

society and use state-administered structures such as schools as the disseminating mechanism?

This leads me to suggest that there might be no better way of ascertaining the process of national identity acquisition than by turning to the very subjects of this examination- the individuals themselves. There is a growing body of work in the area of political science and political sociology advocating to “put the people back in nations,”<sup>21</sup> and recognize the discursive nature of national identity. In the previous sections, I have described the various definitions and categories that writers such as Miller, Smith and Gellner have used to conceive of national identity; and yet the form, content and meaning of these categories remain open to individual interpretation. Can we assume that all citizens recognize the same markers of national identity that these writers argue are central to characterizing a nation? How do individuals come to understand what their national identity means to them? Andrew Thompson succinctly sets up his argument for why a discursive framework of national identity is necessary; referring to the definitions of national identity offered by Smith and Gellner, he writes,

The problem with these accounts is that they do not provide us with an analysis of the rather more untidy processes through which individuals come to acquire an understanding of what their nation means to them and how they use this to locate themselves in relation to others in their society.<sup>22</sup>

Here, Thompson is not necessarily criticizing the work of these political theorists; he recognizes that they paint with broader sociological brushes than would address more individual level notions of personal identity. However, he does contend that just knowing

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Thompson, “Nations, National Identities and Human Agency: Putting People Back Into Nations” *The Sociological Review* 49, no. 1 (2001): 18-32.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

what national identity *is* is not adequate because it does not contribute to our understanding of *how* people interact and negotiate with the common sense assumptions and definitions of national identity that is widely used and accepted.

A common thread in this emerging analytical framework is the recognition that national identities are discursively constructed, amenable to change and re-writing, a feature in marked contrast to earlier notions of the fixity of identity. As such national identities are not completely consistent, stable or immutable, but are fluid constructions generated and expressed differently in different contexts. Helen Haste emphasizes this need to look not only at cognitive processes of identity formation, but also rhetorical and discursive ones:

We must pay attention to the individual actively in dialogue, rather than the individual at the end of a conduit of “influence”. Rather than being regarded as passively “socialized,” the individual actively constructs- and co-constructs with others- explanations and stories that make sense of experience, to develop an identity that locates her or him in a social, cultural and historical context.<sup>23</sup>

For her, it is not enough to simply observe that one is being *influenced* by an external agent that triggers a sense of attachment to one’s country; of pertinent interest is what transpires between an individual and the object of influence that brings about this compelling feeling of belonging and loyalty.

Various studies have emerged that explicitly employ this discursive framework in order to understand national identity. Rudolf De Cillia and his colleagues demonstrate how Austrians actively participate in forming the idea of the nation as it is represented in their national culture; while the work of Frank Bechhofer *et al* and David McCrone *et al*

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<sup>23</sup> Helen Haste, “Constructing the Citizen.” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2004): 420.

provide useful illustrations about the extent to which Scots question the validity of accent or residency as a measure of Scottish identity.<sup>24</sup> To quote Stuart Hall:

A national culture is a discourse, a way to construct meanings which influence and organize both our actions and our perceptions of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by creating meanings of 'the nation', with which we can identify; these are contained in stories that are told about the nation, in memories which link its present to its past and in the perceptions of it that are constructed.<sup>25</sup>

As stated in Chapter One, national identity becomes a narrative of sorts, a story people tell about themselves in order to imbue meaning to their social world.

Much research on nationalism and national identity emphasizes the hallowed image of the nation in so many of our imaginations. And yet few studies have attempted to find out what kind of dialogue and negotiation goes on in our imaginations that leads us to form this image. Thompson heralds this local nationalism as an extension of Billig's banal nationalism. He favorably highlights how *Banal Nationalism* profoundly changed the manner in which we now conceive of national identity because the book demonstrated the ways in which discourses of the nation provide a largely subliminal- but visceral- backdrop to our lives.<sup>26</sup> According to Thompson, Billig paved the way for emerging research to look at how more localized ways of "performing" national identity

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<sup>24</sup> Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities." *Discourse Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 156.

Frank Bechhofer, David McCrone, Richard Kiely, and Robert Stewart. "Constructing National Identity: Arts and Landed Elites in Scotland." *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999): 515-534.

David McCrone. "Who Do You Say You Are?: Making Sense of National Identities in Modern Britain." *Ethnicities* 2, no. 3 (2002): 301-320.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Hall, *Rassismus und kulturelle Identität. Ausgewählte Schriften 2*. (As quoted in De Cillia *et al*, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," 155).

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, "Nations, National Identities and Human Agency."

serve to naturalize a common-sense perception that we live in, and belong to, nations.<sup>27</sup>

However, in Thompson's opinion, this is not enough:

*Banal Nationalism* does not, however, tell us how people actually, and often deliberately, work with concepts of nation to give order to the events they encounter or the relations in which they are involved. Individuals may not be conscious of how they are actively involved in giving life to national identities when they categorize, but they do use these categories to explain, position, and make sense.<sup>28</sup>

What is needed, therefore, is a local nationalism that is grounded on the voices of individual citizens. While banal nationalism refers to the less sensational, day-to-day markers of nationhood that we have always taken for granted, local nationalism represents the personal meanings and stories we construct for ourselves in order to understand what these markers mean to us.

The necessity of a discursive framework that validates individual agency and social interaction in the construction of national identity finds resonance within the new sociology of childhood and its focus on children as active agents in the construction of a multiplicity of childhoods. Just as the various writers above have emphasized the role of individual agency in interacting with representational images of the nation in order to make meaning of national identity, I propose a similar endeavor for children. My concern is to investigate how, and to what extent children actively position themselves in relation to these images and enact a certain level of agency in defining for themselves what it means to be a citizen. As Scourfield *et al* suggest, sociology offers crucial insight to this framework by insisting on children being seen as social actors but while still accepting that agency is limited to by their location in social, cultural and political worlds.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 28.

## 2.2. *Why Children and National Identity?*

In his book *The Political Life of Children*, Robert Coles explores the myriad of ways in which children talk about politics, and reveals how they learn and know much more than we think they do about political issues. He argues:

Those of us who want to understand how children grow up to embody the political and ideological variations of this planet- revolutionists, loyal soldiers, restive but apparently obliging “natives,” troubled men of property, confident proponents of one or another government- would do well to recognize that, like adult sexuality, a political inclination has a “*developmental history*.”<sup>29</sup> (italics mine)

Throughout his book, Coles speaks of, and to, children living in Northern Ireland, teenagers in apartheid South Africa, and Cambodian, Vietnamese and Laotian refugee children now being educated in North Carolina. Through these conversations, Coles demonstrates that many political sentiments and convictions that we assume develop only in early adulthood have their roots much earlier in a person’s life span.

This supports the importance of investigating national identity with regards to young children. As the previous sections demonstrate, political scientists hold varying notions of how national identity is formed. And yet children are puzzlingly absent in their discussions. In these early years, children develop considerable symbolic skill (e.g. language) and begin to experience a variety of types of social interactions. They become increasingly aware of a broader and more varied environment and seek to explore it, assimilate it, and relate it to themselves.<sup>30</sup> Among the social phenomena of which children become aware are the social identities of gender and race, two identities that

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Coles, *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>30</sup> Sandra Kenyon Schwartz, “Preschoolers and Politics”, in *New Directions in Political Socialization*, edited by David C. Schwartz & Sandra K. Schwartz (New York: Free Press, 1975), 230.



have distinguishing physical (and hence concrete and visualized) features. But in addition to these more visible social identities, I suggest that they also experience the hazy awareness of more abstract social identities such as national identity. Childhood is conventionally viewed as a preparatory time during which the values and commitments of the adult world take root within in a child self that is still malleable.<sup>31</sup> National feeling, too, is often seen as something barely conscious that seeps into one's sense of self as one grows and matures. As Gellner asserts, "the culture in which one has been taught to communicate becomes the core of one's identity."<sup>32</sup> Such a view defines childhood as the primal ground in which national cultures take root.

While all this suggests that a consideration of children should be central to the study of feelings of national belonging, we do not know a great deal about how school-age children actually do relate to the idea of nation, and what they think about the processes that promote it. An early study commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1967 reveals that young children-- with the exception of the Japanese-- do not instinctively identify themselves with their nationality.<sup>33</sup> Instead, gender and personal characteristics take precedence in the early years. However, this does not mean that children do not have opinions about what it means to belong to a nationality. The following section surveys the provocative-- though still fairly limited-- scholarship on this topic, and I argue that in fact, the relatively unschooled nature of children's opinions and intuitions presents a rich opportunity for exploring the more affective components of national membership. Heinz Hengst, in his

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Jenks. *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Wallace Lambert and Otto Klineberg. *Children's Views of Foreign Peoples; a Cross-national Study* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

study on children's construction of collective identity in three West European nations and Turkey defends the advantage of having children as research subjects on this issue:

Children's culture is the response that children give in their way of thinking, feeling and activity to the challenges of society. One noticeable difference between children's culture and adult culture is that children's responses are not as restricted as adults' responses tend to be. Children respond in a far more playful and open-minded manner, they are far more engaged in given situations and are more willing to examine their responses. The true sense of many forms of activity in children's culture is the breaking of barriers. They question all divisions, obstructions and conclusions.<sup>34</sup>

There is at least some evidence to suggest what Davies terms the "decided precocity in child politics", i.e. the notion that young children and pre-adolescents do have some understanding of their role as citizens and members of a larger national community.<sup>35</sup> Different groups of researchers have variously conceptualized the development of children's national identity to date, and yet, each perspective is inadequate in independently explaining the issue. The three overarching aims of this section are to 1) take stock of existing knowledge on this topic; 2) identify theoretical developments; and 3) propose the new sociology of childhood as a appropriate and purposeful framework through which to study how children and national identity in light of the weaknesses of existing perspectives. The underlying contention in this section is that in order to better understand children's understanding of, and feelings about, countries and national groups, we need to center children in this discourse, allowing their opinions and formulations on the issue to be validated.

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<sup>34</sup> Heinz Hengst. "Negotiating 'us' and 'Them': Children's Constructions of Collective Identity." *Childhood* 4, no. 1 (1997): 47.

<sup>35</sup> A. F. Davies, "The Child's Discovery of Nationality," in *Socialization to Politics: A Reader*, edited by Jack Dennis (New York: J. Wiley, 1973), 105.

### 2.2.1. *Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Perspectives*

One of the earliest, and most short-lived, ways in which researchers began conceptualizing the relationship between children and the nation has roots in Freudian notions of the mother figure and its relationship with that of the child. This rather modest body of work- popular in the late 1940s into the early 1960s- suggests that the mother image underlies and informs feelings for the country insofar as the nation is conceived of as the piece of the earth that “gave birth” to the individual, and that which comfortably supports and nourishes the individual’s needs.<sup>36</sup> Hungarian anthropologist, Géza Róheim summarizes the psychoanalytical interpretation of the relationship between the child and his country by concluding that belonging to a nation means the successful mastery of Oedipus complex. According to this analytical framework, the path to a healthy relationship with one’s country necessitates the son overcoming- symbolically- the rivalry with one’s father, accepting a share in possession, and identifying with him-- and other males-- in the work of support and defense of the motherland.

However, psychoanalysis as a method for understanding human behavior assumes that action is fundamentally motivated by unconscious impulses over which individuals have little control; in this manner, citizens-- whether man, woman or child-- are seen as tethered viscerally-- but helplessly-- to the nation, with no free will on their part to negotiate this relationship. Furthermore, in the light of the work of female theorists, the generalizability of a psychoanalytical perspective cannot stand to rigorous scrutiny since

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<sup>36</sup> See Géza Róheim, *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences. Vol. 1.* (New York: International University Press, 1947)

A. Bronson Feldman, *The Unconscious in History* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959); and Ernest Jones, “The Island of Ireland: A Psychoanalytical Contribution to Political Psychology.” In *Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964).

it does not take into consideration the relationship between women-- and by extension, mothers-- and their country.<sup>37</sup> In particular, a psychoanalytical notion of nationalism and nationhood has been turned on its head by a body of provocative work that explores the centrality of historically specific constructions of gender, sexuality, privacy and domesticity within previously hallowed structures of urban life, political institutions and the modern nation-state itself.<sup>38</sup> This scholarship questions the established images of women as ‘mothers of the nation’ whose primary responsibility is to care for its future citizens and teach the common ‘mother tongue’, while a ‘brotherhood’ of men is charged with defending, protecting and containing this core domestic space.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.2.2. *Cognitive-Developmental Perspectives*

Contrary to the short-lived nature of psychoanalytical explanation of national identity, the largest- and most enduring- body of work in this area has been conducted in the field of developmental psychology.<sup>40</sup> This body of work moves away from psychoanalytical ways of thinking about child behavior by rejecting discussions of the unconscious and highlighting instead children’s rational awareness and cognition. Developmental research into children’s construction of national identity is largely concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s beginning with Jean Piaget’s first study in 1951.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> Eley and Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader*.

<sup>39</sup> Stephens, Sharon. “Editorial Introduction: Children and Nationalism” *Childhood* 4 No. 5 (1997): 5-17.

<sup>40</sup> Scourfield *et al* note the dominance of developmental psychology as the most influential and well-established model of childhood today. It informs much of professional child-rearing practice, pedagogy and schooling in many parts of the world, and informs key socio-legal assumptions about areas such as the age of criminal responsibility and debates about child testimony and reliability.

<sup>41</sup> Jean Piaget and Anne-Marie Weil, “The development in children of the idea of the homeland and of relations with other countries.” *International Social Science Bulletin* 3 (1951): 561-578.

These studies focused on children's geographical knowledge about nations and their attitudes towards foreign nationals.<sup>42</sup> This initial line of research then virtually vanished from the research agenda of developmental psychologists until the 1990s. This resurgence of interest is largely based in Britain and continental Europe and centers on issues of local vs. national identity (in the United Kingdom primarily) and a national vs. a European identity in the wake of the political and economic transformation of the European Union (EU).<sup>43</sup>

Much of this work is based on Piaget's stages of development, with egocentric and pre-operational characteristics being exhibited in children's societal thinking up to 6-7 years of age, concrete operational characteristics being exhibited between 6-7 and 10-11 years of age, and formal operational characteristics and relatively abstract thinking being exhibited from 11 years of age onwards.<sup>44</sup> Developmental researchers identify age-related stages in the development of children's societal understanding and argue that such developmental states determine the manner in which children are able to make sense of different social phenomena such as politics and national identity. These stage-sequences are assumed to be universal and influences from children's socio-cultural context were

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<sup>42</sup> See, Gustav Jahoda "The development of children's ideas about country and nationality." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 33, no. 2 (1963): 143-153;

Lambert & Kleinberg, *Children's Views of Foreign Peoples*; and Piaget and Weil, "The development in children."

<sup>43</sup> See Martyn Barrett, "The Development of National Identity in Childhood and Adolescence" (inaugural lecture presented at the University of Surrey, March 22, 2000)

Mark Bennett, Martyn Barrett, Rauf Karakozov, *et al*, "Young Children's Evaluations of the Ingroup and of Outgroups: A Multi-National Study," *Social Development* 13, no. 1 (2004): 124-141.

Anna E. Berti, "The Development of Political Understanding in Children Between 6-15 Years Old. *Human Relations* 41, no. 6 (1988): 437-446.

Arantza del Valle Gómez, "The Construction of National Identity as a Developmental Process from Childhood to Adolescence in Catalonia" (PhD dissertation, University of Girona, Spain, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> See Piaget & Weil, "The development in children."

limited only to the extent to which they accelerate or impede children's progression through the stages.<sup>45</sup>

However, despite the dominance of developmental psychology in the discourse of early childhood research, this line of inquiry has been increasingly criticized by sociologists of childhood for universalizing childhood. These earlier developmental studies were situated in relatively static societies (notably West and North Europe) during a time when they had yet to be assailed by profound sociocultural changes- from the migrational shifts of recent decades, media expansion, and massive globalization. According to Scourfield *et al*, there is a historical tendency to present findings of studies conducted in West Europe and North America as though they applied universally.<sup>46</sup> And yet much scholarship now testifies to the fact that childhood is both defined and experienced quite differently in different places. Findings from studies in the Basque region of Spain cast doubt upon developmental theory that assumes that children's national attitudes develop in a similar way irrespective of the specific national context in which they are growing up. The researchers found no evidence to suggest that children in the Basque region exhibited the same substantial age-related changes in national attitudes as children growing up in the contexts of earlier development studies (e.g. the U.K. and Switzerland)<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Cathy Urwin. "Power Relations and the Emergence of Language." In *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, eds. Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine (London: Methuen, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> Scourfield *et al*, *Children, Place and Identity*, 22

<sup>47</sup> Luixa Reizabal, Jose Valencia, and Martyn Barrett. "National Identifications and Attitudes to National Ingroups and Outgroups Amongst Children Living in the Basque Country." *Infant and Child Development* 13, no. 1 (2004): 16.

Most importantly, conventional developmental psychology has been accused of seeing children as human *becomings* not *beings*, and therefore not worthy of study in their own right. This effectively denies them all agency to articulate their own experiences.<sup>48</sup> This blind spot of developmental studies is uninterested in the children's own worldview because a strict focus on cognition-- narrowly defined-- rules out taking seriously the subjective dimensions of childhood that in other traditions, such as the new sociology of childhood, are seen as constitutive of children's identity. Developmental research on children's identity formation explores only the "what" of children's knowledge, and neither the "why" nor "how". By focusing on stages of development, researchers in this area are concerned primarily about whether children comprehend a concept (hence showing that they have 'successfully' transitioned from one state of understanding to the next) rather than about how children have made that transition. This point is duly noted by Sue Howard and Judith Gill in their study of schoolchildren's construction of citizenship in Australia:

The point is not so much *if* they identify as being Australian (or not as the case may be), but rather how they feel about doing so, what images they use, their language, their expressions, their inconsistencies and so on. Only in this way can the research begin to reveal the ways in which 'the nation' operates as an imaginary construction for the participants.<sup>49</sup> [italics in original]

Another critique of developmental psychology that is often raised is its downplaying of the role of exogenous influences- such as the family, media or schools- in the process of children's identity formation. My particular discomfort with this line of

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<sup>48</sup> Allison James & Alan Prout, eds. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer Press, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Sue Howard and Judith Gill, "It's Like We're a Normal Way and Everyone Else is Different': Australian Children's Constructions of Citizenship and National Identity." *Educational Studies* 27 no. 1 (2001): 92.

reasoning is its almost complete disregard of the role of education. The bulk of the research based on Piaget's developmental theory concludes that the stage at which children seem to gain the most nuanced and developed ideas of nationality and national membership is between the ages of five and twelve. As Johoda writes,

At the outset [age 5], their responses reveal an almost complete ignorance about the wider geographical and social world surrounding them; some five years later the outlook of most of them is no longer fundamentally different from that of mature adults. During the intervening years, *they have acquired a set of conceptual tools* enabling them to organize their environment meaningfully and to make the main distinction conventional in our society.<sup>50</sup> [italics mine]

Even Piaget himself concedes that

...the readiness with which the various forms of nationalist sociocentricity later emerges can only be accounted for by supposing, either that at some stage there emerge *influences extraneous to the trends noticeable during the child's development*, or else that the same obstacles that impede the process of "decentration" and integration (once the idea of homeland takes shape) crop up again at all levels and constitute the commonest cause of disturbances and tensions.<sup>51</sup> [italics mine]

These observations all suggest a concession to an external influence that has enabled children to conceive of national identity on a more mature level, but this is not made explicit. There is little discussion in this body of research of the fact that the stage of the most rapid development of an awareness of national identity is also the period where children experience the first years of formal schooling. Surely the role of the school cannot be discounted in contributing towards children's acquisition of knowledge and information that may then influence their ideas of nationhood and membership.

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<sup>50</sup> Johoda, "The development of children's ideas."

<sup>51</sup> Piaget & Weil, "The development in children," 562.



### 2.2.3. *Political Socialization Perspectives*

In contrast to a perspective that does not explicitly acknowledge external agents in influencing children's notions of self and belonging, I turn now to scholarship that positions these external influences front and center. Carried out largely by political scientists, political socialization attends to the process by which children are socialized into developing political attitudes writ large. Though not specifically concerned with the formation of national identity, researchers in this field carry out related work in the area of the acquisition of political dispositions, and conclude that children develop their political beliefs from external agents through observation and modeling adult behavior. Also known as the social learning approach, political socialization posits that children learn how to behave from powerful models around them such as parents and teachers. From these processes, children conform to adult expectations and ease into what has been conceived of as their appropriate role in society.

A particularly robust literature exists that focuses on schools as a vital agent in the political socialization of children. For more than 30 years, researchers have explored the role of the school as one of the sites where children develop the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that shape their roles as future participants in a democracy.<sup>52</sup> While family and home background are often viewed as the primary agents of socialization, schools are

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<sup>52</sup> See Michael H. Banks and Debra Roker. *The Political Socialization of Youth: Exploring the Influence of School Experience*. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17 (1994): 3-15;

Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965);

Robert D. Hess, and Judith Torney-Purta. *The Development of Political Attitudes In Children* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967);

M. Kent Jennings. "Education and Political Development Among Young Adults." *Politics and the Individual*, 3 (1993): 1-24;

Kenneth P. Langton. *Political Socialization*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969);

seen as a significant secondary agent.<sup>53</sup> In their seminal 1967 work, Robert Hess and Judith Torney conclude that “the public school is the most important and effective instrument of political socialization in the United States.”<sup>54</sup> While some researchers have minimized the role of schools, many others highlight the role of schools in teaching both formal and informal civic values.<sup>55</sup> Referring to Hess and Torney’s study, Stuart Palonsky highlights the importance of schools as locations where

children learn about authority relationships, political processes, national heroes, ideals, and superordinate goals. Schools can reinforce or amend the patterns of political learning children acquire at home in dramatic and enduring fashion. So powerful are these early influences on future citizens that some researchers believe that basic adult orientations toward politics are formed before the end of elementary school.<sup>56</sup>

Although political socialization is regarded largely as a process, much of the research has focused on the outcomes of political learning, i.e. the “what”, such as attitudes toward government, and on the acquisition of information about political systems, rather than on the ways in which children acquire and interpret this knowledge, i.e. the “how”. Political socialization researchers in the 1960s and 1970s typically

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<sup>53</sup> Charles K. Atkin, “Communication and Political Socialization.” In *Handbook of Political Communication*. Edited by Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981), 299-328; Carolyn Bronstein, “Tellin’ it like it is: Children’s attitudes toward the election process and the ’92 campaign” (paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, Mo, August, 1993).

<sup>54</sup> Hess and Tourney-Purta, 221.

<sup>55</sup> David Easton and Jack Dennis. *Children in the political system: origins of political legitimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt. *Political Socialization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969); Stuart B. Palonsky, “Political Socialization in Elementary Schools.” *The Elementary School Journal*, 87 (1987): 493-505.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 494.

avoided observing classroom practices and actual instructional time in favor of conducting formal surveys and structured interviews.<sup>57</sup>

However, while this social learning perspective acknowledges the role of external factors in shaping children's ideas, like developmental theories it overlooks children as independent beings and neglects to recognize them as having an active role in constructing political knowledge. As previously mentioned, socialization theory sees children as human *becomings* rather than human *beings*; it is as if they are somehow incomplete, made whole only through the process of socialization.<sup>58</sup> Others criticize this concept of social learning as embodying mechanistic notions of the relationship between children and the environment. Citing Christopher Jenks, socialization theories see children as merely reactive, condemning them "to be an absent presence, a nominal cipher without an active dimension."<sup>59</sup> This approach to understanding children neither interrogates how these learned values and beliefs are internalized nor investigates how children react actively to the social influence to which they are exposed.

#### 2.2.4. "New" Sociology of Childhood

The so-called new sociology of childhood has developed over the past decade in response to the weaknesses of previous paradigms in explaining children's development. It stands demonstrably apart from the conventional sociological tradition of understanding children pioneered by Talcott Parsons in the early 1960s. Parsonian

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (London: Polity Press, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Chris Jenks, ed. *Sociology of Childhood: Essential Readings*. (London: Batsford, 1992), 133.

sociology is akin to theories of socialization in that it proposes that children be socialized into key values that are essential for the stability of society.<sup>60</sup> The implication for a theory of children's national identifications would be that any society needs its members to be socialized into a recognition of its distinctive identity and to feel loyalty towards it.

Parsonian sociology is now considered outdated, but its socialization component continues to endure in some areas of the social sciences. This is perhaps because, in common with developmental psychology, the child is seen as fundamentally different from adults, and thus requiring powerful conditioning in order to make him/her conform to adult norms. The "new" sociology of childhood on the other hand, suggests that children are competent and active participants in all kinds of social scenarios. Such a perspective acknowledges children as developing beings, but at the same time validates their agency in the here and now. As J. Kevin Nugent concludes in his study of Irish children, studies in this field recognize that "the highest level of maturity in the child's relationship with his/her country is mediated by the *necessary but not sufficient* condition of formal operational thinking."<sup>61</sup> [italics mine]

Several studies in the last ten years on children's identification with their country draw from this emerging field of the new sociology of childhood- sometimes also known as the new social study of childhood. In a growing body of research on Australian national identity, Sue Dockett and Mella Cusack focus on the views of young children (5-

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<sup>60</sup> Talcott Parsons. "An Outline of the Social System." In *Classical Sociological Theory*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, Kathryn E. Schmidt and Indermohan Virk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Nugent "The Development of Children's Relationships with Their Country." *Children's Environments* 11, no. 4 (1994): 37.

8 years) on Australia and Australians and demonstrated that children at this age are actually able to grapple with the complexities that often accompany identification, such as being half-Australian, the position of aboriginals in their country, and the problematic notion of defining citizenship.<sup>62</sup> In his comparative study of Turkish, German and British children, Hengst focuses on the “us” and “them” dynamic in the construction of national identity. He suggests that while there were differences between the groups in relation to the importance they assigned to national identity, there was interesting and unexpected evidence of another alignment, where children, in many cases, saw themselves as more similar to other children across nationalities than to adults who shared their nationality.<sup>63</sup> This focus on children’s complex perceptions of sameness and difference in their construction of identity is further developed by Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine who use children’s communications via email to examine how children’s imaginative geographies of the Other encompass a multifaceted mix of highly unsterotypical understandings of difference on the one hand, but also many assumptions of sameness on the other.<sup>64</sup>

Scourfield and Andrew Davies add an interesting caveat to the concept of individual agency and to the idea of an international culture of children posited by Hengst.<sup>65</sup> In an earlier empirical study of national and ethnic identities in children in Wales, they highlighted the agency with which children of mixed nationality constructed

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<sup>62</sup> Sue Dockett and Mella Cusack. “Young Children’s Views of Australia and Australians. *Childhood Education*, 79 (2003): 364-368. (for more sociological research on Australian schoolchildren’s formation of national identity, see also Howard and Gill, “It’s Like We’re a Normal Way”.)

<sup>63</sup> Hengst, “Negotiating ‘us’ and ‘Them’.”

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine, “Spatiality and the New Social Studies of Childhood.” *Sociology* 34, no. 4 (2000): 763-783.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Scourfield and Andrew Davies, *National and Ethnic Identities in Children: Reflections on Social Processes and Disciplinary Tensions*. Working Paper Series, Paper 37 (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2003).

their identity. More recently, the writers-- together with Bella Dicks and Mark Drakeford-- extended their study to include an ever more diverse population of children (8-11 years) all across Wales.<sup>66</sup> Here, they found find that children are not only conscious of stereotypes and images, they also recognize the pressures to conform to them. Whether or not they give in to these pressures is besides the point; it is how children articulate their way of managing these impulses that is important here.

Some of the most interesting work based on this new sociology of childhood emerges from regions where the lines between race, ethnicity and nationhood have been blurred through a history of war, occupation, and liberation. A study carried out in Hussein Camp, a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan show how children first “question the vaunted coherence of nationalist projects”, and then actively reshape prevailing expectations of them in order to create a own vision of their personal future.<sup>67</sup> Spyros Spyrou’s discussions with Greek Cypriot children about Turkey-- former occupiers and primordial enemy-- also unveiled remarkable (re)negotiations of national stereotypes.<sup>68</sup> He was able to show that for many of these children, the category of ‘Turks’ is not what it seems on the surface.

My dissertation connects the fundamental tenets of this sociological perspective of studying children with the discursive nature of national identity as presented in the field of political science; the “new” sociology of childhood demands that we see “identity not as fixed and permanent but rather, fluid and permeable, constructed and reconstructed

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<sup>66</sup> Scourfield *et al*, *Children, Place and Identity*.

<sup>67</sup> Jason Hart, “Children and Nationalism in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Jordan.” *Childhood*, 9 No. 1 (2002): 36.

<sup>68</sup> Spyros Spyrou, “Images of “the Other”: “the Turk” in Greek Cypriot Children’s Imaginations.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 5, no. 3 (2002): 255 - 272.

as one moves one context to another.”<sup>69</sup> Further, my study joins others emerging from this framework and deviates from those conducted by developmental psychologists. For one, these studies are methodologically different, relying more on qualitative research using focus group or one-on-one interviews rather than surveys. Furthermore, they seek to understand the meanings that children ascribe to their positions as citizens, rather than merely deduce whether or not children are able to identify geographical locations, rank countries by preference, or express national stereotypes.

### 2.3. *Schools As Sites of National Identity Formation*

Scholars writing about nationalism and national identity have had varied opinions with regards to the role of the school in national identity development. One of the most dedicated proponents of schools as vehicles of patriotism is Gellner, whose particular conceptualization of the nation invests a great deal of confidence in the education system as a whole to promote and sustain national identity as the lifeblood of a nation. Within his framework of national identity as a modern phenomenon, Gellner uses a rather lengthy-- but nonetheless evocative-- metaphor of botany to compare the needs of the agrarian man to the industrial man:

Agrarian man can be compared with a natural species which can survive in the natural environment. Industrial man can be compared with an artificially produced or bred species which can no longer breathe effectively in the nature-given atmosphere, but can only function effectively and survive in a new, specially blended and artificially sustained air or medium. Hence he lives in specially bounded and constructed units, a kind of giant aquarium or breathing chamber. But these chambers need to be erected and serviced. The maintenance of the life-giving and life-preserving air or liquid within each of these giant receptacles is not automatic. It requires a specialized plant. The name for

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 268.

this plant is a national educational and communications system. Its only effective and keeper and protector is the state.<sup>70</sup>

Then there is Smith who-- as he discusses the inventedness of countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia that were former colonies-- counts education as “the most significant feature of territorial nationalism<sup>71</sup> and the identity it seeks to create.”<sup>72</sup> He highlights a brand of civic education used to

...convey, through language (assuming there to be a *lingua franca*), history, the arts and literature, a political mythology and symbolism of the new nation (or nation-to-be) that will legitimate its novel, even revolutionary, directions in the myths and memories, values, and symbols of its anti-colonial struggle, its movements for social and political liberation and its visions of distant heroes and golden ‘ages’ that may inspire similar self-sacrifice today.<sup>73</sup>

Miller, too, has much to contribute to the discussion on the role of schools in promoting national consciousness. In *On Nationality*, he writes that the principle of nationality implies that schools should be seen, *inter alia*, as places where a common national identity is promoted and children prepared for a democratic citizenship.<sup>74</sup> He uses the example of recently arrived ethnic minorities for whom schools are a place where they can be taught in common with children of different ethnic groups, and somewhere that can act as a counterbalance to the cultural environment of the family. Miller even proposes a national curriculum of sorts, what he calls a “core body of

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<sup>70</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 51-52.

<sup>71</sup> Smith defines territorial nationalism/ patriotism as an attachment based on the space and boundaries “carved” out in former colonies by European imperialists. This novel territorial patriotism was directly encouraged by most administrative authorities (less so in French West Africa, where a policy of “identity” to France was practiced); it was also the product of economic exchange and economic and legal regulation by the colonial regime within each territory. The upshot was an incipient sense of attachment to “Nigeria”, “Kenya”, “Burma” among an elite. (Smith, *National Identity*, 107)

<sup>72</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*, 142.



material that all children should be expected to assimilate.”<sup>75</sup> Here, he highlights France as an example where since the Revolution, anyone might become a French national who resided on French soil and displayed an attachment to French values. But accompanying this inclusive notion of nationality is also a deliberate policy of ‘making Frenchmen’ out of the various communities living on French soil.<sup>76</sup> The two main instruments were compulsory education in public schools and military service. The former was specifically secular in character and patriotic in intent:

The nation... was at the heart of the intellectual and moral curriculum of the schools. History and geography, which and pride of place in the Republican school curriculum, made the nation a central cognitive and moral category, using new textbooks to render concrete, palpable, and emotionally resonant the preciously distant and abstract notion of France, and to surround patriotic duty with a penumbra of dignity and grandeur.<sup>77</sup>

However, charging schools with the task of inculcating national identity is not an uncontroversial endeavor, especially in countries like Singapore or the United States that have ethnically, culturally and/or religiously diverse populaces. Some multiculturalists argue that an exposure to a common education system in order to inculcate *a* national identity would result in the dilution of one’s cultural or religious identity. In fact, they question the very assumption that public schools can claim only *one* unassailable identity to propagate. In an interview in 1995, writer Edward Said commented

Most systems of education today, I believe, are still nationalist, that is to say they promote the authority of the national identity in an idealized way and suggest that it is incapable of any criticism, that it is virtue incarnate.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>76</sup> The classic study is Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1979).

<sup>77</sup> Roger Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992), 107-8.

<sup>78</sup> Edward Said, “Europe and Its Others: An Arab Perspective.” In *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*. Edited by R. Kearney (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the fear that a concession to cultural individuality will splinter and disrupt national unity. Writing from this perspective, Arthur Schlesinger argues that multiculturalism would mean the disuniting of American society and the fracturing of national identity.<sup>79</sup> He contends that multiculturalists overemphasize the development of cultural pride, to the detriment of national unity.

However, how have these ideas and ideals about the importance of schools in national identity development manifested themselves in reality? I now consider what Stephen Heathorn terms the “vocabulary and syntax of national identity” as it is parlayed in schools-- those various elements of education that have been shown to contribute towards children’s development of national identity such as textbooks, the curriculum, teachers, and finally, the students themselves.<sup>80</sup>

### 2.3.1. *The Contested Role of Textbooks*

By examining “readers” used in British elementary schools between 1880- 1915, Heathorn demonstrates the power of schools to not only reinforce class lines, but also to perpetuate a very specific commitment and disposition towards the nation in its working class children.<sup>81</sup> His book is grounded on the argument that instruction in basic literacy was, for the majority of the English population between 1880 and 1914, i.e. the working

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<sup>79</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville: Whittle Direct Books, 1991)

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Heathorn. *For Home, Country, and Race: Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>81</sup> These are akin to the basal readers that are still being used in the United States and were more prevalent among working class schools than were textbooks that were typical much more expensive and hence reserved for the elite.

class, the means by which an understanding of the “nation” and one’s “place” within it was propagated. He saw in elementary schools an almost hegemonic process of what he terms national literacy that was anchored in an essentialized English race at the expense of Celtic identity, i.e. the Scots, Irish, and Welsh. Evoking aspects of Billig’s banal nationalism, Heathorn shows the sheer interconnectedness of the many symbols and narratives of national identity found in both the literacy practices and rituals of turn-of-the-century British primary schools, “the various emblematic recitals of Englishness all seem to reinforce each other, and because of their ubiquitous “ordinariness” seems to be simple “common sense.”<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, such a rich description of national identity promotion in schools has been few and far between in recent scholarship, and research on the topic has been predictably thin and based on historical, rather than empirical data. What little research there is relates to the teaching of history, and the writing and production of textbooks. For example, in her book on the working class in early-20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, Joanna Bourke documents how history and geography were taught in a way that fostered a “burning active love for one’s own country” at the expense of other nations.<sup>83</sup> Children learnt in school that

Frenchmen were “a lot of frogs and were a little sissy as they had a great pull with the opposite sex”... that Germans had square heads, crew cuts, and fancy braces, and were totally without initiative... [that] the violence of ‘Chin Chin Chinaman’ was frightening, the beards and side-curls of Orthodox Jews eerie, and Polish and Yiddish speech disconcerting.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race*, 178.

<sup>83</sup> W. H. Webb, “History, Patriotism and the Child,” in *History* 2, no. 1 (1913): 54.

<sup>84</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890- 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994): 186.

Stuart Foster discusses the profound role that textbooks have in influencing the social and political outlook of students in the United States, “For, no matter how superficial history textbooks may appear in their construction, they prove ideologically important because typically they seek to imbue in the young a shared set of values, a national ethos and an incontrovertible sense of identity.”<sup>85</sup> But the combination of market forces, America’s diverse populace and both liberal and conservative political pressures has caused the writing of a definitive textbook for United States history to be fraught with epistemological, cultural and historical problems.

In fact, more recently, Joseph Moreau, in his painstaking study of 100 textbooks published between 1824 and the present, shows that there never was a shared narrative-- or, for that matter, a simple one-- in American history textbooks.<sup>86</sup> The texts have always presented a hodgepodge of complex and even contradictory perspectives, reflecting the diverse interests and influences of the Americans who sought to change them. Although Moreau does not utilize the literature on nation-building and the dissemination and contestation of nationalist ideas and ideologies, what he does demonstrate is the extent to which textbooks were an indispensable tool with which a variety of interest groups used to shape the interpretation and indoctrination of a modern nation's history.

