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Smell this: Singapore's curry day and visceral citizenship

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In August 2011, many Singaporean citizens grabbed their cooking pots and used the city-state's national obsession with food to express growing dissatisfaction with immigration and integration trends. The 'cook and share a pot of curry' event—a local response to Chinese newcomers complaining about the smell of their Indian Singaporean neighbours' food—is significant for its use of smell to catalyse a collective citizen reaction and for its reliance on contemporary social media. By analysing this event, we intend to (1) conceptualize the role of smell and viscera in framing citizenship; (2) understand how smells shed light on the city-state's contemporary ethnic politics and sense of national identity; and (3) reframe the significance of curry day as an expression of visceral citizenship that complements how the state frames Singaporean citizenry. We maintain that curry day sheds light on a specific dimension of Singaporean citizenship, as it uses smell, viscera and embodied activism to mobilize against rationalistic state-defined distinctions between local and international concerns, economic objectives and social cohesion, inter-racial harmony and national identity.

Keywords: smell, food, visceral politics, citizenship, Singapore

> *Let us detour, for a moment, to a different sense of the city—one saturated with aromas—to explore these issues of power further* (Law, 2005: 231).

Introduction

In August 2011, a report in the Singaporean media about community mediation centres highlighted the case of two neighbouring households in Housing Development Board apartments, Singapore's public housing. The complainant was an immigrant family from mainland China, and the complaint was about their ethnic Indian Singaporean neighbours' cooking curry. The Chinese household had lodged a formal complaint that the smell of curry produced during its cooking was offensive and interfered with their lives. The mediation agreement resolved that the Indian household would agree to cook curry only when the Chinese household was not at home, and that the Chinese household would agree to taste the curry that the Indian household cooked (*The Telegraph*, 2011). The case was met with outrage by Singaporeans who felt that cooking curry was a marker of national identity and culture, and that the agreement restricted a Singaporean household's right to participate in their national culture (Duruz & Khoo, 2014: 173–75; *Reuters*, 2011).

This reaction incited what was termed the 'cook and share a pot of curry' campaign, an event organized largely online through social media as a response to the outcome of the mediation dispute. It began with a Facebook page, which encouraged people to cook curry on 21 August 2011 (Cook and Share a Pot of Curry's Facebook page 2012, 2011). This campaign received more than 57 000 supporters (*Bloomberg*, 2011). Another Facebook event, 'How to win over your new FT [foreign talent] neighbours', was created to 'celebrate National Day and help your new immigrant neighbour [sic] integrate, by

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cooking and sharing your favourite curry with them' (National Cook Curry Day's Facebook page, 2011). These online campaigns culminated in what became colloquially known as 'National Cook Curry Day', notably because the date of the event was close to Singapore's National Day on 9 August and coincided with the election of a new president. More broadly, curry day sparked discussions around the ruling class's commitments to 'Singaporeans first' during a politically charged period when the city-state had been seen to be especially welcoming and accommodating of a growing number of economic migrants from mainland China (*Bloomberg*, 2011; Gomes, 2014; Liu, 2014).

Unpacking the significance of curry day sheds light on recent trends in the city-state's ethnic politics and online platforms. On the one hand, smell and food practices are ingrained in Singapore's multiracial matrix, because they have been used as markers of local ethnic difference and celebrated as the basis for the city-state's successful ethnic hybridization (Chua & Rajah, 2001; Low, 2005; Duruz & Khoo, 2014: 175). On the other hand, Singaporeans have turned to online spaces for public discussions and to mobilize around various causes, building on a growing dissatisfaction with mainstream online media coverage and with the ways state authorities have been trying to educate citizens on the 'appropriate' ways to discuss issues of collective concern online (Lyons, 2005; Lee & Kan, 2008; Gomes, 2014).

In this article, we maintain that curry day provides an entry point into exploring how the visceral dimension of Singaporean citizenship functions, notably in times of major changes in local societal trends. Through this event, we document the ad hoc reaction of Singaporean citizens to the government's position towards new immigration and integration trends, in order to represent a public position less mediated by rationality than viscera. Through the use of smell as a heuristic device, curry day highlights a visceral form of citizen practice that complements the state authorities' understanding of Singaporean citizenship (Low, 2005; Ho, 2009; Liu, 2014). We first conceptualize the use of smell and viscera in framing citizenship and then unpack the significance of curry day within emerging trends in local Singaporean ethnic and identity politics. Finally, we problematize curry day as a Singaporean expression of a visceral citizen practice, offering a counterpoint to the more formal understanding of citizenship offered by Singaporean state authorities.

