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## Expatriate as a 'good' migrant? Thinking through skilled international migration categories

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## **Expatriate as a Good Migrant: Thinking through Skilled International Migrant Categories**

In this paper, I explore how British migrants in Singapore utilise the term ‘expatriate’ to denote themselves as being a different kind of migrant. The way in which a migrant is distinguished from an expatriate is the question of return—the migrant is expected to stay, while an expatriate is expected to return to their home country. Yet the term ‘expatriate’ often becomes one that is axiomatically applied to Western migrants living abroad. This paper argues that we should not see the term ‘expatriate’ as axiomatic in describing this type of mobility, as we need to pay attention to the political context in which the term is enmeshed. The paper therefore argues that we need to understand how expatriation is not only understood as an identity in relation to the place of stay abroad, but in comparison to migration as a whole. First, the paper looks at how British migrants in Singapore draw upon racialised understandings of immigration debates to portray expatriates as being ‘good’ migrants. Second, it considers how the term expatriate is deployed in social sciences literature itself.

Key words: expatriates, highly skilled migration, race, migration, British migrants.

### **1 Introduction**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2015, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) campaigning for the British General Election tweeted a picture with the caption ‘Expats, do your bit on May 7<sup>th</sup>. Register to vote today! Many were quick to point out the irony of this anti-immigration party encouraging British emigrants in Europe to vote (Media Mole, 2015). This helps to highlight that the lexicon through which we talk about migration is a key political issue. In Europe, there has been a rise in popularity of Far Right parties and the UK’s decision to leave the European Union was attributed in part to an anti-immigration feeling. In the 2016 Australian election the immigration minister was described as racist due his comments about refugees. In the USA, presidential candidate Trump has threatened to build a wall to keep Mexican migrants out. In Singapore, foreign workers were a key rallying point for the 2015 election. Yet a point of discussion in these debates is the use of ‘expatriate’ instead of immigrant, the ways in which this works to distinguish some nationalities of migrants as being qualitatively different than others. For example, Koutonin (2015) talks about the hierarchy of terms within migration, suggesting that Europeans see themselves as expatriates because they can’t see themselves as immigrants. In this paper, I contribute to this type of popular debate by exploring how British migrants in Singapore utilise the term ‘expatriate’ to denote themselves as a different type of migrant. In doing so, I explore more widely how we can see the term ‘expatriate’ in what Rogaly and Taylor describe as the ‘racialization evident in discussions of migration’ (2010, p. 1336)—both in terms of how it is popularly used and studied academically.

As defined by the English language dictionary, and in its most descriptive form ‘expatriate’ is a common nomenclature denoting a skilled migrant who lives abroad for a short period of time. The way in which a migrant is distinguished from an expatriate is the question of return—the migrant is expected to stay, while an expatriate is expected to return to their home country. From an organizational perspective, this type of mobility, once seen as exceptional, is becoming more common with management consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2010) arguing that by 2020 it will become the ‘new normal.’ They suggest that one of the ways in which this ‘new normal’ will be enacted is through the mobility of people from all over the world, that as organizations become more global, their workforce will become more mobile within these structures. However, despite evidence to suggest that temporary migration is becoming more common, the term

expatriate isn't applied to all people who migrate temporarily for work or leisure. It is a category of migration that is often seen to be imbued with a 'Western and national baggage' (Fechter & Walsh, 2010, p. 1190), and in particular is seen to be reminiscent of colonial settlers, despite this term not being used to describe this type of migration at the time. It is through these associations that we see the term expatriate as being racialized (Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Knowles & Harper, 2009; Leonard, 2010). The term 'expatriate' is often used without reflection as a way to describe white Western nationals abroad, excluding other groups of migrants who fit within this technical description.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I challenge axiomatic understanding of the expatriate by looking at the way in which British migrants in Singapore identify themselves as expatriates to denote themselves as different kinds of migrants. Through this, I argue that we need to think about the ways in which categories of migration are produced, utilised and practised in political ways. I extend this argument in two ways. First, I argue that we cannot simply understand migrant identities in relation to the place of stay abroad, but have to see how these identities are produced in relation to other migrants. I show how British migrants understand themselves as expatriates in relation to other migrants, highlighting how they do this by drawing upon debates surrounding immigration. In doing so, I argue that the expatriate can be seen as a way through which British migrants categorise and order migration, producing themselves as being 'good migrants' both in the context of immigration debates in the UK and a growing hostility towards immigration in Singapore. Second, through this, I highlight the role that academia plays in producing categories of migration, arguing that we need to be more sensitive to the ways in which our work imagines our subjects of study.