### 2.3.2. *The School Curriculum*

These culture wars are also the theme of Jonathan Zimmerman’s *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools*. Here, in addition to textbooks,

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<sup>85</sup> Stuart Foster, “The Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks,” *History of Education* 28, no. 3 (1999): 251-278.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

Zimmerman also examines the history and social studies curriculum, religion in schools, and sex education and demonstrates that despite the efforts of education reformers to create a truly educative curriculum for America's schoolchildren, the policy arena has been largely co-opted by political and social interest groups whose campaigns have been devoted primarily toward enhancing the status of the constituencies they represent. In discussing the history wars, Zimmerman shows that even though activists from various cultural groups, African-Americans, succeeded in winning a place in the textbook canon for their heroes, the texts still presented an uncomplicated triumphalist narrative of American history:

...even as different groups struggled to insert their own heroes into the national story, they rarely challenged that narrative's broader contours and themes... the infusion of "diversity" into American textbooks—however laudable in its own right—actually delayed rather than promoted the critical dialogue that a healthy democracy demands.<sup>87</sup>

However, Zimmerman's book does not explicitly address schools and national identity; as Margaret Nash notes, ultimately, the bulk of the literature on the relationship between the school and the nation exists on the theme of education for democracy, citizenship education, and civics education in the United States. While all of these are valuable contributions to an important project, one thing that stands out is that patriotism and national identity are seldom explicitly discussed. Nash laments that the discourse of patriotism has been too separate from the discourses of democracy, citizenship education

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<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002), 8.

and civics, and she advocates a more tightly knit connection between education for citizenship and education for patriotism.<sup>88</sup>

This is no fault of existing curricula on civic education of course, and there is much to be appreciated for what is being taught in order for students to emerge as “good citizens” who promote and sustain “democracy.” Joel Westheimer and Joe Kahne categorize the various approaches undertaken by schools by the apparent objectives: one type of program or curriculum sets out to create personally responsible citizens- those who embody the characteristics of hard work, obedience to laws, and honesty. A second type calls for participatory citizenship- that is, active involvement in community-based organizations, religious associations, and political processes. Finally, a third approach seeks to create a justice-oriented citizen, one whose modes of critical inquiry lead to a commitment to eradicate social inequity.<sup>89</sup>

### 2.3.3. *The Role of Teachers*

But citizenship and civic education is not necessarily an education for patriotism although they are somewhat related-- the former has more to do with understanding the processes of the state and its public institutions (e.g. voting, community involvement, the different branches of the U.S. government, etc.), while the latter is related to the *nation*. In her study on a group of preservice teachers’ notions of a specifically patriotic program in schools, Nash concludes that one pressing issue why few have hazarded to tackle the

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<sup>88</sup> Margaret Nash. “How to Be Thankful for Being Free”: Searching for a Convergence of Discourses on Teaching Patriotism, Citizenship, and United States History.” *The Teachers College Record* 107, no. 1 (2005): 214-240.

<sup>89</sup> Joel Westheimer and Joe Kahne. “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy.” *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237-269.

promotion of patriotism in school is because it is a term that is seldom defined and hence rarely explicitly discussed. When asked by Nash to think about what patriotism is, a group of teacher candidates used a discourse of patriotism that was steeped in emotion and symbolism. For them, patriotism primarily meant feeling love, respect, loyalty and demonstrating those emotions by saluting the flag.<sup>90</sup> In general, she found that their answers reflected an uneasiness that arises when the emotional discourses of patriotism bumps up against a discourse of multiculturalism, particularly manifested in a limited understanding of tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism. This narrow and uncritical construction of patriotism and citizenship is further manifested in their notion that saluting the flag is *sine qua non* of showing respect for the country, and that all Americans *should* agree that flag salutes are this fundamental. There is nothing wrong with teaching children about their country's flag of course, but the problem is synecdoche: letting a part stand for the whole.<sup>91</sup> Flags and flag salutes, or other symbols and symbolic acts, should not, and cannot, be the sum total of our definition of patriotism. One supporter of mandatory recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, Missouri State Senator Ted House, called it "a quick and easy way to start thinking about what it is to be an American."<sup>92</sup> Others worry that "quick and easy" forms of patriotism promotes only a superficial understanding of "what it is to be an American." As Kathleen Vail observes, "the flurry of flag-waving could be obscuring the need for deeper lessons of democracy and civic duty."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Nash, "How to Be Thankful," 221.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> "Lawmakers push to make pledge mandatory in schools." (2007, March 3). Associated Press. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from [www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?document-ID=15809](http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?document-ID=15809).

<sup>93</sup> Kathleen Vail. "Lessons in Democracy." *American School Board Journal* 189, no. 1 (2002): 14-19.

Nash's experience with her preservice teachers suggests that the engagement of schools in the promotion of national identity is not an unproblematic process. Just as writers have criticized the lack of a more discursive framework in the study of national identity, scholars here, too, have lamented the absence of the student in the endeavor of schooling for patriotism. One such commentator, Paul Goalen, contends that we cannot take for granted that students are patient, passive vessels waiting to be filled with the carefully constructed messages from teachers and textbooks. As Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith remind us, "we cannot assume that what is "in" the text actually is taught. Nor can we assume that what is taught is actually learned."<sup>94</sup>

#### 2.3.4. *The Role of Students*

In their critique of a civics education curriculum in Australia, Gill and Howard assert that the curriculum could have been written without any consultation with young people in terms of what they already know and how they already see the situation is educationally both incredible and indefensible.<sup>95</sup> This presupposed that what is prescribed in the curriculum was 1) what students *ought* to know; 2) what students did not already know and needed to; and 3) that they would "receive" the information passively and in the manner expected. This is not always the case as a study in Japan clearly demonstrates. In this study, Lynne Parmenter explores some of the alternative perspectives on national

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, "The Politics of the Textbook," in *The Politics of the Textbooks*, edited by Michael Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith (Routledge: New York, 1991), 9.

<sup>95</sup> Judith Gill and Sue Howard. "Under the Power Lines: Reflections on Schooling, Civics Education and Citizenship." *Change: Transformations in Education* 3, no. 1 (2000): 35-51.



identity that exists within the Japanese education system.<sup>96</sup> Her analysis of official Japanese Ministry of Education policy is juxtaposed with presentation of the voices of junior high students and pre-service teachers to highlight the role of education in developing national identity in schools. What she found was the lack of congruence across all three groups- the Ministry is shown as displaying the confident image of schools as a vital site for the promotion of a culturally homogenous and “pure” society through developing loyal and patriotic citizens; for the students, however, Parmenter shows that aspects of national identity, the relative importance of this identity, and often even the existence of national identity is called into question; and finally, with regards to the teachers in this study, the development of national identity through school education is perceived to be problematic, and for some, even dangerous. This multiplicity of perspectives suggests that any curriculum that seeks to engender some form of national identity or patriotism cannot assume to do so without dialogue with those who are most intimately involved, i.e. the teachers and students. To do so would be faulty policy at best, indoctrination at worst.

The issue of schooling for patriotism is contested ground; it is also messy, controversial, and open to questioning and interrogation. I see this not as a problem, but an opportunity to design a school environment that will promote national identity by taking into account students’ voices. This endeavor will be the product of a dialogue between the school and the students with regards to what they already know, what they would like to know, and what they still need to explore on their own with regards their

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<sup>96</sup>Lynne Parmenter, “Constructing National Identity in a Changing World: Perspectives in Japanese Education.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 20, no. 4 (1999): 453-463.

feelings and opinions about national identity and the responsibilities of a citizen. If this can be achieved, then the potential for a purposeful, thoughtful, and relevant process of identity development in schools is a very real possibility.

Furthermore, as the promising work done by Waldron and Pike in Ireland suggests, if schools can influence what children see as both desirable and possible in terms of national identity, then it puts an even greater responsibility on both researchers and educators alike to ensure that children are given the space and opportunities to explore, question and challenge existing conceptions of patriotism national identity.<sup>97</sup> This is one of the objectives of my study; echoing Sharon Stephens in her editorial introduction to a special journal series on children and nationalism, questions now need to be asked in relation to how children themselves understand, experience, identify with, and sometimes perhaps resist or reshape the nationalist projects of which they are the primary objects.<sup>98</sup> And this is precisely a “next step” that Nash proposes needs to be taken by researchers. In her proposal for a more thoughtful marriage of both the discourses of patriotism *and* citizenship in schools, she suggests that

Future work might be geared toward assessing what messages children take from saluting the flag, holding mock elections, hosting military veterans as guest speakers, or being involved in various community projects. Which activities are more likely to foster a belief in young people in the importance of participating in democracy? Which units and activities foster genuine understanding of pluralism? Why might some activities be more successful in these regards with some groups of students than others?<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Waldron, Fionnuala & Susan Pike. “What does it mean to be Irish? Children's construction of national identity.” *Irish Educational Studies* 25, no. 2 (2006): 231-251.

<sup>98</sup> Stephens, “Editorial Introduction.”

<sup>99</sup> Nash, “How to Be Thankful,” 237.

This sets the stage for my argument that we need to not only more actively engage children in thinking about what citizenship means to them, we need to do so in the context of the school if we are to truly understand its role as a purposeful agent of national identity formation. I also reason that to do so by comparing children's experiences from two countries brings into sharper relief the role of the education system and its influence on children's active meaning-making.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Comparative Framework and Methodology

As previously mentioned, the theoretical framework for my dissertation draws on scholarship in three fields: i) the “new” sociology of childhood in childhood studies, ii) the discursive nature of national identity development in political science, and iii) the nationalizing function of schools in education. For the purposes of this chapter, the last two paradigms are particularly important. As a consequence of the contextual nature of identity construction, I argue for the need to situate my study in two different countries in order to investigate the extent to which culture plays a special and specific role in identity construction. This becomes even more pertinent when we consider that school systems themselves are a reflection and product of the culture and context of each nation. Notions of citizenship and identity necessarily vary across countries, and if schools are tasked with promulgating these ideas through citizenship education, it is vital that we take into account the unique historical, cultural, political and social traditions of each society, and how these traditions may produce similar or differential patterns of national identifications. This is underlined in a number of comparative studies on citizenship, civics, and education for democracy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Torney-Purta, John Schwille, and Jo-Ann Amadeo, *Civic Education across Countries: Twenty-four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: IEA Secretariat, 1999).

### 3.1. *Citizenship education vs. civic education*

Before establishing the comparative framework for my study, I present a discussion of what I see as a distinction between citizenship education and civic education. I argue that schools in Singapore and the United States differ interestingly in this paradigm, and that these differences account for the associative patterns children make with regards to the school and nation.

The terms “citizenship education” and “civic education” have typically been used interchangeably to refer to aspects of the school curriculum-- whether formal or informal-- that prepare young people for their roles as citizens. However, I would like to propose that we consider these terms in a more nuanced manner and to think of them as distinct entities. I am not alone in proposing to draw a distinction between citizenship education and civic education. Referring to French educator and sociologist Emile Durkheim, Mark Holmes contends that the former used citizenship education “to refer to the anticipated moral and attitudinal outcomes rather than to the more objective knowledge and understanding of the democratic process.”<sup>2</sup> More recently, Terence MacLaughlin has proposed to look at these terms separately. He sees civic education and citizenship education as a continuum from a minimal to a maximal interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Minimal interpretations are characterized by a narrow definition of citizenship and lead to more formal approaches with regards to education- what he terms civics education. This model is knowledge-based and primarily about the transmission of information about a country’s history, geography, politics and systems of government. Maximal

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Holmes, “Education and Citizenship in an Age of Pluralism,” in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Joseph Viteritti. (New York: Yale University Press, 2001),188.

<sup>3</sup> Terence H. McLaughlin, “Citizenship, Diversity and Education: A Philosophical Perspective,” *Journal of Moral Education* 21, no. 3 (1992): 235- 251.

interpretations, according to MacLaughlin, take a broader definition of citizenship, and this he terms citizenship education. It includes the content and knowledge components of civics education, but also encourages active interrogation and interpretation of this knowledge. The primary aim is not only to inform but also to use that information to enhance students' ability to actively participate in society.

My conceptualization of the two terms builds on McLaughlin's insofar as I agree that civic education is just one component of citizenship education, specifically responsible for educating students about formal political processes such as describing the various branches of government, the importance of voting, and the process of legislation, etc. Similarly, I concur that citizenship education is the broader concept that goes beyond merely teaching and acquiring information about a country. However, what I argue is missing from MacLaughlin's model is an affective component, aspects of schooling that serve to develop an *emotional* attachment between the students and the nation. Here I draw on William Damon's work on moral education and citizenship that asserts:

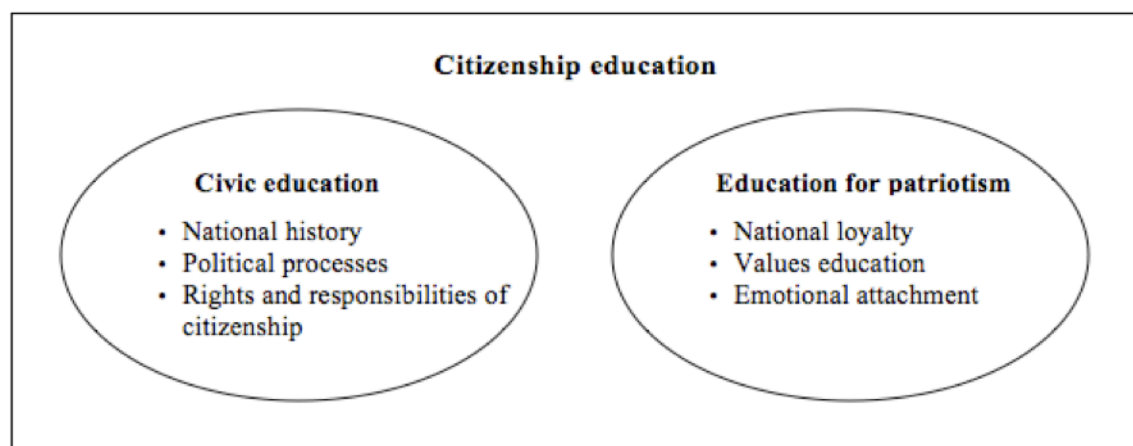
A positive emotional attachment to a particular community is a necessary condition for sustained civic engagement in that community. For full participatory citizenship in a democratic society, a student needs to develop a love for the particular society, including its historical legacy and cultural traditions.<sup>4</sup>

This emotive component is important particularly in light of discussions of national identity. Damon's position stems from his work on moral commitment and character formation which argues that consistent moral action requires commitment, and that

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<sup>4</sup> William Damon, "To Not Fade Away: Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young," in Ravitch and Vitteriti, *Good Citizens*, 135.

commitment is vital to identity.<sup>5</sup> “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong *emotional* resonance of the teller, are what we refer to as identities,” (italics mine) writes Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain.<sup>6</sup> As such, citizenship education, if it seeks to develop national affiliation, civic engagement and participatory citizenship, must involve an affective component, an education for patriotism. I contend that citizenship education should encompass all aspects of schooling related to cultivating a relationship between the student and the nation *including* civic education but also areas such as moral education, service learning, and other informal aspects of school that serve to develop children’s sense of national identity and attachment to the nation (see Figure 3.1). Its intention ought to be to promote in children *both* an intellectual as well as emotional bond to their country.



**Figure 3.1: Components of citizenship education**

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<sup>5</sup> William Damon and Anne Gregory, “The Youth Charter: Towards the Formation of Adolescent Moral Identity,” *Journal of Moral Education* 26 (1997).

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Holland, William Lachiotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

I belabor the discussion on citizenship education<sup>7</sup> and what I see as its two requisite facets-- civic education and education for patriotism-- as I argue that the school systems in the United States and Singapore emphasize these two components to different degrees. I demonstrate the extent to which this difference stems from the unique political and social background of each country and how it presents an interesting framework to then investigate the manner in which children from the two countries understand national identity. Few can deny that education should be involved in the transmission of citizenship values; what is up for debate is the nature of this involvement. On the one hand, in a liberal democratic society like the U.S., schools focus largely on developing the values of basic social morality and democratic civic virtue.<sup>8</sup> Involved here is the notion of an “education adequate to serve the life of a free and equal citizen in any modern democracy.”<sup>9</sup> This includes the notions of education for both a significant form of personal autonomy and for democratic citizenship.<sup>10</sup> This I term a more *political* model of citizenship education. Singapore has taken a different route, one where national loyalty and emotional attachment are valued. Motivated primarily by a commitment to the nation above self, the objectives of citizenship education are driven by the goal of effective nation-building, i.e. a more *patriotic* model. This approach is largely one of socializing children into one nationally-shared set of values.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Subsequent use of the terms *citizenship education*, *civic education* and *education for patriotism* in this study will be based on this conceptualization.

<sup>8</sup> David Bridges, ed., *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World* (New York, Routledge, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Terence McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevičienė, “Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity,” in *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship*, ed. Bridges, 23-35.

<sup>11</sup> Christine Han, “National Education and ‘Active Citizenship’: Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore.” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20, no. 1 (2000): 63-72.



My study looks beyond the viability of either model to examine young children's responses to them. To what extent do they embrace the patriotic/ political brands of citizenship education? Or do they resist and/or reshape these paradigms selectively to suit their own understandings and prior knowledge? Answering these questions will address the role of the school in national identity development while illuminating larger civic and social concerns such as actively engaging children as they begin negotiating their roles and responsibilities as citizens.

### 3.2. *National Identity and Citizenship Education in Multicultural Societies: The Importance of Culture and Comparison*

One reason why a comparative study is compelling with regards to my research focus is the centrality of culture in the development of identity, national or otherwise. Synthesizing theoretical contributions by Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Bourdieu, Holland and her co-writers refer to the identity-formation process as not static but constantly shifting and evolving; for them, identity is culturally constituted and very much an interaction between the self and the cultural resources at hand: "Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations."<sup>12</sup> Culture in this case takes many forms- ethnicity, gender, minority status, nationality, etc. A comparative study will allow me to investigate the extent to which children's patterns of national identifications may cut across these different lines; for example, do minority children in each country- whether racial, ethnic or religious- respond differentially to the nationalizing project of the school, i.e. are minority children

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<sup>12</sup> Holland et al. *Identity and Agency*, 5.

in the U.S. more likely to be similar to other American children in terms of how they identify with the country, or are they more similar to minority children in Singapore? In other words, is there something about inhabiting the culture of a minority group-- across nations-- that influences the process of national identity formation compared to children in the majority group?

This argument is bolstered by some empirical evidence from both comparative and non-comparative studies which suggest that national identifications do align along such cultural lines. In their study of national identity formation in middle childhood in Wales, Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies demonstrate the extent to which national identity formation can sometimes be a gendered process where girls identify with the nation in ways that are distinct from boys.<sup>13</sup> In his comparative study of Turkish, German and British children, Heinz Hengst focuses on the dynamic construction of national identity and the culture of “childhood” in particular. He suggests that while there were differences between the national groups in relation to the importance they assigned to national identity, there was interesting and unexpected evidence of another alignment, where children, in many cases, saw themselves as more similar to other children across nationalities than to adults who shared their nationality.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3. *The Context of Citizenship Education in the United States and Singapore*

While great differences may seem to divide the two countries, one year—1965-- marked a turning point in the political and educational histories of both countries. As

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies, *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Heinz Hengst, “Negotiating ‘us’ and ‘Them’: Children’s Constructions of Collective Identity,” *Childhood* 4, no. 1 (1997): 43-62.

nations, newly independent or otherwise, they would soon be confronted with a populace that would only grow more diverse in the years to come, and shaping a common national identity became of utmost concern. Tasking schools with the responsibility to bring together a multicultural population of students was-- and continues to be-- a constant challenge that the two countries share.

### *3.3.1. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*

The 1965 Immigration Bill passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson had far more sweeping consequences than was ever envisioned. "This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions," Johnson said at the signing ceremony, symbolically held at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. "It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives or add importantly to either our wealth or our power."<sup>15</sup> Initially conceived as a small immigration bill aimed to merely reunite families, the law was believed to have little practical consequences. In reality, this law opened the floodgates to millions of new immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 represented a marked shift in policy. It eradicated the national origins system passed in 1924 replacing it with selection criteria focusing on family reunification and desired occupational skills. For the first time in the twentieth century, immigrants were allowed to enter the country without regard to national or racial origin. As a result, not only has the annual volume of immigration since increased steadily to the current level of a

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<sup>15</sup> Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965. Volume II, entry 546 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966): 1037-1040.

million more arrivals a year, but as has been noted, the major increases in immigration are from Asia and Latin America.<sup>16</sup>

Rudolph Vecoli questions the extent to which this wave of immigration would redefine American national identity and notes how the definition of an American identity has been stretched again and again to accommodate new peoples.<sup>17</sup> And how has this been possible? It lies largely with the institution of the American public school. For many of the nation's schools, the altering immigration patterns resulting from that dramatic change in immigration policy has meant not only an increase in the size of their student bodies, but also represent an enduring shift in the demographic composition of their school communities.<sup>18</sup> As a result, till today, schools continue to tackle the challenge of teaching an increasingly diverse student body and dealing with the accompanying issues of how to educate them in a way that will help them grow into active participatory citizens in a democracy governed by a core set of shared values. Although not referring to immigration in particular, it is important to quote at length here a passage from the Introduction of Susan Fuhrmann and Marvin Lazerson's impressive collection of essays on the American public school. It highlights the traditional role undertaken by schools in not only national identity formation in general, but more specifically, identity formation in a historically multicultural nation. It provides compelling support for my argument in

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey. S. Passel and Barry Edmonston. *Immigration and race in the United States: The 20th and 21st centuries* (PRIP-UI-22) (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1992).

Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism*. (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of an American Identity," *The History Teacher* 30, no. 1 (1992): 9-27.

<sup>18</sup> A. Reynaldo Contreas, "The Impact of Immigration Policy on Education Reform: Implications for the New Millennium," *Education and Urban Society* 34, no. 2 (2002): 134-155; Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism*.

this section that it is impossible to divorce the institution of schooling from that of the nation from whence it originates:

The United States, as one of the first nations consciously “created,” has sustained an enduring obsession with issues of national identity... The history of citizenship in the United States has been closely intertwined with the history of education. Americans have looked to schools to foster individuals’ identifications with the nation. They have expected schools to prepare future citizens, nurturing in children loyalty and common values and forging from them a strong national character. Thus, as key aspects of citizenship have been defined and redefined, expectations of schools have changed as well... The changing population of schools- what groups were included in schools and how they were treated there- has closely tracked the relative status of groups within the nation. Political values dominant at various periods in the country’s history have strongly influenced what children learn about their country and their own role in its future. Educators, by embracing the expectations that one of school’s primary responsibilities is the preparation of future citizens, have ensured that schools have both reflected and helped shape the ongoing debates about the boundaries and meanings of citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3.2. *Singapore’s Independence: 1965*

In August 1965, barely two months before President Johnson had signed the bill that would forever change the face of the American population, across the world in a small island just off the equator in Southeast Asia, Singapore was experiencing an even more profound upheaval of her sociopolitical structure. Suddenly and against her will, she became an independent state. Singapore was a state born, “despite itself, in crisis and trauma,”<sup>20</sup> unexpectedly an independent city-state with a national infrastructure but a state without a nation and without national identity. Granted limited self-government by the British in 1959, Singapore was led by a party, the People’s Action Party (PAP) whose longstanding objective was federal union with Singapore’s northern neighbor, Malaysia.

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Fuhrmann and Marvin Lazerson, ed., *The Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Andy Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 144.

In 1963, she was duly admitted into the Malayan Federation, but was unceremoniously expelled two years later due to political acrimony and racial strife. It was now given full independence and the Singaporean government suddenly found itself leading a country of multiple nationalities<sup>21</sup>, languages and creeds amidst an anxiety of whether it would be able to survive politically as an independent state on its own.

It was under these circumstances that the Singapore state set about constructing itself a nation, and nation-building became a matter of political survival. Education was central to this task. The education system in Singapore was to have two major tasks in the immediate wake of independence: politically, it was to construct a unified nation from the ethnically divided populace; economically, it was to provide a stock base of basic education, skills and attitudes required for industrialization.<sup>22</sup> This is characteristic of the developmental state where education serves the process of economic development, state formation and nation building<sup>23</sup> and is commonly found in Asia. Subsequently, the PAP initiated a centralized school system in 1973 through policies of integrated schools, bilingualism and meritocracy.<sup>24</sup> Since then, the Singapore school system has become highly centralized, tightly controlled, and designed to “be responsive to perceived social

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<sup>21</sup> Singapore’s population has traditionally been- and continues to be- made up of three major ethnic groups: the indigenous Malays, and Chinese (the ethnic majority presently) and Indians whose forefathers migrated from China and India throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century during Singapore’s growth into a regional trading epicenter.

<sup>22</sup> Leslie Sharpe and S. Gopinathan, “After Effectiveness: New Directions in the Singapore System?” *Journal of Education Policy* 17, no. 2 (2002): 151-166.

<sup>23</sup> Aaron Koh, “Towards a Critical Pedagogy: Creating “thinking schools” in Singapore,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002);

Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State*;

<sup>24</sup> For details, see M. Hussin, “Singapore’s Quest for a National Identity: The Triumphs and Trials of Government Policies” in *Imagining Singapore*, ed. K. C. Ban, A. Pakir and C. K. Tong (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992);

S. Gopinathan, *Educational Development in a Strong State: The Singapore Experience*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Newcastle, Australia.

and national needs.”<sup>25</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the decentralized nature of the public education system in the U.S.

In developmental states such as Singapore, education as an instrument is fundamental and powerful because it straddles both the cultural-symbolic and civic-instrumental dimensions of nation building.<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of my study, I highlight the role of the Singapore school system in developing in a diverse population the attitudes and motivations necessary for collective commitment to the common goal of national development. In this regard, education has been harnessed to transform a generation into sharing a common destiny. According to Sim and Print, it is from this perspective that the relationship between education, nation building, and citizenship should be understood in Singapore.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3.3. *Another common challenge*

Over the last decade or so, on top of the omnipresent concern about how to build a shared identity in a multicultural student population, there has been a great deal of public debate in both countries about the disengagement of young people from civic participation and the lack of cultural mooring and national identity. In the United States, this is related to falling voting rates and a perceived lack of knowledge about civic processes; in Singapore, the anxiety is over globalization and how it has allegedly destabilized local culture, values, and identity. Accordingly, this has implications on what

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<sup>25</sup> Jasmine Boon-Yee Sim and Murray Print, “Citizenship Education and Social Studies in Singapore: A National Agenda,” *International Journal of Citizenship and Teacher Education* 1, no.1 (2005): 60.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Hill and Kwen Fee Hong, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (New York: Routledge: 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Sim and Print, “Citizenship Education and Social Studies.”

schools should-- or should not be-- teaching, and what they can do to ameliorate this apparent lack of civic and national commitment.

Robert Putnam's famous argument about Americans increasingly 'bowling alone'<sup>28</sup> reflects wide concern about the state of America's civic culture, especially with reference to young people. In recent years, a chorus of critics and educators has expressed alarm over the retreat of young people from politics and public affairs in the U.S. and the consequent disconnect from a sense of shared dedication to the nation. As William Galston from the University of Maryland pointed out in the *Annual Review of Political Science*<sup>29</sup>:

[While] anxiety about the civic engagement of young adults is nothing new ... there are also disturbing trends over time. If we compare generations rather than cohorts—that is, if we compare today's young adults not with today's older adults but with the young adults of the past—we find evidence of diminished civic attachment.

In 2000, only 26 percent of college freshmen voiced the belief that keeping up with politics is important, compared with 58 percent in 1966. Only 14 percent say they regularly discuss politics—down from 30 percent.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, a Pew Research Centre poll of voters in their late teens and twenties found that fewer than half were thinking 'a great deal' about the elections in 2000, compared to two thirds in 1992. Four in ten believed that it does not matter who is president, twice as many as in 1992.<sup>31</sup> Specifically with regards to the decline of civil and national identity in American youth, Damon

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Putnam, "Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance", in Ravitch and Vitteriti, *Good Citizens*.

<sup>29</sup> William Galston, "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement and Civic Education," *American Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 217–234.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> National Alliance for Civic Education, available at: [www.puaf.umd.edu/NACE](http://www.puaf.umd.edu/NACE)



alludes to a recent Department of Education assessment which showed that only 9 percent of U.S. high school students were able to cite two reasons why it is important for citizens to participate in a democracy, and only 6 percent could identify two reasons why having a constitution benefits a country.<sup>32</sup>

Although these data are not related specifically to national identity per se, I argue that in the U.S., involvement in the civic processes of a constitutional democracy is a large aspect of national identity.<sup>33</sup> More importantly, I highlight this public anxiety because it explains to a large degree the increasing pressures on schools to cultivate “good” citizenship and to work harder in order to ensure social and national cohesion. Just as it has been even since the founding of America, the public school is being called on to be the panacea of all social ills, be it exponential immigration or declining test scores in Civics and Government. Says Mark Holmes in his critique of the public school and its ability to provide moral education in a pluralist society, “If the school is to contribute to the reconstruction of social order, to a better and stronger sense of citizenship, then both the content of good citizenship and the mechanisms by which it can be promoted must be established...”<sup>34</sup>

This public concern over young people’s commitment to their nation is not America’s alone. In Singapore, a similar unease has been apparent. Current government rhetoric in the media is directed at “Generation M”, a term used by former Prime Minister

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<sup>32</sup> “35% of High School Seniors Fail National Civics Test,” New York Times, November 21, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> For support, see:

Leonie Huddy & Nadia Khatib, “American Patriotism, National Identity, and Political Involvement,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 63–77.

Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, “Is Patriotism good for democracy? A Study of High School Seniors’ Patriotic Commitments,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 87, no. 8 (2006): 600-607.

<sup>34</sup> Holmes, “Education and Citizenship,” 194.

Goh Chok Tong to describe the younger generation of Singapore as the generation of the millennium. This generation was born into post-Independence Singapore and during a time when Singapore had already attained economic wealth and political stability. As such, they are perceived to be either ignorant of or flippant about the history of Singapore. Generation M is seen as disconnected from Singapore's nation-building endeavor that is built around an ideology of survival, discipline, and diligence.<sup>35</sup> They have been singled out for displaying amnesia of Singapore's history,<sup>36</sup> for professing to prefer a Caucasian identity rather than their own ethnicity,<sup>37</sup> and more recently, for expressing their angst and uncertainty over what constitutes a Singaporean national identity.<sup>38</sup>

In 1996, former Prime Minister Goh officially and publicly drew attention to this issue by highlighting the "serious gap in knowledge" among the young generation of Singaporeans who knew little the country's history.<sup>39</sup> His claim was based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education that asked students about Singapore's post-war history. The survey revealed that students had little knowledge of significant post-war historical figures and events. For example, they were generally ignorant about the country's state of Emergency from 1948 to 1960. Some thought the Emergency had to do with water shortage even though in actuality, the Emergency was declared by the colonial

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<sup>35</sup> Beng Huat Chua, *Communitarian, Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> "Serious Gap in the Education of Singaporeans: We Are Ignorant of our Own Country," *The Straits Times*, 18 July, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Eunice Lau, "Being Chinese is Fine, But Caucasian is Better," *The Straits Times*, 18 December, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Laurel Teo, "I Want to be Proud of Singapore... But What About?" *The Straits Times*, 20 February, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Chok Tong, Goh, *Teachers Day Rally Speech* by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Harbour Pavilion, World Trade Centre, on Sunday, 8 September 1996. Retrieved December 1, 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/corporate/contactonline/pre-2005/rally/speech.html>

government to fight communist subversion and insurgency in the Malayan peninsula and Singapore. Students also had little knowledge about the cause of the Hock Lee bus riots in the 1950s. Many students guessed that they were caused by a rise in bus fares and poor working conditions, when in fact they were Communist-instigated.

The government perceived this as a critical issue, potentially jeopardizing the nation as young people appeared to take Singapore's existing peace and prosperity for granted. More importantly, he emphasized the notion that it is only with a knowledge of a shared past can there be a common bond of nationhood. In the absence of that knowledge, the very tenets of meritocracy and multiracialism upon which the country was built would be threatened. It was in the context of this threat that schools were subsequently summoned into the limelight. Just as it is in the U.S., the responsibility for ameliorating this perceived threat fell upon the institution of education:

National Education must be a vital component of our education process. We will revise the contents of Social Studies, Civics and Moral Education, and History, to emphasise nation-building. But National Education goes beyond book knowledge. It is an exercise to develop instincts that become part of the psyche of every child. It must engender a shared sense of nationhood, an understanding of how our past is relevant to our present and future. It must appeal to both heart and mind.<sup>40</sup>

As Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry have observed, education policy or any form of educational change is invariably informed by a significant history or prior events that justify and legitimize a policy or curriculum change.<sup>41</sup> What I hope to have done in this section is to show that citizenship education in Singapore and the U.S. did not grow

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<sup>40</sup> Hsien Loong, Lee, *Launch of National Education* by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the TCS Theatre, World Trade Centre, on Saturday, 17 May, 1997. Retrieved December 2, 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/speeches/1997/170597.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Aaron Koh, "Imagining the Singapore "Nation" and "Identity": The Role of the Media and National Education" *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 25 no. 1 (2005): 75-91.

out of a vacuum. They are products of a specific context, and must be understood as policy responses to a specific social and political need.

### 3.4. *Citizenship Education in the U.S. and Singapore*

Responses to sociopolitical needs necessarily vary depending on the culture and history of a nation. In this section, I present a brief description and discussion of citizenship education as it is implemented in the U.S. and Singapore. This survey highlights the axes along which the two systems are similar, but more importantly, their points of departure. I suggest that the interesting ways in which citizenship education in the two countries are differentially conducted present a rich context for my research.

Prime Minister Goh's speech quoted above was the catalyst for the implementation of National Education (NE) in Singapore. NE was conceived as a state-wide curriculum initiative designed specifically to "develop national cohesion, cultivate the instinct for survival as a nation and instill in our students, confidence in our nation's future. It also emphasises cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore."<sup>42</sup> NE was officially launched in May 1997 by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, whose speech at the ceremony echoed the rhetoric of anxiety and lack voiced by Prime Minister Goh the previous year:

This ignorance will hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood. We will not acquire the right instincts to bond together as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world. For Singapore to thrive beyond the founder generation, we must systematically transmit these instincts and attitudes to succeeding cohorts.

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<sup>42</sup> Official National Education website. Retrieved October 10 , 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: <http://www.ne.edu.sg/>

Through National Education, we must make these instincts and attitudes part of the cultural DNA which makes us Singaporeans.<sup>43</sup>

At its inception, the structure and pedagogy of NE was a novel one for Singapore- instead of implementing it as a subject in and of itself, NE is infused across the formal curriculum in subjects such as Social Studies, Civics and Moral Education, History, Geography, and the General Paper. The six NE messages that are to be infused through the subjects mentioned above include:

- 1) *Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong. Singapore's heritage and way of life must be preserved.*
- 2) *Racial and religious harmony must be preserved. Despite the many races, religions, languages and cultures, Singaporeans must pursue one destiny.*
- 3) *Meritocracy and incorruptibility must be upheld. This means equal opportunities for all, according to ability and effort.*
- 4) *No one owes Singapore a living. It must find its own way to survive and prosper.*
- 5) *Singaporeans themselves must defend Singapore. No one else is responsible for the country's security and well-being.*
- 6) *Singaporeans must have confidence in our future. United, determined and well-prepared, Singaporeans shall build a bright future for themselves.*

Two points I would like to draw attention to are i) the pervasive and systematic nature of this policy initiative, and ii) its emotive and affective quality. First, NE was designed to infuse throughout much of the formal curriculum, and is presented systematically with themes for each educational level, specific pedagogical objectives, outcome measures to be evaluated, and an informal component that schools can implement outside of regular school hours. This is possible only because of the tightly centralized characteristic of Singapore's education system. Like much of other facets of Singapore's social structure

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<sup>43</sup> Lee, *Launch of National Education*.

such as transportation and housing, education in general, and NE in particular, is “top-down in approach, state initiated and driven by the goal of effective nation-building.”<sup>44</sup> Consequently, with the exception of a few commentators, NE was received without much furor or fanfare by policy-makers, educators, and the general public writ large. I state that another reason why NE was fairly uncontroversial is because the whole endeavor of nation building has been inextricably enmeshed with the fabric of Singapore society that another policy intervention in this direction was unlikely to raise nary an eyebrow.

Another fundamental characteristic of NE is the deeply emotional nature of its rhetoric and objectives. I argue that NE reflects an intensely *patriotic* notion of citizenship, one that places a great degree of emphasis on national loyalty, values and emotional attachment. A brief analysis of policy documents relating to NE’s design and implementation, speeches about NE, and the official NE website reveal language steeped heavily in emotion. Terms such as “core values”, “will to prevail”, “instinct for survival”, “emotional attachment” are used liberally. There is little in NE documents that refer to the actual processes of citizenship such as voting or civic and political participation. As noted by Christine Han, “much of the thrust of NE is of an affective nature. The approach taken is very much one of socializing children into *a* particular set of values and views.” (italics mine)<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, the picture is very different across the world in the U.S. Not only is the country staunchly decentralized and traditionally wary of any centralizing influence of the federal government, its rhetoric relating to citizenship education has been careful to

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<sup>44</sup> Sim and Print, “Citizenship Education and Social Studies,” 65.

<sup>45</sup> Christine Han, “National Education and ‘Active Citizenship’: Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20, no. 1 (2000): 65.

steer clear of patriotic language. Educational discussions about citizenship and nationhood in the U.S. more often than not constellate around the teaching of history and social studies. These two subjects have long been the battleground between advocates of a national “historical vocabulary” vs. those who reject any effort to promote just *one* vision/ version of what it means to be American. As Gary Nash and his associates write in their recounting of the “history wars,” *History on Trial*,<sup>46</sup> the issue is two competing visions of national identity. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that the subject of history should promote loyalty and pride in national achievements. Here, social injustices committed are taught as minor aberrations in America’s larger quest for freedom and opportunity. On the other hand, opponents to this view argue that students should also be taught the dark side of the nation’s history and the prominent role of conflict that characterized her nation building efforts. Proponents of this position advocate for the equal representation of marginalized groups and their struggles in history curriculum. Nash’s labeling of history teaching into such strict categories is of course nothing short of controversial and the “history wars” continue to be waged as we speak. However, it does provide a very broad heuristic against which to compare Singapore’s citizenship education model.

In contrast to the language parlayed in Singaporean educational discourse, however, current discussions about national identity in the U.S. and the role of schools in its formation are rather free of emotive rhetoric, at least in public discourse. It is instead inextricably tied to the notions of rights, responsibilities, and the upholding of certain hallowed ideals such as justice, democracy and equality. A brief look at Social Studies

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<sup>46</sup> Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, Knopf, 2001).

standards reveals an emphasis on the processes of governance and civic duty and practices.<sup>47</sup> Unlike the NE website hosted by the Singaporean Ministry of Education, there is no evocative language that mentions loyalty, attachment, or patriotism. The American perspective rests more strongly on the side of a political- rather than patriotic-brand of civic education.

McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevičienė suggest, in their study on national identity and education in Lithuania, that this is a feature of public education in a pluralistic liberal democratic societies.<sup>48</sup> This form of education cannot assume the truth of, or promote, any particular comprehensive, or all-embracing vision of the good life. Instead it is focused largely on developing the values of basic ‘social morality’ and democratic ‘civic virtue’. Involved here is the notion of an “education adequate to serve the life of a free and equal citizen in any modern democracy”<sup>49</sup> which includes the notions of education for both a significant form of personal autonomy and for democratic citizenship.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, there seems to be an anxiety in American discourse in general about the idea of *patriotism*. It is often associated with the subordination of individuals’ interests to those of the nation, and with notions of jingoism and chauvinism. Recent controversy surrounding attempts to implement a specifically patriotic form of citizenship education in the U.S. is worth highlighting at this point. In 2002, the federal government announced a new set of history and civic education initiatives aimed squarely at cementing national identity and pride. These initiatives, former president George W. Bush declared, would

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<sup>47</sup> Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Retrieved November 3, 2007 from National Council of Social Studies website: <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

<sup>48</sup> David Bridges (ed.) *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World* (New York, Routledge, 1997), 25.