On a methodological note, we conduced this research online from March 2013 to March 2014, by following social media, online forums and blog discussions relating to curry day (see Appendix 1 for a list of selected webpages). Online blog posts, discussions and social media campaigns were selected based on their direct engagement with the ethnic dimension of this event and their justification pertaining to activism, citizenship or identity formation in the Singaporean context. This technique allowed us to gather various types of positive and negative views on curry day, especially the extreme, emotional and excessive ones. With a focus on the visceral dimension of citizen practice, such positions are not seen as a weakness of the study, but rather a strength, as the main intent is to highlight various sentiments about foreignness in Singapore. Whether the voices are marginalized or not, the posts gathered here help us unpack the various issues addressed through discussions of curry day, from citizen practice to immigration, integration, political expression and xenophobia.

Such a method is also adapted to the nature of contemporary public debates in the city-state, in which the Internet has become a platform to indirectly discuss politics and activism through lifestyle and cultural practices, recognizing it as a space where state control of political discussions is less prevalent (Lee & Kan, 2008; Soon & Cho, 2014). Even if such online postings, discussions and organizing can be seen as an outlet in the face of heavy-handed regulation and censorship of traditional media (see Rodan, 1998), these sentiments are not representative of the population as a whole. Their contribution is not in their objective significance and representative value, but rather in how expressed nuances, disagreement and discontent with the perceived status quo open up new avenues to study Singaporean society (Montsion, 2009: 641-43). Moreover, these online postings reflect current trends in both the study of food and online citizenship to use web-based archival work, in order to document how public discussions evolve at specific moments in time before they are deleted or relocated. This method is also congruent with how online tools offer a qualitatively different avenue for previously marginalized voices to create intersections that are overlooked in mainstream media, notably when relating foodscapes and smellscapes to citizen practice (see Bennett *et al.*, 2009; Cook *et al.*, 2010; Goode, 2010; Couldry *et al.*, 2014).

Smell, viscera and citizenship

Sensuous landscapes other than visual ones, and more specifically smellscapes, have been deemed worthy of study, because they help us better comprehend their roles in mediating social life. However, they are often depicted as passive conditions of social life and are under-theorized in scholarship interested in framing political agency and citizenship (Pocock, 1993; Low, 2005: 400; Montserrat Degen, 2008: 66). In this section, we put the sense of smell front and centre to understand its functions in shaping citizenship. Our intent is not to theorize olfaction—the elusive and ungovernable human sense—per se but rather to highlight its roles in expressing specific functions of citizenship from a visceral and embodied perspective.

Sensescapes help complete our understanding of the social world through a specific combination of senses mediating social life: 'It is the idea that the experience of the environment, and of the other persons and things which inhabit that environment, is produced by the particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study' (Howes, 2005: 143). Focusing on the olfactory sense highlights specific relations and mediations between the self and the city (Montserrat Degen, 2008: 41). Odours help to navigate an urban setting by telling us how to differentiate strangers in terms of class, gender, age, ethnicity and even citizenship status. We situate ourselves based on previously determined attitudes towards good and bad smells and take smells as indicative of our and others' changing positions in a given environment based not only on collective changing attitudes, state and city designs, but also on personal preferences (Ackerman, 1990: 24; Classen, 1997: 407; Bendix, 2011; Drobnick, 2011).

As more than just a provider of ambience and character (Porteous, 1985), smell has been studied as the sense of transitions and thresholds (Howes, 1991) that 'always escapes', that is not bound and cannot be governed easily (Montserrat Degen, 2008: 44). In bolder statements, smell is said to oppose control and order; it is difficult to prevent odours from entering a space (Bauman, 1993: 24), and odours can only be masked by even stronger odours (Laporte, 2002: 84–5). Smells also make any neutral space more intimate: 'Smells provide us with a more fluid experience of space and time. They subvert the immediate experience of place by making individuals relate to other places and times' (Montserrat Degen, 2008: 45). It makes everything and every place private and intimate to the detriment of other senses: 'The sense of smell defies visuality and tactility in that you do not need to be near an object to surrender to its odour' (Montserrat Degen, 2008: 45).