## 2 Expatriates in the Social Sciences

Erik Cohen, writing in 1977, attempted to address the dearth of research on expatriates at a time when this type of temporal migration was becoming more common, suggesting that 'Expatriate is, admittedly a loose or 'fuzzy' term, capturing that category of international migrant who fills the gap between the tourist, on the one hand, and the semi-permanent or permanent immigrant on other' (p. 6). However, although the temporary movement of employees became more common with the intensification of the globalisation of the world economy in the 1980s, it arguably wasn't until the mid-noughties that research on expatriates took off in the social sciences with Beaverstock's (2002; 2005), Walsh's (2006) and Fechter's (2007) work. It is an area of research that is becoming increasingly popular, with research on expatriates contributing to our understanding of diverse topics, from body size (Lloyd & Hopkins, 2015) to mobilities (Butler & Hannam, 2014). However, this increasingly buoyant field of research on expatriates is characterised overall by one key point—a lack of clarity over who or what an expatriate is. That is, the various different ways in which academics use the term expatriates, means that this term remains ambiguous as an analytical category.

For example, the political and raced connotations of the term expatriate mean that academics often have difficulty in knowing what to call their research subjects when looking both at corporate mobility and 'Western' migrants. For all the critical awareness of the power relations involved in the term expatriate, it does remain part of the everyday lexicon for Western migrants. For example, a British migrant moving to Singapore can seek assistance from 'expat' websites, join 'expat' clubs or read 'expat' self-help books (Cranston, 2016). This means some researchers axiomatically name Western migrants as expatriates in their research. For example, in some research, the terms expatriate and skilled international migrant are used interchangeably without much consideration of the difference between them. In Harvey's (2008) analysis of the social

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<sup>1</sup> The exclusions associated with the term expatriate is one reason that some transnational organisation no longer use this term as it does not fit their global brand (Cranston, 2016).

networks of scientists in Boston, he defines skilled international migrants as having been born outside the country in which they are currently residing, having a degree and having worked for three years since graduation. As he uses 'expatriate' interchangeably, this is also his definition of the expatriate. However, others call this category of mobility migrants or transmigrants and seek to explore how expatriate is utilised (Fechter, 2007; Yeoh & Willis, 2005; Walsh, 2011). For example, Van Bochove and Engersen (2015) question the way in which knowledge workers in Rotterdam fit within this term or how they can be considered cosmopolitan through their mobility. In the rest of this section, I explore this work further, looking at the ways in which research on Western migrants has sought—both directly and indirectly—to make sense of this type of migration as being 'expatriate' or not expatriate. Through this, I argue that this research has focused primarily on two things—first, exploring how an 'expatriate' identity is produced in relation to encounter and second, modelling the expatriate as a category. This paper argues that we need to put this literature into conversation to think about how expatriate as a category and identity is produced in relation to other migrants.

As part of the wider cultural turn, research that looked at expatriates, or people that we can consider expatriates, turned the scale of the analysis to the body—looking at how the experiences of being a migrant varied between gender (Yeoh & Willis, 2005), race (Fechter, 2007) and class (Scott, 2006). This research in looking at expatriate identity looks at how this category is produced and performed through encounter, for example, how the category expatriate was produced on the ground by migrants through practices of Othering (Fechter, 2007). Therefore, the focus of this research was how an expatriate identity was produced in relation to the space of stay abroad through encounter. One strand of this research is that which considers how expatriates perform a white identity, seeking to advance our understanding of whiteness as a racial category. For example, in the research carried out on British migrants in Hong Kong by Knowles and Harper (2009) and Leonard (2010), the ways in which whiteness is produced, maintained, and performed as an identity marker are examined. Set against a backdrop of Hong Kong, they highlight the continued relevance of empire and colonialism in the practices of white expatriate identities that are 'produced using the materials furnished in the bodies, habits, journeys, social relationships—the settlement practices—of British migrants' (Knowles & Harper, 2009, p. 17). However, with a focus on how these expatriate or white identities are produced in relation to the country the migrant is living in, the focus is on what whiteness confers in relation to place as opposed to migration and migrant categories more widely.