<sup>49</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>50</sup> McLaughlin & Jucevičienė, “Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity.”



“improve student’s knowledge of America history, increase their civic involvement, and deepen their love for our great country.” To engender a sense of patriotism in young Americans, we must, President Bush emphasized, teach them that “America is a force of good in the world, bringing hope and freedom to other people.”<sup>51</sup>

What is interesting here is the use of the same emotive language harnessed by government officials in Singapore justifying the need for NE- it is rhetoric designed specifically to stir a sense of national loyalty and emotional commitment. However, unlike the calm reception NE received in Singapore, many educators in America have objected to engaging students in this patriotic pedagogy as initiated by the Bush Administration. They do so on two grounds: i) that this form of patriotism is often monolithic, reflecting an “America-right-or-wrong” stance,<sup>52</sup> what philosopher Martha Nussbaum warns is “perilously close to jingoism,”<sup>53</sup> and ii) that few of these initiatives included teachers or local school administrators in their conception or development. The direction had come top-down, from the federal government and the U.S. Department of Education. Once again, the contrast to Singapore is stark, where the top-down nature of NE’s implementation was hardly criticized or questioned.

I acknowledge that in presenting such a distinct dichotomy between the Singaporean and American models of citizenship education, I am painting in broad strokes. Such things can seldom be so plainly defined. In fact, there has been a movement in both countries that suggest a reframing of sorts. A new social studies curriculum in Singapore

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<sup>51</sup> “President Introduces History and Civic Education Initiatives,” remarks of the President on Teaching American History and Civic Education Initiative, 17 September 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Joel Westheimer, “Politics and Patriotism in Education” in Westheimer, *Pledging Allegiance*.

<sup>53</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Cambridge, MA: Beacon, 2002), 29.

is showing promising signs of moving away from the more conservative and prescriptive model of citizenship education traditionally practiced in Singapore.<sup>54</sup> There is hope that the greater emphasis on critical thinking skills and inquiry will pave the way for more instruction in civic processes and participatory citizenship. In the U.S. recent discussions about the nature of patriotism have argued for its compatibility with the ideals of democratic citizenship education. Joel Westheimer and contributors to his collection of essays on patriotism in the American public school advocate for a pedagogy of constructive, active and democratic patriotism.<sup>55</sup> This reframed notion of patriotism involves both an emotional and psychological commitment to the nation, but one that is still very much anchored in democratic principles and practices. However, I suggest nonetheless that my distinction between the American political form of citizenship education and Singapore's more patriotic model is a useful one to employ as I begin to examine the role of schools in developing national identity in young children.

### 3.5. *Study Objective*

The goal of this dissertation is to examine, describe, compare, and contrast national identity resources or markers, i.e. “those characteristics which are perceived to carry symbolic importance either as a signal to others of a person’s national identity, or which might be mobilized by the individual themselves in support of an identity claim.”<sup>56</sup>

I should note that I am not referring here to the internal, subjective dimensions of identity—my access to that as a researcher can only ever be limited—but rather I am

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<sup>54</sup> Sim and Print, “Citizenship Education and Social Studies”.

<sup>55</sup> Westheimer, *Pledging Allegiance*.

<sup>56</sup> Frank Bechhofer, David McCrone, Richard Kiely, and Robert Stewart. “Constructing National Identity: Arts and Landed Elites in Scotland.” *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999), 527-528.

concerned with what the children spoke of as distinguishing Singaporeanness/Americaness from other nationalities. This was reflected in the judgments and opinions children made about national *habitus*. Bourdieu's concept of habitus<sup>57</sup>—applied to national identity by De Cillia et al.<sup>58</sup> amongst others—refers to socially acquired dispositions that are manifested in outlooks, opinions, beliefs, and embodied phenomena such as deportment, ways of sitting, walking, etc. Of course, this is a process that is difficult to study without extended participant observation. However, the children I spoke with revealed something of these judgments in their negotiation of identities in the responses to my interview questions and prompts.

### 3.6. Methodology

I am guided by my belief that childhood research should be non-hierarchical and collaborative, and that it should move away from investigations *on* children towards investigations *with* children. As such, my research protocol elicits the meanings children themselves generate rather than meanings constructed within my research instrument. The unique opportunity of conducting research with children requires strategies that are specially adapted for them, taking into account their level of cognitive and linguistic development, and making use of materials and techniques with which they are familiar.<sup>59</sup>

My research protocol involves a combination of classroom observations, a writing and drawing exercise, and individual interviews. This combination of data collection

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<sup>57</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction*. (London: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities." *Discourse Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 149-173.

<sup>59</sup> James Garbarino, Frances M. Stott, & Faculty of the Erikson Institute. *Eliciting, Interpreting, and Evaluating Critical Information from Children*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

methods serves several purposes: first, the use of child-created artifacts validates children's agency in creating meaning and expressing their ideas; next, when working with children, variety can stimulate and maintain their interest; third, using more than one method may provide the opportunity for triangulation of data; and finally, because young children are not familiar with the process of research, we cannot assume that they will all respond the same way to one method. When doing research with children, unlike with adults, there needs to be a greater awareness of the desirability of at least trying to match the child to method. If a child is reluctant to share sensitive matters in a group, perhaps an individual interview may be more appropriate. Or if a child is uncomfortable speaking to a stranger, expressing their opinions through a drawing might elicit more information. Children with different attributes may require different methods. As Garbino and Scott state "The more sources of information an adult has about a child, the more likely that the adult is to receive the child's message properly."<sup>60</sup>

This plural and more creative approach has been successfully used in studies to elicit children's opinions on a variety of topics that are conventionally thought of as difficult for them such as poverty and emotions.<sup>61</sup> As such, this multi-faceted method towards conducting research with children has become increasingly popular and is recommended as engaging children more effectively in research interactions. It will also

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>61</sup> see Melanie Mauthner, Berry Mayall, & Sheila Turner, S. *Children and Food at Primary School*. (London: Institute of Education, 1993); Ann Oakley, Deborah Hickey, Lynda Rajan, & Alan S. Rigby. "Social Support in Pregnancy: Does it Have Longterm Effects?" *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 14, (1996): 7-22; and Janet Holland, Melanie Mauthner, and Sue Sharpe. *Family Matters: Communicating Health Messages in the Family*. (London: HEA: 1996).

hopefully allow children to engage more critically with their own ideas, thus allowing them to move their own thinking about identity forward.

Furthermore, employing multiple data collection methods is also one manner of triangulating data. As Miles and Huberman write, triangulation is essentially supporting a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with, or at least, do not contradict it.<sup>62</sup> Using a variety of research methods with children is not only appropriate for this age group, but also avoids biases that might occur from using only a single data collection method, and hence reinforces validity.

### *3.6.1. Analysis of documents (Social Studies curriculum and policy documents)*

I also analyze pertinent documents related to citizenship education and national identity in education from both countries. These include the Social Studies curriculum from Singapore and the Novi school district, relevant speeches,<sup>63</sup> and policy documents. This analysis looks at the similarities and differences between the two countries in terms of how citizenship education is conceptualized and how their objectives may vary. I analyzed the documents using constant comparative methods to look for patterns throughout the data. I then develop themes and categories that appear to emerge across the various documents, and used these categories as axes of comparisons across the two countries.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. (Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, 1994), 236.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech at the launch of National Education and President Bush's speech on the Teaching American History and Civic Education Initiative

### 3.6.2. Sample

Table 1 displays the classrooms I have identified for this study. My sample includes 155 children, 75 from three classrooms in the United States and 80 from two classrooms in Singapore. The children range from ages 9 to 11.

A main focus of this study is to explore how children understand the notion of national identity and the role of the school in its development, with particular reference—as suggested by the literature—to social positionings such as gender, ethnicity, minority status, and language use. As such, I have purposefully chosen classrooms in schools that allow me to explore these dimensions to as rich an extent possible. Two schools—Nee An Primary in Singapore and Chestnut Elementary in Novi, Michigan have a school enrollment of children who are in the predominant ethnic group— Chinese and Caucasian respectively, while in Bennett Estate in Singapore and Prairie Elementary in Novi, even though there is still a Chinese and Caucasian majority, the enrollment of minority children—Malays and Asian- and Indian-Americans-- is above average.

**Table 3.1: Description of research sites**

Grade level	Singapore		Novi, Michigan	
	<i>Bennett Estate</i>	<i>Nee Ann</i>	<i>Prairie</i>	<i>Chestnut</i>
	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	5 <sup>th</sup> grade (2 classrooms)	4 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Sample size</b>	40	40	50	25
<b>No. interviewed<sup>64</sup></b>	32	33	43	22
<b>No. of minority</b>	14	5	19	4

All schools in the sample are coeducational and I will therefore be able to make comparisons across gender groups as well. What these different demographic configurations allow me to investigate is the extent to which cultural positionings—

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<sup>64</sup> There is a difference between the total number of children in each classroom and the number of children I interviewed because of 1) absenteeism on the days I conducted the interviews or 2) children declining to be interviewed one on one.

relative minority status, ethnic, and linguistic-- influence children's identifications with the nation as well their reception to the nationalizing function of the school.

Novi, Michigan is an ideal city with which to compare with Singapore because of their fairly similar demographic profiles. They share comparable proportions of minority and immigrant populations and have income profiles that are almost equivalent. Table 3.2 presents information on the population breakdown and per capita income of both sites.

**Table 3.2: Demographic information of research sites**

	Singapore <sup>65</sup>	Novi <sup>66</sup>
<b>Percentage minority</b>	21.6%	12.6%
<b>Percentage foreign-born</b>	14.6%	12.7%
<b>Per capita money income</b>	US\$ 40,591	US\$ 35,992

The largest minority in Singapore are the Malays, followed by the Indians, while in Novi, Asians make up the largest minority group. There is an overlap in that Asians also make up the largest immigrant group in Novi comprising predominantly Japanese, Koreans, and Indians (in that order). In Singapore, immigrants have been arriving in large numbers from China, India, and Indonesia.

### 3.6.3. *Issue of Consent*

Children's participation in research-- especially one informed by the theories of the sociology of childhood-- involves a changing emphasis in research methods. And nowhere is this more salient than with regards to the issue of consent. Consent is a critical component in all research studies but especially so with children as we consider the issue

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<sup>65</sup> Information based on Singapore Census of Population, 2010 compiled by the Singapore Department of Statistics and the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (<http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/people/demo.html>)

<sup>66</sup> Information based on U.S. Census Bureau 2006 estimates (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2659440.html>)

of power dynamics between the adult researcher and the child. Recognizing children as subjects rather than objects of research entails accepting that children can speak “for themselves” even in matters of giving consent. Parental consent was obtained and parents were informed that they were free to withdraw their children at any point of the study; however, I also sought consent from children verbally. Having the opportunity to give or deny informed consent is not only a right in relation to research which children share with adults, but also respects their sense of agency as consistent with the tenets of the sociology of childhood.<sup>67</sup>

Consistent with my belief that children should be engaged as actively as possible in the research process, before beginning my research, I first talked briefly with each class about research- what research is and why one might engage in it and for what ends. I introduced to them the idea behind my study and what it is about, shared with them who will have access to the results, ensure confidentiality, and then allowed them to ask me questions in turn. At the end of this process, I discussed with them the issue of consent, and whether they would like to participate in the research activities. Even though parental consent was obtained, if any child chose not to participate in the study, I respected his/her decision.

#### 3.6.4 *Research Model*

As mentioned, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in the development of approaches to research with children that are non-hierarchical and

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<sup>67</sup> Lois. A. Weithorn & David. G. Sherer. “Children’s Involvement in Research Participation Decisions: Psychological Considerations.” In *Children as Research Subjects*, eds. Michael A. Grodin & Leonard H. Glantz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 133- 180.



collaborative as a result of developments in the sociology of childhood. As such, for my study, I developed a research model that is broadly democratic in its practice.<sup>68</sup> I am particularly interested in providing opportunities for children to engage critically with their own ideas, and, by so doing, to move their own thinking about identity forward. To do so, I allowed children to contribute to aspects of my data interpretation and analysis as a form of member checking as well as critical reflection.

### Classroom Observation

I observed the children's Social Studies lessons twice a week over the course of three weeks (six lessons in total). I chose Social Studies because it is the lesson during which teachers are most likely to integrate information related to national identity and citizenship education. During these observations, I took notes about the content of the lessons, but more importantly, I focused on children's responses to the material being taught. Some general focus points that guided my observations include: *How do (different) children respond to instruction on citizenship education? Are there instances where they seem to resist or challenge the information that is being taught to them? In what ways is this unconformity expressed? Which aspects of the curriculum lend themselves to inquiry and questioning more than others and why so?*

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<sup>68</sup> See Simon Warren, "Let's Do This Properly: Inviting Children to be Researchers." In *Researching Children's Perspectives*, eds. Ann Lewis & Geoff Lindsay, (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2000), 122-134.

Samantha Punch, "Negotiating Autonomy: Childhoods in Rural Bolivia." In *Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations*, eds. Leena Alanen & Berry Mayall, (London, Routledge-Falmer, 2001) 23-36;

Sonja Grover, "Why Won't They Listen to Us? On Giving Power and Voice to Children Participating in Social Research." *Childhood* 11, no. 1 (2004): 81-93.

### Writing/ drawing activity and individual interview<sup>69</sup>

Each child was asked to respond pictorially and in writing, to the question, “What does it mean to be Singaporean/ American?” This prompt was chosen in order to elicit the widest response from children and was designed to encourage children to think interpretively about notions of citizenship and national belonging. Children then drew a picture and at the back of the picture, described briefly why they chose to draw what they drew. I informed children that they did not necessarily have to draw a person; data from my pilot study demonstrated that children were just as likely to draw pictures of national symbols or places of interest. What is most important is the different ways in which these pictures are related to their notions of what being a citizen of their respective countries means to them.

This activity forms the foundation of my study as it establishes broadly what children associate with Singapore/ the U.S. and how they feel about it. Studies have shown that this “write and draw” strategy often enables younger children to articulate their opinions about abstract issues better than verbal responses alone.<sup>70</sup> In other words, this activity may enable children who may otherwise not speak up during their Social Studies lesson (or at all) to express themselves and their opinions about Singapore and the U.S.

Furthermore, the use of drawings in research is supported by the age appropriateness of the method- “drawing is a natural mode of expression for children age

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<sup>69</sup> Whenever children asked to keep the pictures they drew, copies were made and the originals were returned to them.

<sup>70</sup> Noreen M. Whetton & Jennifer McWhirter, J. Images and Curriculum Development in Health Education.” In *Image-based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, ed. Jon Prosser, (London: Falmer Press, 1995).

5–11. Long before youngsters can put their feelings and thoughts into words they can express both conscious and unconscious attitudes, wishes, and concerns in drawings.”<sup>71</sup>

In attachment research, drawings have been used to provide a symbolic representation of internal models of relationships while a number of studies have confirmed that children’s drawings of themselves and their families can be interpreted in relation to emotional markers of relationship quality.<sup>72</sup> These findings are particularly important to my study as this exercise is designed to allow children an opportunity to express their attachment to their country as well as an avenue to articulate their ideas about the relationship they have formed with it.

Children’s discussions of their verbal and pictorial responses is also very much of interest to me; consequently, as a follow-up activity to this exercise, I randomly picked ten pictures and conducted individual interviews with these children, asking them to talk me through their drawings and statements. Some prompts I used in this exercise (which evolved depending on children’s responses and the content of the picture):

- Can you tell me more about this picture?
- Why did you choose to draw \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is it about this picture that tells me about Singapore/ a Singaporean?
- Can you tell me more about why you wrote \_\_\_\_\_ [insert child’s written response.]

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<sup>71</sup> Gail Fury, Elizabeth A. Carlson, & Alan L. Sroufe. “Children’s Representations of Attachment Relationships in Family Drawings”. *Child Development*, 68, (1997) 1154–1164.

<sup>72</sup> Robert C. Pianta & Katie Longmaid, “Attachment-based Classifications of Children’s Family Drawings: Psychometric Properties and Relations with Children’s Adjustment in Kindergarten”. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 28 (1999), 244-255.

Sheri Madigan, Michelle Ladd, & Susan Goldberg. “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Children’s Representations of family as indicators of early attachment.” *Attachment & Human Development*, 5 (2003) 19–37.

One reason for using children's pictures and writings to anchor the interview process is that studies have shown that young children generally find *doing* something to be easier, more comfortable, and more interesting than merely talking about something that is not physically present. Part of this has to do with children's concreteness of thinking in general and to the incompatible hypothetical-verbal nature of the interview process.<sup>73</sup>

On top of asking children to talk about their pictures, I presented all the children I interviewed—both in Singapore and the U.S.-- with two scenarios. First I asked them to imagine that an alien landed in their home. I asked them what they would tell the alien about Singapore/ the United States and how they would describe their country and its people to this alien. Second, I asked the children which country they would like to live in when they grew older and to justify their choice. These strategies, taken together, provided me with a number of insights about 1) what images children associate with their home country, and 2) their relationship to these images, and by extension, the nation.

Children were not told explicitly that they will be "interviewed" as this would represent an adult controlling behavior that is inimical to research with children. Instead, I said that I would like to find out more about their drawing and writings and invited them to share their opinions with me. The interviews were semi-structured and fairly exploratory because I wanted the direction to come from the children. As Tammivaara and Scott contend in their article on children as informants, it is important that the adult interviewer "attempt to adjust to the discourse patterns presently utilized by the child informants being interviewed rather than vice versa."<sup>74</sup> Further, another reason to let the

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<sup>73</sup> William Damon. *The Social World of the Child*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977).

<sup>74</sup> Julie Tammivaara & D. Scott Enright. "On Eliciting Information: Dialogue with Child Informants." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 17 no. 4 (1986), 218- 238.

child direct the interview encounter is that children tend to identify any setting in which an adult asks a series of questions as a *lesson*.<sup>75</sup> As such, unless children are afforded greater flexibility and autonomy in terms of answering questions, the adult interviewer will be treated as a teacher figure and the interview experience becomes a classroom “game” of finding out what the teacher wants instead of an exercise in sharing own honest point of view.

Consent was continuously obtained throughout the various stages of the study, and this is especially pertinent in the interview component. I was cautious that some children were not comfortable with the power dynamics associated with being interviewed by an adult stranger; as such, I asked each randomly selected child if they would like to speak to me one-on-one;<sup>76</sup> if not, I then asked another student.

#### Re-presentation of data

The final part of the research process was a re-presentation to the children of a preliminary analysis of the research data. I facilitated a discussion of the data and my initial interpretations as form of member checking to ensure validity.<sup>77</sup> This also stemmed from a respect for children’s rights as research subjects to be made aware of how their opinions are being interpreted by the researcher. I designed this process of re-presentation to facilitate children in reflection and critical thinking around the issues raised by the research and to provide them with the opportunity to participate in the analysis.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> These interviews took place in the child’s school, but either in the hallway outside the classroom or in the teachers meeting room adjacent to the classroom. Whatever the case may be, it was in a place where children felt comfortable and least threatened.

<sup>77</sup> Miles and Huberman, 242.

### 3.6.5. *Analysis*

For analysis of the data generated by the different activities, I used a process of analytic induction, allowing the categories of analysis to arise out of the data itself rather than imposing on it my own pre-determined interpretative framework. Using the constant comparative method, children's drawings, writings, interviews, and focus group discussions were coded and organized into themes. A number of content areas emerged, and these will be described in the next chapters. Children's and teachers' names have been changed and the quotes used have been edited for length and spelling standardized to facilitate access. No other changes have been made.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Singapore

In the previous chapter, I introduced the notion of national habitus, the socially acquired dispositions and outlooks that distinguish (or is perceived to distinguish) one nationality from another. In this chapter, I propose that Singapore's national habitus—or the Singapore story of national identity—is one heavily characterized by the discourse of materialism and pragmatism. I propose that as Singapore evolved into a post-industrial society, strategies that have been implemented by the government in the face of globalization have brought about economic prosperity and political stability to the country. However, these material achievements have been attained at a cost; the focus on survivalism and economic development has engendered a growing emphasis on consumption and created a pragmatic attitude toward the collective good and self-sacrifice. Consequently, as children's responses in this chapter will demonstrate, the discourse of what national identity represents in Singapore is anchored firmly in these concerns as well. I will show that while several elements-- such as a concern with military security, language, and multiculturalism—make up the Singapore story, each of these elements are inevitably tethered to the larger discourse of materiality and pragmatism in Singapore society.

This chapter and the next (which form a thematic and analytic pairing) are structured according to different categories of national identity markers. Responses from children in both countries fell along remarkably similar lines of concerns which enabled me to group them into matching sections that will facilitate some comparisons and contrasts. Each chapter will begin with a section describing the overarching narrative of national identity in that country. Following that, I present three sections— the cultural, the historical, and the political—into which I have organized children’s ideas and opinions about nation, national identity, and citizenship.

Throughout these sections, I will discuss how my findings illuminate the theoretical frameworks I introduced in Chapter 2-- the discursive nature of national identity, children’s agency in identity formation, and the role of schools in national identity development-- particularly the extent to which they reinforce, reject, or re-configure, existing research in each area. I then conclude by bringing the various threads together and commenting on what the implications of education for national identity in young children in each country is.

#### *4.1. The Schools*

Nee An Primary School is a government-aided co-educational school which means that part of the school’s funding comes from the Nee An Kongsi, a foundation that is actively involved in educational, cultural, and welfare activities particularly for the Chinese community. The Nee An Kongsi does not dictate any aspect of the school curriculum but because of its involvement with the school, Nee An Primary does tend to attract a higher proportion of Chinese students. The main academic subjects- science,



mathematics and social studies, are taught in English, in common with all other Singapore schools. Like all public schools in Singapore, three Mother Tongue languages are offered at Nee An: Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. One class of 40 fourth-grade students was recruited from this school.

Bennett Estate Primary School is a government co-educational neighborhood school in the Eastern area of Singapore. Unlike Nee An Primary, the school is fully funded by the government and receives no extra funding from external foundations. As the name suggests, neighborhood schools serve the neighborhood within which it is located, and the composition of the school population often reflects the demography of the neighborhood. Bennett Estate Primary School is located in a district with a large proportion of Malay Singaporeans, the second largest ethnic group in the country, and Singapore's largest minority group. There is therefore, an above average enrollment of Malay students here in Bennett Estate, although Chinese students still make up the majority. Many Malay students also speak Malay at home. Just as in the case of Nee An, three Mother Tongue languages are offered here and all academic subjects are taught in English. Also, as it was with Nee An, one class of 40 fifth-grade students was recruited from Bennett Estate.

#### 4.2. *The Material Story*

National identity in Singapore—as it is conceived by schoolchildren—is one very much steeped in the discourse of the material and pragmatic, where the image of the nation is often inextricable from concerns of financial wealth, economic survival, and political stability. For instance, it was important for children to emphasize Singapore's

high standard of living. Many references were made to her efficient transportation system, high-rise buildings, and economic prosperity, which together stood for how developed a nation Singapore has become:

Serene: What was Singapore like in the past?

Jerome: Run down. Old. Smelly. Hot.

Serene: And is it very different today?

Jerome: Yes. We have air-con now! We have flats. And good transportation.

Serene: What else?

Jerome: Clean water. Very important.

[Jerome, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

This theme is expressed in the drawings as well where children drew pictures depicting the progress Singapore has made and the level of development she has now attained. The picture on the left includes renderings of Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit system, high-rise flats, an expressway, the Esplanade (Singapore's newest performance arts venue), and the Singapore Flyer- Singapore's answer to the London Eye and the largest ferris wheel in the world.



**Figure 4.1: Children's drawings of Singapore's developmental progress**

When asked to describe his drawing in words, the student, Clement, wrote:

This picture reminds me of Singapore's rapid development from a fishing port to modern Singapore.

[Clement, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian boy]

Testimony to the persistence of this sentiment and the symbols associated with it, the picture on the right captures very similar images, again of high-rise buildings and the

Esplanade. Describing his picture, Tian Yong writes

Singapore flag- red symbolises "universal brotherhood and equality of man", and white, "pervading and everlasting purity and virtue". The crescent moon "represents a young nation on the ascendant". The five stars "stand for the nation's ideals of democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality."<sup>1</sup>

Merlion- The lion represents the legendary animal that Sang Nila Utama<sup>2</sup> saw. The fish represents the ancient sea town of Temasek and Singapore's humble beginnings as a fishing village.

Tall buildings- It symbolizes Singapore a modern city.

Esplanade- It is to show people famous acts that come to Singapore.

[Tian Yong, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

It appears to be important to children to emphasize how far Singapore has come since its days as a small fishing outpost; Tian Yong was not the only student to mention this fact either in his writings or in interviews; several other children expressed this notion as well:

Singapore has changed from a fishing village to something modern. If you look at the older photographs of Singapore, you'll see that in older times, there were many trees, now there are many HDB<sup>3</sup> flats. Last time, the houses were made of wood, it was cooler because wood is an insulator. And now it's made of concrete and bricks.

[Dini, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

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<sup>1</sup> Words in quotation marks were taken verbatim from their Social Studies textbook.

<sup>2</sup> Sang Nila Utama, also known as Sri Tri Buana, was a prince from Palembang who founded ancient Singapore. The prince ruled the island from 1299 to 1347.

<sup>3</sup> Housing Development Board, Singapore's centralized housing agency responsible for providing public housing to almost 70% of Singapore's population.

I would say that Singapore wasn't always this modern. But Singapore has been thriving ever since it was a small fishing cove. Just that now that it's so modern, it's doing even better.

[Baoling, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

To some extent, these examples embody exactly what Anthony Smith describes as the pre-existing symbols, territories, and memories that make up the core of national identity. He talks about a vernacular historical culture into which citizens preternaturally tap, something the children seem to be doing. However, as I have critiqued in Chapter 2, Smith's conceptualization does not quite take into account how citizens interact with these symbols and histories. What is apparent in my study is that children do not merely evoke these representations of national identity, they are also consciously relating it to a larger discourse of material progress and economic development. Reference to the National Education messages as well as social studies curricular for both fourth and fifth grades show the extent to which this might be related to what children are exposed to via the school curriculum:

No one owes Singapore a living. We find our own way to survive and prosper, turning challenge into opportunity..

(National Education message #4)

Pupils will be able to understand that resources are scarce and have to be allocated through various mechanisms.

(Social studies Knowledge Objectives, 5<sup>th</sup> grade)

There is much evidence in children's responses that demonstrates the pride with which they associate Singapore's accomplishments. In fact, there was consistent and persistent use of superlatives when describing Singapore, especially in relation to other nations:

Serene: Can I take you and plant you in the Maldives and say that you're a Maldivian or take you and plant you in Paris and give you a French passport and say that you're French?

Baoling: No. Even if the authorities say it's OK, I'd say no way. Coz Singapore is just better in every way.

[Baoling, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

Serene: Ok, and where did you learn that people might want to invade Singapore?

Sam: Well, I just thought about it as I was thinking about how great Singapore is. Then I thought other countries would be jealous of our country so they might attack and try and take stuff from us.

[Sam, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Eurasian boy]

Jamal: I don't really want to stay in Thailand, Malaysia, or India.

Serene: Why?

Jamal: Because they're not as civilized.

Serene: Tell me what it means to be civilized.

Jamal: That means they have the knowledge, the intelligence to do things. The special power, like we have a lot of buildings.

[Jamal, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

Children see the strides Singapore has made, compared it not only to its own past but to other countries, and have actively evaluated this increasing prosperity and economic development as a positive thing for the nation. And yet there was a small minority who were concerned that the country's rapid economic development may have come at no small price. The following quotes are in response to my question about things in Singapore children would like to change if they could:

But it might be too much progress. We should slow down a bit. [*When asked how can progress be bad*] They've become so proud of themselves this might ruin Singapore.

[June, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

From being humble, some people have now become quite rude. They're not very gracious, not very polite. And I think that's because of how much progress we've made. Everyone's so proud.

[Reetha, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian girl]

This echoes the ambivalence that has been riding on the coattails of Singapore's economic development since the beginning of the 1980s. By that time, as economic and materialist orientations were fully established, some influential members in government began to notice that younger generations of Singaporeans were abandoning tradition values in favor of a more self-seeking and amoral outlook in life. Till today, debates continue over whether or not Singapore's rapid economic prosperity since independence in 1965 was achieved at the expense of a progress that could have been more oriented towards a greater sense of social consciousness and a more values-based outlook.<sup>4</sup> Further, it is worth noting at this point that the children who are more likely display caution and anxiety about Singapore's rapid economic growth prosperity—like June and Reetha—come from minority groups. I propose that their relative social and economic status relative to the Chinese engenders a level of unease that somewhat destabilizes the master narrative of what Singaporeans tell themselves about their nation and what it stands for. I will further discuss this phenomenon, its implications, and possible explanations for it in Chapter 6.

Nonetheless, what is important to take away from children's fixation with the materiality of their environment is that it symbolizes the extent to which children's personal experiences- whether a tourist attraction, a play park, recycling bins, or the national flag flying daily in school are important markers of national identity. For these children, it would seem that the capacity to identify with the nation comes not simply from atypical acts of national celebration and rituals such as national day parades or sporting events but from the routine, familiar, and ubiquitous experience of nation

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<sup>4</sup> Selvaraj Velayutham. *Responding to Globalization: Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore*. (ISEAS Publishing: Singapore, 2007): 68

throughout our everyday lives. Once again, this is Billig's notion of banal nationalism where in addition to the extraordinary rituals of nation, there also exists a form of nationalism-- the daily reproduction of beliefs and habits-- which structures everyday life in modern nations. This is symbolized not by "a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building."<sup>5</sup> In this way, a sense of living in a nation is embedded in habituated routines such as going to school and playing at a theme park. This is a less overt but nonetheless pervasive experience of the nation. Taking Billig's argument that it is important to examine how the nation is experienced and felt in everyday life, the children's responses above signal that to some extent, it is the lived experience and spatiality of Singapore that serve as a vehicle to fashion a sense of identity in and belonging to the nation, perhaps especially for children.

### 4.3. *The Cultural*

#### 4.3.1. *Language*

A particularly contentious issue that emerged from children's responses is the issue of language, specifically, of Singlish. Based on the country's lingua franca, English, this variety of English mixes English with parts of Chinese grammar and includes many Chinese, Malay, and Indian words. For many Singaporeans, Singlish has become a "badge of identity."<sup>6</sup> Even though Singlish is also spoken in neighboring countries, Singaporeans have adopted this language as perhaps their most visible national

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (Sage Publications Ltd, 1995), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Anthea Fraser Gupta, *The Step-tongue: Children's English in Singapore* (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1994), 4.

characteristic. However, the place of Singlish in Singapore culture has consistently been one of the most hotly debated issues in the country's recent history, and one that does not appear to be easily resolved in the near future. The role of language in Singapore must be seen in the context of the overall language education policy, which is shaped by the state's multiracial ideology. Language, has, of course, always been of prime importance in the politics of national homogenization in modern nation-states.<sup>7</sup> Four official languages are used in Singapore: three of them (Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil) represent ethnic diversity, and the fourth, English, is the working language and the language of science, trade, and technology. For pragmatic reasons to do with British colonial heritage and ethnic "neutrality," as well as its status as the international language of global capitalism, English was made the sole medium of instruction in schools. As such, despite the pervasive use of this indigenous dialect, the government has been committed to promoting and maintaining the use of what has become known as Standard Singaporean English across society and in the process, discouraged widespread speaking of the local vernacular. As Peterson makes clear, "although Singlish is the closest thing to a truly indigenous, national language it is considered too colloquial for use in business or education..."<sup>8</sup> However, although the state has been able to control the official use (especially in the media) of Singlish, it can be heard in wide circulation among Singaporeans of all levels of education, on the street, among friends, and in the popular

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<sup>7</sup> Annelise Kramer-Dahl. "Reading the "Singlish Debate": Construction of a Crisis of Language Standards and Language Teaching in Singapore." *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 2, no. 3 (2003): 159-190.

<sup>8</sup> William Peterson, *Theater and the Politics of Culture in Contemporary Singapore* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 58-59.



culture. In fact, it is considered by many younger people as the language marking their Singaporeanness.<sup>9</sup>

In my study, children's responses mirror this tension between official policy and popular practice. On the one hand, some children believe that speaking too much Singlish will not only affect one's proficiency in English but also adversely affect Singapore's image in relation to the rest of the English-speaking world:

Minah: Because instead of talking normally, in good English, they don't really speak English but they mix. They'll use a little Mandarin, a little Malay, and a little English.

Serene: How do you feel about Singlish? Is it a good thing?

Minah: No, when they speak Singlish, their English will get bad and they will mix things up. And during their exams, what if they accidentally write a Malay word in an English paper?

[Minah, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

I think speaking Singlish is not a good thing. People from other countries will not be able to understand us and how are we going to maintain our world-class image?

[Tyrone, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

Tyrone's unease about Singlish in particular is tied to the Singapore government's larger anxieties about globalization and modernization. The official stance is that Singlish is a threat to the nation's competitive advantage in the global marketplace; as such, educators, parents and the lay public have constructed Singlish as a less prestigious dialect associated with low social status. Tyrone clearly subscribes to this version of the story.

However, on the other hand, there were children who reject this discursive construction; they argue instead that Singlish should not be set aside as the poor cousin to Standard Singapore English, but instead, embraced as a symbol of Singapore's uniquely multiracial population. One child felt strongly enough about this issue to use it as the

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<sup>9</sup> Beng Huat Chua, "Culture, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Singapore," In *Trajectories, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, ed. K. H. Chen (London: Routledge, 1998), 200.

theme of her drawing (See Image 5). For her, speaking Singlish should be a source of national pride precisely because it is an amalgamation of Singapore's several ethnic languages:

Zaheela: It shows our unity... like maybe this language was developed a very long time ago when the Malays, Chinese and Europeans used to work together. Maybe they developed this language and now their great-grandchildren like us are using it too.

Serene: Why did you highlight Singlish?

Zaheela: Because I speak it sometimes and it's kind of a unique and common language between all of the Singaporeans.

Serene: How do you feel about Singlish? I feel kind of happy because we can all communicate in one language instead of proper English. We can be more comfortable with our own dialects and all.

[Zaheela, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]



Figure 4.2: Use of Singlish in Singapore

Figure 4.2 highlights the most ubiquitous discourse particles<sup>10</sup> used in Singlish, “lah”, “leh,” and “hor.” When probed further about why she drew what she drew, Zaheela emphasized that she wanted to show how Singlish is a “mish-mash” of English and the various second-languages spoken in Singapore. I then asked her to re-express the sentences in the word bubbles into Standard Singapore English and her response speaks to the central place of Singlish in her conception of Singaporean multiculturalism in particular and Singaporean national identity in general.<sup>11</sup>

It's not the same saying these things in proper English. Singlish is just a Singaporean thing. It represents all the races. Like together. We speak proper English when we're in school to our teachers and principal, and outside to important people like the President. But to our friends and at home, Singlish is more comfortable. Like more natural. It's a part of you. So I feel like it's very strange to say these things like properly.

[Zaheela, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

In so doing, Zaheela is showing that she will not be passively socialized into just *one* conception of the role of Singlish in Singapore society and that depending on context, Singlish can be used successfully. She has reconfigured the secondary position of Singlish in Singapore and elevated it not only to the position of national parlance but also as an organic and natural symbol of what being Singaporean means.

When English was instituted as the national language of Singapore over Singlish or any of the other second-languages, it was a decidedly political decision that signified the importance of language as a significant symbol of collective identity. This can be thought of as the *public* status of a national language- how important it is to identify the

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<sup>10</sup> In linguistics, a discourse particle is a lexeme or particle which has no direct semantic meaning in the context of a sentence, having rather a pragmatic function: it serves to indicate the speaker's attitude, or to structure their relationship to other participants in a conversation. Discourse particles are primarily a feature of spoken language.

nation and draw political boundaries around and within it. However, as Zaheela's picture and response suggest, there is also a *personal* dimension of language that must be considered, the extent to which children actively evaluate and judge the language they speak—and that is spoken around them—as essential to their own conceptions of self- and national identity.

This puts schools in a delicate position: on the one hand, as an extension of the centralized ministry of education and hence a form of state infrastructure, schools are expected to extend and maintain the national language policy. The informal use of Singlish in Singapore's schools is strongly discouraged due to concerns that it will impede the acquisition of 'good English', the effective development of students' literacy skills, and the quality of their overall education. However, on the other hand, despite this disparaging view of Singlish as a stigmatized variety of English and explicit official disapproval, the presence of the vernacular in the classroom continues to be robust. Taken together with studies that show how Singlish is growing in importance as a symbol of social identity and cohesion in Singapore in general,<sup>12</sup> schools are in a position to capitalize on the use of Singlish in the school to nurture national identity from the ground up, rather than impose it based on language policy from the top down. Existing research has suggested various ways in which teachers can constructively use Singlish to 1) facilitate curriculum access for poorer English speakers, 2) manage classroom discourse, and 3) build interpersonal relations in the classroom. I suggest there is also room for looking at the extent to which Singlish—rather than be seen as a detriment and stigma—can be harnessed as a rich resource for national identity development as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Rani Rubdy, "Creative destruction: Singapore's Speak Good English movement," *World Englishes* 20, no. 3 (2001): 341-355.

#### 4.3.2. *Racial harmony*

Another aspect of Singapore's culture that was often evoked in this master narrative is that of her multi-racial population. Children's drawings and responses reveal the centrality of racial harmony in children's conception of Singaporean national identity. Children were more likely to draw people as representations of the country compared to buildings or symbols. In these pictures of people (n=39), there was *never* a single Singaporean but always four figures, representing the four official races of the nation (see Figure 4.3). This may suggest the extent to which citizenship education has made Singaporean identity inextricable from the nation's multi-racial character. Asked why she drew four Singaporeans in her picture, one student replied, "Because Singapore usually has four races, not really just one."

When asked to talk about why multiracialism is so important to the nation, children's response reflect Singapore's consistent obsession with survival as a small nation with limited resources:

Being four races gives us strength to withstand anything. If we can work together as one, then even though we don't have any natural resources, our people resources is strong and this can make us compete better in the world class.

[Aisha, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

The close relationship children have constructed between racial harmony is particularly disturbing for its utilitarianism. It seems as if children view peaceful race relations less as an end in itself than as a means towards economic competitiveness. This issue will be further elaborated in the following section where I show how children's anxieties about racial harmony are in fact deeply rooted in historical events, and its larger relationship with the discourse of materiality and pragmatism.

Reference to the National Education messages as well as social studies curricular for both fourth and fifth grades show the extent to which the teaching of racial integration and national unity are explicit objectives.

We must preserve racial and religious harmony. We value our diversity and are determined to stay a united people.