Nonetheless, smell is undervalued as an explanation for one's experience of place, most notably because of its low ranking in the Western hierarchy of senses. Western civilization projects have been detrimental to the value associated with our olfactory abilities, associating in particular a suppression of strong odours with modern progress from the sixteenth century onwards (Laporte, 2002: 39). Western modernity, rationality and progress narratives have developed based on a revaluation of senses to favour sight over other senses and on a relegating of olfactory capabilities to the lowest form of human experience (Howes, 1991; Pocock, 1993; Low, 2005: 400). The sense of smell thus becomes underused and reduced to the realm of olfactory intolerance in urban and public spaces; as such, the function of authorities begins to include controlling pungent smells by framing them as health-related risks, barbaric cultural practices and security threats (Laporte, 2002: 42, 97-103).

In times of transition to Western modernity, rationality and progress narratives, communities have often used smell and other less valued senses to oppose imperialist and colonialist designs (Law, 2005; Roseman, 2005). The importance of senses other than sight during times of social disorder and changing values, ideologies and attitudes is seen as an indication of confusion (Corbin, 2005: 129). Dominique Laporte (2002) goes further in seeing the role of smells in constantly reclaiming human experiences from Western civilization projects that privilege a sight-only and vision-dominated understanding of social realities:

> The primacy of the visible still requires the kitchen as its backdrop. That which smell muddles vision. But when withdrawn from vision […] far from simply disappearing, odor remains affirmatively inscribed in an economy of the visible. Suppression triggers a return of the repressed (Laporte, 2002: 39).

As such, smell can be understood as an under-explored but crucial connector between everyday experiences, political subjectivity and broader societal trends. Following Elspeth Probyn's (2000: 3) call to resituate social actors in the 'rawness of a visceral engagement with the world', scholars have used smell among other under-theorized senses to 'conceptualize the body as actively participating in the unfolding of discursive regimes that fashion choices, subjectivities and social difference' (Waitt *et al.*, 2014: 286). As a political subjectivity that is constantly affected and influenced by matters of the body (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008: 464), smell helps us connect to the 'gut level' and grasp how, through our bodies, we 'inhabit the axes of economics, intimate relations, gender, sexuality, history, ethnicity and class' (Probyn in Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010: 1278). Smells are part of visceral experiences, understood as the 'elemental emotions, natural instincts, and non-intellectual bodily judgments' (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010: 1273). Herein lies the capacity of smells to mobilize social actors beyond established social conventions as expressed through Western modernity, rationality and progress narratives. Smell—as a trigger and expression of gut reactions—facilitates an engagement with the social world in which modern rationalistic binary oppositions, such as individual/collectivity and domestic/international, are de-emphasized to the benefit of the wholeness, situatedness and rawness of the body (Ho, 2009: 790; Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010: 1274; Waitt *et al.*, 2014: 285).

The role of smell in shaping political subjectivity can help us better understand its significance as an expression of embodied activism and the visceral dimension of citizen practice (Butler, 2004; Waitt *et al.*, 2014). Citizenship is a status inherently linked to the rights and responsibilities associated with participating in one's community by discussing and acting on what is collectively seen as 'good', 'right' and 'just' (Arendt, 1994: 208-12), and the meanings of citizenship have been expanded in recent years beyond questions of entitlements and residency to centre around questions of relationality and difference from other types of residents (Miller-Idriss, 2006: 551–56; Staeheli & Hammett, 2010: 671–73). Based on the work of scholars such as Bonnie Honig (2001) and Tim Cresswell (2013: 105-10), citizenship is better understood through its relations to mobility and migrant figures at specific moments in a country's history. The citizen figure and his or her community are strengthened by opposing stereotypes associated with the migrant in daily life and by associating with specific elements of the migrant figure that echo a traditional part of the country's ethos (Honig, 2001: 74-77). This takes the form of embodied activities, such as cooking and dancing, that are interpreted as symbols of core national values, norms and principles (Honig, 2001: 84-86; Law, 2005).