Therefore, although this research that looked at expatriates has produced rich accounts of the privileges through which expatriate lives are constructed, it tends to miss understandings of ways in which expatriate identities are produced in relation to other migrants. In this so-called 'age of migration' (Castles, et al., 2013), the ways in which we understand migrants in relation to other migrants is arguably of critical importance. This is something that we see research that looks at expatriates from a skilled international migration perspective as doing. This literature seeks to explain and provide the limits of this category of migration, focusing on what constitutes migration, skill, and the impact that this has on the local economy (Findlay & Gould, 1989). However, returning back to the point made in relation to Harvey's work, this modelling of the skilled international migration patterns pays little consideration of specific expatriate identities, or the work that the categorisation of skilled migrants as 'expatriates' does. Therefore, while this literature contributes to our understanding of the expatriate, by for example, highlighting the role that transnational organisations play within this mobility (Millar & Salt, 2008), an understanding of identity is generally not addressed. What it means to be an expatriate is often assumed, being used as a synonym to explore the role of the skilled international migrant within the labour market. Despite comparisons being made with other types of migrants, the way in which expatriate is used is as a descriptive socio-economic category, not as a way through which identity is produced or practised.

Through this paper, I look at the ways in which British migrants utilise the term ‘expatriate’ to make sense of their migrant status in Singapore. In moving away from place-based understandings of expatriate identity, I explore how the ‘expatriate’ is produced relationally as a category of identity in relation to immigration debates both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad.’ That is the Other, to which the expatriate identity is produced, is not only the culture of the abroad, but other groups of migrants. This does not suggest that place does not matter, as the paper will illustrate, the Singaporean context where white migrants are a minority frames the ways in which British migrants make sense of themselves as expatriates. However, through this, I argue that we can see how British migrants use the term ‘expatriate’ to mean a ‘good’ migrant, in relation to both immigration debates in the UK and a growing hostility towards foreigners in Singapore. This notion of a ‘good’ migrant draws upon research from the geographies of labour markets that looks at the role that labour market intermediaries play in producing ‘normative understandings of what is understood to be the ‘ideal’ worker’ (Findlay, et al., 2013, p. 147). The idea of a ‘good’ migrant therefore speaks to the ways in which essentialist characteristics of individuals, such as nationality and race, are produced as being the desirable or normal characteristics of any given role not just in terms of labour migration, but migration more widely (Scott, 2013; Findlay, et al., 2013). This paper will illustrate how British migrants in Singapore use the term ‘expatriate’ to mean a ‘good’ migrant, conflating an understanding of ‘goodness’ with race and skill, when they seek to make sense of their migrancy.

### **3 British in Singaporean Context**

Singapore is a ‘city with a high dependency of labour migration’ (Yeoh, 2006, p. 26), with statistics indicating that roughly a quarter of Singapore’s population are non-residents (Beaverstock, 2012). Placing themselves as the ‘gateway’ between China and the West, the Singaporean government worked to actively attract skilled migrants to boost their global competitive advantage under the scheme of foreign talent (Yeoh, 2006; Beaverstock, 2012). However, like many other ‘world’ or ‘global’ cities, this desire to attract the highly skilled is accompanied by the movement of the ‘low-skilled,’ a very different experience of migrancy that results in increasing social inequalities between the top and the bottom (Sassen, 2001). So as Beaverstock (2012) estimates that ‘expatriates’ make up 16.5% of immigrants in Singapore, the majority of immigrants in Singapore are categorised as foreign ‘workers’ (Yeoh, 2006). These migrants are seen to be low-skilled or unskilled, undesired for Singapore’s long-term development, but required to provide labour in the domestic and construction sectors. This is reflected in Singapore’s migration and residency policies, which ‘specify who is considered a desirable and an undesirable subject under a new citizenship design’ (Montison, 2012, p. 470). For example, professionals will receive ‘Employment Passes,’ which enable you to bring your spouse and dependents, and are eligible to apply for Permanent Residency; whereas migrants working as domestic workers do not have these allowances.