(National Education message #2)

Pupils will be able to appreciate the cultural diversity of the different ethnic communities living in Singapore.

(Social studies Attitudes and Values Objectives, 4<sup>th</sup> grade)

Pupils will be able to appreciate the contributions made by immigrants and Singapore leaders in the 1950s.

(Social studies Attitudes and Values Objectives, 5<sup>th</sup> grade)

Some scholars, however, see the focus on the *four* races as an essentialization of Singaporean identity into too-neatly demarcated social identities as represented by the official ethnic groups in Singapore: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others (or CMIO as they are sociologically termed). Talking with reference to Singapore's housing and labor policies, they argue that this is an "Orientalist" classificatory system used to discipline the social body into an essentialized category based on one's "race" when Singapore was under British colonial rule.<sup>13</sup> I believe that this has educational repercussions as well; while the CMIO paradigm demonstrates the extent to which Singaporean students have almost internalized the multi-racial nature of the country, if left unchecked, I am

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<sup>13</sup> Nirmala Purushotam, "Disciplining Difference: 'Race' in Singapore". In *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, ed. Joel S. Kahn (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 1998).

Aaron Koh. "Global Flows of Foreign Talent: Identity Anxieties in Singapore's Ethnoscape. *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 18, no. 2: 230-256.

concerned that the education system, rather than encouraging a more inclusive perspective of ethnic groupings-- especially in light of growing immigration and diversity-- will in fact perpetuate a colonial construction, and therefore an *exclusive* notion of who (and where from) can be considered official citizens of Singapore. What happens when the flow of immigration disrupts the somewhat exclusive or state-sanctioned identities? Will students be able to see beyond the CMIO paradigm to include these new citizens in a reconfiguration of what a Singaporean identity will be? Further, with regards to race relations within Singapore itself, the continuing emphasis on CMIO in government forms and other official business, over time, may heighten the “we” vs. “you” reference points in inter-ethnic interactions.



Figure 4.3: The four races in Singapore

Children's responses in this regard do suggest that government officials, policymakers, school leaders, and teachers may want to consider a rethinking of how race and ethnicity are presented to students in the face of Singapore's evolving demographics.

#### 4.4. *The Historical*

Children's keen awareness of racial harmony and multiculturalism is in fact deeply rooted in the past. In particular, the racial riots of 1964 emerged as an important watershed event in children's conception of national identity. The riots were actually a series of riots that took place in Singapore during two separate periods in July and September between the Chinese and Malays. As the first and last time the two races have come to heads with each other, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and arrests, this event has since been used as a rhetorical device and a spectered threat of what would be if racial harmony is not maintained. Consequently, although children are talking about multiculturalism and race relations in the present, their anxieties and concerns have roots in history:

If the four races can't live together, Singapore would not be like this so peaceful and Singapore would have race riots like before.

[Amil, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

Another student was careful to mention several times in his interview that to maintain peace and prosperity in the nation, the different races must practice tolerance and good will towards each other:

We learned in Social Studies about the racial riots and we cannot repeat what happened in the past. If we want to have peace, the Indians, Malays, Chinese and Eurasians must continue to get along like they do now. They



must respect each other and not think about fighting and rioting. Our economy and all depend on having peace.

[Lian, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

It appears that children think about racial harmony as a function of national security. For these young Singaporeans, a multi-racial population is not just a demographic fact but a defense imperative. For many of them, racial harmony is critical to Singapore's political stability and survival because of what they have been told regarding the devastating effects of racial unrest in the past. I suggest that these responses demonstrate the extent to which Singapore's "survivalist ideology"<sup>14</sup> has become ingrained in even the youngest of her citizens. The argument made is that despite Singapore's remarkable economic and social achievements, there still remains a consistent obsession with its history of racial conflict, and survival as a small nation with a precarious position in the region:

As the past was wrought with ethnic tensions and corruption, Singapore's leaders elevated the concepts of "multiracialism" (which includes "multilingualism" and "multireligiosity") and "meritocracy" as the two key founding myths of the Singapore state, both of which incorporate the futuristic characteristics of the Singapore story. The leaders considered these principles essential for Singapore's economic success. As a predominantly Chinese city in the heart of Malayan countries just between Indonesia to the south and Malaysia to the north, any overt favoritism of the Chinese would have generated great difficulties with these important trading partners and also (in the case of Malaysia) water suppliers. The island state was just too small to survive on its own.<sup>15</sup>

In schools, this anxiety is reflected in the commemoration of key historical events, such as Total Defense Day (which marks the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942) and Racial Harmony Day (which marks the day in 1964 when racial riots broke out in Singapore). These events were designed to remind children not to take Singapore's

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<sup>14</sup> Selvaraj Velayutham, "Affect, Materiality, and the Gift of Social Life in Singapore," *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 19, no. 1 (2004): 27-45.

<sup>15</sup> Stephan Ortman, "Singapore: The Politics of Inventing National Identity," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 28, no. 4 (2009): 30.

present economic, political, and social stability for granted, and to inculcate the sense that this peace can be easily lost if its citizens take a breather or lose the driving energy of the poorer past. As made explicit in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies syllabus, one of the knowledge objectives is to highlight the theme of “Scarcity, Choices and Resources.”

Interestingly, with regards to notions of multi-racialism, there is a spectrum of responses as to whether or not children (re)negotiate the lessons they learn in school, ranging from passive acceptance to cautious criticism. In particular, several children were able to compare the information they are taught in social studies to the realities of Singaporean life. For example, while textbooks and their teachers constantly emphasize how racially integrated Singapore has become since independence in 1965, children articulated their skepticism that this was truly the case in reality. Many pointed out the persistence of the historical racial enclaves in the country and how the different races are more likely to interact within themselves than with those of other ethnic groups.

I know we need to have racial harmony and we have to learn it in school because our parents don't teach us all the time like our teachers. Miss Nora told us that during Social Studies, especially after what happened during the race riots last time. [*After being prompted about where she had learned about the race riots*] Miss Nora told us about the race riots and how the Malays and Chinese were fighting. I think we have some racial harmony now, but you can see that the Chinese still hang out with the Chinese and the Malays stay mostly in the same place as each other. So there's still not a lot of harmony there like what we learn in school. It's different.

[Evan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore during World War Two represents another historical event which children harnessed as an important marker of national identity. As the last major war fought on Singaporean soil and also the only time in Singapore's short history where she was subject to such violent and abusive colonialism, the war and the

Occupation remain haunting reminders of Singapore's geographical and defense vulnerability. Just as the racial riots have been used a reminder to children of the fragility of race relations, the Japanese Occupation has also been operationalized by the government—and by extension, schools—to inculcate in children a keen appreciation for military preparedness:

Bonnie: It happened quite a few years ago when Singapore was taken by surprise. We were not prepared for the attack by the Japanese who took over many things and killed and tortured many people. We cannot let that happen again. We cannot be complacent like in the past.

Serene: So that do you think we can do so that we will not be taken by surprise like we were before?

Bonita: Yeah, we have to build an army that is always prepared to defend us and we have to work as a country together so that history will not repeat itself.

[Bonnie, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Eurasian girl]

The desire to prevent this dark period in Singapore's history from happening again was a particular concern of the boys in my study. On top of a preoccupation with all things military and defense-related—a topic I will discuss in greater detail in the next section—many boys talked about wanting to protect Singapore with specific reference to the Japanese Occupation:

Serene: Why do you feel like you need to protect Singapore?

Brian: Because I don't want it to be like the Japanese Occupation again where the British didn't really help us and we didn't have enough soldiers of our own. We Singaporeans need to defend ourselves or our comfortable lives will be taken away from us.

[Brian, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Eurasian boy]

Hussein: If we don't do N.S.\* and become operationally ready to defend Singapore, then what's going to happen if the Japanese Occupation is going to happen again?

Serene: What makes you think that something like the Japanese Occupation is going to happen again?

Hussein: I don't know. Because you never know. Who knows what might happen tomorrow. Maybe our neighbors will get jealous of us and try to take over like the Japanese. We must always be ready. Always be prepared. We need to keep peace in Singapore. We need to protect our lifestyles and our prosperity. If we don't do it, who is going to do it?

*\*National Service*

[Hussein, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

Two issues stand out from these examples- one, we once again see children evoking the discourse of survivalism and pragmatism- defending Singapore from a potential enemy is imperative because children do not want the lifestyle with which they have grown up to be compromised. Hussein in particular gives equal weight to Singapore's wealth as he does national peace. Second, the boys' comments demonstrate how they have constructed for themselves a story where the job of protecting Singapore must and should be borne by Singaporeans. This common history seems to imbue children with a shared sense of responsibility for safe-guarding the nation's assets.

Singapore's government has long acknowledge the constructive "use" of history for the purposes of nation-building: the explicit use of historical events for myth-making purposes. The infusing of the history curriculum with explicit National Education messages are prime examples. In the perception of Singapore's leaders, history has its proper use not only for the present but also for the future. "To understand the present and anticipate the future", Lee Kuan Yew explains, "one must know enough of the past, enough to have a sense of the history of a people".<sup>16</sup> It is believed that the past should be studied," not with a view to resurrecting the past but with a view to helping us shape the

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<sup>16</sup> Kuan Yew Lee, "History Is Not Made the Way it is Written." *Speeches: A Monthly Collection of Ministerial Speeches* 3, no. 8 (February 1980), 7.

future so that it better fits in with the facts, new realities and new *needs*.”<sup>17</sup>. In other words, in the minds of Singapore’s leaders, history legitimizes the ethos of survival.

#### 4.5. The Political

##### 4.5.1. Defense

My analysis suggests that a large percentage of the children in my study exhibit a pronounced insecurity disproportionate to the country’s prevailing political, economic and social stability. Children appear to be acutely concerned with national defense and a citizen’s role in protecting the nation. This is demonstrated starkly by the sheer number of pictorial representations of the military and/ or war scenarios (n=20).



**Figure 4.4: Children’s images of war and the military**

<sup>17</sup> S. Rajaratnam, “The Uses and Abuses of the Past.” *Speeches: A Monthly Collection of Ministerial Speeches* 8, no. 2 (Mar-Apr 1984), 30.

In particular, their responses revolve heavily around the impact the racial riots of the 1960s just prior to Singapore's independence.<sup>18</sup> Children were also keenly aware of Singapore's venerability as a geographically small country.

Ponz: I will help them in the war. Aid them. Help them fight.

Serene: And do you think it's important for all Singaporeans to do?

Ponz: Yes. Because if you don't, then who else is going to protect our country? We have to take care of our country and not start riots. Just make it peaceful.

[Ponz, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

If you don't protect Singapore well, all of these [economy, education, clean water] are secondary. If we have this, then we can also have that. We must have racial harmony and no riots.

[Roger, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

We have to stand up for ourselves. We are Singaporeans. If we take out all our army and all that, our enemies will see our weak defenses and take over. You can barely find us on the map. We're a little dot.<sup>19</sup>

[Lionel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

I suggest that children's apparent anxiety over national security and defense issues may have been influenced by National Education (NE). In particular, two of the six NE messages deserve note here:

- 1) *No one owes Singapore a living. It must find its own way to survive and prosper.*
- 2) *Singaporeans themselves must defend Singapore. No one else is responsible for the country's security and well-being.*

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<sup>18</sup> The 1964 Race Riots were a series of riots that took place in Singapore during two separate periods in July and September between the Chinese and Malays.

<sup>19</sup> In a 1998 Asian Wall Street Journal article, then Indonesian President B.J. Habibie created a stir by calling Singapore a "little red dot." That comment was not only a reference to the city-state's size- a mere 648 square kilometers, but also at its then 3.5 million people, who are overwhelmingly ethnically Chinese in a region that is predominantly Muslim. Although originally used in a disparaging manner, it has come to be used by both Singaporean politicians and ordinary citizens with pride and a sense of the nation's success despite its physical limitations.

I argue that this is Singapore's survivalist ideology at work once again. At the center of these two NE messages is the notion that Singapore is continually under threat and that this status of perpetual peril demands that her people maintain a constant state of vigilance and caution. Some may argue that this symbolizes the state's utilization of the "crisis motive", using education in general, and NE in particular to highlight the relatively small size of the city-state, the scarcity of natural resources, and its location within "enemy territory" (a Chinese city surrounded by Malay states), among other threats, thus generating a widespread and chronic sense of anxiety. We are reminded once more that one of the objectives of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum is "Scarcity and Choice." With regards to nationalism theory, one could argue that this persistent theme is in effect a narrative constructed by the state to create and preserve unity and national identity in a multi-cultural nation through a sense of common crisis. The creation and maintenance of national myths is one of the tenets of civic nationalism, where people are united less by a shared ethnic history but by a common commitment to a shared set of political practices and values and an investment in myths constructed—or "invented", to use the words of Anderson—to sustain the "imagined community" of the nation.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.5.2. *Birth place*

The idea of place of origin—where one is born or comes from—was seen by some of the children as a significant and immutable source of national identity. In the interviews, approximately 10% of children defined Singaporeanness in terms of birth

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<sup>20</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York Verso, 1991.

and/or parentage. While it was not seen as an exclusive aspect of national identity and citizenship, it was obvious that it is considered a salient indicator of Singaporeanness:

- Serene: You say you would like to move to Japan when you grow up. Will you then love Japan as much as you love Singapore?  
Huiling: It's a different kind of love.  
Serene: What do you mean?  
Huiling: Maybe I'm not used to Japan. Because I was born in Singapore, not in Japan. From young, I've lived in Singapore. Because I was born here, I have the culture here, so it's first in my heart. I am Singaporean first.
- [Huiling, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

This became an issue when I asked the children if they could change their national identity by moving to another country. Most felt that this would not happen:

- Serene: So why is it that you can't just take an Australian passport and move to Australia? Doesn't that make you an Australian?  
Adir: But I'm born in Singapore. I'm a Singapore citizen.  
Serene: So is being born in a country very important? That makes you a citizen?  
Adir: Yah. You cannot just move there and live there. Then it's like you're a visitor.  
Serene: Even if you have an Australian passport?  
Adir: Yah.
- [Adir, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

#### 4.5.3. *Citizenship*

The issue of birthplace and parentage was tightly related to ideas about citizenship. In this regard, children had a wide-range of responses and had some very strong opinions about what the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are. A useful heuristic framework to make sense of this spectrum is Westheimer and Kahne's Kinds of Citizens typology.<sup>21</sup> This framework was designed to align well with prominent theoretical perspectives on citizenship and citizenship education and highlights important differences in the ways

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<sup>21</sup> Joel Westheimer & Joe Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237- 269.



that educators conceive of democratic educational aims. Each vision of citizenship—*the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen*--reflects a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals.

For many Singaporean children in my study, citizenship is first and foremost an emotional connection to the nation as well as a source of pride. Here are some responses when I asked them to define what being a citizen of a country means:

A citizen of a country means that you are a person of that country and you are proud to be a citizen of a country.

[Linda, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian girl]

In order to be a citizen, you actually have to feel for the country. You can't just say I have the passport and I can just fly there and live there. You actually have to have the memories and the feelings that come with it.

[Baoling, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

If you are a citizen of a country, from my opinion, it means that you belong to that country. So like say someone gave me a choice to have an American passport, I'd rather go there and just have a permanent residence than become a citizen there. Being a citizen means I really want to be there, means I'm migrating there and leaving Singapore forever. Being a permanent resident is okay if I'm staying there for a few years, like five years, but I'll still come back to Singapore, my homeland.

[Patricia, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Eurasian girl]

For these children, citizenship is an immutable emotional attachment to the nation and not something that can be easily (re)negotiated through politics or policies.

Other children highlighted duties that must be fulfilled with citizenship, such as voting, paying taxes, and defending it in times of crisis:

Bonita: Follow the law. Pay taxes. Work. Try hard to be a Singapore citizen. They will have to defend Singapore...

Serene: What else makes a person a Singaporean? Apart from being born here and having to defend?

Bonita: I think they should also take care of Singapore and live together in harmony with other people. [During war] I think if there's war, I think I would help the soldiers in bring bandages and medicine to cure them or something.

[Bonita, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

To be a citizen of a country is to protect the country very well and take care of the country. And let the country be proud of their people.

[Cindy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

To be a citizen means you must vote.

[Rong, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

This point became particularly striking when interviewing a permanent resident who had just migrated to Singapore from China. When asked why he would choose to fulfill his National Service duty even though he is not bound to as a permanent resident, he answered:

My mother asked me to. And because you must do something for Singapore. Singapore has given me an education and so I need to do something to repay Singapore.

[Guorong, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

In general, it would seem that children's responses fall into what Westheimer and Kahne term *personally responsible citizens*. Children's responses suggest that for them, being a citizen is about being personally responsible for what happens within their community and fulfilling some core legal and social obligations such as abiding the law and paying taxes. Analyzing the data, I did not identify examples of responses that would fall into the categories of either *participatory citizens* or *justice-oriented citizens*. While Westheimer and Kahne do not suggest that these are cumulative typologies, they do highlight the limits of personal responsibility. They propose that this emphasis is an inadequate response to the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry. Critics note that too great a focus on individual character and behavior may obscure the need for collective action and greater social awareness, that personal responsibility alone distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systemic solutions, and

that volunteerism and kindness can sometimes merely an attempt to avoid politics and policy.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the visions of obedience and patriotism that are often and increasingly associated with the personally responsible citizen can be at odds with democratic goals. As Westheimer and Kahne write:

Indeed, government leaders in a totalitarian regime would be as delighted as leaders in a democracy if their young citizens learned the lessons put forward by many of the proponents of personally responsible citizenship: Don't do drugs; show up at school; show up at work; give blood; help others during a flood; recycle; pick up litter; clean up a park; treat old people with respect. These are desirable traits for people living in a community. But they are not about democratic citizenship.<sup>23</sup>

To the extent that emphasis on these character traits detracts from other important democratic priorities, it may actually hinder rather than make possible democratic participation and change.

What this means for citizenship educators in Singapore is perhaps to question whether there is a need to refocus curricular goals and look beyond a personally responsibility framework for citizenship education. For a nation like Singapore, should schools expand instructional activities to foster commitments in civic participation and social justice as well as develop the capacities to fulfill those commitments? In the context of Singapore, should teachers design programs that support civic participation and promote students' capacities for critical analysis and social change as well as nurture the personally responsible paradigm already in place?

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Barber. *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992);

Harry C. Boyte. "Community Service and Civic Education." *Phi Delta Kappan* 72, no. 10 (1991): 765-767; Joel Westheimer and Joe Kahne. "Service Learning Required- But What Exactly Do Students Learn?" *Education Week* 42 (2000).

Joe Kahne and Joel Westheimer. "In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan* 77, no. 9 (1991): 593-599.

<sup>23</sup> Westheimer & Kahne (2004), 244.

#### 4.5.4. Government

Just as children had varied notions of what citizenship entails, they also possess diverse ideas of what government is and does. I argue that children's views about power, politics, and government plays an important role in their development of national identity insofar as it crystallizes the place of the state in children's attachment to the nation. I demonstrate that children's perceptions of government fall along a spectrum- on one end, the government is seen as an abstract entity that exercises power in important but inexplicable ways; and on the other, the government is seen as having very specific and concrete responsibilities to fulfill. The first notion of government is mostly related to power and children whose responses fall in this category seem to have only a vague idea of how governmental power is exerted:

- Serene: So who are these authorities in the government?  
Baoling: They're like the President, the Prime Minister, those people in the Parliament, some of them who sit in court. Or some of the ministers who go to the NDP (National Day Parade). They sit in the front row in the VIP seats.  
Serene: And why is the government important?  
Baoling: They get things done- the President tells his subordinates what to do and the subordinates will carry them out.  
Serene: And what things does the government do?  
Baoling: I'm not sure. Because a lot of things the Parliament and the authorities choose it. We the normal people have just to go along with it.

[Baoling, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

- Cathy: I drew the People's Action Party<sup>24</sup> sign because I think it's very important to Singapore and without the people who are in the party, then I don't think we would be where we are now.  
Serene: What have they done to make the country the way it is now?  
Cathy: Well, I don't know much about it. I just know they have helped Singapore a lot.

[Cathy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

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<sup>24</sup> The People's Action Party is the leading political party in Singapore. It has been the city-state's ruling political party since 1959.

For these children, it is evident that the government is a very important part of Singapore and an entity with which they associate a sense of Singaporeanness; however, there seems to be a lack of awareness in terms of what exactly the government does and by extension, how the government is related to Singapore in general.

Conversely, there are children for whom the government performs very specific function; for them, the primary purpose of the government is to ensure that citizens are safe and secure, and that their needs are satisfactorily met:

Helmi: I drew a picture of the PAP sign because the government's been taking care of Singapore for many years. And they've been doing it very well.

Serene: How do you know that they've been doing it very well? What can you see?

Helmi: Because so far, there hasn't been any riots or war. And no one has been on strike for the past few years. The PAP keeps us safe.

[Helmi, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy]

In other countries, the government does not listen to the people, but in Singapore, the government listens to us and takes care of us. Like provides jobs and schools. And upgrading the flats<sup>25</sup> so that there are lifts on every floor.

[Andrea, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl, on why she chose to remain in Singapore]

One of the best things about Singapore is that the government gives us things that we want.

[Bonita, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl, on her parents voting for the ruling People's Action Party at the last general elections]

On this end of the spectrum, the government is seen as the provider of physical safety and material comfort. Unwittingly, it is a view of the government that is almost paternalistic.

This set of findings reveals an important facet that underpins national identification in

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<sup>25</sup> "Upgrading" is short for Main Upgrading Program, or MUP, which was formally launched in July 1990, initiating a massive physical upgrading exercise for the thousands of flats built by the Housing and Development Board in Singapore.

Singapore. In some ways it supports Chua Beng Huat's reading that national identity construction in Singapore has been largely predetermined by economic discourse.

He argues:

There is a certain measure of pride in being part of an incorruptible system which is efficacious in generating economic growth, in improving material consumption for all, maintaining a clean and efficient city and, maintaining social stability and public security.<sup>26</sup>

Further, I would like to propose that just as “scarcity and survival” is a myth constructed to sustain the imagined community of the nation, in the absence of alternative symbols of national identity, for children, public facilities provided by the state have evolved into symbols of nationhood. Such things together represent a nation: the covered walkways leading to bus-stops, the landscaped streets and gardens, the constant and efficient public works and urban renewal projects, the high-tech transport system, the modern road system, the well-funded and high-level educational institutions, etc. These facilities provide comfort, security, a sense of familiarity, and the feeling of being at “home”, but have also come to symbolically represent the nation.

This belies a more fundamental issue related to the resources upon which national identity is anchored and built in Singapore. Based on children’s writings and interview responses, it would seem that while most students are quick to declare their love for Singapore and their pride at being Singaporean, this sense of national belonging and patriotism is largely framed in the materiality and social modernity of everyday life in urban Singapore. As my analysis of the data suggests, Singaporean children are quick to

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<sup>26</sup> Beng Huat Chua "Racial Singaporeans: Absence after the Hyphen". In *Southeast Asian Identities*, ed. Joel S. Kahn, pp. 28-50. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998b.

highlight Singapore's comfortable and clean environment, modern conveniences, high standard of living, and economic and political stability.

Singapore has good jobs which you can work as. There are no homeless people because there are nice flats to live in.

[Bonita, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay]

I still want to live in Singapore when I grow up. Because it's where I was born. And I grew up and was bred here. And I have lots of memories in Singapore and also I think that Singapore is a very good place for security. There's no tsunami or tornadoes that happen. And for the kids, the education here is very good also.

[Ailing, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

Serene: Why else would you choose to live in Singapore as opposed to anywhere else?

Neil: Because it is very comfortable. We get our own house, can work and earn money

[Neil, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

It would seem that to some extent, their sense of belonging to Singapore is based on material comforts and the standard of living. They are seen as an integral component of being Singaporean and have come to be conventionally associated with the idea of "Singaporeanness". This replicates findings from Velayutham's study which focused on the discourse of Singaporean adults gathered from an Internet discussion forum, an e-mail survey, and a newspaper report.<sup>27</sup> In this study, he found that Singaporean adults internalized the government's frequent efforts to statistically measure Singapore's "successes". He argues that performance-based indicators (economic, financial, and social) and Singapore's comparative ranking in the world in terms of trade, gross national product, foreign reserves, busiest sea-port and airports, and the standard of living are regularly promoted to the public as measures of Singapore's achievement and status in

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<sup>27</sup> Velayutham, 2004.

the world. He ascribes his findings to public programs that focus on efficiency, cleanliness, and comfort, and of how "world-class" and modern Singapore is. He writes:

These indicators serve as more than markers of achievement; they have generated amongst Singaporeans a deep sense of pride and provide a point of identification with the practical, material realm of Singapore.<sup>28</sup>

#### *4.6. The Role of the School in National Identity Formation*

However, while Velayutham attributes this to governmental efforts that have consistently and persistently promoted economic development, home-ownership, and a high standard of living and modern facilities, I argue that children are less susceptible to the effects of these public programs and policy initiatives. Instead, I suggest that the reason why Singaporean children, too, seem to see Singaporeanness and being Singaporean in practical and material terms is due to what they are exposed to via the school curriculum, particularly in social studies. Based on the published Social Studies curriculum used by all teachers in Singapore, the aims of the social studies syllabus are to enable pupils to:

1. understand the issues that affect the socio-economic development, the governance and the future of Singapore;
2. learn from experiences of other countries to build and sustain a politically viable, socially cohesive and economically vibrant Singapore;
3. develop citizens who have empathy towards others and who will participate responsibly and sensibly in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society;
4. have a deep sense of shared destiny and national identity.<sup>29</sup>

Themes 1 and 2 are particularly pertinent in light of children's responses insofar as they require teachers to emphasize Singapore's social and economic development. These

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Education, Singapore. Social Studies Syllabus (Primary Level). Curriculum Planning and Development Division (2001).



objectives translated vividly into classroom practice during two of my observations. In the fifth-grade classroom, the topic of the day was World War Two and the Japanese occupation of Singapore. A substantial portion of the lesson was devoted to talking about how harsh life was during the Occupation and how that compares to the comforts enjoyed by Singaporeans today:

Remember what we talked about last week? How difficult were things during the Japanese Occupation? There was no food, we had to have food and water rationing and people were eating uncooked sweet potato from the ground. Rice was rare and every grain of rice mattered. Unlike today, some of you are throwing rice down the sink like it's nothing. Look around us now- we have plenty of everything. No one complains about not having enough food or water. Singapore has really come a long way since then and we should be proud.

[Miss Nora, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher]

While Miss Nora also discussed other issues related to the war including the role of the British and life after the Japanese Occupation, the bulk of the lesson centered on having children brainstorm the various ways in which the material and practical life of Singapore was disrupted during the Occupation and juxtaposing that to the quality of life they now enjoy.

This juxtaposition was made even more explicit during my observation of the fourth-grade classroom. The topic for the week was Chinatown and the teacher, Mrs. Rani, had children compare modes of transportation in the 1900s in Chinatown to the transportation common in Singapore in 2008. Using their textbooks as aids, children were able to identify antiquated transportation systems like bullock carts, rickshaws, *sampans*<sup>30</sup>. To these, they compared cars, motorcycles, and airplanes. As a discussion point, Mrs. Rani asked the children to think about the process by which Singapore

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<sup>30</sup> A sampan is a relatively flat-bottomed Chinese wooden boat from 3.5 to 4.5 m (approximately twelve to fifteen feet) long.

achieved the level of development that has made modern transportation possible. She also asked them to brainstorm what some of the advantages and disadvantages are of Singapore's present transportation system. The only disadvantage children could identify was increased pollution; the advantages though, were many and uncannily similar from child to child:

Even though Singapore is a small island, it had made a lot of improvements in defense, economic, and transportation. This shows that even though we are small, we are powerful.

[Weijie, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy]

We can now get from here to there faster. The MRT<sup>31</sup> is so fast and efficient. This is one of the many things Singapore has accomplished even though it's not a big country.

[Anita, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl]

It's very convenient to go anywhere now. Not like last time. Now, everything is so advanced and modern. We are so successful in developing.

[Minyi, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl]

Evidently, to these fourth-graders, indicators of modernity such as a good transportation system, a clean environment, an orderly society, and an all-round high standard of living, serve as more than markers of achievement; they generate a deep sense of pride and provide a point of identification with the practical, material realm of Singapore, which have come to function as symbolic markers of national belonging and identity. The persistence of these symbols is so trenchant that one might venture to say that in light of her young history and multi-racial immigrant population, this sense of belonging to Singapore is all the more powerful because there are few alternative national myths and symbols of identity that transcend ethnic boundaries. And it appears that the social studies curriculum contributes some degree to this process by stating as one of its major

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<sup>31</sup> The Mass Rapid Transit is a rapid transit system that forms the backbone of the railway system in Singapore, spanning the entire city-state.

objectives the teaching of Singapore's successes in the economic and developmental arenas.

However, this is not to suggest too direct a relationship between the published objectives and children's ideas. It must be acknowledged that the Social Studies lessons I observed were the product of *choices* that the teachers, Miss Nora and Mrs. Rani had made. They must be recognized as active agents in interpreting the benchmarks. As Deborah Ball and David Cohen argue in their discussion about the interaction between teachers and the curriculum:

teachers work with their own understanding of the material, which shapes their interpretations of what the central ideas are, how they hear, evaluate, and respond to students' ideas, and how they decide how to focus and frame the material for students.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, while the curriculum is an important framework through which to view children's responses, I would be remiss to omit teachers' *enactment* of the curriculum as an important component of what children are exposed to in school. One could possibly envision the possibility that in the hands of other teachers, Themes 1 and 2 of the Social Studies curriculum may be interpreted differently and the material aspect of the Japanese Occupation and Singapore's development throughout history overlooked or downplayed instead of highlighted.

And yet as it stands, one cannot ignore the early warning bells of what children's existing opinions might mean for the future. As Velayutham and other commentators point out, a national identity forged on economic progress, has little emotional or

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<sup>32</sup> Deborah L. Ball and David K. Cohen, "Reform by the Book: What Is: Or Might Be: The Role of Curriculum Materials in Teacher Learning and Instructional Reform?" *Educational Researcher* 25, no. 9 (1996): 6-14.

motivational hold on the populace.<sup>33</sup> The fear is that the mode of relating to the nation in practical and material terms is highly individual-oriented and is not conducive to developing a sense of collective identity. Presently, some children in my study are already beginning to exhibit the weakening attachment to Singapore that these commentators have predicted will ensue if authorities continue to perpetuate the Singapore story (myth) of economic success. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, this very economic progress, and the values of pragmatism, entrepreneurship, and opportunism into which a Singaporean national identity has evolved, is not only starting to undermine a sense of national attachment but may also signal a schism emerging between different racial and ethnic groups within the nation.

In the previous chapter, I proposed that based on published curriculum objectives and official speeches/ documents, Singapore practices what I term a patriotic model of citizenship education. This model is one which is motivated primarily by a commitment to the nation above self and where national loyalty and emotional attachment are valued. Based on my findings, I posit that in reality, while most children are deeply patriotic and fervently committed to Singapore, there is a concurrent discourse that children have created, a more pragmatic narrative of what national identity means to them. There emerges a tension between intent and outcome in that while most children do have an emotional investment in Singapore, it is an one that is very much based on the material and practical and not just the emotional.

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<sup>33</sup> Randolph Kluver and Ian Weber, "Patriotism and the Limits of Globalization: Renegotiating Citizenship in Singapore", *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 27, no. 4, (2003): 371-388.

This showcases the challenges faced by Singapore's schools as they try to play a twofold role in the development of the nation- to provide students with the skills and dispositions required in an industrializing and modern Singapore; and to inculcate in them values that will ensure their loyalty and commitment to the nation. On the one hand, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong cited the need for schools to prepare students for the increasingly competitive global environment and for how globalization and technology were transforming the nature of work and communities.<sup>34</sup> On the other, Dr. Aline Wong, a former senior minister of education, made a case for social studies as a means to develop a deep sense of belonging to community and nation in the face of globalization.<sup>35</sup> It almost seems that schools have been tasked to do two almost mutually exclusive tasks. And as my data show, this has (unexpected) consequences. It appears that while children have more or less successfully internalized the survivalist mentality necessary to traverse the ever-globalizing world economy, this has been achieved at the expense of a deep and abiding attachment to the nation. One wonders, consequently, if it is possible to demand that schools (and the process of schooling) accommodate and manage *both* global as well as national imperatives. I will provide a fuller discussion of this question in Chapter 6.

Children articulated a wide range of makers with regards to their constructions of national identity. From the more everyday themes of language and culture to more abstract notions of citizenship rights, it is obvious that children do have some clear conceptions of what being Singaporean means to them. In seeking to explain the potency

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<sup>34</sup> Chok Tong Goh, *Shaping our Future: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation*, (1997), <http://www1.moe.edu.sg/Speeches/020697.htm> (accessed July 8, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Aline Wong. Address at the opening ceremony of the Primary Social Studies Symposium, (2000), York Hotel, Carlton Hall, <http://moe.gov.sg/speeches/2000/sp13032000a.htm> (accessed 31 March 2010).

of national identity, Barrett suggested that part of the answer lies in its objectification and reification. National identity is seen as *natural* and *inevitable*, something that every individual has as a matter of course.<sup>36</sup> What I argue he might have overlooked is that what is often taken for granted by adults are in fact matters of great import to the younger citizens of a nation, once again Billig's concept of banal nationalism. This daily flagging of the nation through mediums such as the media, sporting occasions, and displays of national symbols and icons entrenches ideas of nationhood and nationality in everyday life. Speaking with children who are less cynical and in turn more aware of the background noise of banal nationalism allows us to tease apart the meanings and representations that these mundane symbols in fact hold for discussions on the development and perpetuation of national identity.

I propose that there is some evidence from this study to suggest that schools do have a substantial influence on children's development of national identity, albeit a mixed one. On the one hand, as an extension of the state's rigid language policy, the school is caught in the middle of the Singlish debate, leaving it unresolved even as increasing numbers of Singapore's young embrace it as their parlance of choice when outside the school setting. Citizenship education in Singapore also does not seem to be doing enough to develop children's notions of citizenship beyond the framework of personal responsibility to one that involves a greater sense of social consciousness or commitment towards change and justice. Data also suggest that children are able to discern instances when what is taught to them in school is inconsistent with the social realities they encounter in reality, especially with regards to race relations.

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<sup>36</sup> Martyn Barret. "The Development of National Identity in Childhood and Adolescence." (inaugural lecture presented at the University of Surrey, March 22. 2000).

However, I have also presented data to show where children's respect for Singapore's multi-racialism and their commitment toward the defense of the country accorded with particular are likely to be a direct result of NE efforts. While commentators have voiced their concerns about NE as a prescriptive project on the part of the government to discipline and disseminate mandated conceptions of national identity,<sup>37</sup> what is more important is the fact that schools have such influence to begin with. If we can reshape and rethink the curricular goals along more democratically conscious lines, schools have the power to influence what children see as both desirable and powerful in terms of national identity. This therefore puts an even greater responsibility on educators to ensure that children are given the space and opportunities to explore, question, and challenge exiting conceptions of national identity.

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<sup>37</sup> Aaron Koh. "Imagining the Singapore "Nation" and "Identity": The Role of the Media and National Education." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 25 no. 1 (2005): 75-91.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The United States

While Singaporean children talk about the nation and Singaporeanness in material and pragmatic terms, this chapter demonstrates that children in the U.S. evoke images and ideas that are more ideological and creedal; specifically, American children— via both their pictures and interviews—referred more to the principles of liberty, democracy, individualism, rights, and equality as embodied in the American Creed. The term “the American Creed” was popularized by Gunnar Myrdal in 1944 in *The American Dilemma*. Scholars have defined the concepts of the Creed in various ways, but they almost universally agree on the central ideas that Myrdal identified, “the essential dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity.”<sup>1</sup>

In particular, the notion of freedom resonated very strongly with the children in my study. In this chapter, I show that in its various incarnations freedom can be connected to almost every national identity marker that children evoked- the cultural, historical, and political. I then present the extent to which schooling both instilled and nurtured the centrality of the creedal principles to children’s concept of an American national identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal. *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944).



### 5.1. *The Schools*

Chestnut Elementary School is a public school located in Novi, Michigan. Enrollment in the Novi school district is predominantly White (87.2%) but there is a significant Asian student population-- mostly made up of East Asian- and Indian-Americans—which makes this group the largest minority population in the district (11%)<sup>2</sup>. In the Novi Community Schools, students are assigned to elementary and middle schools based on the neighborhood in which they live. Because of the location of Chestnut Elementary, the school—and hence the 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom (25 students) I identified for this study—reflects the demographic of the school district as a whole.

Prairie Elementary School is a public school also located in the Novi school district. Like Chestnut, it also serves the children of the neighborhood within which it is located. Because of a concentration of Japanese, Korean, and Indian-Americans living within the catchment area of the school, there is an above average number of Asian-American children enrolled in the school. Caucasian children are nonetheless still the majority in Prairie and the two 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms (25 students each) I recruited are reflective of this demographic.

### 5.2. *The Creedal Story*

Of the principles most closely held by Americans, none was as resonant to the children as that of freedom. Whether it was through their pictures or the interviews, it was evident that the notion of freedom is central to children's conceptualization of an

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from the City of Novi homepage: <http://cityofnovi.org/Default.asp>

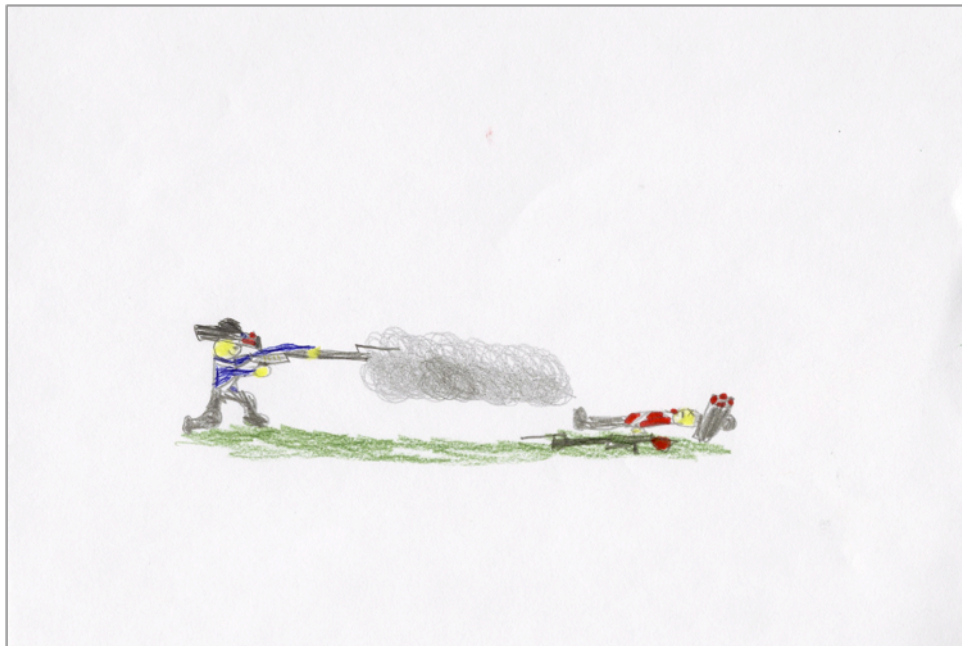
American national identity. When asked about his picture, fifth-grader Lionel describes it as such:

Lionel: It's George Washington defeating the British army for our freedom.