Following Nikolas Rose's (1999) work on ethopolitics and the neoliberal practice of 'governing through community', the definition of citizenship also includes personal perceptions and individual attitudes emerging from daily experiences, and especially based on encounters with difference. Various social groups, cultural processes and events are key to shaping the values, norms and morality associated with one's citizenship and national identity, training citizens to care for their community and ensuring they take responsibility for social cohesion away from the direct intervention of the state (Staeheli, 2008; Anderson, 2012). This aspect of citizen practice is highlighted through the use of new technologies and social media. Lifestyle choices, feelings and attitudes towards specific moments in daily life are understood in relation to questions of status, rights and entitlements in helping to define citizenship and allegiance (see Oswin, 2010). Congruent with neoliberal and ethopolitical developments, digital citizenship constitutes a preferred mechanism to express everyday concerns and to mobilize one's community around normative and axiological issues of concern (Bennett *et al.*, 2009: 106-07; Goode, 2010: 527–28; Waitt *et al.*, 2014).

Focusing on the affective dimension of citizenship, scholars such as Engin Isin (2004) and Anne-Marie Fortier (2010) show the importance of specific human emotions in state and community designs. Emotions such as fear and love are used to support the production and dissemination of roles ascribed to citizens, as 'governing through affect […] draws on and targets the affective subject for certain strategies and regulations aimed at designing people's behaviours and attitudes in the public domain' (Fortier, 2010: 17). Whereas the affective citizenship literature has mostly investigated the ability of using emotions to discipline citizens as a governmentality tactic (Anderson, 2012), Lefebvrian analyses complement such a picture of affective citizenship by emphasizing the need for and possibility of citizens tapping into emotions and embodied activism to oppose neoliberal designs (Soja, 2003; Merrifield, 2005). Disconnected from the requirements of globalized economic structures in which one participates, the citizen reacts to the 'aberrant functionalization of existence' and rational decisions through excess, passion, derailment and imperfection, in order to advocate for more humanized designs (Merrifield, 2005: 699).

In this view, citizenship is inherently linked to embodied practices, and its visceral dimension has been increasingly important to understanding its contemporary inceptions. As the realm in which 'representations join and become part of old memories, new intensities, triggers, aches, tempers, commotions, tranquilities' (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008: 467), viscera intersects with citizen practice to refer to how bodies are socialized, disciplined and educated into becoming self-governed entrepreneurs, while also expressing how possibilities for new forms of activism emerge from communal discussions and mobilizations about smells, food and embodied politics (Berlant, 2002: 153; Staeheli & Hammett, 2010: 671). Visceral citizenship is experienced through feelings, belonging and emotional perceptions of the Other (Ho, 2009: 790–91); it challenges and complements the traditional categories of citizenship (such as legal status, geography, history, norms and behaviour), in order to reconnect the 'practical figuring of an everyday ethics of living' (Probyn, 1999: 224) to our embodied political subjectivity and its place in the material and physical world (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010: 1274; Staeheli & Hammett, 2010: 673). Visceral citizenship is shaped by reactions to difference and events occurring in the public realm and is an expression of the disjuncture between daily life, citizenship and requirements of economic structures. It is always a way to oppose the functionalist separation of a citizen's participation in public life into different realms and to reconcile the different requirements of and pressures on citizenry by advocating for the primacy and wholeness of the body.

Racialization/distanciation in Singapore

As a Southeast Asian postcolonial city, Singapore has been negotiating the various unintended consequences of its rapid urbanization and industrialization since the Second World War. Clashes of scent, especially between Chinese, Malay and Indians in public spaces such as public transport, have been one of these consequences; hence the state authorities perceived their role in fighting the stench associated with the 'cultural lag' of specific segments of the population (Cohen, 1988), stopping the penetration of culturally rooted scents emanating from the private realm into public ones and sterilizing commonly shared spaces from various odours (Bendix, 2011: 217). In this section, we explore the relationship between smell and racialization in the Singaporean context to understand its impacts on the current distanciation processes increasingly used to frame foreignness and to better delimit the meanings given to Singaporean citizenship. In light of Rachel Slocum's (2010; 2013) work, we argue that Singapore's smellscapes have traditionally served as a racializing and distanciating device and are—through curry day—a helpful entry point into contemporary struggles over the meanings of Singaporean citizenry.