Rather than explore the inequities of these visa regimes (see Yeoh, 2012), this paper argues that one of the ways in which British migrants use the term expatriate is to denote themselves as being ‘good’ (Scott, 2013) or ‘desirable’ (Montison, 2012) migrants. The paper argues that this is produced relationally two ways, one that draws upon immigration debates in the UK and the other that references similar debates in Singapore. At the time my research was carried out in 2012, there was a growing hostility to immigration in Singapore, derived in part from discussions from the 2011 General Election. These debates followed tropes similar to those in ‘Western’ economies in terms of a perceived injustice at ‘foreigners’ taking ‘Singaporean’ jobs (see for example Curtis, 2014). In 2014, in response to this, the Singaporean Government introduced a new policy which made it mandatory for all jobs to be advertised to Singaporeans before employment passes would be issued for foreign workers.

In 2012 there were roughly 30,000 British people living in Singapore (Gov.uk, 2012). The paper is based on 36 semi-structured interviews with 39 British migrants and ethnographic observation carried out in Singapore between February and April 2012, which looked, in part, at how these migrants defined expatriates. The interviews then were designed to understand what expatriation and migration means from the perspective of British migrants. Through this, there were four core themes discussed in relation to what it meant to be an expatriate in Singapore—corporate packages, lifestyle, race and immigration status—although these often overlapped. This paper focuses on discussions surrounding two of these themes—race and migrant status. Respondents were recruited initially through attending British social and business events and subsequently through snowballing by appealing to my respondents to put me in touch with other British people that might be willing to take part in my research. 36 out of the 39 respondents were white British, although I do not identify the race of my respondents in the paper as this could mean they become identifiable. Pseudonyms have also been used throughout to protect anonymity.

Being myself both British and in Singapore for a temporary period of time to carry out this fieldwork, meant that I embodied my research subjects. However, in line with feminist thinking, I cannot claim to know what effect my race, class or gender had upon my respondents: ‘we cannot know what effect the intersecting ‘I’ have on the participants’ (Valentine, 2002, p. 125). One of the most commonly articulated utterances in my interview transcripts was ‘you know,’ showing a certain level of expectation from these respondents that I thought in similar ways to them. However, as a white person, it was carrying out the interviews with the non-white respondents that assisted me in understanding the ways in which white body as opposed to the British body enabled certain sorts of privileges. For example, one respondent talked of what he described as the ‘white man’s wave,’ that in going through the security of a condo, a white person would be waved through whereas others were stopped and required to sign in. It was only in hearing a description of this did I realise that visitors signing into a condo was a requirement—I had previously just walked past security. Seeing the research as part of a political project that seeks to break down social barriers of difference is more important in terms of understanding the analysis presented, than the effect that my race or nationality have upon this. The paper therefore offers valuable contributions to the way in which we understand the intersections between migration, race and how these play out in everyday life, overall looking at how these barriers can be contested.

#### **4 Expatriate as a ‘Good’ Migrant**

In this section, I will look at the ways in which British migrants in Singapore understand themselves as ‘expatriates’ in relation to other groups of migrants—both in Singapore and in relation to immigration debates in the UK. As shown above, previous research on British migrants has looked at how they understand, practice and perform their identities in relation to encounter. Contributing to this literature that looks at how migrants draw upon whiteness as part of their identities, I look at the ways in which my respondents migrancy ‘exposes the skills and competence of white Britishness as an ethnic minority’ (Knowles & Harper, 2009, p. 17). However, in looking at how race is seen as part of British migrants lives, I show first, how this is produced in relation to other groups of migrants in Singapore, with the expatriate as a white migrant coming to confer both a sense of privilege and a desirability as a ‘good migrant’ in Singapore. Second, I illustrate how the resultant use of the term ‘expatriate’ is used by British migrants to distinguish themselves from immigration debates at ‘home.’ With immigration in the UK discursively produced as being problematic, this again highlights the ways in which British migrants utilise the term expatriate as a ‘good migrant.’ Again, this is something that we can see as being racialised, with migrants to the UK often being perceived as those who are visibly different: ‘media and political elites have produced and perpetuated a racialised perspective on contemporary immigration to Britain’ (Rogaly & Taylor, 2010, p. 1337). In popular discourses, being non-white then is associated with immigration, and immigration to the UK is often

represented as threat to British values (Hubbard, 2005), particularly in terms that reference concerns over integration (Phillips & Robinson, 2015) and the alleged ‘stealing’ of British jobs (Ince, et al., 2015). This section illustrates that the distinctions that British migrants make between their status in Singapore as ‘good’ migrants and immigration in the UK becomes racialised, as Rogaly and Taylor highlight, there was a racialization evident in immigration where ‘white British emigrants often referred to themselves not as migrants, but used an entirely separate term: expatriates’ (2010, p. 1336).