Serene: Why is this important to you.

Lionel: Um...because America to me means freedom. They won freedom in the war.

[Lionel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]



**Figure 5.1: Lionel's drawing of George Washington defeating the British**

There is the sense that freedom is precious not only because it is uniquely American, but also because it was something that had to be fought over and won.

When asked to describe what is uniquely American to the alien visitor, several children's *first* response was to highlight the importance of freedom to the United States:

I would tell him that America is a free country and that there is love in it... you can basically do whatever you want—except break the law-- and you can always be free.

[Molly, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

That it is a free country and you can always do whatever you want. And um...there are a lot of places and a lot of things that you can do because we're free.

[Beverly, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

These quotes demonstrate how intuitively children associate freedom to an American identity- their answers were instinctual and without hesitation. To them, freedom is an indelible and permanent component of Americanness (“you can *always* be free”, “you can *always* do whatever you want”). The two are inseparable insofar as freedom—to them—is entrenched in the very notion of being American. In the same vein, David, a fifth-grader talked about how “Our country is all about freedom,” while Jodie, another 5<sup>th</sup> grader emphasized that it is important that the alien understood that “He has landed in a country that takes freedom very seriously. It’s like in our blood.” As far as these children are concerned, nationality and freedom are conflated, virtually synonymous. Figure 5.2 shows the various pictures children drew depicting American freedom.



Figure 5.2: Importance of freedom

### 5.2.1. The Flag



**Figure 5.3: Importance of the American flag**

While many children in Singapore chose to draw the national flag when asked to draw something that best represented the country, the proportion of children who did so in the U.S. was comparatively higher. Out of 75 pictures, 47 pictures included the American flag in some way, shape, or form. This was particularly striking for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class where out of 26 children, 20 children included an American flag in their picture. The descriptions below come from a sample of children who had drawn pictures of the American flag. Note the explicit connection they make between the flag and freedom:

My drawing is a picture of the American flag. That is a great simble (sic) of that we were in war and the people put up the flag at night. By the morning, it was still there. That is why it is a flag we still use today. Also, the flag has 50 stars in the corner saying that the are 50 states that we take care of. It also stands for freedom! When you come to America you were free to do what you want with a little bit of help from the government.

[Meghan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

The United States flag and heart means to me freedom, liberty, life and love.

[Heather, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

We're free! I drew the American flag because it represents America. Another reason I drew the American flag is because it represents freedom!

[Jonas, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]

My drawing is an American flag. I think that the flag symbolizes our 50 states, and the right we have to be independent.

[Lori, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Asian-American girl]

I drew a picture of the American flag because our country is a free country.

[Joanna, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

This flag stands for the United States of America. In every town there is at least 1 American flag. This gives us liberty and freedom.

[Caroline, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Asian-American girl]

The United States of America's flag is important to me because every state has a star and it stands for freedom, liberty, justice, and no slavery.

[Jamal, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, African-American boy]

For these children, the flag is more than a piece of cloth that denotes a geographical location; it is a symbol that represents common purposes and allegiances. It also stands for commitment to a set of principles, the most esteemed of which is freedom. National identity and patriotism are often associated with the symbol of the flag. California requires daily “patriotic exercises” in its public K–12 schools; the only example given in the Education Code of an exercise that would satisfy this requirement is the Pledge of

Allegiance to the flag.<sup>3</sup> The Utah State Board of Education requires “patriotic education” in all grades, and defines it as that which will help students “identify, acquire, and act upon a dedication to one’s country.” The content matter is solely tied to the flag- learning the history and etiquette of the flag, and learning the Pledge.<sup>4</sup> The National Council for Social Studies offers a myriad of resources and curricular materials on its website. In the data bank of user-submitted resources, though, there is one educational tool on patriotism: a videotape for the elementary grades called The Young Patriot’s Multimedia Educational Series on the American Flag. This video includes information on the “proper way to handle the flag” and a visit to the home of Betsy Ross.<sup>5</sup> And yet none of these exercises/ activities asks children what they think of when they think of the national flag. What feelings does it evoke? What principles does it represent? There is the worry that flag waving and flag saluting are merely outward expressions of patriotism that ring hollow of meaning. They do not cultivate depth of thought about “what it is to be an American and may in fact obscure the need for deeper lessons of democracy and civic duty.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, speaking to children about their ideas associated with the flag—in this case, specifically related to the concept of freedom— may sidestep this danger and pave the way for a more thoughtful understanding of the symbolism of the national flag.

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<sup>3</sup> California Education Code, Section 52720. (n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2009, from <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=edc&group=52001-53000&file=52720>

<sup>4</sup> Utah State Board of Education. Administrative Code, R277-475. Retrieved May 20, 2009, from [www.usoe.k12.ut.us/board/r277475.htm](http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/board/r277475.htm)

<sup>5</sup> National Council on Social Studies DataBank. Route 66 Productions creates patriotic educational tool. Retrieved May 20, 2009, from <http://databank.ncss.org/article.php?story=200302192034463>

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Vail. “Lessons in Democracy.” *American School Board Journal* 189, no. 1 (2002): 14.

And so, when children see the flag and the concept of freedom is triggered, what does freedom actually mean to them? When they say that America is freedom, what exactly are they referring to, do they have merely an abstract notion of being able to do whatever they want, or do they possess a more concrete conceptualization? Existing research on young people and their views on civil liberties such as freedom of speech and religion emerges mostly from the psychological literature and has tended to examine the opinions of adolescents as opposed to children.<sup>7</sup> This research states that the acquisition of the concepts of rights and civil liberties are subsumed under the development of moral judgment. For example, Kohlberg describes the development of concepts of rights and freedom as part of a six-stage sequence, in which at earlier stages (early childhood), rights are identified with survival, power or control, social rules or expectations, or the requirements of law; only at the final, *principled* level (adulthood) are they conceptualized as human rights. Only at this stage is there the critical evaluation of existing social systems.<sup>8</sup>

On one level, the responses from the children in my study appear to adhere to this psychological progression: younger children did seem to exhibit a simpler-- though no less compelling—conceptualization of freedom in America:

Serene: Can we really do all-everything that we want to?

Katie: No, we just have- like the stuff that we want to do that's important in life.

Serene: Okay, such as? What are some things that are important in life?

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<sup>7</sup> See Judith Gallatin & Joseph Adelson, "Individual Rights and the Public Good: A Cross-national Study of Adolescents." *Comparative Political Studies* 2 (1970): 226-244

Charles Helwig, "Adolescents' and Young Adults' Conceptions of Civil Liberties: Freedom of Speech and Religion." *Child Development* 66 (1999): 152- 166.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 1, The Philosophy of Moral Development*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row: 1981).

Katie: That I have a family and I go to church. And I go to school. And I have food on the table. And I have clothes to wear.

Serene: So these are some things that you are glad that you have the freedom to do?

Katie: Yeah

[Katie, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

There is an echoing of the Declaration of Independence in Katie's notion of freedom as the ability to do the important things in life. What are the things she has mentioned—family, education, sustenance, religion, and clothing—but concrete manifestations of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness? Once again, we see evidence of Billig's banal nationalism at work where children speak about the routine, familiar, and ubiquitous experience of nation throughout their everyday lives. Further, Katie's response also corroborates existing research which shows that elementary school age children tend to appeal to individual desires, wants, and personal prerogatives in endorsements of rights.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, my study suggests that children as young as nine are capable of seeing beyond egocentric needs to look at social reality and make critical observations and more abstract conceptualizations of what they deem to be correct and ideal in terms of rights and freedom.

### 5.3. *The Cultural*

#### 5.3.1. *Religious freedom*

While children in Singapore focused on language and multiracialism as meaningful cultural markers of national identity, in the U.S., in both schools and across

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Helwig. "The Role of Agent and Social Context in Judgments of Freedom of Speech and Religion" *Child Development* 68, no. 3 (1997): 484-495.



grade levels, religious freedom was what stood out as resonant to children. One of the most striking drawings in my study came from Kaden, a fifth-grader who describes his picture as such:

I choose the cross because America allows you to choose your own religion. I also picked the cross because if you can choose your own religion, you can choose what you want to do (besides breaking the laws). That's just the beginning. It's a free country. That's what America means to me.

[Kaden, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]



**Figure 5.4: Religious freedom in America**

When pushed further to explain what he means when he says religious freedom is just the beginning, Kaden expressed his belief that being able to choose your own religion is symbolic of a whole host of other freedoms Americans have:

It means you can also be free to think whatever way you want about anything, even if it's different from the people around you. Like well, personally I don't really like the President. I wanted McCain to win but um...sort of my whole family. But my neighbors had those Obama bumper stickers and we were OK with that.

It would seem that religious freedom represents the larger affordance of the First Amendment which also enables the freedoms of speech, the press, peaceable assembly, and in Kaden's opinion, freedom of thought and belief in general.

Existing research on children's notions of rights and freedom focus comes decidedly from the psychological literature and focuses on the manner in which children evaluate the role of governmental, school, and familiar authority in restricting various expressions of personal wants and desires.<sup>10</sup> This research demonstrates how elementary school age children do have early understandings of the concepts of freedom and speech and religion. They are able to affirm basic freedoms for children (as well as adults), judging prototypical restrictions on freedom of speech and religion as wrong and outside the scope of various authority figures. This ability marks the early development of ideas about personal autonomy and serves as the basis for concepts of rights and civil liberties.<sup>11</sup> However, in my study, children's conceptions of freedom are of a more sociological and ideological nature. What I see in my data are examples of children talking about freedom in a way that transcends whether or not parents (or the government and school) have the right to tell them what to do. They perceive of freedom more than just as a right in and of itself but as symbolic of a larger Freedom in general. And it is a kind of freedom that is uniquely American, which sets this country apart from other nations, and it is thought of as the bedrock upon which this country draws its sense of being.

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<sup>10</sup> Helwig, "Adolescents' and Young Adults"  
Helwig, "The Role of Agent and Social Context"

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Larry Nucci. "Morality and the Personal Sphere of Actions," in *Values and Knowledge*, eds. Edward S. Reed, Elliot Turiel, & Terrance Brown (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1996), 41-60.

Because we feel strong depending... I don't know, like what god we worship. We feel that we can pray in our own way. And we don't feel afraid. And that helps us kind of grow, some people say spiritually or like mentally. We feel we don't have to be um... afraid that we can worship any god we want, think however we want. And so that makes America stronger as a people because we can... because our beliefs are safe. No one can take that away from us.

[Tammy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl, on why she feels so strongly about religious freedom]

In other words, religious freedom is important to children beyond just being free to worship any god you choose; it is a sacred and essential part of American national identity insofar as it represents the larger freedom of thought and belief that is entrenched in the American Creed.

It is also interesting that in our conversations about the freedom of religion, few children went into detail about their own religion or the extent to which religion was a salient component of their national identity. There was talk of “going to church,” “I worship the God I want,” and “I like going to Sunday School,” but there was little else to suggest an intersection between religious and national identities. It was the “freedom” part of the phrase that appeared to be more important to them. Samuel Huntington calls this the ideational basis of national identity, where the ideals and values of the American Creed define American national identity and are essential to the continued existence of the United States as a nation.<sup>12</sup>

#### 5.4. *The Historical*

Implicit in children's exaltation of the freedom of religion was an awareness that this freedom has particular historical antecedent. Going much further back than

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel P. Huntington. “American Ideals Versus American Institutions” *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (1982): 1-37.

Singaporean children's conception of history, American children talked about the freedom of religion as the freedom from English religious persecution. They were clearly cognizant of America's history with regards to England and this figured prominently in their conversations about religious freedom. Reflecting on a lesson about the pilgrims, I asked 5<sup>th</sup> grader Liam why it was important that he learned about the pilgrims in school:

Liam: We need to know that the pilgrims and the Puritans—they came here to worship God.

Serene: Why did they have to come here to do that?

Liam: Because the church in England, you had to obey their rules and their religion. No one could pick their own so people escaped to America so they could worship their own God. Or not worship anyone, anything if they didn't want to.

[Liam, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Asian-American boy]

The image here is of America as religious haven, an “escape.” There is also an understanding that religious freedom includes not wanting or needing to practice a religion. Further, children understood that religious freedom is a constitutional right and that this right sets America apart from the political system practiced in the England of the past.

Well, Obama can't really say to us, “Be like my religion.” We have our rights in the constitution. And he can't force us to do stuff like a long time ago-- like when there was a king or ruler that told them- do this and do this, and believe in this because I believe in the same thing. That wasn't OK.

[Melissa, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Here, Melissa demonstrates the knowledge that American constitutional democracy—and the specific role of the president- is a very different system of government from the English monarchy, which in her opinion, disallowed religious freedom. In fact, “a president is not the same as a king,” and “having a president is better than having a king,”

were refrains that were expressed over and over during the individual interviews. Throughout my sample, whenever children mentioned being under the rule of a king, it was always an implicit reference to the English king. Children were adamant that having a president is much preferred over having a king and this, once again, was tied to the notion of rights and freedom. According to the children, unlike a king, the president does not dictate his wishes onto the populace:

- Serene: Do you think a president does different things or behaves differently compared to a king?
- Virginia: Yes. He doesn't want to be treated like royalty. He wants to be treated fairly, like a person. And a king wants to be treated like royalty. And wants everything- he wants to have a maid, he wants to be wealthy. A president allows us to still have our freedom. The king has slaves and stuff.

[Virginia, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Virginia, like almost all children who mentioned a king, talked about living in a monarchy negatively. Their conceptualization of a monarch is one who rules with absolute power and is abusive of that power. While one could argue that this reflects a fairly narrow notion of this particular form of government, this image is no doubt influenced by what they know and infer about the circumstances of America's independence from the British. It would seem that in some sense, children derive some sense of national identity by vilifying the image of a king, associating it with tyranny, oppression, and the suppression of liberty and individual rights.

It might be worthwhile at this point to quote at length a conversation with Rachel, a fourth-grade, who gave a fairly representative impression of children's opinions about the Old World in general and their image of a king in particular:

- Serene: Why is freedom such a huge deal for you?

Rachel: Because otherwise a war would still be going on and we would be under circumstances of the King.

Serene: Is that a bad thing?

Rachel: Well, it would just mean that we'd have to do what he tells us.

Serene: Well you still have a leader today.

Rachel: Yeah.

Serene: You have the President. But how is that different from living under a king?

Rachel: Living under a king meant...this dude all the way from the other side of the world would be telling us rules. And we had no idea why. They wouldn't make sense over here.

Serene: How is that different from having a President?

Rachel: It's different because he is like um...he like makes different rules. He doesn't like say, if you don't worship me we will throw you in jail.

Serene: What does he say instead?

Rachel: He says like, I'm here to make changes.

Serene: Well, this President did. How does a king come to power?

Rachel: Um...he had to have been a prince or princess and they rise up when their parents die.

Serene: Right and then how does the President come to power?

Rachel: People elect him.

Serene: And is that a very different thing?

Rachel: Yes, very different...

Serene: How is it different? Why is coming into power after your parents die so different from people actually voting you in to office?

Rachel: Because when you get voted into office, it means like the people wanted you into it. And you wanted to do it. Other than when a King is there, they just like blah and like, they could not be happy with that person. But they didn't get say. And what if the king didn't really want to be king? Then he might be an unhappy king and take it out on us.

Serene: Do you think that it is an important thing that people in America get to vote their leader into office?

Rachel: Yeah

Serene: Why?

Rachel: Because if we didn't have that choice it would be a lot different now. People wouldn't be happy because they had no say... in um... whoever was leading them. And someone they didn't choose would be telling them what to do.

[Rachel, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Rachel's response encapsulates several different, though related, opinions of many of the children in my study. First, she typifies the negative reaction many children have regarding the prospect of being ruled by a king and makes distinct his role compared to that of a president. In her opinion, a king is served by his subjects, even if they are unwilling; a president, on the other hand, serves the people, the people who elected him into office. This last distinction seems to be an important one, and one that Rachel was not the only child to make. The notion that a president is elected into office and does not inherit his position lies at the heart of children's embrace of the president as a symbol of American national identity:

And with our President we get to vote for who we want. And that is just... I think is special. We just don't have the same people from the same family over and over again.

[Emil, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]

Because then it is our opinion- we like who we have for President. Because he's supposed to represent our country. With a King and Queen, we might not like who it is so they're not really representing the real people.

[Michael, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Asian-American boy]

These excerpts suggests that for these children, in order for the head of government to truly represent the country and its people, he/she should be popularly elected as opposed to having inherited the title. Children's awareness of and faith in America's political system is something I will discuss in greater detail in my next section. More importantly here, however, is how attached children are to the image of the president. Across both grade levels, ethnic groups, and gender, children highlighted the special place of the president in America and on several occasions, cited him as one of the first things they would mention to their alien visitor:

Serene: What is it about a president that is so important for you to tell Mr. Alien Man?

Rebecca: That it's different than for a king. Presidents for sure know that they want to do this and that, they kind of are like volunteering themselves to do it. And then we can vote for them. But they are not doing it because they have to but because they want to. Not like kings. They [presidents] want to help people.

[Rebecca, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

There is a benevolence to children's conception of the President which not only contrasts sharply with their image of an oppressive king, but also stands out because children at this age seem to bestow upon the president the role of protector of their rights and freedoms as Americans. The president appeared to be the political figure on whom their sense of national identity was anchored. This is to some extent consistent with existing literature which states that for children in elementary school, complex social and political systems are initially conceptualized as persons to whom the child can relate. Through attachments to these persons, the individual becomes related to the system.<sup>13</sup> The argument here—and one that my data refutes to some degree as I will show in a later section—is that relationships among groups, social codes and standards, and complex political institutions are much too difficult for children to understand and hence must be symbolized by personal figures who can act as sanctioning agents and objects of attachment. More than that however, if we scrutinize the excerpts more closely, we will see that for the most part, children are more concerned with how being able to vote for your own president is preferable to living under a king than they are with the actual day-to-day responsibilities of a president. Here, the president is the idealized personification

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<sup>13</sup> Robert D. Hess & Judith V. Torney. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Piscataway, N.J.: Transaction Books, 2006).



of American electoral politics as how it is imagined, a popularly elected— and benevolent-- guardian of all the rights and freedom of the populace. Interestingly, and perhaps, as a result, in children’s conversations about the president, they refer more frequently to the abstract figure of the president rather than to President Obama specifically. While children do mention President Obama aplenty, he is spoken more with regards to the historic nature of his election and presidency rather than to his actual responsibilities and obligations as leader of the country.

Children’s preoccupation with freedom and being led by a person who would not oppress them like a king may explain why there were no less than 37 examples of children emphasizing—in various contexts-- that they do not want people telling them what to do:

Serene: What about the whole independence thing?

Adele: Independence gives like...you don’t want to be bossed around...like I don’t like to be bossed around by my sister when she’s babysitting me. It is the same thing like with a dictator or king...they’re telling you what to do.

Serene: But he is the person who leads the country...why can’t he tell us what to do?

Adele: Because back way then--Benjamin Franklin and some other guys...George Washington and all of them, they all wrote the Constitution that said all our rights because some people didn’t think it was fair that other people could just tell us what to do. Like they can’t just tell us what to do or what we’re supposed to do.

[Adele, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

What begins as a seemingly banal analogy between babysitting and a dictatorship becomes a thoughtful reflection on the founding tenets of this country and the reason why America sought independence from England. Independence is a principle children do not only value but it is also something whose provenance they are very keenly aware of. They know it is their constitutional right.

While this fixation with not being told what to do transcended age and was something I noted in both age groups, it did emerge with greater vehemence from fifth-graders. One suspects if it might have to do with some of the benchmarks set for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies curriculum:

- 1) *Give examples of authority and the use of power without authority.*
- 2) *Interpret the meaning of specific rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including religious liberty, free expression, privacy, property, due process of law and equal protection of the law.*

These benchmarks translated vividly during one Social Studies lesson I observed at with Mrs. Greenfield at Prairie Elementary. The topic of interest for the week was the Pilgrims' move to the New World. While asking the class to review the Pilgrims' decision-making process at that time, she makes apparent the circumstances surrounding their decision to board the Mayflower:

Land was free here, unlike in England where you would have to be born rich and inherit land. Here, there were more opportunities for upward mobility and for you to own property. [*responding to one student's comment about religious freedom*] That's correct, they were seeking freedom from the Church of England. They felt they were being told whom, how, and where to worship. At that time, the Church of England was the same as the Government of England. In other words, King James I was the head of both the country and the church. Not belonging to the church meant not obeying the king. This was treason. And so the Pilgrims had no choice. [Mrs. Greenfield, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher]

The message here is clear: the Pilgrims were compelled to move to the New World because they were subject to a form of authority—both religious and political—that they found unacceptable, and America offered them a haven from eventual persecution. Mrs. Greenfield continued to make other intimations to the freedom to own land/ property

when she mentioned that many of the Pilgrims left England impoverished and were looking forward to being able to grow their own crops and support their family America: “Feeding their families was a great motivation for the pilgrims and you don’t think about it much but to be able to own your own plot of land—no matter how small-- to do that was a big deal.” These lessons not only align tightly with the benchmarks established in the 5<sup>th</sup>-grade Social Studies framework, but they also serve to highlight to students the creedal principles already so central to the early settlers that still resonate today.

While I do not assume to make claims of causality, more than one student admitted that many of their opinions about independence and freedom and the extent to which these principles were important to them was indeed influenced by what they learned in school:

- Serene: I’m really interested in how passionate you are about your freedoms. Where did you learn that these are the freedoms that you have and why are these so important to you? Did you get it from your parents? Did you get it from school?
- Anthony: I learned all this from Social Studies even though not entirely in this grade. I learned it in grades before. But um... quite a bit this year. These are really important to me because... uh... other countries are not as lucky as us. My teacher always keeps reminding this to us... that other countries don’t have freedoms like us and we have to treat them with respect... uh... take advantage of them.
- Serene: Can you remember specific things about Social Studies that taught you these freedoms? Was it from the textbook? Was it a game that you played? Or was it something that your teacher said that really meant a lot to you?
- Anthony: Usually it was from textbooks or papers we read that we use to study for our tests. But we learned them. We learned them for a long time in so many grades that it is almost drilled into our heads now.

[Anthony, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, bi-racial boy]

Children also talked about how they learned about their constitutional rights from materials they received in school:

Well this first picture-the one with the two hands-I actually got that from...uh...a paper we have that we study from. It tells us about um...some of the amendments of the constitution. And it was talking about freedoms and so I remembered that picture with the chains being broken.

[Alex, 5th grade, Asian-American boy]

While there were few examples of children disagreeing with the school curriculum, there were nonetheless examples of students engaging critically and thoughtfully with aspects of what they were learning. Reflecting on what she was taught about how different the systems of government between England and the United States are, Maddie expressed her personal opinions about what she thinks about the responsibilities and limits of government:

See, that's the whole point why the Pilgrims came to the U.S.- they didn't want to be told what to do. They could not believe in... uh... worship the God they wanted and had to follow the king. They would get shot for doing something they're not supposed to. Mrs. Landon was talking the other day about why this is the reason we have checks and balances put in place in our government now. So that no one branch can have all the say. I think that's such a big thing for America. We have one like main President that tells us, that guides us in the right direction. But then doesn't tell us exactly on what day we have to do what. Mrs. Landon says there are limits to what the President... well, the government can do and I think that applies to my day to day life. Because I wouldn't want to be told to do everything on a certain day. I would want to be able to do it whenever I have my free time or whenever I need to. And I just wouldn't want to do it with somebody else telling me exactly what time to do it. And I just don't think it would be fair if you were told to do that.

[Maddie, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Once again, we see that aversion to being told what to do that so many other children in the American sample professed and embraced with great fervor. In her own way, Maddie has transformed what she was learning about the founding of America into a very vivid conception of self, giving meaning to the political world as it acts on her. She does not merely react and accept the political world that confronts her, she is reconstructing it, or

remaking it for her own purposes. And Maddie's keen sense of what it means to be American involves independence, individualism, and a conception of government that comes straight out of the Constitution. The very first sentence of the Constitution, following the Preamble, makes Maddie's point: "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress..." The point is reiterated in the Tenth Amendment, the final documentary statement of the Founding period: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

#### 5.5. *The Political*

Children's notion of government plainly illuminates what an American identity means to them. Maddie was not the only child to highlight the concept of limited government and its accompanying concept of individualism and personal liberty. When asked to think about what makes America special vis-à-vis other countries, Paul, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, had a straightforward answer: "We the people have the power not the government." He elaborated by talking about the three branches of government and the concept of checks and balances: "It is to make sure that no one can overpower. I forgot that... it's something about we the people... we the people are the ultimate power. We're the ultimate authority." For Paul, abiding by a democratic system of government where power is derived from the people is a uniquely American trait. David (5<sup>th</sup> grader) raises this distinction as well when comparing the system of government today to how things were in England:

Serene: And how is the system different now? People are still going to disagree with things that someone says. But how is that different from when we had one king?

David: Well it is different now because more of it is controlled by the people. It is something that everybody has a say instead of just one person. So of course it still is... well, most likely people are disagreeing but it is still going to be actually what most people are going to like and want. It's the people's decision.

[David, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian-American boy]

These sentiments appear to dovetail with survey findings which ask children to choose pictures that “showed best what the government is.”<sup>14</sup> In Robert Hess and Judith Torney's large-scale study, younger children (2<sup>nd</sup>-graders) were more likely to choose pictures of Presidents Kennedy and George Washington, while older children (8th-graders) found *Congress* and *voting* to be more appropriate symbols. This may suggest that for the children in Hess & Torney's survey, the conceptualization of government is tied to personal figures for young children and institutions and political processes for older children. The children in my study do not mention Congress specifically but I would like to propose that one could argue that technically, members of Congress are elected to represent the people of the fifty states and as such, my findings seem fairly consistent with established research.

Interestingly, responses of the 4<sup>th</sup>-graders in my study also seem aligned with the younger children in Hess and Torney's survey- a greater percentage of them were more likely to highlight the role of the president when talking about aspects of the American government or when introducing the country to the alien visitor:

Serene: And so do you think that if enough people want something to be done that whatever this important thing is can get passed even though it wasn't the President's decision?

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<sup>14</sup> Hess & Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes*.

- Hailey: I think that the President... I think the people decide and then the thing goes to the President and he gets to decide if it happens or not.
- Serene: But the people have a say...
- Hailey: Yeah, but he makes the final decision.  
[Hailey, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]
- Serene: What's the first thing about America you tell the alien?
- Karl: Um...I'd tell him that um...like, how the President works, maybe...
- Serene: And how does the President work?
- Karl: He is in charge of everything. He makes decisions.
- Serene: He makes all the decisions?
- Karl: Yeah...like he makes the laws and this messenger sends it off to the-like the Supreme Court or something and they'd make it a law or not. And let people vote.  
[Karl, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]

While Karl clearly gets the legislative process backwards, what it nonetheless shows is his awareness that there is such a process in place, that there are three branches to the government, and that they are meant to work together in a system of checks and balances in order to pass a law.

My findings build on Hess and Torney's survey insofar as it qualitatively illuminates what children's conceptions of government and national identity are beyond merely choosing pictures. While their survey demonstrated that older children were more likely to choose *Congress* and *voting* as representative of government, my study goes further by showing the ways in which children negotiate with other ideas such as freedom, independence, individualism, and a sense of history as they come to these conclusions. With younger children, what I show above and beyond the fact that children are indeed attached to the figure of the President, is that they do so in a way that is neither personal nor familial, but political; as far as many 4<sup>th</sup>-graders in my study are concerned, the president is the most potent symbol for government because in their minds, he wields

the greatest political power even though they do acknowledge the democratic foundations of the U.S. (in that the American people do have decision-making powers). This insight is possible not only with a qualitative study but also with the discursive framework of national identity I established in Chapter 2. Knowing what children can choose and identify is inadequate without also comprehending the process by which they reached that understanding.

Without a larger sample across other age groups, it is not possible to make a definitive statement to explain this pronounced difference between 4<sup>th</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-graders. Hess and Torney also concluded from their study that the acquisition of political attitudes proceeds rapidly especially between the fourth- and fifth-grades but did not provide an explanation for why this might be so.<sup>15</sup> My study provides modest evidence that the curriculum that children are exposed to in school may contribute to this development, where a focus on state and local governments in 4<sup>th</sup> grade gives way to a more national and political focus in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *5.5.1. Voting*

Tightly related to children's sense that America is a country where it is the people's power that matters and where individualism and independence are unique and defining markers of national identity, no activity is more hallowed or more mentioned in my discussions with children, than that of voting. It was imbued with an almost sacred power, the code for all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that come with being an American citizen. Nowhere is the connection between voting, national identity, and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

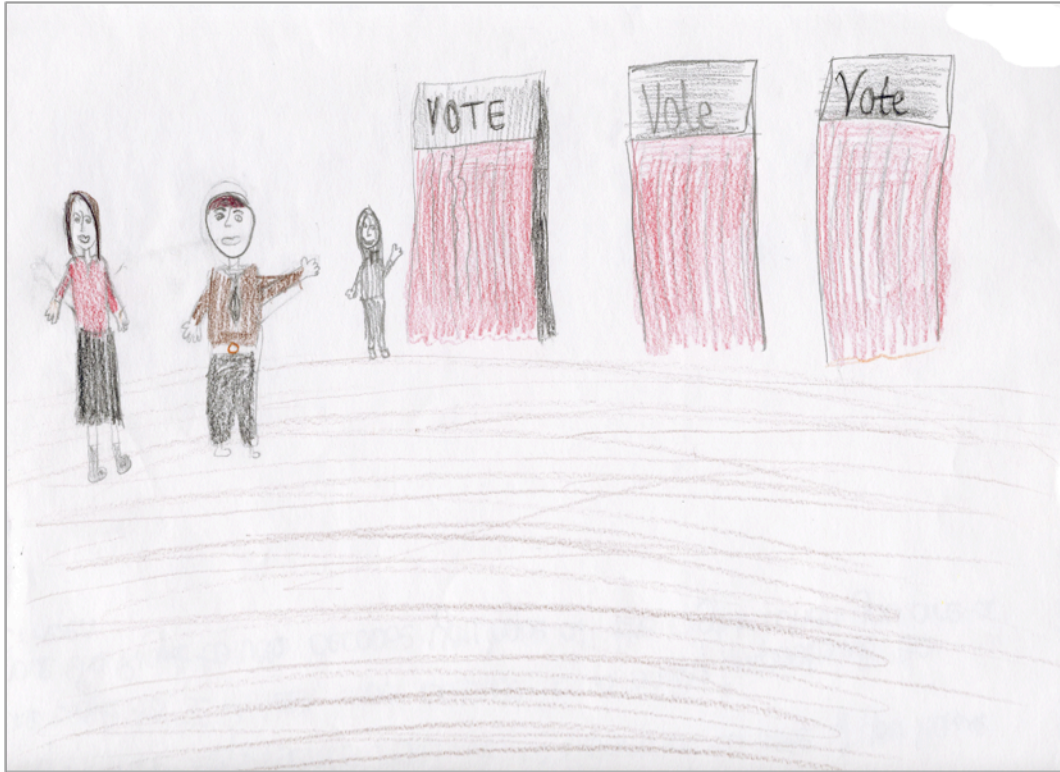


Americaness more vivid than in the words of 5<sup>th</sup>-grader, Samantha. She mentioned that as one of the most important things she would like to tell the alien visitor is how important voting is.

- Serene: What does voting mean? What does it stand for?  
Samantha: Um...I think it stands for picking what you want.  
Serene: Mm-hmm... So why is voting a huge deal for you?  
Samantha: Um...I think voting is a huge deal for all Americans.  
Serene: Can you tell me more?  
Samantha: Because usually it makes a place better if they know what the people in the country want. It's like our right and we can. And this is what the United... America is.  
Serene: What else?  
Samantha: And voting, it's really personal and stuff. It's something that you don't have to tell anybody else if you don't want to. And people cannot tell you how to vote either.  
Serene: Why is that such an important thing that you shouldn't have to tell anybody?  
Samantha: Because it is something that you believe in. Like if you pick for somebody else, it's because you think that they have a better thing to give. And that's your own idea.  
[Samantha, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Asian-American girl]

Just in this one vignette, Samantha captures a myriad of ideas about voting and what it stands for in the United States. Having a vote, being able to cast it, and the fact that it is personal decision can once again be distilled into the creedal principles of freedom, independence, and individualism. It also shows a striking faith in democracy as an *essential* system of government.

Children's pictures also spoke volumes about the centrality of voting to children's conception of what it means to be an American citizen. Thomas (4<sup>th</sup> grade) described his picture as representing "how it is important to vote if you have the right to and when you're old enough. I picked that because it is really important to have the Right to vote because you have all the rights when you are a citizen."



**Figure 5.5: Importance of voting**

When asked to elaborate on what voting achieves—and this is perhaps testimony to how fundamental to America the practice of democracy has become-- Thomas talks about things as varied as electing the president, the mayor, “what we’ll eat at lunch,” “who has to help my Dad shovel snow,” and, amusingly, American Idol. Banal as some of these items may seem, they reflect the larger commitment Americans in general have to democratic institutions and to a democratic self-image. And implicit in this image is the belief that the right to vote is, and long has been, widely distributed among Americans and that the United States has something close to universal suffrage. In his book, *The Right to Vote: the Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, Alexander Keyssar writes this about the abiding conviction Americans have about universal suffrage in this country:

As every schoolchild learns, thousands of soldiers fell at Gettysburg so that government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” would not perish from the earth—and presumably a government of and by the people was one that the people selected. Indeed, in popular usage, the term *democracy* implies that everyone, or nearly everyone, has the right to participate in elections; the image of a democratic United States is that of a nation with universal suffrage. And rightly so: although a nation certainly could have universal suffrage without being a democracy, a polity can not be truly democratic without universal suffrage.<sup>16</sup>

It was evident in many ways that children’s grasp of the concept of voting extended beyond electing a president. For one, the legislative process was understood to involve voting although children expressed only vague and broad understandings of the workings of Congress and how a law comes to being:

We get to vote for the, for our leader. And uh...if the leader wants something, he has to ask the public. And all of us vote and whoever has the most votes, gets that. So it is not like Obama can say, I’m going to ban basketball. People actually have to agree before he can pass that.  
[Yasmin, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Freedom means if you want this, if you want something to happen, you can tell other people and they’ll think about it and maybe, then maybe they’ll vote on it. Which means if you want it bad enough and enough people think the same way, you could probably get it to happen.  
[Alisha, 4<sup>th</sup>, African-American girl]

This second quote from fourth grader, Alisha ties voting specifically to the concept of freedom. In her mind, American citizens have the right to propose and support the kind of legislation they deem necessary. While her understanding of the legislative process is still vague and under-developed, it is nonetheless evident that she possesses a grasp not only of one of the core tenets of democracy, but also the political processes at work in the

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Keyssar. *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi.

United States, and the pivotal role that freedom and voting play. To her, being free means being able to participate to some degree in America's governance and her democratic institutions.

### 5.5.2. *Comparisons with other nations*

Related to this keen sense of American political culture is an accompanying awareness that such practices may not be common around the world. According to David McCrone, nationalism has particularism built into it; every "us" has to have a "them".<sup>17</sup> It is about drawing boundaries, setting up "lines of separation or contact [which] usually creates an "us" and an "Other" identity.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, many of children's responses in the interviews involve boundary-drawing with regards to features and traits that distinguish Americans from non-Americans. It is in this othering that one gains an even clearer picture of children's sense of an American national identity. This section addresses Others, with particular reference to the social, civic, and political culture in the United States and how that differs from practices in other countries. Instead of more tangible traits like language or appearance, children were fixated instead, on the ideological, making frequent comparisons to the extent to which the rights and freedoms accorded to American citizens are special and unique, and not always available to people everywhere in the world.

We're all free today as Americans and not every other country is as free as we are. We are a free nation and we can, you know, do... Um, we have the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of press and stuff. We

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<sup>17</sup> David McCrone. *The Sociology of Nationalism: Tomorrow's Ancestors* (London: Routledge, 1998)

<sup>18</sup> David Newman and Anssi Paasi, "Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography." *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 186- 207.

kind of like, are a much freer nation than a bunch of other countries in the world.

[Monica, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Serene: How is what you have in America different from other countries?

Rainer: Maybe in some countries they have, um... they don't have freedom of speech. They don't have independence. And they can't vote for their President or some don't even have Presidents. They have dictators or something.

Serene: So why is it important that he (the alien) knows in America you have freedom of speech and you can vote and that you are independent?

Rainer: Because maybe he went to another place like China where they don't have freedom of speech and then he comes here, he might think that he doesn't have freedom of speech here too. So he doesn't say anything about anything even if it is really an important issue.

[Rainer, 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Caucasian boy]

It is interesting that Rainer assumes that countries that do not have popularly elected presidents automatically have dictators. While this may suggest a naïve, two-dimensional conceptualization of systems of government around the world, when he uses China as an example, it does suggest a level of awareness about Chinese politics and the lack of civil freedoms in the country. Further, this does not detract from the fact that both Rainer and Monica use freedom as the axis along which to compare the U.S. to other countries. In particular, Rainer is adamant that the alien visitor understands that unlike China, in the United States, he (the alien) has the privilege of the same freedoms as all citizens.

Children also made some interesting comparisons with regards to the concepts of equality where foreign societies were seen as somehow less egalitarian:

Serene: No one gets left out- can you tell me a little bit more?

Victoria: In other countries there is not really- well, in other countries- there can be different laws and they may not believe in the whole all men are created equal thing.

Serene: What does that mean that all men are...?

Victoria: Because in the time of segregation-people were judged by the color of their skin. And that-to me that doesn't seem fair at all and I don't really understand why any country would think that it's fair where they say that some people are more... or where they treat people differently depending on who they are. Martin Luther King helped us all realize that all men are created equally...oh...and women. And it doesn't matter your religion or the color of your skin. You are created as strong or smart as anybody else. We are equals as part of this nation. We all have freedom.