Grounded in the nineteenth-century racialized efforts of British colonizers to manage smells and disease propagation on the island, the ranking and racialization of social others in postcolonial Singapore can be seen through disciplined olfactory judgments (Yeoh, 1996: 87–92; Low, 2005; Velayutham, 2007). Based on a 'complex assemblage of phenotypes and environments rearranged by colonialism and capitalism' (Slocum, 2010: 305), race as discourse, practice and distanciation mechanism in postcolonial Singapore is reinforced through smellscapes. This interplay between the traditional racial categories forming the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other (CMIO) system and smellscapes illustrates Slocum's (2010: 316) point that 'the taste and smell of food as well as the aesthetics of its making are central to embodied racial identities'. For instance, Kelvin Low (2005) among others (Chua & Rajah, 2001; Velayutham, 2007) has questioned and documented the instinctive use of smell to embody the racialized CMIO categories and to express, judge and characterize cultural differences, demonstrating specific functions of distanciation that smellscapes play in multiracial Singapore:

> When the sense of normalcy is being disrupted, what is brought to the forefront is that olfactory experiences are first made visible, and are then unpacked from our taken-from-granted behaviours, moving towards unraveling the sense-making/rationalizing processes that social actors go through orienting themselves (Low, 2005: 408).

One function of smells has been to perform or reinforce incidents of racial categorizing and stereotyping (Velayutham, 2007). Racialized groups use smells to justify a distance between races and reinforce the incommensurability of racial difference, whether consciously or not. Intricate parts of creating race and racism, smells are mechanisms that give coherence to a specific racialized group, notably by dismissing and complaining about other ethnicities (Slocum, 2010: 305). Engrained in the circulations of power and race, smells are used as easy gut-level answers to justify one's own public behaviours and to explain others' behaviour (Slocum, 2010: 317). Such a distanciation mechanism allows personal intolerances of and emotional responses to racialized odours to become legitimate, albeit visceral grounds on which one defines one's citizen practice (Ho, 2009: 796). For example, a Singaporean citizen's complaint to a minister about the 'Indian sweaty smell and unwashed bodies' is seen as a legitimate way to frame one's vote in upcoming elections, especially if the minister is perceived as not working towards fixing the 'problem' (*SingIn*, 2012).

However, people in their everyday lives can also reinforce racial categories in a positive way, when the fusion of smells is used to promote and celebrate the city-state's distinctiveness and harmony. The use of 'culinary hybridization as a cultural process' presents both a reification of racial smellscapes as scripted by state authorities and a strong everyday critique of their exclusionary nature in daily life (Chua & Rajah, 2001: 167). Such hybridization reinforces the neoliberal ideal that the individual choice and responsibility to engage with cultural difference, such as by trying new foods or fusing culturally discrete ingredients, will ensure greater social cohesion in a diverse society and will somewhat reflect a more ethical and cosmopolitan citizen practice (Slocum, 2010: 306-08).

Furthermore, smell is used in Singapore as a way of performing a move of distanciation towards types of cultural difference that officially remain at the margins of the CMIO system (Oswin & Yeoh, 2010: 172). Smell can be seen through a governmentality lens as a discursive device that systematically excludes the normalcy of specific racialized realities, as their presence does not fit the contemporary state-defined historical and normative narrative of racial diversity on its territory (for a discussion of smell and governmentality, see Moore, 2005; Slocum, 2010: 311–2). Even within the CMIO model, traditional smellscapes are used to exclude contemporary Caucasian racial realities in Singapore, even if they are associated with the Other category. The vernacular Hokkien phrase *chao Angmo*, which means 'smelly white person', is a general term for referring unfavourably to white foreigners and for expressing general and collective distance toward their perceived bad behaviour. The use of this expression is not limited to literal smelly encounters, as there are incidents of Singaporeans using the term 'smelly Angmo' even when the issue has nothing to do with smell (SG Forums, 2011).

With the 2011 curry event, these functions of smell are an entry point to better understanding evolving societal trends with respect to local ethnic politics and immigration in Singapore (Gomes, 2014). As indicated by Slocum (2010: 303–5), changes in the circulation of power and race can be perceived through food and smell practices, as they are the embodiment of socially constructed tastes and habits that reflect familiarity, belonging and one's political community. Participants in curry day have explicitly framed the event as their contribution to the political community that is Singapore. As discussed on one of the Facebook campaign pages, 'one thing Singaporeans cannot tolerate is people messing with our food […] Let us united and tell 'Garmen' [government] enough is enough' (Singaporean Curry's Facebook page, 2011). Following the various functions of smell identified above, curry serves as the basis to celebrate Singapore's multiracial identity and successful multiethnic fusion:

> There has been an uprising on social media and as of Sunday afternoon (13th August) almost 30 000 people have agreed to a nationwide call to cook curry on 21st August. That's great for showing our solidarity to our national identity of harmony, tolerance and mutual respect (Daryanani, 2011).