Race is way in which British migrants highlighted what it means to be an expatriate in Singapore, with, for example, Emily suggesting that it was a category that she couldn't escape:

Emily: I try not to, but obviously I am. I can't really get away from that. It's the colour of your skin, it's not like being in an European city and being an expat, it's different... (Law, March 2012).

By living abroad, white British migrants often become aware of their race for the first time. Research in white studies has highlighted that whiteness as a racial category and marker is often seen to be invisible (Dyer, 1997). Hence in the UK, racialised bodies are perceived as being non-white, with whiteness represented as the norm or unraced. However, as Knowles and Harper argue ‘Migration circulates the operational surfaces of race and ethnicity around the world’ (2009, p. 17), that is the migration of white British bodies into other locations means that the migrant becomes confronted with a new norm, one where they become an ethnic minority. This is something that Fechter has highlighted by showing how white migrants find the practice of being racially Othered ‘deeply unsettling’ (Fechter, 2007, p. 71). Part of these feelings of discomfort Fechter suggests are because ‘As white Westerners, they object to being marked as ‘racial’ in the first place’ (2007, p. 77). Fechter is arguing that rather than feeling discomfort because they are raced, white migrants are objecting to their visibility which results in them being stared at. Henry, one of my respondents in Singapore suggests similar ideas about being visibly white, or visibly different. He articulated this through his perception of being repeatedly picked upon by security guards in the MRT (public railway system). Through this he feels visible and compares this to the treatment of raced bodies in the UK as being subject to additional surveillance: ‘Because they aren't used to it, at home, white British people. It is the Caucasian that has the difficulty’ (Henry, Consultancy, March 2012).

This type of visibility of white British migrants meant that some felt that hostility towards immigration in Singapore was directed towards them. For example, Henry is a permanent resident of Singapore meaning he is entitled to live in a Housing Development Board (HDB) flat, that is a flat subsidised by the government. He highlights the resentment he feels from locals due to where he lives in a way that is strikingly similar to popular debates about immigration and council housing in the UK: ‘Yeah, I mean you get the looks, there are times you don't want to understand Chinese, it's because they think I am taking their HDB flats’ (Henry, March 2012). Visibility then becomes in part associated with perceived racist behaviour by Singaporeans over entitlement to state help. This means that British migrants highlight that hostility is directed towards them not because they are white, but because they are white *migrants*. That is respondents suggested that they felt that they became the target of hostility because they are visibly different as migrants:

‘They come into town and see all the glitz and glamour and the cost of buying lunch and buying a drink and they associate that with umm foreigners and principally I think with white foreigners because it's easy to spot a white foreigner, you can't spot a Chinese foreigner because they look the same’ (William, Finance, March 2012).

Hence, for the white British migrants I spoke to, race was a way in which their migrant status in Singapore was understood through their visibility, in comparison to migrants who they collectively Othered as looking like Singaporeans. However, returning to Emily's reasoning as to why she is an expatriate, we can see how this becomes a way in which British migrants can understand, practice and articulate their everyday lives as being different in Singapore. That is to say, expatriate becomes a way through which British migrants label their racial difference and status as an ethnic minority. As Emily suggests, 'if you are white in Singapore then you are, the first thing that someone is going to say or think when they meet you is, expat' (March, 2012). Expatriate becomes a racialised and embodied category, a way in which British migrants make distinctions between themselves and other non-white white migrants in Singapore—white migrants become understood as expatriates.

However, this distinction between white and non-white migrants in Singapore is also produced through discussions of skill. Some respondents would use the term 'expatriate' as a way of distinguishing themselves from other migrants, who they perceived as not being as desirable to the Singaporean economy: 'With the election here the number of foreigners and the rise in housing prices was a big issue. And the government knows this, but they know they still need good immigrants' (Archie, Consultancy, March 2012). Archie here, in talking about Singaporean's hostility towards foreigners, suggests that it doesn't apply to groups like British migrants because Singapore requires them for their long-term development and world-city growth (Beaverstock, 2012). This is a reflection of Singapore's immigration policies, particularly that on foreign talent, showing how a 'redefinition of entry categories has occurred as human and economic capital have become the privileged criteria for the valuing of immigrants' (Ley, 2010, pp. 64-65). Here, the 'expatriate' is used to describe a migrant who can promote the city-state's economic growth through the capital they can offer (Montison, 2012). As highlighted above in the skilled international migration literature, 'expatriate' is commonly used as an alternative to 'skilled international migrant' in academic writings about expatriation. In articulating a sense of the expatriate as being a skilled migrant, British migrants are articulating their worth in Singapore. This becomes something that both becomes qualitatively associated as Archie suggests as being 'good' and with the white body.