[Victoria, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, African-American girl]

In her indictment of “other countries,” Victoria highlights a faith in classic American egalitarianism that involves equality of opportunity, equality of rights, racial equality, sexual equality, etc. Her inability to “understand why any country would think that it’s fair (to) treat people differently depending on who they are” suggests that for her, the U.S. represents the model of social egalitarianism towards which other countries ought to aspire. One might argue that this is a laudable, though slightly misguided notion, considering the startling inequalities that continue to exist in contemporary America. I delve deeper into this issue in my conclusion to this chapter.

Adiri makes an even more pointed contrast when she compares her life in America with the summers she spends in India where her parents were born:

Adiri: Over there, doctor children can go to a really advanced school and all, like a private school. But then my parents are not doctors and so I'd go to a regular public school. Anyhow over here, even if my parents are doctors, I can still go to a public school which I like better anyway.

Serene: So you're saying that things are more fair here?

Adiri: Yeah, mostly because you don't really get judged on how much money you make. You don't really get judged a lot.

Serene: Here?

Adiri: Yeah. Over there you get judged on the way you dress. If you dress like really expensive and all-you get like-you get judged on what you bring to school. Do you bring a backpack? Do you bring it in a regular bag? And then like-what do your parents do?

And then like-do you live in a big house? People are always comparing because I think there're more differences there.

Serene: Do you feel that people don't judge others as much over here?

Adiri: Well, yeah even if I did live in a big house which I really don't. Um...they don't really care. There are other things that make us the same. My friends, Beverly and Jessica-they don't judge me on the way I dress or the way my house is. We don't really judge each other by the way we dress. We don't really judge each other. We just like each other because of the way we like, are.

[Adiri, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian-American]

The Indian caste system and large income gaps between the wealthy and poor make India a country rife with profound political, social, and economic inequalities. While Adiri's comparisons of the two countries along these lines are a little more muted compared to Victoria's, she does appear to demonstrate an awareness that disparities are wider in India when she talks about "*differences there*." Also, Adiri seems to believe that even if income inequalities do exist in the United States, that these differences can be compensated or evened out by assets in other areas. I asked her to elaborate on what she means when she said, "*There are other things that make us the same*.":

Well, so even if I live in a bigger house- which like I said, I don't. We actually all live in the same sub-division. So Beverly can play the drums which is kind of cool and I can't. And like Jessica's family, they like have parties in their house all the time and invite the neighbors which is also quite cool. So that sort of makes us all equal. It's not like about who has the bigger house, you know.

Implicit in this is the belief that there is a fundamental sense of egalitarianism that binds all Americans in spite of wealth and income. In Adiri's image of America, equality transcends socio-economic status. Compared to India where class consciousness is pervasive, in America, at least in Adiri's mind, people are more the same than they are different. It also shows how individualism—the extent to which Beverley, Jessica, and Adiri are *different*—is actually intimately related to the collective good.

This finding stands out from existing studies on what children think of when they compare themselves to other nations. In his study on Turkish children living in Germany, Hengst demonstrated that children attributed particular importance to language and appearance as sources of identity and hence a sense of difference when comparing nationalities.<sup>19</sup> In addition to language, the children in Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, and Davies' student associated sport with Welsh national identity and patriotism.<sup>20</sup> Unlike these studies which found that children are fixed on more tangible traits and characteristics as markers of national identity, my project demonstrates the extent to which the creedal notions of freedom, equality, and independence are so enmeshed in children's conceptions of Americanness that it is these principles that become the criteria by which they establish dissimilarities between nations.

But more than just echoes of the American Creed, children's responses suggest an assertion of a brand of American ethnocentrism. A belief in the superiority of one's own country is a finding common in many studies on children's development of political attitudes<sup>21</sup> and Chapter 4 demonstrates that many Singaporean children broadly compare Singapore favorably to other nations as well; however, what these studies do not illuminate and what children in Singapore do not specify is the *particular* characteristics

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<sup>19</sup> Heinz Hengst. "Negotiating 'us' and 'Them': Children's Constructions of Collective Identity." *Childhood* 4, no. 1 (1997): 43-62.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies, *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and Locality in Middle Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Robert W. Connell. *The Child's Construction of Politics* (Hong Kong: Melbourne University Press, 1971);

Martyn Barret, Hannah Wilson, and Evanthia Lyons. "The Development of National In-Group Bias: English Children's Attributions of Characteristics to English, American and German people." *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 21 (2003): 193-220;

Martyn Barret, "Children's Understanding Of, and Feelings About Countries and National Groups." In *Children's Understanding of Society*, eds. Martyn Barrett and Eithne Buchanan-Barrow (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005);

Hess & Torney, *Development of Political Attitudes*.

Scourfield, et al, *Children, Place, and Identity*.



they believe to set their home country apart from others.<sup>22</sup> This dissertation demonstrates that not only do children have concrete notions of what makes America a better place to live, these notions are specifically related to principles central to the American Creed.

### 5.6. *The Role of the School in National Identity Formation*

In chapter 3, I posited that in a liberal democratic society like the U.S., schools focus largely on developing the values of basic social morality and democratic civic virtue.<sup>23</sup> The objective is to provide an “education adequate to serve the life of a free and equal citizen in any modern democracy.”<sup>24</sup> This includes the notions of education for both a significant form of personal autonomy and for democratic citizenship.<sup>25</sup> This I termed a more political model of citizenship education. Based on the published Social Studies benchmarks used as a guide by the teachers in the Novi school district across both grades, some of the aims include helping students:

1. *Distinguish among national government in the United States and describe the roles of government institutions at all levels.*
2. *Give reasons for limiting the power of government.*
3. *Interpret the development and summarize the main points in the Declaration of Independence.*
4. *Interpret the meaning of specific rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including religious liberty, free expression, privacy, property, due process of law and equal protection of the law.*
5. *Explain responsibilities citizens have to uphold constitutional rights.*

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<sup>22</sup> One might argue that children in Singapore are just as ethnocentric as their American counterparts and that they ethnocentrism merely takes on a different form.

<sup>23</sup> David Bridges, ed., *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World* (New York, Routledge, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Terence McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevičienė, “Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity,” in *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship*, ed. Bridges, 23-35.

This is just a snapshot of the established benchmarks (for full list, see Appendix A) but it is evident nonetheless that the objectives laid out do align consistently with a political model of citizenship education as I had proposed in Chapter 3. Less affective and more cognitive, these benchmarks ask that students understand, evaluate, and review fundamental tenets of America's political structure. Based on children's writings and interview responses, it would seem that children's sense of national belonging and patriotism are indeed related to such a political paradigm insofar as they rest heavily on liberal democratic ideals.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, we cannot overlook the role of the teacher when discussing the relationship between the curriculum and children's ideas. To what extent were teachers mindfully taking into account the benchmarks when planning and teaching their lessons? One anecdotal conversation with 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mrs. Landon, suggests that while the benchmarks were foremost on her mind, her lessons are in fact a combination of the Social Studies curriculum established by the district and topics-- in her experience—5<sup>th</sup> graders are capable of and interested in. She confessed that she “was not surprised” that her students were so fixated on notions of freedom and independence and that 5<sup>th</sup> grade is “about the right age” that they should be learning about and internalizing these principles. Having been a teacher for 17 years, she disclosed that she is able to identify the point in the year at which her students would be ready to talk about themes such as authority, checks and balances, limits to government in ways that would be thoughtful and evaluative. She admits that these “are not easy issues” and is heartened by the fact that the students have gained “more than [she] had expected” in terms of their ideas about the principles of the American Creed.

It is not the intention of this study to assume causality between what is taught in schools and what children believe and think about national identity- other institutions such as family, technology, and the media can be equally potent sources of influence. However, I must draw attention to the strong association between what the curriculum benchmarks suggest teachers infuse in their lessons and the various creedal ideals and principles captured in children's responses. One possibility is that in this age of accountability, children have been trained to simply present back to teachers (or in my case, researchers) what they were taught and that their responses were less genuine opinions than rote restatements of the Core Democratic Values, an integral part of the Michigan Social Studies curriculum (see Appendix B). While it is likely that there might have been some element of this in my data collection process, I also posit that there was enough variation in children's interviews in terms of negotiations and reconstructions of the master narrative to suggest that I was also observing children's own active interpretive meaning-making.

Little if at all has been written about the American Creed and its place in America's schools, especially at the elementary levels. However, Samuel Huntington, in several books and articles, had written prolifically about the role of the American Creed in the country's conceptualization of itself.<sup>26</sup> He maintains that throughout the history of the United States, a broad consensus has existed among the American people in support of liberal, democratic, individualistic, and egalitarian values- precisely what the American Creed stands for. This has provided the core of American national identity

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<sup>26</sup> See also Samuel P. Huntington. *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

since the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> However, he also makes the argument that throughout American history, political institutions have reflected these values but have always fallen short of realizing them in a satisfactory manner. He identifies a gap between the ideals in which Americans believe and the institutions that embodied their practice.

However, I propose that for children, a gap between what is ideal and what is real does not exist; in the child's view of the adult world, what is ideal is. And so when children talk about the extent to which America is the land where freedom, egalitarianism, and equal opportunity reign, they believe it to be truly so. And therein lies a potentially troubling tension- children's whole-hearted embrace of freedom as *the* defining trait of Americanness is a blind spot insofar as it is spoken about as an unproblematic concept that has a common and shared meaning for all Americans. While Singaporean children are too fixated on the tangible and material, American children lie on the other extreme, intent on the abstract and ephemeral which is open to a myriad of interpretations. There is a universality to the manner in which children talk about freedom that camouflages what could be a host of divergent connotations and applications. Throughout American history, freedom has variously served as the clarion call to exercise one's fundamental human right (e.g. the Civil Rights movement) but also as the justification for the curtailment of those very same rights (e.g. McCarthyism during the Cold War). And that it can be used for such opposing purposes is testimony to its ambiguous and potentially contentious nature. Children may speak passionately about the concept of freedom and they so seem to have some idea about what freedom means to them, but they do not yet seem to grasp the tensions and challenges inherent in a creedal

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<sup>27</sup> Huntington, "American Ideals".

notion of national identity and the embrace of freedom by all. When Kaden talks about freedom as being able to choose one's own religion, he does not yet envision the possibility that one American's idea of religious freedom could impinge on another American's notion of freedom of worship (for e.g. a Christian proselytizing outside a Muslim religious festival); or when Victoria talks about all Americans being equal *and* free, she does not recognize that freedom and equality are in fact in constant tension where one is often exercised at the expense of the other. There are inherent tensions to within the creedal values that children clearly do not yet grasp and while it is heartening that children subscribe to these principles so faithfully, it remains to be seen how children will deal with the concrete materialization of freedom in real life as it confronts them personally.

In his book, *The Story of American Freedom*, Eric Foner writes:

If the universalistic American Creed has been a persistent feature of our history, so too have been efforts to delimit freedom along one or another axis of social existence... Non-whites, women, and laborers experienced firsthand the paradox that one person's freedom has frequently been linked to another's servitude.<sup>28</sup>

This quote speaks not only to the challenges that accompany championing freedom as a national creed, it also suggests how easy it is to forget that universal freedom may not in fact always be universal. In my study, there were very few instances to show that children were cognizant of the inequalities and injustices that continue to plague certain populations in this country. One child brought up racism and how that is something she had heard still exists in some places:

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<sup>28</sup> Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), xx.

Terence: Some people are kind of mean about people who are not the same color, still. Like I heard on the news that they are still kind of mean...

Serene: What do you mean by still kind of mean?

Terence: I heard this one taxi driver didn't let someone Black into a taxi.

[Terence, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy]

This was the only example of children even acknowledging that prejudice and discrimination are still being practiced; in general, children seem to truly believe that the principles of the American Creed that so define their sense of national identity are fully realized in reality. There is little, if any, acknowledgement that there while the American Creed is held by most Americans in *theory*, it might not be something enjoyed by all in *practice*. As with John Wills' findings in his study of high school social studies classrooms, if the goal of the curriculum is to sensitize students to others' experiences, then it is at least partially successful. But if the goal is to have students use history to inform their understandings of what is happening today, then it falls short. Children seem to see the injustices they learn about as specific to an earlier point in time, as problems that were solved, rather than as linked to contemporary forms of racial exclusion.<sup>29</sup>

This has implications for citizenship education and its role in the development of children's sense of national identity. While I am not specifically advocating what Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne have termed a justice-oriented model of citizenship education,<sup>30</sup> I do suggest that schools have some responsibility to present to students the realities of their social world and to identify, discuss, and evaluate the causes of existing

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<sup>29</sup> John Wills, "Who Needs Multicultural Education? White Students, U.S. History, and the Construction of a Usable Past" *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 27 (1996): 365-389.

<sup>30</sup> Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne. "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237-269.

Justice-oriented citizenship education uses rhetoric and analysis that calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice.

social problems. It is appropriate here to highlight a debate that between Eamonn Callan and William Galston concerning the need for an appropriate model of citizenship education in a liberal democratic society such as the United States. Let us first consider the ways in which Callan and Galston are alike: they both agree that the modern nation is confronted with the fact of pluralism and the various- sometimes divisive- attachments its citizens have to other identities; both see the need for a strategy of integration to ensure the attachment of citizens to the political institutions of the liberal society; and importantly, both see citizenship education as essential to the achievement of that end. However, where they diverge is the nature of this education. Let me first quote at length – as Callan does – the key passage from Galston:

On the practical level, very few individuals will come to embrace the core commitments of liberal societies through a process of rational inquiry. If children are to be brought to accept these commitments as valid and binding, it can only be through a process that is far more rhetorical than rational. For example, rigorous historical research will almost certainly vindicate complex ‘revisionist’ accounts of key figures in American history. Civic education, however, requires a more noble, moralizing history: a pantheon of heroes who confer legitimacy on central institutions and constitute worthy objects of emulation. It is unrealistic to believe that more than a few adults of liberal societies will ever move beyond the kind of civic commitment engendered by such a pedagogy.<sup>31</sup>

Callan dubs this non-revisionist moralizing form of citizenship education ‘sentimental’ where sentimentality involves a ‘sustaining fiction of moral purity’.<sup>32</sup> According to Callan, a sentimental civic education has three fundamental flaws: first, a ‘truncated historical imagination’, a sort of myopia about one’s own communal past; second, a ‘propensity to filter complex political problems through a network of mutually supportive

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<sup>31</sup> William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 243-244.

<sup>32</sup> Eamon Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 106.

moral fictions’, i.e. a general ‘coarsening of moral vision’ which comes with acquiring secondary falsehoods that protect an illusory national purity; and, third, a ‘debased conservatism’ which does not see the political present as capable of progress or advancement.<sup>33</sup> Callan’s critique of Galston’s debilitating “sentimentalism” goes beyond the moral dimension, it is also political. He maintains that the dispositions promoted by a sentimental political education cannot be reconciled with the proper rights and responsibilities that underpin representative institutions.

I am not suggesting that the curriculum used in the Novi school district perpetuates a fictional image of America or is in any way “sentimental;” however, the data does suggest that children are to some extent oblivious to the social and political problems endemic to contemporary America (even though they seem very aware of the country’s historical struggles with racism and slavery). If American schools aim to create citizens who are not only patriotic and deeply attached to their country, but also active participants in the civic and political processes of a democratic nation, then it may be worthwhile for curriculum designers and teachers to look beyond the creedal principles that are fundamental to the existence of America, investigate the extent to which they have been fully realized in society today, and most importantly, engage children actively to evaluate ways to bridge the potential gap between “ideals and institutions.”<sup>34</sup> Room must also be made to discuss the various tensions and challenges inherent in embracing freedom as a national creed, how divergent notions of what freedom translates into for different groups of people can collide, or the extent to which freedom—just like

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 105- 108.

<sup>34</sup> Huntington, “American Ideals”.



authority—must necessarily have its boundaries in a healthy, functioning, multicultural democracy.

The tight alignment between what I termed a political model of citizenship education in the U.S. and the responses of children in my study is nonetheless a promising example of how schools can have a positive role in inculcating deep and abiding commitment to a set of abstract principles. Existing studies show that this ability accelerates at around fourth and fifth grade,<sup>35</sup> which is precisely the age of the children in my study. However, what this chapter accomplishes is to go beyond merely identifying the various political entities (abstract or otherwise) that children are attached to; it demonstrates the discursive ways in which children construct a consistent story of a creedal America by relating these entities with each other, and how they help contribute to children's growing sense of what it means to be an American.

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<sup>35</sup> Hess and Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes*.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Of Comparisons & Contrasts**

The case studies of schoolchildren and their patterns of nation identification in Singapore and the U.S. presented in the previous two chapters are symptomatic of nation-states which have experienced—and are still experiencing— dilemmas and tensions at socio-political and cultural levels. The question immediately following now, is one of commonalities and differences- to what degree do the similarities in the debates around national identity, citizenship, and citizenship education lend themselves to generalizable themes? This chapter will show that while striking differences do exist between the two countries—not the least of which is the way in which children talk about national identity and the form of citizenship education practiced in each country—these differences belie some general themes that can and must be made about notions of citizenship and nationality. I begin with a discussion of some broad differences between the two groups of children and then spend the rest of the chapter on two larger themes- race/ethnicity and immigration.

#### *6.1. The Different Stories Children Tell*

This section looks back at some of the differences I identified in Chapters 4 and 5. As I describe them in greater detail, I also present my postulations for why these dissimilarities exist. The most striking difference is clearly the way children’s national

identity stories fall on the two extremes of the spectrum, with Singaporean children evoking the tangible and material on the one hand, and American children talking about the abstract and creedal on the other. One way of explaining this polarity is that children internalize what they learn in school and because the curriculum in each country seem to construct and privilege such different narratives of national history, symbols, and experiences, children necessarily express such widely divergent views. Another perhaps more complex way of looking at things might be to consider other sources from which children glean a sense of the national discourse; schools are but one institution—though an important one—where stories about the nation are formed and shared. I return to Billig’s notion of banal nationalism by suggesting that the rhetoric of freedom, equality, and independence so permeate the American consciousness that children are literally immersed in this master narrative whether they are consuming popular culture (depictions of America in movies, TV, video games), engaging in social media websites, exposed to social and political discourse at home, or in the case of the children in my study specifically, being inundated with media images and reports of their then new President who had just been inaugurated as I was conducting this study. For them, the school curriculum may be merely reinforcing what they already know to be the prevailing story of American national identity.

Similarly, banal nationalism applies just as well to children in Singapore whose material markers of national identity are also grounded in everyday experiences. I posit that on top of a school curriculum which encourages teachers to highlight the material progress and economic wealth of the country, the Singapore government's self promotion of Singapore's modernity as the prime marker of nationhood has significant influence

over children's construction of a national story. In exchange for controlled media outlets and limited political expression, the government has given its citizens a standard of living that is characterized by a high level efficiency, cleanliness, and the presence of all modern conveniences within its borders. Citizens have a material—if not political-- stake in the country in areas such as a high employment rate, world-class public housing and education systems, and near-universal health care. And these comforts are not lost on children; it is partly through such encounters and everyday living experiences that the children experience the nation.

In other words, one must take into account the social, cultural, and political milieu within which children live when looking at how Americanness or Singaporeanness is internalized and expressed. This is reflected in another striking way with specific regards to children's drawings. In Chapter 4, I highlighted the finding that in Singapore, children were more likely to draw people as representations of the country compared to buildings or symbols and that in these pictures there was *never* a single Singaporean but always four figures, representing the four official races of the nation (see Figure 4.3 in Chapter 4). In the U.S., the converse is true- there were in fact very few drawings of people. Children were more likely to draw symbols (such as the flag) or significant landmarks like the Statue of Liberty. In the few pictures that did include people, it was typically of a single person, either an African-American to represent their significant struggle for freedom or of a race-less, race-less "general" American who embodies all the creedal values the children so revere. When asked during the whole-class re-presentation session why there were so few people in their pictures and if there were, they were usually just one person, Tanya, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader captured best the general opinion of many other American

children: “Because it’s so hard! We have so many races and people from different countries that you can’t draw all of them. There isn’t enough space on the paper! So sometimes, we draw just one person to represent everyone.”<sup>1</sup>

As the responses in Chapter 4 suggest, multiracialism figures strongly in Singaporean children’s story about national identity and hence it is not surprising that their drawings reflect this preoccupation. This does not mean that American children do not have a sense that multiculturalism is important in the U.S.; that they acknowledge the *difficulty* in depicting the true extent of American multiculturalism may in fact indicate a deeper understanding of the complex nature of ethnicity/ethnicities in the country. The anxiety with regards to Singapore is that such a narrow conceptualization of racial demography may result in an exclusive notion of who “gets” to be Singaporean, whether or not they fit comfortably in these pre-existing categories, and what happens if they do not. The advantage of not being able to capture Americanness in any one single person (or group of people) is that this enables—potentially—for a more *inclusive* notion of citizenship, where the abstractness of who an American is allows for the country to more easily accept a wider, more diverse group of would-be citizens.

As established in Chapter 4, children’s conception of Singapore’s four races is tightly wrapped up with their fears of racial unrest and impending war. There is constant unease that Singapore’s “enemies” (who children never really identify) will exploit this vulnerability and wage war against the country. This anxiety at the prospect of war distinguishes the children in Singapore from their American counterparts who I argue, view war and national security in a very different way. In Singapore, even though the

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<sup>1</sup> I include the exclamation marks to convey the near-exasperation that Tanya was expressing. There appeared to be an element of frustration at the fact that I had to ask what seemed to her to be such an obvious answer to an unnecessary question.

country faces no impending threat of war or even civil unrest, the anxiety over the possibility of war is very real. They are constantly fixated with its potential imminence and its likely disruption to their way of life. I suggest that this sense of being in a perpetual state of crisis only serves to heighten children's preoccupation with all things material and practical. Children seem to be under the impression that these are the things that Singapore's "enemies" are envious of and therefore are the very things that will be taken away from them first (or so they believe)- housing, efficient infrastructure, and economic wealth.

Conversely, the U.S. is fighting a war overseas and while some children do acknowledge American involvement in the war, there seems to be only a vague awareness of the circumstances surrounding it. When asked about her drawing of soldiers and the Navy, Shira says:

Shira: Because we want everybody to be safe first. Like when there is a war--people are unsafe. And when like, you need something to go fight it off...

Serene: Do you think that we are in a state of war, right now?

Shira: Oh yah. Kind of- like Iraq or Pakistan. I forgot where.

[Shira, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Indian-American]

Michael: Because they're the ones who fight for our country and for us to be like free and stuff. Like my... two of my great, great uncles died in World War II. One was, both of them were on a sub that got sank.

Serene: So, are we at war now? Do you think that we still rely on soldiers, today, to keep our freedom?

Michael: Yeah. I don't really know where though. Just really far away. For like religion and stuff.

[Michael, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian, in response to why he wants to be a soldier when he grows up]

Shira's phrase "*when* there is a war" (italics mine) suggests that she almost had forgotten that the U.S. is in fact at war at this point in time, and neither she nor Michael know

exactly where or what about the current war is being fought. Instead, when children mentioned war in the U.S., most of them referred either to the War of Independence or the Civil War. Even in these instances, it was not the specific details of the war that mattered but the fact that these wars were fought in the name of freedom and equality for all Americans. For example, in response to my prompt about important things to tell the alien visitor, one of the things 4<sup>th</sup> grader, Glen lists is: “He should know about all the wars because all these wars have helped us build up to what we are today. Because of the wars, we now all have freedom, we’re now all free. Because whenever I think of a war-I think of someone holding a flag up, claiming that they won the war for freedom.” It would seem that for most American children who talked about wartime, war is something that has been overcome and from which America has emerged triumphant with its creedal principles reinforced through the process. In other words, unlike many children in Singapore for whom war is a constant prospect and threat, in the minds of more than a few American children, war is a distant issue and not something in the here and now, even though ironically, it is something very real for many of their fellow citizens.

The transcendence of the freedom narrative is also evident when examining children’s relationship with their cultural markers of national identity, which brings up another axis along which to compare children’s construction of their national stories. In Singapore, as children talk about language and multiculturalism, there is a fundamental belief that these markers are also essential to their sense of self. As 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Zaheela mentioned, Singlish is a part of her, just as being Malay as well as Singaporean is a part of her. These elements come together in her conception of self. In the U.S. on the other

hand, the cultural marker of religion is spoken of less as an aspect of children's sense of self than as representative of the country's larger national narrative. Children did not say much about religion as essential to their self concepts or the extent to which being Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim was as important to them as being American and being free.<sup>2</sup> One could argue that the master discourse of freedom in the U.S. is so all-encompassing as to transcend individual self-concept, or it could simply be that in Singapore, with so few resources on which to project both national and self identity, children grasped on to what is most salient to them.

A main focus of this study is to explore how children understand the notion of national identity and the role of the school in its development, with particular reference-- as suggested by the literature-- to social positionings such as ethnicity, minority status, and language use.<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, identity-formation process is not static but constantly shifting and evolving; it is culturally constituted and very much an interaction between the self and the cultural resources at hand, which in this case takes many forms such as those afforded to a person via their ethnicity, immigrant status, or nationality, etc. In this chapter, I propose that while Chapters 4 and 5 present a very consistent and shared master narrative of how the children in each country conceptualize national identity-- the pragmatic and material in Singapore and the creedal and ideological in the U.S.-- viewing children's responses in light of these cultural configurations reveals nuances and variants

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<sup>2</sup> This in no way suggests that children may not in effect *feel* strongly about their religious/cultural beliefs; but they were not moved to express these sentiments to me the same way children in Singapore did.

<sup>3</sup> In the initial presentation of my theoretical framework, I had postulated that gender may perhaps emerge as a potential lens through which to view children's views on national identity. However, in analyzing my data, I did not find significant differences between boys and girls. The only exception is that in Singapore, before of the National Service policy, boys were more likely than girls to highlight ideas related to national defense, military security, and their own role in protecting the nation.



to this master narrative. I propose that master narratives of national identity are in some sense template stories—scripts, if you will. My findings suggest that children in the two multicultural societies appear to understand that the various stories about cultural and national identity *are* scripts (instead of The Truth) that are presented to them to validate, challenge, negotiate, and rewrite. They are open to active and continued interpretation based on the resources available to them. Depending on whether children are in the majority ethnic group or in the minority, native or immigrant, different cultural resources—history, family, memory—are brought to bear in order to create their own side-stories. Sometimes these stories overlap, sometimes they contradict, or they may simply co-exist side by side; but most importantly, they are always tethered in one way or another on the larger discourse of national identity fundamental to their specific country.

It may be helpful to draw on John Dryzek’s description of political discourses as it resonates strongly with my notion of national stories and narratives:

A discourse is a shared means of making sense of the world embedded in language. Any discourse will always be grounded in assumptions, judgments [sic], contentions, dispositions, and capabilities. These shared terms of reference enable those who subscribe to a particular discourse to perceive and compile bits of sensory information into coherent stories or accounts that can be communicated in intersubjectively meaningful ways. Thus a discourse will generally revolve around a central storyline, containing opinions about both facts and values.<sup>4</sup>

The following sections argue that for each country, while there is this central storyline which forms the core of what Americanness or Singaporeanness represents, there are also discourses that branch out from this mainline whose form is determined by the different histories, cultures, memories, and expectations of specific cultural groups. In

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<sup>4</sup> John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2000), 18.

particular, ethnicity/race and immigrant status emerged in my study as significant dimensions along which to discuss children's stories about themselves and their country. Essentially the assertion of national identity is very close to the assertion of race and immigrant status insofar as they have to do with the symbolic construction of community.<sup>5</sup> If we assume that children are variously enmeshed in a range of symbolic communities and collective identifications, including ones that blur the boundaries between race, immigrant status, and nationality, then questions of 'Who am I?', 'Where do I belong?', and 'Who do I relate to?' become very important ones to address. Some issues I examine in this chapter include the relative importance of children's ethnic vs. national identities, how different groups of children perceive the role of minorities in society, discourses about the meaning of Singapore/ America as countries constituted by immigrants, and the challenges facing immigrant children as they juggle multiple group identifications and attachments.

## 6.2. *Race and Ethnicity*

In Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrated that children in the U.S. and Singapore talk about nationality in decidedly different ways—children in the U.S. evoke the creedal ideals of freedom, independence, egalitarianism while for children in Singapore, the sense of national belonging and patriotism is largely framed in the materiality and social modernity of everyday life such as a comfortable and clean environment, modern conveniences, high standard of living, and economic and political stability. And while these are sentiments broadly shared by almost all the children I spoke to in each country,

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. (London: Tavistock, 1985).

there were interesting variations in the ways in which they were discussed by children from different cultural groups. For instance, in Singapore, minority children—the Malays in particular— tell a story about Singapore’s economic prosperity and defense imperatives in ways that are just a little divergent from their Chinese peers. In Chapter 4, I described how most Singaporean children frame their sense of national belonging and pride around the materiality and social modernity of everyday life in urban Singapore. Students are quick to highlight Singapore's comfortable and clean environment, modern conveniences, high standard of living, and economic and political stability. However, as I briefly raised in that chapter, not all children were at ease with the rate of Singapore’s economic development.

Singaporeans are too money-faced. Like this one day, I saw about two people who were driving Lamborghinis along Orchard Road. It’s not necessary to drive such cars in Singapore. Petrol is so expensive. And COE<sup>6</sup> too.

[Hamtaz, Malay boy, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Singapore, on what he would change about Singapore if he could]

I'm not sure if other people think the same way, is that Singapore sometimes is very expensive. You can say it's very expensive- the oil prices are going up, this is going up, that is going up, so... some people want to afford it but cannot afford it.

[Dinah, Malay girl, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Singapore, on why her father started taking the bus to work]

While most other children in Singapore unreservedly expressed pride at Singapore’s accomplishments, Malay children tended to veer towards caution and ambivalence, worrying about burgeoning materialism and the increasing cost of living. I propose that

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<sup>6</sup> The Certificate of Entitlement (COE), instituted by the Singaporean government since May 1990, is a program designed to limit car ownership, and hence, the number of vehicles on the country's roads. This system, in effect, requires residents of Singapore to bid for the right to buy a motor vehicle, with the number of certificates deliberately restricted.

their minority status in the country may to some degree explain some of this anxiety. In theory, Singapore's model of multiculturalism is based on meritocracy, with equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of race or religion. The assumption is that minorities' rights and interests will be safeguarded and they would not be discriminated against on account of their ethnicities. However, this presupposes that all races are able to avail themselves of the equal opportunities, which is not necessarily the case in reality, particularly for the Malay community. While the Malay community has made much socio-economic progress, in the last 20 years,<sup>7</sup> it still lags behind the other races. There continues to be persistent socioeconomic problems within the community and this may account for why the Malay children in my study view Singapore's material prosperity with a level of reservation. One could argue that while Singapore has indeed made great strides economically, not all racial groups within the country have been able to benefit from this wealth equally. There are traces of envy and resentment in both Hamtaz and Dinah's deviation from Singapore's master narrative that hint at the unequal dividends accrued to the different groups of citizens within the nation.

And yet, interestingly, these feelings of economic inequality do not necessarily compromise the level of national pride and devotion Malay children feel for the nation. As established in Chapter 4, an aspect of Singaporean children's preoccupation with materiality is a concern with maintaining political and military stability in order to ensure a secure quality of life. If this is the master narrative guiding Singaporean children's sense of national identity, I suggest here that the variant story Malay children tell themselves is that even though they are in the minority, Singapore's security is actually

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene Tan, "We, the Citizens of Singapore...": Multiethnicity, its Evolution and its Aberrations," in *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*, ed. Ah Heng Lai (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2004), 65- 97.

of even *greater* importance to them than it is for the Chinese children. For instance, more Malay boys spoke of National Service-- Singapore's compulsory military conscription policy-- with a sense of pride and duty:

- Serene: How do you feel about National Service?  
Zul: It makes me feel proud to be able to defend Singapore.  
Because if there is any terrorist attack or there is war happening, then the SAF\* will defend us.  
Serene: Why does Singapore need defending?  
Zul: Because Singapore is a trading port and many people come to us. So if a terrorist attack happens then a lot of people may get hurt. That's why we have to have our army to protect us and also we need NS men like me to do their duty.  
[Zul, Malay boy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Singapore]

*\*Singapore Armed Forces*

Compare this to the sentiments of some of the Chinese boys with whom I spoke, who expressed more than an element of anxiety at the prospect of national service:

- Serene: Ok, as a boy, you know when you turn 18 you're going to have to do NS right? How do you feel?  
Sam: I'm scared.  
Serene: But why? You'll get to use all the military things that you drew in your picture.  
Sam: But I might kill myself while using it.  
Serene: Let's hope you'll be safe and careful. What else makes you scared about going to NS?  
Sam: It's going to take so long. And you have to march and march and march.  
[Sam, Chinese boy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Singapore]

As an extension of this, minority students as a whole also offered richer responses about the meanings they associate with various national symbols and events. While talking about the relationship between the flag and the nation, Adaam, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade Malay boy replied, "It is the soul of the nation. It represents all the different things-- like ideas, I think, that Singapore stands for, like peace and harmony and all that." Arti, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade

Malay girl, captures the essence of Michael Ignatieff's notion of civic nationalism in her description of what the Singapore flag means to her:

- Serene: So why is it so important that you know your flag so well?  
Arti: It stands for your country. Your country is where you live, where you're born, and sometimes you feel that your flag stands for you. You treat your flag like your life because we stand in front of it to say the pledge everyday. It says "We the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion..." blah blah blah and so on... So all citizens have rules we have to follow and things we have to do as Singaporeans.
- Serene: What are some of these things you have to do?  
Arti: I'm not so sure how to explain- how do you say? You can say it's to live in this country, to respect the people who live in this country and to love this country forever.
- Serene: So you can't do that for any other country but Singapore?  
Arti: Yes, because I'm born here. That's quite a big deal to me, yeah. I don't know how other people think, it should be quite a big deal to be born here.

[Arti, Malay girl, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Singapore]

Arti's recitation of the opening lines of Singapore's national pledge is Ignatieff's civic nationalism in a nutshell- unequivocally, she understands that in Singapore, all citizens (her emphasis)—regardless of heritage-- share the responsibility to live by a specific set of commitments to the nation. In addition here, an interesting series of symbolic associations is taking place in Arti's response: she believes that the flag represents Singapore, but it can also represent her as a citizen, and hence the necessity to treasure it like life itself. This almost metonymic use of the flag demonstrates how inextricably the flag is tied to both a sense of national identity as well as a sense of the obligations due to a country by its citizens. Arti's relationship with the Singapore flag is as much a rational/ political one as it is an emotional one- fundamentally, you perform these civic duties as citizens because you love your country.

One possible explanation for the emotionalism with which Malay children express their Singaporeanness might be the unique position of Malays in Singapore. Despite being a minority group, Malays are in effect the indigenous peoples of Singapore and hence enjoy protected status as stipulated by the Singapore Constitution:

The Government shall exercise its functions in such manner as to recognize the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, unlike minority groups in other countries who may feel less enfranchised in political and social arenas compared to those in the majority, the special status of Malays in Singapore may instead make them feel *more* invested in the protection and well-being of the country.

Another way in which this theme of the majority vs. minority story manifests itself in Singapore is in the way children responded to the prompt about country choice. I asked them, “When you grow up, which country would you like to live in and why?” This question was designed to capture children’s perceptions about their relationship to their home country; I speculate that children’s choices, and more importantly, their justifications, reveal insights about why their country may or may not be the place they would like to call their permanent home and hence shed light on their sense of national identity in the present.<sup>9</sup> Analyses reveal that of the 65 Singaporean citizens who were

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<sup>8</sup> Singapore Constitution, Part XIII, *General Provisions, Minorities and Special Position of Malays*, section 152.

<sup>9</sup> In order to investigate patterns in children’s responses to this question, I analyzed the data by statistically quantifying this portion of the interview (see Michelene T. H. Chi, “Quantifying Qualitative Analyses of Verbal Data: A Practical Guide” *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* 6, no. 3: 271-315).

Using a statistical software program, I coded children based on their demographic profiles as well as their choices as to whether or not they would choose to remain in the U.S. or Singapore. For children who said

interviewed, 21 children said they would chose to live in another country. All of them were Chinese.

Here, it is necessary to quote some of the exchanges with these Chinese students at length because there is much in their narrative that speaks to the extent to which they abide by the master narrative of a material-based national identity, and the implications this has on their country choice. Lynn here justifies her choice of moving to Australia by talking the rising prices of food in Singapore. She identifies this as a sign that Singapore's standard of living is escalating, not what you would expect a typical 4<sup>th</sup> grader to be troubled by. And yet, this very pragmatic concern clearly figures enough in her decision-making process to cause her to choose Australia. Further, she admits that there is little in Singapore that she will miss if she does leave the country.

Lynn: Australia.

Serene: Why?

Lynn: Because I went there before and it's very fun.

Serene: What's so nice about Australia that you want to live there?

Lynn: There are many nature reserve parks and tours.

Serene: So why don't you want to live in Singapore when you grow up?

Lynn: Food prices are expensive. Our standard of living is getting high.

Serene: Will you miss anything about Singapore when you leave?

Lynn: No, not really.

Serene: So you don't mind leaving Singapore at all?

Lynn: So, don't mind.

Serene: So you don't feel anything for the country, you'll just move to Australia.

Lynn: Yah.

[Lynn, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese girl, Singapore]

Lynn's concern with the rising cost of living in Singapore is shared by Liwei who echoes a common Singaporean complaint, "It's tough to make a living." His other motivations for wanting to move to the United States are equally fixated on comfort, safety, and

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they would move to a different country, I then made a record of what this country was. For the purposes of this section, I only analyzed responses of U.S./ Singaporean citizens and permanent residents.



stability. He laments the warm weather and he worries about natural disasters befalling Singapore. Even his response to how he would feel when he does make his move is to describe a physical sensation as opposed to an emotional one.

- Liwei: USA  
Serene: Why?  
Liwei: Because car magazine says America has all these huge cars and I'll get to see some of those cars that are gas-guzzlers, especially those SUVs.  
Serene: So Liwei, why wouldn't you want to continue living in Singapore when you grow up?  
Liwei: The weather is so hot and everything is rising.  
Serene: As in prices?  
Liwei: Things are getting very expensive- it's going to get tougher to make a living.  
Serene: Why else?  
Liwei: Right now, we're being protected from everywhere but once Indonesia and Sumatra break up, the danger is going to come.  
Serene: Can you tell me more? Danger from whom?  
Liwei: From Indonesia. Let's say now it's blocking the tidal waves. Then when Sumatra breaks up, the tsunami will be unleashed and the waves will come our way.  
Serene: So you mean natural disasters? Will you miss Singapore when you move to the US?  
Liwei: Maybe. I'll probably miss mom and dad.  
Serene: Anything or anyone else?  
Liwei: Don't know.  
Serene: How would you feel moving away to the states?  
Liwei: Jetlagged because the time is different over there.  
Serene: How about feelings? Would you be happy or sad? What emotions do you think you'll feel?  
Liwei: Excited.