The smell of curry is used as a distanciation mechanism to identify cultural difference that is present, but often unacknowledged, in official discourses. As one participant explains, 'this Indian family are Singapore citizens and have been living here for generations and the mediator is allowing the Chinese PRC family to actually control when the Indian family can cook in their own house' (Roslina Sin in SG Forums, 2011). Participants used curry to Other the other Others, namely, foreigners seemingly incapable of appreciating the smells of curry and integrating into the city-state's way of life despite their state-approved skills, talents and cultural backgrounds: 'FT [foreign talent] must eat curry if they want to be Singaporean' (Singaporean Curry's Facebook page, 2011). Referring to government decisions to favour highly skilled migration from mainland China, one participant notes: 'the PRC should accept our culture and way of life before getting us to accept them. This is a multiracial country, not like China, which is biased against some race' (Jiani in SG Forums, 2011). Unlike with the traditional white foreigner Others, this visceral reaction directly critiqued newcomers based on their nationality, residency history and citizenship status, despite their privileged ethnic position in the CMIO system (Liu, 2014).

Curry serves as a catalyst for Singaporeans to express anxiety and fear towards what is perceived as foreign. Understood by Honig (2001: 34) as 'the cultural symbolic organization of a social crisis into a resolution-producing confrontation between an "us" and a "them"', the politics of foreignness intersects with curry day to present tolerance for the smell of curry as the Singaporean way, while olfactory intolerance to it is associated with foreignness. As one blogger argues, 'When you're a guest in another person's home country, you wouldn't ask them to stop their cultural practices that are the norm of that country, would you?' (Singapore Actually, 2011). In contrast to understanding local citizenry as divided based on the CMIO model, this event unites ethnic groups and their economic, political and moral claims over foreigners around one Singaporean national identity and its 'newly constructed national symbols, including curry' (Liu, 2014: 1233). Curry day signals a normative shift: whereas good smells used to be separated from bad smells internally and are based on CMIO distinctions, these distinctions are now made to separate inside from an 'outside' that is associated with foreignness (Gomes, 2014: 31–2).

As Hong Liu (2014: 1234) indicates, Singaporean state authorities' efforts to build closer relationships with mainland China have led to 'a substitution of ethnicity by nationality' in understanding Singapore's evolving ethnic politics and identity. Since the 1990s, the city-state's strategy to support China's economic development by becoming a training hub and business gateway has had direct local social impacts, especially due to the increasing numbers of foreign talent and students from China (Sidhu, 2009; Montsion, 2012. For immigration trends in Singapore, see also Yeoh & Yap, 2008; Teng *et al.*, 2014; Vasu *et al.*, 2014). After 10 years of rising social tensions from issues of immigration and integration, such impacts were felt especially during the May 2011 elections, when a main concern was the government's take on the 'influx of foreigners' and resulted in lagging support for the ruling party (Gomes, 2014: 33; Thompson, 2014: 320–24). Therefore, Singaporeans involved in curry day reacted in solidarity with the Indian household that was asked to limit its cooking habits to accommodate foreigners, but this act also became a way to express distance from newcomers who were seen as not integrating into Singaporean life. Curry day also became a means to celebrate Singapore's multiracial founding principles (Duruz & Khoo, 2014: 175; Gomes, 2014: 32).

The visceral dimension of Singaporean citizenship

Curry day symbolizes how embodied practices can create parameters to formal citizenship beyond rationalistic designs and justifications, both by excluding difference and reiterating solidarity and belonging among citizens (Ho, 2009: 791–92; Gomes, 2014; Soon & Soh, 2014). In this section, we explore curry cooking as an act of visceral citizen practice and as an expression of an under-explored dimension of Singaporean citizenship that completes the more legal and social definitions usually associated with citizenship by state authorities. In other words, the act of cooking curry and producing the smell is an expression of visceral citizenship to the extent that it directly contributes to normative discussions about immigration and integration concerns. This contribution functions 'alongside the better known political-legal and social-cultural dimensions of citizenship' by both complementing and critiquing the government position of differentiation between citizens and foreigners (Ho, 2009: 792).