[Liwei, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy, Singapore]

This pragmatic sense of belonging emerges even more vividly in the following exchange with Jerome, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese boy; he sums up well the concerns and priorities of many of the 21 Singaporean children who chose to leave Singapore if they were given a choice.

- Jerome: Most likely Australia.  
Serene: Why Australia?

- Jerome: Because firstly, it doesn't really get really hot. Then there isn't that much work or stress.
- Serene: So is it very stressful here in Singapore?
- Jerome: Sort of.
- Serene: Is that why you wouldn't you want to continue living in Singapore when you grow up?
- Jerome: Yeah, it can get really hot. And then, sometimes you can get overloaded with work. It's very stressful.
- Serene: OK, and why else?
- Jerome: There are a lot of cars so there's a lot of carbon monoxide. That makes it sort of hot and tears out a hole in the ozone layer. And then we might get skin diseases.
- Serene: Would you miss anything about Singapore when you move to Australia?
- Jerome: Of course. Family, friends, and my bed.  
[Jerome, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy, Singapore]

At nine, Jerome is worried about being overworked and contracting skin cancer, two conditions he believes he will experience if he continues living in Singapore. These are of course legitimate concerns, even for a nine-year-old, but they also speak to the depths to which the master narrative of a material-based sense of Singaporeanness has become ingrained in even the youngest citizens. And although Jerome admits that he will miss Singapore if he moves, note that the things he lists have less to do with Singapore specifically than personal relationships and an ordinary bed.

Of course, the view of 21 should not negate the fact that the rest of the Chinese students chose to remain in Singapore; however, the consistent vocabulary of material comfort and pragmatism that many of these 21 children evoked is nonetheless disturbing, almost suggesting that government rhetoric about Singapore's economic success and the curriculum's focus on the country's rapid ascent in the region may have been too successful for its own good. Beyond the material experiences of nationhood, there seems to be little else for these Chinese children to cling on to as symbols and markers of an abiding and emotional allegiance to Singapore. As Velayutham writes, "It is not the kind

of passionate or emotional national identity that people imagine they might fight and die for.”<sup>10</sup>

These finding seems counter-intuitive considering the deeply emotional and affective nature of Singapore’s National Education (NE) program. As described in Chapter 3, policy documents relating to NE’s design and implementation, speeches about NE, and the official NE website reveal language steeped heavily in emotion. Terms such as “core values”, “will to prevail”, “instinct for survival”, “emotional attachment” are used liberally. And as noted by Christine Han, “much of the thrust of NE is of an affective nature. The approach taken is very much one of socializing children into *a* particular set of values and views.” (italics mine)<sup>11</sup> I argue, however, that as much as children do frequently express their love and commitment to Singapore, it is patriotism that is has roots in utilitarianism and pragmatism. It does seem that NE has been successful in fulfilling its objectives of instilling in most children that all-important emotional connection to Singapore; but it is an attachment that is tied up intimately with one’s material well-being and comfort.

It is necessary to point out here the similarities between the concerns voiced by Lynn, Liwei, and Jerome in this section and the ambivalence expressed earlier by the Malay children in reference to Singapore’s economic development. Even though both sets of comments represent a common feeling of unease about the rate at which Singapore is prospering, the two groups of children respond to this unease in totally opposite ways. The Chinese children have chosen to move away because of these

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<sup>10</sup> Selvaraj Velayutham, “Affect, Materiality, and the Gift of Social Life in Singapore,” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 19, no. 1 (2004): 32.

<sup>11</sup> Christine Han, “National Education and ‘Active Citizenship’: Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20, no. 1 (2000): 65.

material pressures; the Malay, on the other hand, chose to remain in Singapore *in spite of* these apprehensions. Across grade levels and gender, *all* nineteen minority children in my Singapore sample—whether Malay, Indian, or Eurasian—refashioned the narrative of material comfort and stability by choosing to remain in Singapore in the future. This finding is consistent with emigration figures which show that the Chinese have left Singapore in record numbers, while Malay migration has continued to remain low.<sup>12</sup> Zul, a 5<sup>th</sup>-grade Malay boy explained his decision in a way which echoes the aforementioned emotionalism and commitment of his fellow Malays:

Because Singapore is my home. This is where I was born. And to be a citizen of a country is to protect the country very well and take care of the country. And let the country be proud of their people. Which means you can't just abandon it. It doesn't matter if you Chinese, Malay, Indian or what. You're Singaporean first.

[Zul, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy, Singapore]

Because Singapore is where I was born. I grew up and bred here. And this is where I have memories and roots. I can't just pack up and go. This is my homeland and we have a duty to take care of it. Singapore already has very little people to protect it and with more soldiers, we can defend Singapore better.

[Aziz, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay boy, Singapore]

Note the prominent use of the pronoun “I” in both excerpts- these Malay children are inserting themselves into their narrative of Singapore; they are taking it upon themselves to safeguard Singapore's future because them, this is the obligation that comes with citizenship. In some ways, both Zul and Aziz are still adhering very much to the grand story of political safety and stability, except that they have rewritten it in a way which inserts themselves as being *responsible* for maintaining this level of stability. There

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<sup>12</sup> Hussin Mutalib, “Singapore's Quest for National Identity: The Triumphs and Trials of Government Policies,” in *Imagining Singapore*, ed. Kah Choon Ban & Anne Pakir (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2004), 54- 80.

appears to be a level of emotional inability to leave Singapore because they feel duty-bound by their citizenship status to stay and protect. I argue that they are just as concerned as their Chinese counterparts with survivalism and a comfortable existence but instead of representing push factors that would cause them to leave Singapore, these are in fact pull factors for the Malay students, drawing them to harness the ambivalence they share with the 21 Chinese students into a decision to remain in Singapore instead of move away. There is a heartening level of reciprocity here that is also shared with many Chinese students who themselves chose to remain in Singapore, but which stands out in particular coming from the Malay community considering their often marginalized place in Singapore society.<sup>13</sup>

The country choices made by the 21 Chinese students points to the way in which the symbols, myths, and stories used to create and sustain Singapore's national identity may have backfired, causing pressures in the majority ethnic group that they can only contemplate addressing by leaving the country. Conversely, in spite of, or perhaps *because* of their indigenous minority status and relative lower socioeconomic status—the specific cultural resources available to them because of their cultural status as minorities—Malay students feel simultaneously a deeper sense of national pride as Singapore's original peoples, greater caution with regards to her rapid economic growth, and perhaps consequently, also less anxiety in terms of having to live up middle-class aspirations of a typical Chinese Singaporean.

One of my research objectives in this study was to also investigate the extent to which children's construction of national identity might be contextual, i.e. does it vary

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<sup>13</sup> See Lily Zubaidah Rahim, "Singapore-Malaysia Relations: Deep-Seated Tensions and Self-fulfilling Prophecies", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 29, no. 1, (1999): 38-55.

depending on the environment within which children find themselves. This was the motivation behind my sampling design where one school in each country enrolled an above average number of minority children. I wanted to examine whether or not being amongst relatively more or fewer minority children would affect the opinions of children in the majority group or the minority group themselves. In Singapore, it would seem that children's stories are fairly consistent across context. Chinese children did not talk about Singapore any differently between the two schools or across grade levels. More importantly, neither did the minority children. Whether or not they were in fourth or fifth grader, in Nee Ann Primary or Bennett Estate, there was a constancy to the emotional commitment and personal nature of national identity expressed by the Malay children in particular.

Just as the children in Singapore took dimensions of the master narrative of the Singapore story and refashioned it into their own versions, so did children in America. In particular, children's views about freedom in terms of race and the experience of slavery and segregation in the United States stand out. These observations fell along interesting racial lines. In particular, the position of African-Americans in the U.S. emerged as a topic that many children addressed. When asked what makes Americans different from people from other countries, Lionel, a Caucasian fifth-grader answered:

Well I think we have more freedom than other countries. And no one can just- no one has the right to just say- you have White skin and I don't like you. Um...they won't let- not let you be friends with anyone just because you don't like the same thing or you have a different color skin. That's not OK.

[Lionel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy, U.S.]

Lionel's vision of freedom as the right to live in a colorblind society typifies the response of several other Caucasian children the U.S. sample and across grade levels as well.

When asked what she thinks Americans value most in life, Brianna, another fifth-grader and Caucasian, said:

America believes in that [sic] they can be free. And they could be- they should have their own life and not be poor. Everybody should have that freedom, no matter who you are, or your grandfather. Or what color we are. And um...America is a good place in life. And you don't have to do what other people tell you to... And we are- our country is free now for everybody. That's why- like the person that shot Martin Luther King- he just didn't want that rule. That rule where the colored people can be free.  
[Brianna, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl, U.S.]

Two things stand out from these responses: first, like Lionel, Brianna also brings up the notion of color-blindness (*"Everybody should have that freedom, no matter who you are, or your grandfather. Or what color we are."*), a possibly troubling phenomena which has the potential to turn into color-blind racism. In her study on the racial discourse constructed in an (almost) all-white school, Amanda Lewis discusses how color-blind "race talk" masked an underlying reality of racialized practices and color-conscious understandings.<sup>14</sup> While I did not spend enough time in these schools to uncover tensions between what the children say about being color-blind and their actual behaviors, it is nonetheless worthwhile to note that it was only the Caucasian children who spoke about race not mattering (anymore) in American society. As children who belong to the majority ethnic group, it was perhaps easy (if not natural), but these children to believe that they now live in a color-blind society. What makes this more note-worthy is that the children quoted above—Lionel and Brianna—are 5<sup>th</sup> graders and attend Prairie Elementary, which unlike the school at which Lewis conducted her study, enrolls an above-average number of minority children. One speculates whether the nature of the minority enrollment may affect children's expressions of color-blindness, that if the

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<sup>14</sup> Amanda E. Lewis, "There Is No "Race" in the Schoolyard: Color-Blind Ideology in an (Almost) All-White School" *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (2001): 781-811.

largest minority group at Prairie had been African-Americans instead of Asian-Americans, whether or not children like Brianna and Lionel would still think of America as having overcome all racial discrimination.

Brianna's and Lionel's opinions also demonstrate how Caucasian children situated the African-American struggle for equal rights and freedom within the larger historical picture of slavery, Emancipation, the civil rights movement, segregation, and desegregation. It is not only a more expansive conceptualization of what it means to be free in America, it is also one where Caucasian children insert themselves into the African-American narrative of the struggle for freedom.

Fifth-grader, Ryan, who is Caucasian, embodies this vividly in his drawing which captures the story of African-Americans from slavery to Emancipation:



**Figure 6.1: African-American freedom**

My drawing is a African-American boy breaking free from a chain and birds flying free. I drew this because I feel that freedom best represents the U.S.A. This is because before the civil war and Abe Lincoln, the



segregation laws were treating African-Americans unfairly. After the civil war America became a place of freedom.

[Ryan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian boy, U.S.]

Ryan does not draw a picture of a Caucasian boy like himself, but instead chooses not only to identify with an African-American experience but to highlight it as representative of the larger American story. Gloria, who is nine, and also Caucasian, exhibited the same sentiment as she reflected on the inauguration of Barack Obama. Commenting on the historical nature of the event, she notes, “It’s important because *they* [African-Americans] used to be slaves at one point and *we* were segregated. And they weren’t treated equal but now they are. *We* fought for it *together*. Now *we* are all free. It’s like a big change.” [italics mine] Within two sentences, by transitioning from talking about African-Americans as *them*, to talking about a segregated *we*, and then to a collective *we* that fought together, Gloria has involved herself in the history of segregation and the civil rights movement. Her last “we” is not an ethnic “we”, it is an American “we.” There is a level of inclusivity that suggests the sharing of a common past. The freedom won by African-Americans is the freedom won by all Americans.

And while Caucasian children tended to embrace the larger historical nature of the African-American experience, African-American children themselves—across grade levels-- were more likely to talk about freedom in relation to specific people who were involved in the civil rights movement. There was a level of conceptualization and identification that was more intimate and personal where children highlighted the role of civil rights heroes like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks as if they were someone familiar. For example, Daniel, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and African-American, was talking about how

he had seen parts of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech on a poster at the library. I asked him what he understood from the speech:

Um...from the speech, he stated that one day he wanted his children to be able to play with other White children. And for the African-Americans to be treated the same as Americans- like Caucasian people. And um...that everyone would come to peace and everyone would be free and we wouldn't be told what to do. He helped all of us.

[Daniel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, African-American boy, U.S.]

What is striking here is how Daniel did not seem to consider African-Americans to be Americans, at least not the same way Caucasians are. At ten, he seems to already be exhibiting a level of disenfranchisement and a sense of not quite belonging. He noted a difference in the way that African-Americans were treated compared to Americans, i.e. Caucasians, and this was something he felt was the dream of Dr. King's to remedy. There is also the subtle cast of the shadow of slavery in his words, where "we wouldn't be told what to do" is a reference to the legacy of slavery. When I asked Daniel who were the people "everyone" in his response wanted to be free from and who would no longer be able to tell them what to do, he said, "the White owners." I also asked him to be specific about who the "we" and "us" referred to and his response, "us Black people." In other words, even though he, too, spoke in the first person, unlike the case of the Caucasian children whose inclusive "we" referred to all Americans, Daniel's "we" here *excludes* Americans who are not African-American and is used almost as a distancing mechanism.

Another similar example comes from JJ, a fourth grader. When asked to elaborate on specific freedoms that are particularly important to America, she says,

That we can think what we like to think and be free. Like Martin Luther King made us free. And so we don't have to be judged by our color. And we can like... think what we want to think and not have to answer to anyone.

[JJ, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, African-American girl, U.S.]

Once again, Martin Luther King is exalted as a hero for African-Americans in particular, not of the nation as a whole. Almost mirroring Daniel's words, JJ also seems to be preoccupied with the notion that freedom means not having to answer to someone else. And yet, when asked to elaborate who she were some people she might have to answer to, JJ was vague and referred merely to "Just those people who like to tell us what to do. Them." She was not vague however, when I asked her to be specific about who she means by "us" and "we." Unequivocally and almost immediately, "Black people."

Rosa Parks was another figure who featured prominently in children's narratives about freedom. Victoria, a 5th-grader and African-American, recounted Parks' experience as if she was talking about someone she knew personally:

Back then, they wouldn't do anything for the colored people, like Rosa Parks. She was working really hard and was tired and sat on the bus and then a White person came up to her and said- "Can I have this seat?" And she said no and then she went to jail. But she was just fighting for what she believed in. She wanted the freedom to sit anywhere she wanted to.

[Victoria, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, African-American, U.S.]

By including details such as Rosa Parks being tired after work, Victoria adds a level of authenticity and intimacy to this historical event, as if she were privy to Parks' feelings and emotions. Rickah, a 5th grader, echoed her classmate's sentiments by simply and succinctly summing up Parks' iconic role in both African-American and civil rights history: "Thanks to her, we are free to sit on any part of the bus."

It is not surprising that African-American children identify more personally with the larger struggle for equality and freedom of their race; what is interesting is that they do so by anchoring their opinions on a specific figure versus Caucasian children who

view racial freedom as a broader, national experience. I propose that these heroes provide them with a framework for interpreting history in a concrete way. Identifying with Dr. King and Rosa Parks on a personal level enabled the African-American children in my sample to “own” the struggle for freedom and equal rights in a way that is different for Caucasian children. There is also the striking difference in the way that the two groups of children use the notion of “us” and “we” while talking about freedom; while the Caucasian children took on a more inclusive view of the way in which freedom was fought for, achieved, and sustained, African-American children saw the struggle for freedom more as an exclusively Black experience.

This finding raises some interesting questions about the relative intensity of ethnic vs. national identities for African-American identity children. To what extent do African-American children prioritize their racial identity over their identity as American? Recall that in Singapore, when asked why he would choose to remain in Singapore, Malay boy Zul highlighted that race and ethnicity come second, “You’re Singaporean first.” Based on the (modest) sample of African-American children in my study, I propose that for African-American children, their racial identity may be more salient than their national one. While African-American children clearly subscribe to some of the same elements of the American story—freedom, liberty, independence—they have constructed a story where freedom is *their* freedom, liberty is *their* liberty, and independence, *their* independence. There is at least some research that seems to demonstrate the secondary role of national identity in African-American students’ overall sense of self. For instance, the 1996 General Social Survey asked respondents separate questions about how close they felt to the United States and to their own racial or ethnic group. A high proportion of

African-American respondents indicated that they felt close attachment to their own ethnic group but not the country as a whole, possibly implying that they would be more likely to privilege ethnicity over nationality when trade-offs must be made.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, in a survey of 669 American-born high-school students (made up of Caucasians, African-Americans, and Hispanics), Jean Phinney, Cindy Cantu, and Dawn Kurtz found that American identity was not significantly associated with higher self-esteem for African-American adolescents but a strong ethnic identity was.<sup>16</sup> While data from my study cannot make such conclusive statements, the sense of disenfranchisement in Daniel's response and the exclusive nature of how freedom is conceptualized by JJ seem to hint at some measure of distance from an absolute attachment to America that may or may not be at the expense of a very strong sense of African-American identity.

It is worth mentioning at this point that these data cannot make grand claims about the opinions of African –American children, bearing in mind the small numbers, purposive sample and the contingent nature of such identities. The number of African-American children was small (nine) and they did not constitute the largest minority group in my sample. Therefore, caution is needed in drawing conclusions. Nonetheless, I propose that the African-American variant to the master narrative of freedom and independence in the United States is an important one to consider in light of how Caucasian/ Asian-American and African-American children include and exclude each

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<sup>15</sup> Jack Citrin, Cara Wong, & Brian Duff. "The Meaning of American National Identity," in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. Richard D. Ashmore, Lee J. Jussim, David Wilder (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2001), 71- 100.

<sup>16</sup> Jean S. Phinney, Cindy Lou Cantu, and Dawn A. Kurtz, Ethnic and American Identity as Predictors of Self-Esteem Among African American, Latino, and White Adolescents, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26, no. 2 (1997): 165- 185.

other vis-à-vis freedom and the American experience, as well as the extent to which the African-American story of freedom is also an American one.

At this point, I would like to draw a parallel between the African-American children in the U.S. and the Malay children in Singapore despite what might first seem like two different modes of deviations from each country's master narrative. In the case of the U.S., the abiding story is one based on the creedal values of freedom and equality. Here, African-American children take a detour by taking a more exclusive, almost personal view on freedom, where racial freedom in particular is an African-American experience, and one deeply anchored in specific figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. In Singapore, the grand narrative is one of pragmatism and survivalism and we see the how ingrained this mentality is when half the number of Chinese students chose to live overseas in the future, many citing better material prospects elsewhere. Malay children veer from this somewhat by not only taking a more cautious stance on Singapore's rapid economic growth but also by taking ownership of Singapore's survival by choosing *not* to leave but to stay and taking it upon themselves to serve and protect the nation. I propose that in both cases, what we have is the minority groups choosing to fashion a very *personal* response to the grand narrative being embraced by the majority group. Their deviation is not one of rejection but one of *personalization*, reading themselves into the master narrative in a way that encapsulates the history and experience of being a minority. Walter Feinberg, writing about the relationship between the citizen "I" and the nation "we" argues:

Culture is implicated in self-development because the "I" is implicated in the "we." The "I" is always formed in the context of the "we," and it is the "we" that provides the ideas of identity and

attachment that constitute the “I.” Culture as a system of meaning provides the material through which self-recognition occurs.<sup>17</sup>

Whether it is the historical yoke of slavery or their place as the indigenous peoples of Singapore, it is obvious that both African-Americans and Malays use these resources to tell a story about national identity that exists on a more intimate level than that constructed by children in the majority.

The distinction of being the largest minority group in my American sample goes to Asian-American children. Admittedly, it is not truly possible to treat them as a monolithic ethnic group since this population, both in America as well as in my study, is very diverse in terms of national origin.<sup>18</sup> However the Asian-American children in my sample as a whole responded fairly consistently in terms of their ideas about nationality and citizenship, and although they do make specific references to different countries of origin, I will demonstrate in this chapter that the patterns of responses among the Asian-American children are nonetheless quite similar.

Perhaps because of their relatively small size, or because of their comparatively high socio-economic status upon arrival, or because of their public image as a model minority, studies on education, demography, sociology, etc. have found Asian-Americans more similar to non-Hispanic whites in many observable measures.<sup>19</sup> This observation/assumption is validated to some degree in my study where the responses of Asian-

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Feinberg, *Common Schools/uncommon Identities: National Unity and Cultural Difference*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 64.

<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, the largest numbers of children in my sample come from Japan, Korean, and China, with children of Japanese heritage forming the biggest group.

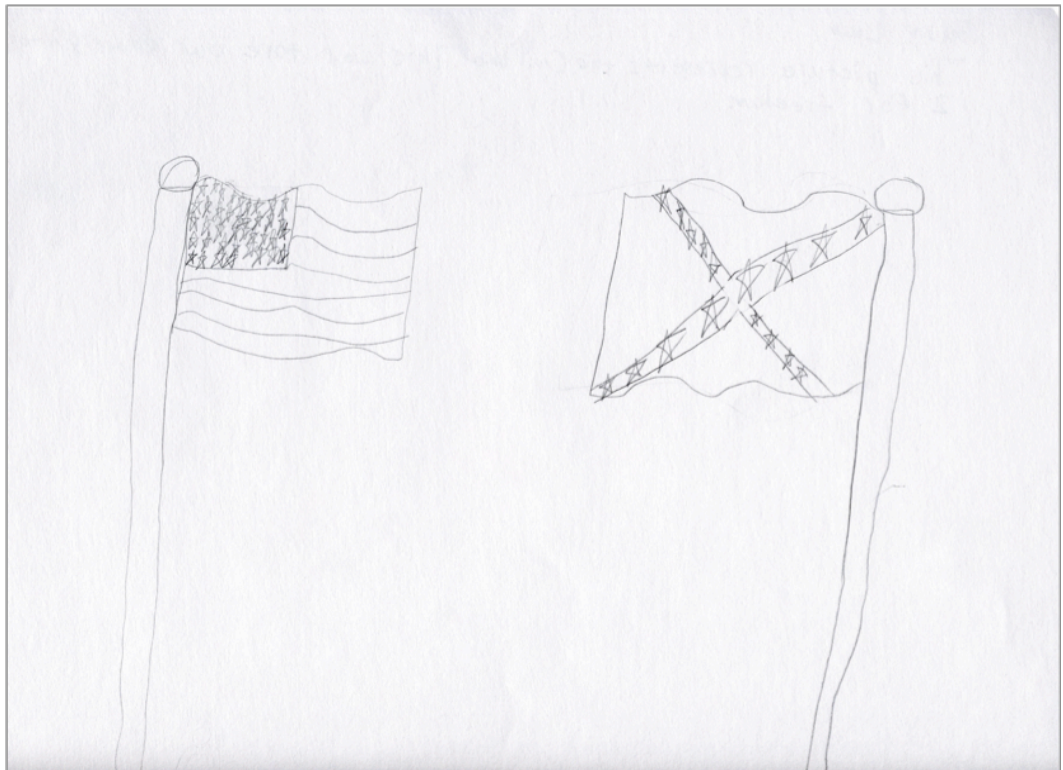
<sup>19</sup> There is an equally significant body of work that argues against this homogenized view of Asian-Americans and instead advocates for a more complex and nuanced approach to understanding this very diverse minority group. Unfortunately, it is not within the purview of this study to elaborate on the debate, but for reference, see Min, Zhou & Sao Xiong, Yang “The Multifaceted American Experiences of the Children of Asian Immigrants: Lessons for Segmented Assimilation” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 6 (2005): 1119- 1152.

American children come across as being very similar to their Caucasian schoolmates. Asian-American children could have chosen to interpret the American story of freedom more exclusively like that of a fellow minority group- the African-Americans-- but instead, their version of the American story is more like Caucasian-Americans, as the literature suggested it might be. For one, they expressed an equally expansive and inclusive conceptualization of racial freedom in America. And yet, instead of focusing on racial struggles one assumes might be closer to their hearts, e.g. the internment and relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II or the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, these Asian-American children, like their Caucasian peers, were very much concerned with issues of African-American freedom, although with some slight variation. While the Caucasian children were more likely to talk about racial freedom in light of the civil rights movement, Asian-American children were particularly fixated on slavery, Emancipation, and Abraham Lincoln. Here is Randall, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader who self-identified as being Chinese. Both his picture as well as his interview reflected a deep interest in both the Civil War and its implications for African-American history:

- Randall: My picture...um...this is our U.S. flag, right now. And this was the Rebel Army flag during the Civil War.
- Serene: So why did you choose to draw two different flags?
- Randall: Well, the Civil War reminds me of the U.S. It was a very important time in our history.
- Serene: Why is the Civil War the first thing that you thought about when you think about America?
- Randall: Freedom
- Serene: Whose freedom?
- Randall: The slaves.
- Serene: What do you know about the Civil War?
- Randall: Um...that... well, it was fought for the freedom of slaves. And well, some slaves had already escaped. And Lincoln was our President during that time. And the general of the U.S. Army was Ulysses S. Grant. Who later became President.



- Serene: Ok, let's see what you wrote behind: [description of picture]  
"This picture represents the Civil War. The war tore our country into two for freedom." What else can you tell me about your picture?
- Randall: Um...actually there used to be slavery but now there isn't. Slaves couldn't go to all public places and couldn't share schools with people. Um... no, actually, they couldn't go to school at all. But now slavery has been abolished and we're all free. [Randall, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese-American, boy U.S.]



**Figure 6.2: Two flags of America**

While this does all seem consistent with the master narrative involving the creedal principles of freedom and liberty for all, there is in fact an element of appropriation at work. Even though the civil war was fought, in some sense, for the rights and freedom of enslaved African-Americans, Randall's first response in the interview as well as his description of his picture reveal that he perceives it primarily as a war that was fought for freedom in general. And this is further reinforced when he talks about how with the

abolition of slavery, “we” are all free. It is to some degree a strange co-opting of the African-American experience and of the freedom of another minority group in a bid to claim freedom for all.

Adding another dimension to this side-story is Irene’s interesting use of pronouns in her description of the abolition of slavery:

- Serene: What do you know about how slavery was abolished?  
Irene: Um...like a bunch of people did it, like some presidents did it. Abraham Lincoln, I think. And lots of other people helped with it too.  
Serene: And why was that a huge deal?  
Irene: That one minute we had slaves and the next minute we didn’t. OK, it wasn’t really a minute [laughs]. But it’s a good thing. A very good thing.  
Serene: How was the abolition of slavery a good thing?  
Irene: Um...because we were making people do stuff that they shouldn’t be doing. Like bad stuff. If they don’t do it, we whipped them or stuff like that.  
Serene: And now that there is no longer slavery?  
Irene: America is a much freer place for everyone. We don’t have to be slaves anymore. We all have the right to freedom.  
[Irene, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Japanese-American girl, U.S.]

Irene starts out by associating herself with the slave-owners, seeing herself in their story and implicating herself in the abuse of slaves; and yet, by the end of this section of the interview, with the end of slavery, she is one with the freed slaves, and like Randall, can say that “we” have the freedom. By transitioning from slave-owners to freed slaves, Irene is in a sense experiencing the full spectrum of the history of slavery, making that final victory of freedom all the more vivid and significant.

Although largest in my sample, Asian-Americans are only the third largest minority group in U.S. As I previously mentioned, it is by no means a monolithic group and consists of subgroups from as diverse a set of Asian nations as the Philippines, China, India, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, Japan and Thailand.

As such, one reason for why Asian-American children seem to identify, and to some degree, appropriate the African-American history might be because they do not have a unified history of their own. In order to abide by and subscribe to the grand narrative of American freedom and liberty, Asian-American children need to be able to tell themselves *a* story about enslavement and emancipation, and perhaps due to the influence of education and its prominence in American history writ large, the African-American story becomes a useful and natural choice.

Another way in which the Asian-American children expressed an embracing notion of American identity is the consistency with which they raise the issue of diversity and multiculturalism, a theme few other children in the other ethnic groups mentioned. This is where the kind of inclusivity with which Asian-American children talk about freedom differs from their Caucasian peers. Caucasian children—as previously established—craft their version of the American story by embracing the African-American fight for freedom as a fight experienced by *all* Americans. Asian-American children go beyond that and exhibit a level of inclusivity that extends beyond the traditional dichotomized paradigm of Caucasian and African-American. Their variant on the American story is one where the creedal values extend to a larger community of diverse peoples:

Serene: Why is it important to you that you live in a country where there are so many different cultures?

Rae: Because then I'm not the only Japanese around. In America, you have Japanese but also White, Mexican, Black, Koreans, Indians, err... and Arab... and so on. That makes me feel a lot less different because it's scary being different when you see nobody else is different. But when everyone is from a different culture, it's more comfortable.

[Rae, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Japanese-American girl, U.S.]

Serene: Why does Mr. Alien need to know that America has many different people?

Timothy: I think because we're bringing more than one or two or three cultures together. America is so diverse. And then some people may join another culture and do some of their traditional, fiesta things or whatever. And that helps make this country a more special place.

Serene: Because people are different.

Timothy: Yeah

[Timothy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Japanese-American boy, U.S.]

We see this sentiment expressed in children's pictures as well. As the only student to draw more than one person in his picture, Alex, a Chinese-American 5<sup>th</sup> grader says of his picture, "My first drawing the two hands and broken chains represents that everyone has freedoms of religion and speech. My second drawing with people holding hands shows that even though we are smart or dumb, fast or slow, boy or girl, black, brown or white, have hair or are bald, are skinny or fat we all are Americans and should all be treated as so."



**Figure 6.3: Multi-racial view of America.**

This drawing reinforces the wider net cast by Asian-American children in their conception of who should be included in the definition of an American citizen. Like the other children, Alex does not explicitly talk about being Asian-American in his interview; he does, however, highlight the fact that being free in America is not an exclusively African-American experience:

Serene: First of all what's interesting is that have the chains that are broken but the colors of the hands are different. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Alex: Well even though we know that the Black people got to be free but some people are not Black but from different cultures and races—they still get to be free when they live in America.

[Alex, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese-American, U.S.]

These comments are typical of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Asian-American children in both classrooms in Priarie Elementary. There is not only a general awareness and appreciation of the larger cultural diversity of the United States, but also a belief that this diversity is a distinctive and unique aspect of the United States as a country. Other studies have found similar inclusiveness in studies of children's views of the nation. Howard and Gill's qualitative research in Australia found that the children of minority-ethnic and indigenous backgrounds all celebrated the idea of Australia as being a multicultural mix;<sup>20</sup> Carrington and Short, in surveying children about Britishness, reported the fairly optimistic finding that few children made racialized distinctions about belonging to the British nation.<sup>21</sup> However, there might be some evidence that this sentiment is somewhat contingent on context. I return to Rae's comment about how being amongst other people who are different makes her difference feel less conspicuous. Here, it seems Rae draws

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<sup>20</sup> Sue Howard and Judith Gill, "It's Like We're a Normal Way and Everyone Else is Different": Australian Children's Constructions of Citizenship and National Identity." *Educational Studies* 27 no. 1 (2001): 80-94.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Carrington & Geoffrey Short, "What Makes a Person British? Children's Conceptions of Their National Culture and Identity". *Educational Studies*, 21, no. 2 (1995): 217-238.

some comfort from the relative “anonymity” of her difference when she is in a context where a variety of other cultures are represented. Recall that in Prairie Elementary, while Caucasian children are still in the majority, there is an above-average enrollment of Caucasian children are still in the majority, there is an above-average enrollment of Asian- and Indian-American children. This precisely the kind of multicultural environment that Rae and the other 5<sup>th</sup> grade Asian-American children describe as appreciating about the United States. In Chestnut Elementary, however, the enrollment of minorities in general is low- in the one classroom of 25, there were only 2 African-American and 2 Asian-American students. Here, the comments of the one Asian-American student who did mention race/ ethnicity resembles more closely the inclusivity expressed by the Caucasian children, i.e. it was very much concerned with the African-American experience:

Freedom is when you want to have what you can do, like go to school, like the Blacks and Whites could be together. And have peace and freedom in this country.

[Yun, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Korean-American girl, U.S.]

There is a possibility that being in the context where they were among other Asian-Americans imbued in the Asian-American children in Prairie developed a “strength in numbers” sensibility and a greater consciousness of the wider diversity of the United States. Consequently, in addition to their embrace of the African-American experience of slavery, they were moved to also highlight the broader multicultural nature of this country.

This suggests a potential difference in the relationship between ethnic identity and the kind of national identity story children tell between the two minority groups in my study. For the African-American children, across contexts, i.e. schools and grade-levels, there is a discursive continuity to their story of ethnic identity in that it is fairly stable- as

a group, they identified with specific figures in African-American history and their responses expressed a notion of racial freedom that was more intimate and personal; for Asian-American children on the other hand, there appears to be some sense of *fluidity* to the construction of their story. The creedal elements of freedom, independence and equality are still very much present and so is an inclusive mentality of who these elements encompass that they share with Caucasian children; what varies is the extent of this inclusivity where children who are amongst many other Asian-Americans tend to see beyond the traditional dichotomy of White and Black in order to articulate the broader multiracial/ multicultural nature of the United States compared to children who are in a context with fewer Asian-American children. This finding validates my theoretical framework of the discursive nature of national identity formation where identity is seen “not as fixed and permanent but rather, fluid and permeable, constructed and reconstructed as one moves one context to another.”<sup>22</sup>

### 6.3. *Immigrant status*

The notion of belonging to a different socio-cultural group and how that influences children’s construction of their national stories becomes more nuanced and complex when we look at children who make an explicit reference to belonging to immigrant families. Concerns that recur in this section are related to children’s negotiations of the various identities available to them in immigrant, multicultural nations- for example, to what extent does coming from an immigrant background influence one’s discursive construction of national identity? How are loyalties between

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 268.

origin countries and host countries weighed and balanced? And at the end of the day, what motivating forces compel children to choose one identity over another?

Before I delve into those issues, it is appropriate here to discuss the manner in which children construct the discourse of immigrants and immigration in each country. In general, children in both countries acknowledge that fundamentally, the U.S. and Singapore are nations constituted by immigrants. Because the lines between ethnicity and immigration often blur, it is no wonder that minority children (second- to third-generation immigrants) are more likely to highlight the significance of immigrants-- both historically and culturally-- to the discourse of national identity in each country:

Serene: What else will you tell Mr. Alien Man about America?

Ted: Yeah and well to the fact that really there is no real, pure non-immigrant American, that all of them had to come from somewhere else to come over here.

Serene: Tell me more. What do you mean?

Ted: Well as in before, the thing is that the Native Americans actually came over from Asia. And so therefore they didn't really start here. And how the English colonies were set up, well, they were coming in from Europe. And so then, pretty much everybody had to move to here from somewhere else in other for America *to... like be formed and to progress*. There were no real... nobody was actually born... I mean later, they were born here. But their ancestors had to come from somewhere else. (italics mine)

[Ted, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Korean-American boy, U.S.]

Because in Singapore, people from other countries like China, Arab and from the Riau Islands in Indonesia, all of them came to Singapore to try to make something of themselves here. So from all these, from the Riau Islands we got the Bugis and the Javanese. From Malaysia we have the Malays, and from China we have the Hokkiens, Teochews, and from Arab and India we also have lots of different races come in. Before that, Singapore was like jungle and forest. So if you think about it, you can say actually that Singapore was *found by the immigrants*. They started it. All of us are basically come from immigrants. (italics mine)

[Zaheela, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Malay girl, Singapore, when asked about how she thinks Singlish evolved]



Both responses, despite coming from children from different countries, almost mirror each other in content. They paint a picture of the U.S. and Singapore as countries constituted by immigrants but more importantly, as *founded* by immigrants. To Zaheela and Ted, immigrants are not an afterthought in the story they are telling about national identity but instead have been given a significant role, and one which is associated with the birth of a nation. In the opening words of words of Oscar Handlin's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Uprooted* more than fifty years ago<sup>23</sup>: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the story these children are creating of immigrants in America and Singapore is *not* one where "real" citizens like great presidents or leading native leaders directed the grand project of forging each country while immigrants merely made contributions; immigration is not some marginal theme in American or Singaporean history; it has been a crucial player in both Singapore and America's distinctive developments from the very beginning.

But despite this shared view of the central role of immigrants in their respective country's histories, differences emerge when we look at the way in which children perceive contemporary immigration today. Children in the U.S. appear to be rather welcoming of immigrants, easily positioning their embrace of immigrants within the broader discourse of freedom in America.

Rachel: I'd say... I think he'd (the alien visitor) like to know about freedom... That it's big.

Serene: Freedom is big?

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<sup>23</sup> Although Handlin was referring specifically to the U.S., the words are highly relevant to Singapore as well.

<sup>24</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1951), 3.

Rachel: Yah, like it's a big deal. Also, we welcome other people to our country.

Serene: How does that work? Can anyone just come to America?

Rachel: Yeah. Like I said, freedom is big.

Serene: Has this always been the case all through history?

Rachel: No.

Serene: When did it start happening?

Rachel: Um...it was all because of the Statue of Liberty basically. Because the Statue of Liberty said that you can have liberty and peace.

Serene: And people just started coming?

Rachel: Uh no... before people came and they would stay on this little island. Um... Ellis Island. So those people had to stay in these little, tiny bedrooms until we finally got... until the rights were established for other people to come.

Serene: Do you think that it has made America a better place that we allow people from different places to come?

Rachel: Yeah, I think that is better.

Serene: Why?

Rachel: Because if there wasn't anybody, probably you wouldn't be here. And I wouldn't be here. And maybe some of my friends wouldn't either. And if we didn't have it- we wouldn't have so many things about the U.S.

[Rachel, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl]

Rachel, who I quoted at length in the previous chapter talking about the tyranny of kingship, is equally effusive about how welcoming immigrants to America is not only consistent with the overarching notion of freedom in America, but she also echoes Ted's reasoning that without immigrants, America would not be half the nation it is today. Similarly, her classmate Joanna was also quick to associate the coming of immigrants as a larger symbol of American freedom and independence:

Serene: You say here, "the land of many cultures." Can you tell me more?

Joanna: Because we like to invite anyone to come live in America. And it's um...you can meet new people. It's a nice place to start new.

Serene: Why? What is it about America that allows people to start a new life?

Joanna: Because we tell them they are welcome here and we are free here. When you move here, it makes you feel happy that you

don't have to be told what to do because we have freedom in America.

[Joanna, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl, U.S.]

Drawing once again from those familiar creedal values, Joanna has applied them to the story of immigration and reiterated the fixation with not being told what to do that I had discussed in the previous chapter. She is in a sense bestowing onto immigrants the same concerns and desires with which she is preoccupied because her belief is that once they arrive to America, immigrants are allowed to start anew as citizens who can partake of the same freedoms. Note also the active voice used by both Rachel and Joanna: “We welcome other people...”, “we like to invite anyone...”, and “we tell them they are welcome here” are turns of phrases which imply an active call to immigrants on the part of the United States as opposed to immigrants merely arriving on American shores on their own accord. It is a perspective which designates immigrants as being desirable and worthy of pursuit.

On the other hand, Singaporean children seem somewhat less comfortable with the nation's rising immigration rates. While some children viewed increased immigration as a positive and essential development, others were more ambivalent. Interestingly, although not too surprisingly, in both cases, children were just as likely to turn to the Singapore story of material survivalism for arguments to justify their case. To set the context for this section, it is important to note that I conducted my interviews with the students in Singapore in August 2008. The Olympics were underway and Singapore was—for the first time in more than 40 years—in the finals of any Olympic event, table-tennis. The controversy however, was that the players representing Singapore were China-born, having recently applied for and were granted permanent-residentship on the

basis of their sporting skills. There was heated debate in the classroom as to whether or not Singaporeans should be proud of this achievement since the players were not—in the minds of many—Singaporean. On the one hand, some children viewed this positively, citing Singapore’s small size and human resource needs:

I was proud of Singapore. They came here to help us and play for us. And I appreciate that. Singapore is too small to produce good athletes all the time so if China-born players can come and help us win medals and bring Singapore Olympic glory, then we should thank them.  
[Jie, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy, Singapore]

On the other hand, there were children who were virtually outraged that Singapore would field China-born players to represent the country in the Olympics and the larger significance of this for the economic prospects for native-born citizens:

These foreign talent<sup>25</sup> are here competing for the same jobs and it just makes things harder. Like no jobs already and now we have to compete with immigrants. Even for our Olympics team, we had to get China players. You can’t just come here and become Singaporeans. I can’t understand it. Don’t they know that our reputation is being questioned? Why didn’t Singapore send Singapore-born players? Why didn’t we send players who were born and raised in Singapore? It’ll be very embarrassing if we cannot answer that.  
[Luke, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chinese boy, Singapore]

Here, it would seem that Luke was holding on to a vision of what being Singaporean means—one must be born and raised in Singapore—and the arrival of these skilled immigrants who are bestowed the rights and privileges of residency simply because of their professional skills called this story into question. There appears to be a level of cognitive dissonance at the incompatibility of this reality to his vision of citizenship that

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<sup>25</sup> The term “foreign talent” is the popular reference for skilled foreign labor, often but not always eventual immigrants. They have been actively recruited by the Singapore government—through generous incentives—to live and work in Singapore and have, consequently, become the target of much debate, contention, and ambivalence.

is then expressed as outrage and anger. Contrast this unease in the face of immigrants and the hesitancy to share the rights of citizenship with the readiness with which Rachel and Joanne welcome the prospect of immigrants to America. One could possibly argue that Rachel and Joanna were talking about immigrants in the abstract that their opinions might also change if and when they encounter immigrants in real life scenarios.

As we turn to the immigrant children themselves, examining their country choices was particularly illuminating in terms of the various discourses children activated and alignments across contexts. For example, I found patterns of similarities between second-generation immigrant children in the U.S.<sup>26</sup> and first-generation immigrants—or to use a more academic term, the “1.5 generation” in Singapore.<sup>27</sup> Research about immigrants has focused largely on the experiences of first- and second-generation adults and adolescents. However, much less is known about younger children, even though they are already a very visible presence in the schools of many American communities and increasingly so in Singapore as well. In fact, few in-depth empirical studies have been conducted so far on the adaptation process of younger immigrant children (regardless of generation) and little is known about the subjective aspects of their experience such as their modes of ethnic or national self-identification, aspirations for their adult futures, cultural preferences, etc. In my study, children who are second-generation immigrants in the U.S.

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<sup>26</sup> One could potentially argue that many other children are probably second-generation immigrants as well which renders this particular categorization unhelpful. However, only a handful of children *self-identified* as coming from immigrant families and I argue that for these children, their heritage is evidently a strong enough component of their self-identity that it was worth investigating deeper into.

<sup>27</sup> While there is some ambiguity as to the definition of first- and second-generation immigrants, for the purpose of this dissertation, the term first-generation immigrant is used to describe the generation that migrated. Consequently, second-generation immigrant then refers to children born to immigrant parents and who are the first in their family to be born in the new country. The term 1.5 generation was coined by Rubén Rumbaut to characterize the children who straddle the old and the new worlds but are fully part of neither (see Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children,” in *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*, eds. Frederick L. Ahearn, Jr. & Jean L. Athey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press: 1991): 53–91)

and of the 1.5 generation in Singapore defy neat lines of categorization in terms of ethnic/racial/ national identification. In the U.S., second-generation immigrant children come from families who are likely beneficiaries of the 1965 Immigration Bill mentioned in Chapter 3. The children in my sample belong to families who come from places as diverse as Mexico, China, Italy, Russia, and the Palestine. In Singapore, the 1.5 generation immigrant children hail largely from China and neighboring South-east Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

In this section, I demonstrate how the immigrant discourse of national identity, while retaining tropes of the master narrative of each country, is nonetheless a product of the unique cultural resources exercised by these children from immigrant families. Specifically, I propose that these children tell a story of *duality*- of choices, of cultures, of nationalities. While it is evident from their interviews that being Singaporean/American is central to their identity, so is their origin country. For instance, despite differences in their migration experience, second-generation immigrant children in the U.S. and the 1.5 generation children in Singapore displayed similar patterns of choice when asked to choose a country to live in when they grow older- they both expressed a deep desire to return to the country from whence their family (or themselves, in the case of Singapore) came. In the U.S., this meant that children talked about the country of their parents' birth.

Melissa: I've always wanted to go to Italy because that's where my family... My dad and uncle and grandpa moved to Dearborn when my dad was little. My great-grandpa was apparently very, very Italian. My grandpa too. He even spoke Italian to me and so I have a lot of Italian in my blood. So I've always wanted to go and see what it looked like. And see what people did there and stuff. It might help me understand my crazy family more. We like one of those loud Italian-American families and it'll be fun to find out more about the Italian part of me.

Serene: How different do you think Italy will be from America?  
Melissa: Not very different, I don't think. I mean the language I guess.  
And the flag. What it stands for is different. All that freedom  
stuff. They used to have a dictator.

[Melissa, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Caucasian girl, U.S.]

David: Um...I'd like to go to Mexico because um...basically the rest  
of my family lives there, like my Grandma and my Uncle.  
And um... I want to know more about Mexico, like the culture  
and stuff, about my family. And get a chance to speak more  
Spanish.

Serene: So do you think of Mexico as home?

David: I mean, sometimes, I think of America as home because I was  
born here and I believe in the American values. But I also  
think a little bit of Mexico as home because the rest of my  
family is there too. And there's that piece of me.

Serene: What American values do you mean?

David: Like everything- freedom, equality, what we fought for.

[David, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Hispanic boy, U.S.]

Alexa: [already mentioned earlier that her parents and grandparents  
are from the Palestine] I would choose to move where my  
ancestors came from because a lot of our family still lives  
there. And I haven't met that much of them yet.

Serene: Do you know very much about the Palestine?

Alexa: Not really...um...I'm learning Arabic but not really. I just  
don't really know what I'll expect to see there. But I'll learn  
when I'm there. My Grandma, she goes once or twice a year  
and stays for like a month. And she said in a couple of years,  
she's going to take me with her so that I don't forget. I'm  
excited.

Serene: Don't forget what?

Alexa: That I'm a bit Palestinian even though I was born here.

[Alexa, Caucasian girl, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, U.S.]

Melissa's and David's comments stand out in that we can clearly see the resonance of the American creedal story for them, whether it is Melissa's reference to Mussolini or David talking about fighting for freedom. However, as much as the grand narrative is something clearly close to their hearts, they nonetheless have chosen to return to the country where

their parents were born. A consistent pattern here was that even though these children chose to move away from America later in life, they nonetheless identified strongly with being *both* American and Italian, or Mexican, or Palestinian. Here we see the theme of duality where children conceive of citizenship inclusively. The national-origin identity is not assimilated into the American one, nor is the American identity cast aside in favor of the country of origin.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it would seem that one of the motivating factors for why these children want to return to their ancestral countries is the *lack* of present knowledge about these countries and the desire to learn more about their heritage. All three children quoted above mention to some degree that they want to find out more about their family and/ or the national culture of which they are at least partial members. Which suggests that their choices were made based on some level of attachment that is less about the place than it is about the people in the place. Melissa did not choose Italy because there was something inherent in Italy that she is interested in; she chose it because she associates it with family, history, genealogy. In other words, children's conception of place is—in this context- necessarily *peopled*, inevitably experienced through their social and interpersonal relations.<sup>29</sup> Once again, like the minority children in the previous section, the story of national identity for these second-generation immigrant children is a deeply personal one.

What we see here also is children actively constructing and reconstructing their family histories as they grapple with how that fits in their story about themselves and

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<sup>28</sup> Historically, this has been an established finding, at least for many European immigrants who passionately embraced key aspects of Americanization while still defending their cultural differences in the context of their new host country. See Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism*. (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies, *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and Locality in Middle Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2006).



their sense of national identity. This reminds us that national identity formation is fundamentally a rhetorical and discursive endeavor where people actively create explanations and stories that make sense of experience, to develop an identity that situates him or her in a social, cultural, and historical context.

Children who are the 1.5 generation in Singapore, i.e. who migrated to Singapore together with their parents in their childhood (and are presently permanent residents), made the same pattern of country choice as second-generation immigrant children in the U.S. Of the eight of them across both schools in Singapore, six chose to return to the country of their birth:

- Prom: I'll probably go back to Thailand.  
Serene: Why?  
Prom: It's been a long time since I go back to Thailand. And I miss my homeland. My family and friends. My cousins. And grandparents.  
Serene: What does homeland mean to you?  
Prom: It's the place where I grow up. Where I was born.  
Serene: So even though you're a permanent resident here in Singapore, you'll still choose to return to Thailand?  
Prom: Yah. Because that's where I belong.  
Serene: What will you miss about Singapore when you go back?  
Prom: How clean Singapore is. Bangkok has a lot of pollution. And traffic jams. Singapore can take MRT.<sup>30</sup>  
[Prom, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, boy, Thai by birth, Singapore]

- Guorong: I feel like going back to China.  
Serene: Why?  
Guorong: Because my hometown is there and all my friends are there.  
Serene: But you're a P.R. [permanent resident] of Singapore?  
Guorong: Yes, I'm a P.R. and a Chinese citizen.  
Serene: What it means to be a citizen of a country?  
Guorong: Means you must vote for Singapore or whatever...  
Serene: And that's the same in China?  
Guorong: Yes.  
Serene: So what do you miss most about China?

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<sup>30</sup> Mass Rapid Transit, Singapore's highspeed rail system.

Guorong: My grandparents.  
Serene: What if your entire family moved here? Your cousins and your friends, and your grandparents moved here too. Will you still want to go back to China?  
Guorong: Maybe.  
Serene: Why?  
Guorong: Because that's my country. And no matter how successful and rich Singapore make me, you still need to go back to your own country.

[Guorong, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, boy, Chinese by birth, Singapore]

What emerges as noteworthy in these examples is first, how children's conception of place is so similar across contexts; like their counterparts in America, Prom and Guorong associate the countries of their birth primarily with people—family and friends, and grandparents appear to be very important figures here. One might propose that at this age, for children who are consciously negotiating multiple and layered citizenship identities, people are the most visceral crucibles of memory and attachment, not history, culture, or ideology. As such, it is little wonder that when faced with the dilemma of where to live in the future, these 1.5 generation immigrants (and children in the U.S. who actively self identify as coming from immigrant families), it is the place most defined by the people they miss or love.

Second, while these children in Singapore share with some second-generation American children the desire to return to their origin country, their motivations are very different. Unlike their U.S. counterparts, there is no lack of knowledge here. These children had moved to Singapore within the last five years and hence are intimately familiar with the language and culture of their origin country. Their impetus to return is not based on the need to learn more about their heritage. What it seems to be based on is the idea of “going home”. Both Prom and Guorong explicitly acknowledge Thailand and China respectively as home, not Singapore. What seems to be at work here is place of

birth—which both Prom and Guorong bring up—as a powerful marker of nationality for these 1.5 generation immigrant. Although they do acknowledge the duality of their immigrant/citizenship status just as their counterparts in the U.S. do, unlike the American children, these new immigrant children do not embrace both equally. When asked to affirm their nationality, they prioritized country of origin. As Prom declares, Thailand is where he belongs and Guorong unequivocally asserts China as *his* country.

And third, we see another example of children deviating from a country's national identity story. On the one hand, although only having migrated to Singapore fairly recently and having made the decision to return to the country of their birth, both Prom and Guorong have also already internalized some aspect of the Singapore narrative. Note that when asked to identify what he would miss about Singapore when he returned to Thailand, Prom mentions Singapore's cleanliness and efficient transportation system. Guorong focuses on wealth and success and he also mentioned—as I quoted in Chapter 4—how he has to “repay” Singapore for having provided him with an excellent education. These are all pragmatic and material considerations, very much consistent with the Singapore narrative I presented in Chapter 4. But instead of embracing the material comfort that they acknowledge Singapore has been providing them, most 1.5 generation immigrant children would still choose to return to the country they consider “home.”

This represents another interesting alignment between the 1.5 generation immigrants and the second-generation immigrant children in the U.S.—both sets of children chose to return to their origin country despite recognizing that their origin country is lacking in some of the things they have come to enjoy and revere in the new

country, whether that be the creedal values of freedom and independence or economic comfort and a good standard of living. This suggests that there is something else at work drawing them back that transcends ideology or material comfort. Some research in what is known as the returnee reintegration literature<sup>31</sup> offers an explanation that could potentially address this phenomenon. The second-generation return can be seen as a retreat to an idealized home:

The ancestral home becomes the terrain through which the negatives of life in America — from exile and nostalgia to the rat race and not knowing one's neighbors — are *replaced* and 'cured'. This 'healing' process is inextricably linked to participants' search for 'self' and 'home'. Hence, the 'homecoming' is a project of *being, becoming* and *belonging*; it is a project of identification and closure.<sup>32</sup>

While the American immigrant children in my study did not express any negative experiences in America, there was nonetheless the element of wanting to find out more about their family, as if there were something missing in their conception of self. In desiring to reconnect with the country of their family, children were seeking a sense of belonging that they perhaps did not completely feel in the U.S. With regards to the 1.5 generation children in Singapore, it is obvious that their return is motivated by the desire to return to homeland. It is likely that having only moved to Singapore so recently, they have yet to feel completely like they belong, and it is only by moving back to their country of origin can they feel their Thai-ness, or their Chinese-ness to its fullest extent. It is only there that they can express their true and desired identities. In other words, the

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<sup>31</sup> See Frank Bovenkerk, *The Sociology of Return Migration: A Bibliographic Essay*. (Nijhoff, The Hague: 1974);

George Gmelch, "Return Migration." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9, (1980): 135–59; Lynellyn D. Long & Ellen Oxfeld (eds.) *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia: 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Anastasia Christou & Russell King, "Migrants Encounter Migrants in the City: the Changing Context of 'Home' for Second-Generation Greek-American Return Migrants," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no..4 (2006): 823.

sense of “being, becoming, and belonging” is more powerful than the ideology of freedom or the lure of material comfort that America and Singapore have to offer.

These examples indicate that for children occupying uneasy relationships with the dominant ‘standard’ as in children who have recently immigrated or who are acutely aware of their immigrant heritage, simple assertions of national or cultural belonging are not readily available. This is where children’s agency is exercised where they have to choose among possible labels carefully, negotiating the complicated terrain of family history, memory, origin stories, and potential futures in their construction of a national identity. Children do not make these choices easily. The duality that characterizes these children’s national identity stories necessarily extends to the decision-making process they undergo as they make their country choice. For example, I asked 4<sup>th</sup> grader, Prithi, whether or not she would choose to return to India where her parents were born.

I don’t know because I like some things here and I like some things there. A lot of family are still in India but I’ve already made so many friends in Novi. Maybe like if we could combine it together. And then I’d be like, okay. That would be perfect. It’s so hard for me to choose because they’re like my home. Both.

[Prithi, 4<sup>th</sup> grader, Indian-American girl, U.S.]

We see here once more evidence that second-generation immigrant children in the U.S. actively embrace both nationalities as equally valid, and even though Prithi eventually chose to return to India, the decision was made with no small amount of regret on her part: “Sometimes I wish India were a floating island in a bubble so that it can move just next to America and I just hop back and forth.” Ted, who I had earlier quoted as talking about immigration, captured perfectly the combination of sadness, yearning, and struggle

that confronts some immigrant children when faced with the issue of where home might be for them.

- Ted: I don't really know if I want to move—from the start anyways.  
Serene: That's fine. Tell me why?  
Ted: Because I really like it how it is here. And I'm used to it. And so I can't really [sighs] adapt to like the next place or something. And I don't like really, really want to live somewhere. I'd like to like go to a vacation somewhere and not like—live, live there. Even Korea.  
Serene: Do you go back to Korea to visit?  
Ted: I actually only did it once—as far as my knowledge goes. But I got to go do a lot of things and I learned a lot.  
Serene: But you don't think of Korea as home?  
Ted: *I don't know what to say about it. It is home and yet not home... (italics mine)*  
Serene: Do your parents try to remind you about Korea or talk to you about Korea or speak to you in Korean?  
Ted: Right now, I'm trying to learn about Korean and stuff and all. But it doesn't make me think of it as home, though. Not really.  
Serene: And if I asked, where do you think home is? Where would you say?  
Ted: I guess, Michigan. I moved from Walled Lake where I was born to here after I finished my kindergarten year, so yeah, Michigan.  
[Ted, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Korean-American boy, U.S.]

For all intents and purposes, Michigan is the place where Ted considers home; and yet, based on his ethnicity and the country of his parents birth, he recognizes that Korea does have a pull over him which creates the most poignantly expressed “home and yet not home” dilemma

In Singapore, Jasper has an equally difficult time comparing and deciding between whether or not to continue living in Singapore or to return to Indonesia where he was born:

- Serene: So if I ask you where your home is, what would you say?  
Jasper: I'd say Singapore.  
Serene: Do you feel more Singaporean than Indonesian?

- Jasper: I'm not sure how to compare. Because in Indonesia, my relatives are all there. In Singapore, I have friends here and stuff. It's hard to compare.
- Serene: So when I ask you, when you grow up, when you become an adult, and I say you can choose to live in anywhere in the world, where would you choose to live?
- Jasper: That's so hard to answer. It's not really a very fair question. Can I not answer that?
- Serene: If you don't feel comfortable, then you don't have to.
- Jasper: [*long silence*] Ok, I choose... most probably Singapore.
- Serene: Why?
- Jasper: Because it's clean and very lively.  
 [Jasper, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Indonesian ancestry, Singapore]

Unlike the other Singapore children I have quoted in this chapter, Jasper chose to remain in Singapore; but I highlight his interview to demonstrate the difficulty immigrant children sometimes face when confronted with issues of home and belonging. As Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut write in their seminal book about second-generation immigrants:

Relative to the first generation, the process of ethnic self-identification of second-generation children is more complex and often entails the juggling for competing allegiances and attachments. Situated within two cultural worlds, they must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (sometimes in two countries and in two languages) and to the classifications into which they are placed by their native peers, schools, the ethnic community, and the larger society.<sup>33</sup>

This strengthens my argument that it is necessary to study the process of national identity formation qualitatively. Unlike many adjustment theories which come out of the psychological literature that map out rigid pathways and patterns that various groups of immigrants are supposed to follow, examining identity development qualitatively reveals

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<sup>33</sup> Alejandro Portes & Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies : The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 150.

the struggles, challenges, choices, that are weighed and balanced in order for immigrant children—all children and adults, in fact-- to tell a story that best captures their immigrant and national identity experience.

What this section—and by extension, this chapter—demonstrates is that while there is an overarching sharedness to the grand narrative of national identity held by each nation, the cultural resources held by ethnic minorities and children from immigrant families, affords them the ability to stray somewhat from the master story. For minority children, it is the inserting of the personal that sets their story apart from the majority narrative; for immigrant children on the other hand, it is a sense of duality that children in the majority do not have to struggle with.

This reinforces my argument that national identities are discursively constructed, amenable to change and re-writing, a feature in marked contrast to earlier notions of the fixity of identity. The individual—whether child or adult— is actively constructing and co-constructing with others, explanations and stories that make sense of experience, to develop an identity that locates him or her in a social, cultural, and historical context.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Helen Haste, “Constructing the Citizen.” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2004): 413-439.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to convey some of the complex issues involved in national identity development in two multicultural nations. I have shown that in order to fully understand children's conception of national identity, we need to consider the phenomenon through three different frameworks simultaneously: the discursiveness of identity construction, children's agency in understanding the world, and the role of schools in national identity formation. In writing the preceding chapters, I have been struck by the extent to which children's talk is consistently tethered— although in different ways-- to the master narrative that encapsulates their nation. I have discussed this through general observations drawing on the extant literature, but I have also carefully sketched out and interpreted the findings derived from the two case-studies of children in Singapore and the U.S. Although I cannot make bold generalizations from this study, nor was it intended to produce standardizable results, it has allowed me to contribute to developing knowledge about how children relate to the nation, as well as the role of the school in this process. At the same time, it has allowed me to engage with theorizations of childhood and nation and to shed a little more light, I hope, on some of those ongoing debates. In this concluding chapter, I return to those debates as established in Chapter Two in the process of mapping out and reiterating some of my arguments.

### 7.1. *The Construction of National Identity*

When called upon to talk about the nation, children certainly adhere to rather consistent discourses of the nation that draw from the cultural resources they have at hand. I do not propose that children invented this national narrative; it is composed from well-rehearsed cultural scripts provide the resources with which they express national identity. The overall sharedness of each country's master narrative, as established in Chapters Four and Five, demonstrate the extent to which nations require stories to which citizens subscribe and which hold the populace together. Lacking a common religion or ethnic heritage that constituted earlier organizing principles of nations, multicultural nations such as the United States and Singapore realize national identity via commitment to a set of common institutions and political rights, as well as what Anderson calls "national myths" invented to sustain the imagined community of the nation. This emphasizes the constructedness of national identity which is especially applicable to multicultural societies like Singapore and the U.S. where national identities are not *natural* entities but social constructions based on intentional and purposeful belief in a shared set of political and social discourses.

In Singapore, this took the form of a story of pragmatism and materiality that pervaded all of what the children described about Singapore and their relationship to it. Whether it was introducing their country to an extra-terrestrial visitor, making choices as to where to live in the future, or expressing their thoughts about immigration, Singaporean children drew consistently from this grand narrative, focusing sharply on issues related to survivalism, political stability, and a comfortable standard of living.

In the U.S., the prevailing national myth was of the supremacy of the creedal values of freedom, independence, individualism, and egalitarianism. The story of how free America is underlied all markers of national identity to the extent that even when children were ambiguous—sometimes even mistaken—about specific political processes, their faith in the fundamental freedom of all men (and women) in the U.S. was unwavering. This was particularly telling in children’s comparisons of America with other countries where they veered from conventional dimensions of comparisons by looking at ideological differences instead of superficial or cultural ones.

And while children’s descriptions were incredibly tethered to these national myths, there were enough variations to the stories to raise a debate I first intimated in Chapter Two. Throughout the chapters, there has been an underlying question as to how far a sense of national belonging is inculcated through top-down representations of the nation via the education system and how much it is a product rather of the enmeshment of the self in pre-existing ethnic traditions, customs, ties and symbols. To some extent, such a question echoes the differences of approach outlined in Chapter Two in relation to Smith and Gellner’s debate over the origins of national identity, in that the enmeshment of the self approach fits quite well with Smith’s emphasis on the durability and importance of ethnic ties and ‘spontaneous cultures’, while the representational approach sees national symbols and narratives as top-down cultural constructs propagated through schools.<sup>1</sup> The evidence from my empirical study cannot resolve this difference of emphasis, but it does show both kinds of influence in action.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991). Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983),

To the extent that children’s responses veer from the master narrative according to certain cultural groupings to which they belong—ethnicity and immigrant status -- children are in a sense influenced by Smith’s notion of “traditions and experiences that often draw on long histories of “ethnic memories, myths, symbols and values.”<sup>2</sup> I showed how children from different cultural groups interpreted the narrative of national identity of each country differently- in Singapore, children in the minority group—who more often than not, also belong to lower SES groups—were more ambivalent about Singapore’s economic progress but were also more likely to express their patriotic feelings for the country; and newly-immigrant children also had their specific notions about where they call home that are related to their liminal position between two nations. In the U.S., for minority children, particularly, African-American children (across both grades), the ethnic memory of enslavement and discrimination creates a conception of American freedom that is exclusive to the African-American experience. In contrast, Caucasian and Asian-American children have a more inclusive and expansive notion of what freedom represents in the United States. These examples suggests a vernacular culture that exists, as Smith argues, independent of any state-arranged manipulation.

And yet, the manner in which the curricular content of each education system echoes in the master narrative expressed by the children suggests that schools do have a profound influence on the way national identity is understood and manifested. We saw how the defense imperatives and discourse of progress as exemplified in Singapore Social Studies lessons are echoed in children’s preoccupation with these same issues. And in the U.S., the alignment between Social Studies benchmarks about citizenship

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 55.

imperatives and what children say about freedom and the American Creed is remarkable for how tight it is. As Gellner asserts, “the culture in which one has been *taught* to communicate becomes the core of one’s identity.”<sup>3</sup> [italics in original] Such a view not only establishes childhood as the primal ground in which national identity takes root, it also reflects the idea that a sense of national attachment is not natural or instinctive in children but is consciously cultivated in them. As my findings show, a nation’s schools are places where dominant discourses of national identity and history are promulgated.

### 7.2. *Children’s Agency in the Construction of National Identity*

Underlying the “what” and “where from” of national identity is the “how”, and my study shows that children do exercise agency in identity construction from both the resources they take from their cultural networks as well as the discourse imparted to them at school. In Chapter Two, I presented the framework for the “new” sociology of childhood which suggests that children are competent and active meaning-makers in all kinds of social scenarios. In the chapters that follow, I then showed the extent to which children do not merely passively react and accept the social and political world that is presented to them, but instead consciously struggle with the tensions of identity in complex multicultural societies. Minority children from both countries adhere to the general narrative of their national stories but have *rewritten* it in ways which insert themselves personally into the narrative, whether it is in a more exclusive conception of American freedom as mentioned above, or in taking personal responsibility as defenders of their country’s safety and stability. These children do not see themselves as passive

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<sup>3</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 61.

bystanders in history but as active participants in the writing and construction of their respective national stories.

There is also a level of resistance (though not outright rejection) of the master narrative by children across the board, suggesting that exercising ones agency is not the prerogative of minority children alone. I presented examples of children actively (re)negotiating the message of Singaporean racial harmony presented to them by their teachers, drawing instead on their own observations and interpretations of what they deem to be the reality of race relations in the country. In the U.S., the American President, rather than a figure with specific political powers and responsibilities, is variously crafted as an idealized symbol of American electoral politics and/or a benevolent guardian of the American Creed as held dear by the children. Here, children do not merely passively accept what they are being taught in school about political processes but instead reconstruct and remake what they learn into a vivid conception of not just self identity but of an American identity as well.

In general, my findings also lead me to tentatively suggest that boundary construction appears to be a significant feature of children's efforts at representing their sense of who they are. Their use of distinctions between us/them, self/other in talking about, for example, the Emancipation Proclamation or about other countries in comparison to their own was readily apparent. Throughout my study, children show themselves to be competent and active participants in expressing or withholding judgments about others, drawing and redrawing boundaries, initiating talk that may include or exclude others, and so forth.

Nowhere is the role of the child in negotiating his/her identity more vivid than with regards to children who come from immigrant families. Their particular position in the nation blurs the boundaries between race, immigrant status, and nationality and this is where children's agency is exercised with greatest finesse in order to manage the various possible labels carefully, negotiating the complicated terrain of family history, memory, origin stories, and potential futures in their construction of *a* national identity.

### 7.3. *Schools and the Development of National Identity*

In Chapter Three, I presented a paradigm for understanding the different approaches towards citizenship education in Singapore and the United States. On the one hand, I proposed a *political* model as practiced in the U.S. where schools focus largely on developing the values of basic social morality and democratic civic virtue.<sup>4</sup> Involved here is the notion of an “education adequate to serve the life of a free and equal citizen in any modern democracy”<sup>5</sup> which includes the notions of education for both a significant form of personal autonomy and for democratic citizenship.<sup>6</sup> On the other, is Singapore where national loyalty and emotional attachment are valued. Motivated primarily by a commitment to the nation above self, much of citizenship education, as described in official documents and published curricular, is driven by the goal of effective nation-building, i.e. what I term a more *patriotic* model.

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<sup>4</sup> David Bridges, ed., *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World* (New York, Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Terence McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevičienė, “Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity,” in *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship*, ed. Bridges, 23-35.

I proposed that my study would examine the extent to which children embraced the patriotic/ political brands of citizenship education or whether they would resist and/or reshape these paradigms selectively to suit their own understandings and prior knowledge. What my findings suggest is that both these possibilities materialized. In the U.S., I observed a fairly tight alignment between the objectives of citizenship education—with its focus not only on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, but also on the political processes as influenced by the hallowed creedal principles-- and the sentiments expressed by the children. Without making conclusive statements about causality, it was nonetheless obvious that children had internalized much of what they learned in school—in combination with what they must have been told by other external sources —about the American values of freedom and democracy. The consistency with which children across both schools, across ages, genders, and ethnic groups (to various degrees) expressed their allegiance to the American Creed speaks to the promising influence that schools can have in inculcating a deep and abiding commitment to a set of abstract principles.

On the other hand, it would seem that the objectives set out by the National Education program in Singapore fell somewhat short of its aim to develop patriotic citizens with deep emotional attachments to the country. Instead, I observed a more pragmatic relationship towards the nation, and while children did express an emotional bond to Singapore, it was one that is based primarily on the material and practical. I suggest that the root cause of this misalignment is the tension inherent in a country like Singapore. As a young nation still attempting to manage the consequences of its too-rapidly acquired prosperity, she is a country ridden with contradictions, even in education



policy. While expecting schools to prepare citizens for the global challenges of an industrializing world economy—with its accompany focus on survivalism and materiality-- the government also demands that schools help nurture patriotic and emotionally-attached citizens. I argue that this tension between global and national imperatives produced inconsistencies and fissures in the curriculum. Even though an emotional patriotism is the ends, the means towards this end— myths about Singapore’s vulnerability, insecurities about her defense, anxieties about the fragility and tenuousness of racial harmony, and other stories “constructed” to bind Singaporeans together in a common destiny—instead became too good at the task they were designed to do. While children have more or less successfully internalized the survivalist mentality necessary to traverse the ever-globalizing world economy, this has been achieved at the expense of a deep and abiding attachment to the nation

#### 7.4. *The Story of Children and National Identity*

In writing the preceding chapters and through the analysis of children’s drawings and talk, I have formulated a notion of national identity which I believe encapsulates the data I collected. I propose that national identity is primarily a *story* that we tell ourselves about how we fit into the larger discourse of the nation. This story can be reproduced throughout generations through imperceptible ways—the banal and mundane, the lofty and epic. It captures common memory, history, habits, traditions, geography, fears, anxieties, triumphs, shame, and so on. Most importantly, this story must have strong emotional resonance. And its roots are based largely on the resources made available to us not only by immutable attributes such as our ethnicity or our gender, but also by

external forces such as education and the media. In other words, national identity is a discourse which influences but is also influenced by both our actions and our perceptions of ourselves.

This is particularly pertinent to children in that children's talk—with its multiple and potentially contradictory amalgamation of 'texts' from various sources—lays bare the complex positions and perspectives that make up cultural discourse in multicultural societies where citizens often juggle multiple identity labels. Seeing national identity as a story—or a script, if you will-- allows for a more fruitful line of inquiry for thinking about collectives insofar as it allows for sets of positions and stories that do not necessarily fit together smoothly. Further, in a multicultural society, children come to understand that the various stories and scripts about cultural and national identity *are* scripts (rather than The Truth) that are presented to them to validate, challenge, negotiate, and rewrite.

This conceptualization of national identity broadly captures the myths and traditions described by Smith, but extends it to include the external influence of schooling as advocated by Gellner. Further, conceptualizing national belonging as a story one tells oneself can also explain the viscerality of both civic and ethnic nationalisms as described by Ignatieff.<sup>7</sup> What is a common commitment to a set of political practices and values but a shared narrative constructed by a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens; and ethnically-based nations are united by the shared stories of an inherited genealogy, the myths and folktales perpetuated through history, family, and schools. At its core, I argue

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys Into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

that this is what sustains Anderson's sense of the imagined community,<sup>8</sup> where unity to a nation and solidarity with each other is imagined—conjured—by stories.

### 7.5. *A Note About Context*

If I am to argue that children's national identity construction is necessarily a contextual endeavor, then I must also acknowledge the contextual nature of my research process. I interviewed these children in school and was not able to follow them into their homes. As such, this dissertation is more about education than it is about socialization; I cannot make statements about the extent to which other sources—such as family, media, or popular culture— may also have had an influence on the way in which children see themselves as Americans or Singaporeans. And because this study was conducted in school, children drew on what might be considered the “official” memory of national identity which was closest to their mind. It is entirely possible that there exists a private memory/story about what citizenship means which exists separately that I might have been able to elicit had I conducted this study in a different context, such as the home.

This is something akin to W.E.B. Dubois' notion of “double consciousness”<sup>9</sup> or more recently, James Wertsch's distinction between individual and collective memory where collective remembering typically provides an essential basis for the creation and maintenance of groups – specifically, imagined communities.<sup>10</sup> Wertsch talks about how the modern state pursues this agenda by providing its citizens with official accounts of

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, ““Strivings of the Negro People,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 1897.

<sup>10</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

the past through the role of formal education. He then distinguishes this from individual memory that can be manipulated to fit our life history and our own views about ourselves.

In other words, it must be recognized that the ideas about citizenship and national identity presented in this dissertation are necessarily bound by the context of the school if we are to see children as interpretive beings. A potential next step in my research endeavor may be to talk with children in an environment that may engender a more “natural” and private recollection of national stories.

As Robert Coles suggested in his book on children and their thoughts on politics, ideas about the nation, identity and how one situates oneself in relation to those concepts have a developmental history.<sup>11</sup> To look at how children make sense of what it means to be a citizen, and to do so in the specific context of the school recognizes three things at once: that childhood is the crucible within which children’s first sensibilities about national belonging are conjured and formed; that children have valuable insights to this process that can inform our understanding of national identity development as a whole; and that schools are vital sites of national identity formation, brimming with the potential to produce thoughtful, active, *and* patriotic citizens.

The issues raised by my dissertation resonate with current concerns. A recent report by the Bradley Foundation, *E Pluribus Unum* asserts that America is facing an identity crisis.<sup>12</sup> It claims that the next generation of Americans will not have the same

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Coles, *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> The Bradley Project on America’s National Identity, *E Pluribus Unum: A Study of American’s Views on National Identity* (Milwaukee: The Lynne and Harry Bradley Foundation, 2008).

knowledge of America's history and founding ideals as their parents. Half a world away, Singapore's youths are similarly described as experiencing "national amnesia," ignorant of and flippant about the history of Singapore.<sup>13</sup> I contend that worrying about which historical facts students can or cannot recall is asking the wrong question, masking the underlying complexity of the relationship they have with national identity. It is not what they know, but how and why they know what they do. If my findings are any indication, there is much we can learn about the complex conceptual map about nationhood-- an inter-connected web of responsibilities, rights and obligations-- young citizens possess, or are in the process of acquiring. In view of the growing importance of citizenship education, understanding children's ideas about national identity is vital if educators are to engage children in the construction of an enthusiastic, critical and reflective citizenry.

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<sup>13</sup> Laurel Teo, "I Want to be Proud of Singapore... But What About?" *The Straits Times*, 20 February, 2001, 1.

## APPENDIX A

### Social Studies Benchmarks in Novi School district

Subtopic: Government	
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	5 <sup>th</sup> grade
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distinguish among national government in the United States and describe the roles of government institutions at all levels.</li> <li>2. Explain how law is used to manage conflict in American society.</li> <li>3. Explain the basic organization of the local and state governments.</li> <li>4. Engage each other in conversations about issues pertaining to governing their school.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distinguish among local, state, and national government in the United States and describe the roles of government institutions at all three levels.</li> <li>2. Give examples of authority and the use of power without authority.</li> <li>3. Give reasons for limiting the power of government.</li> <li>4. Interpret the development and summarize the main points in the Declaration of Independence.</li> <li>5. Interpret the meaning of specific rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including religious liberty, free expression, privacy, property, due process of law and equal protection of the law.</li> <li>6. Explain responsibilities citizens have to uphold constitutional rights.</li> <li>7. Describe what state and federal courts are expected to do.</li> <li>8. Describe issues that arise over constitutional rights.</li> <li>9. Distinguish among making, enforcing, and interpreting laws.</li> <li>10. Explain the basic organization of the local, state, and federal governments.</li> <li>11. Describe how citizens participate in election campaigns.</li> <li>12. Explain the various ways that nations of the world interact with each other.</li> <li>13. Describe events in other countries that have affected Americans and conversely, events within the United States that have affected other countries.</li> <li>14. Report how their behavior has been guided by concern for the law.</li> <li>15. Engage in activities intended to contribute to solving a local, state or national problem they have studied.</li> </ol>

## APPENDIX B

### **The Core Democratic Values** (Later Elementary Middle School)

#### ***Life***

Each person has the right to the protection of his or her life.

#### ***Liberty***

Liberty includes the freedom to believe what you want, freedom to choose your own friends, and to have your own ideas and opinions, to express your ideas in public, the right for people to meet in groups, the right to have any lawful job or business.

#### ***The Pursuit of Happiness***

Each person can find happiness in their own way, so long as they do not step on the rights of others.

#### ***Justice***

All people should be treated fairly in getting the advantages and disadvantages of our country. No group or person should be favored.

#### ***Common Good***

People should work together for the good of all. The government should make laws that are good for everyone.

#### ***Equality***

Everyone should get the same treatment regardless of where your parents or grandparents were born, race, religion or how much money you have. All people have political, social and economic equality.

#### ***Diversity***

Differences in language, dress, food, where parents or grandparents were born, race, and religion are not only allowed but accepted as important.

#### ***Popular Sovereignty***

The power of the government comes from the people.

#### ***Patriotism***

A devotion to our country and the core democratic values in words and deeds.

#### ***Rule of Law***

Both the government and the people must obey the law.

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