The participants' use and production of smell on curry day are significant to the extent that they indicate local citizens' frustration with the city-state's period of transition, as argued by Alain Corbin (2005: 129). Curry day symbolizes Singaporean citizens' participation in local debates about collective social issues (Kong & Yeoh, 2003: 210–11) by reframing what are seen as the city-state's core values and principles and by identifying groups and trends that are perceived as endangering those values (Berlant, 2002: 153). The participants started by questioning the mediation centre's decision to eliminate culturally rooted stenches as a threat to multiracial harmony (and the assumptions behind this decision), then used curry day to introduce into the discussion issues regarding government plans during times of increased immigration and perceived concerns over newcomers that are not properly integrated into social life. In response to the government's take on curry day as potentially xenophobic, a blogger highlights the main concern of curry day as rather the preservation of Singapore's national identity through smell production: 'when the Law Minister spoke up, his first instinct was to caution Singaporeans against xenophobia, rather than protecting our cultural heritage and way of life' (Sgpolitics, 2011). This collective act was guided by normative parameters to delimit what is and is not acceptable for Singaporeans in their daily lives, coming from the unintended consequences of government decisions or foreigners themselves.

Such a normative stand puts front and centre anxieties and emotions in framing the participants' citizen practice. Scholars such as Luce Irigaray (1985: 214–26) have focused on irrationality, emotions and embodied reactions to account for the under-explored dimensions of citizen and political practices, including smells, as legitimate expressions of agency and subjectivity. Sara Ahmed (2004: 119–20) adds to the importance of examining the role of emotions in binding people to the same cause and in making different ideas and normative positions 'stick' together. Echoing Lisa Law's (2005) work on the reproduction of the Filipino national identity in Hong Kong through the cooking of staple meals, embodied and emotional actions like cooking take on significance in their horizontal associations with questions of nationality, citizenship and the negotiation between national and foreign identities.

In the case of curry day, horizontal associations made an emotionally driven symbol out of denying neighbours from cooking curry and linked this symbol with embodied concerns such as the government's privileging of foreign workers over citizens in daily life activities, the sheer number of immigrants expected in coming years to come to sustain economic development, and the perceived lacks in the integration of newcomers into the city-state's way of life. Speaking of depictions of curry day participants through their excessive and embodied reactions to the mediation centre's decision as 'anti-immigration', 'anti-Chinese' and 'anti-foreigner' (*Reuters*, 2011; SG Forums, 2011; *The Telegraph*, 2011), one participant notes, 'This is too much. Curry is one of the Singapore dish, and if the PRC cannot take it, they are always free to go to some other place where it is curry free' (Mel.greywolf in SG Forums, 2011).

With the disjuncture between the government, which perceived curry day as xenophobic, and participants, whose embodied reaction emphasized questions of national identity and cultural heritage, the latter's citizen practice did not match more accepted definitions of Singaporean citizenship, although it did complement them. Whether one focuses on citizenship as an ensemble of nation-building strategies (Hill & Fee, 1995), as a social cohesion and community-building mechanism disseminated through national education plans (Han, 2000) or as an evolving practice under recent state-facilitated internationalization designs (Kluver & Weber, 2003), Singapore's citizenship is mainly understood as 'a valuable possession, something that those holding Singapore citizenship should feel grateful for and see as a valuable to themselves as individuals' (Thompson, 2014: 322).

In contrast, participation in curry day can be seen as an expression of what Eric Thompson (2014: 315–17) calls social citizenship. These participants are explicitly advocating for civil sociality, everyday reciprocity and implicit obligations between citizens, as social citizenship 'rests neither in a property that individuals own nor a property of what individuals are, but rather in the circuits of debt, obligation and reciprocity incurred in our relationships with others' (Thompson, 2014: 318). Such an understanding of curry day as expression of social citizenship is congruent with citizen practice evolving under neoliberalism, as a collective reaction putting front and centre in various public forums such as online platforms, questions of behaviours, cultural politics and discussions about collective attitudes and feelings that bound a nation together despite individual differences (Miller-Idriss, 2006: 555–56; Bennett *et al.*, 2009; Staeheli & Hammett, 2010: 673).

As an expression of a visceral citizen practice, curry day offers a counterpoint to the city-state's rationalistic emphasis on 'differentiation' strategies to frame and justify local citizenship status, and a contrast by which citizens have privileged and better access to public services than foreigners (Thompson, 2014: 322–24). State differentiation strategies, understood as a 'range of "perks" and subsidies already available only to citizens', are enriched by curry day's bottom-up perspective on citizen practice, as it is a mechanism for distancing citizens from newcomers who will not abide by the rules of social citizenship (for example, sociality, reciprocity and implicit obligations), while offering inclusion to those who do want to integrate into the city-state's political community (Thompson, 2014: 321).

Complementing state channels for expressing Singaporean citizenship, curry day emerges through online mobilization efforts to shape a sense of community and solidarity that runs parallel to and in conversation with state-run recruitment campaigns for foreign talent (Liu, 2014; Soon & Soh, 2014). Echoing Laporte's (2002: 40) argument that smells help oppose the capitalist logic of sterilization of public spaces, curry day interrupts the government's recruitment campaigns based on sterilization of the city-state. Instead, curry day contributes to a process of 'culture-in-the-making' (Duruz & Khoo, 2014: 3), which is understood here as a productive critique of culturally acceptable compromises for the social integration of newcomers and the advancement of modernist and capitalist goals, while making curry day a symbol of Singapore's multiracial uniqueness, cosmopolitan ethos and gesture of welcome. As such, curry day participants' actions are not an exclusionary and nationalistic social ritual, but a sharing of Singaporean foods and smells with foreigners. The Facebook event entitled 'How to win over your new FT neighbours' calls attention to the increasing numbers of issues with foreigners, while clearly intending to demonstrate to newcomers that curry is not a bad, 'smelly' thing, but a good, tasty one. Curry day has grown into a broader call to include foreigners and neighbours in Singapore: 'don't forget to teach your new FT neighbours how to enjoy [curry] too. Spread the love!' (National Cook Curry Day's Facebook page, 2011).

Conclusion

As a political act, cooking curry on curry day 2011 became an affirming example of visceral citizenship, as it created parameters for acceptable social behaviours in a time of transition to increased government-facilitated immigration from mainland China. Indicative of broader societal trends and changes in the city-state's configuration of power relations, curry day was a local response to state designs, using the transgressive human sense of smell around which it is difficult to maintain public-private and local-international distinctions. With the celebration of curry as a pillar of Singapore's smellscapes and national identity, the use of smells highlights—through the rawness of embodied citizenship—the contradictions within the state design of building a prosperous nation on the labour of foreigners who require specific accommodations. Reacting to the privileges foreign workers are seen as receiving over Singaporean citizens, participants of curry day used smellscapes and foodscapes as a visceral catalyst for mobilizing local collective action, providing feedback on everyday parameters to better frame formal citizenship and immigration designs.

With its traditional emphasis on merit-based entitlement and the unloading of state powers to the community and family levels, Singaporean state authorities may be an advanced example of neoliberal government. However, curry day demonstrates how citizens have taken on the affective skills required for neoliberal state designs to work, and offers an interesting critique of the government's rationalistic approach (Rose, 1999; Fortier, 2010). Curry day happened in a context in which Singaporean state authorities framed 'good' and 'desirable' citizens and migrant workers based on specific cultural, social and emotional skills, in order for Singapore to serve as a gateway between Chinese and Western societies (Montsion, 2012). However, the desirable populations and self-governed entrepreneurs are not only the expression of state designs, but also the representation of limits of cosmopolitanism through the embodied and visceral realities of tastes, preferences, feelings and other markers of belonging (Duruz & Khoo, 2014: 22–23).

More broadly, visceral citizenship as practised through curry day puts into perspective some of the limitations of cultural pluralism's main precepts as experienced in some Asian cities. By supporting the cultural rights of already defined citizen groups, cultural pluralism can also be perceived as a 'recipe for exclusion' (Kim, 2012: 113) based on the rights associated with citizenship status or the income-level of specific social classes (Anjaria, 2009: 391). Whether in Mumbai, Seoul or Singapore, middle-class activism has developed as embodied reactions and everyday disciplinary practices of being 'stewards of the city's streets and sidewalks' (Anjaria, 2009: 391). This activism has targeted the internationalization designs of state authorities and the demands of business elites to ‘making money, so to speak, odorless’ (Laporte, 2002: 40). Indicative of sociologically wealthier societies engrained in modernist designs, such reactions refer to rapid transition periods and the disjuncture between the role of cultural pluralism in facilitating increased diversity and the local limitations to accepting difference, especially when thought of and lived in a visceral fashion.

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Appendix 1. *Selected webpages*

Blogs and online forums

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