For example, Logan references this in terms of the confusion that he perceives Singaporeans having about labour migration: 'I think people also misunderstand a lot of the government changes that were brought through, umm, I think most people were concerned about lower paid jobs being taken by migrants, but white-collar workers I don't think are under the same level of scrutiny' (Finance, April 2012). Here, he is making a distinction between professional jobs that white-collar workers have, and lower-paid jobs that are filled by migrants, with the white collar workers not posing an issue. However, these distinctions are also ones that become understood in terms of race/nationality, with certain groups being perceived as fulfilling certain roles over others: 'I can't remember the last time I walked into a 7/11 and a Singaporean accent served me. It's always been a Filipino or maybe an Indian, but mainly Filipinos. The service industry, all left, right and centre seems to be full of Filipinos' (Liam, Finance, April 2012). Or Jamie discussing the jobs that migrants from China do: 'PRC [People's Republic of China] generally means you are a migrant worker in construction' (Jamie, Finance, March 2012). Therefore, British migrants draw upon essentialist understandings of nationality and race to see groups of people as being more appropriate to certain kinds of jobs than others—a migrant division of labour (Wills, et al., 2009). However, importantly, these British migrants place themselves as being on top of the migrant skills hierarchy in terms of their desirability to Singapore's economy: 'there's a lot of expat jobs here are jobs that locals can't do' (Sam, Finance, April 2012). For some, this means that they do not perceive themselves as being problematic within Singapore's economy: 'I think Singaporeans recognise that, umm, part of their success is sort of built on attracting foreign companies and therefore they sort of need umm expatriate workers' (Ross, Energy, March 2012).

Ross, in disputing the notion that there could be hostility towards his presence in Singapore, highlights what he sees as Singapore's need for his and other 'expatriates' contribution to the labour force. Others directly name the nationalities that they assume hostility should be directed to as part of a skills hierarchy: 'I think it is more to Filipinos, so that hole I was talking about, it's not the people low down there. So it's not the bankers or the professional levels taking all the HDBs slots' (Lewis, Engineering, March 2012). Therefore, whiteness as a race becomes seen as a marker of skill for British migrants in Singapore—it is not just skin colour (Dyer 1997). With a growing perceived hostility towards foreigners in Singapore, this racial distinction works to mark British migrants out as a 'good migrant'—desirable and required to Singapore and hence not part of the problem: 'the widespread perception that the incomer population had grown too fast, leading to a first class (foreigner)/ second class local) distinction. Although a lot of that was Indians and the Chinese, they don't get on naturally' (Alex, Finance, April 2012). Therefore, although the 'good migrant' is often articulated in term of skills, it becomes conflated with race, with the white body becoming the embodiment of certain skills. This 'good migrant' becomes called an 'expatriate' to mark this distinction. Expatriate then marks the white British migrant as being good, and hence any hostility directed towards them as misguided.

Expatriate is used then to denote someone who is 'recognizable as you don't belong there,' or someone who feels that they are visually out of place in Singapore. It is a term that is used by British migrants to make sense of their difference abroad, how they understand their status as an ethnic minority. However, this is not just produced in relation to Singapore, but the 'expatriate' becomes a way through which British migrants make a distinction between themselves and migrants in the UK. Many of my respondents, in reflecting on immigration debates in Singapore, also discussed immigration debates more widely. The talk of my British migrant respondents about immigration in the UK is in many ways was reflective of the same tropes about foreigners in Singapore with concerns over jobs and housing. Like the comparisons made between themselves and other migrants in Singapore, the comparisons British migrants make between themselves as 'expatriates' and migration in the UK is based upon nationality and race which become conflated with skill. For example, Archie on being asked whether he intended to return to the UK responded with 'I don't know, I have to say that the previous administration in the UK [Labour Party] let immigration rip...we just need good immigration' (Consultancy, April 2012). Archie here is making the distinction between 'good' immigration, like his migration to Singapore which he described in the quote above, than what he sees a mass undermined immigration to the UK. The separation between himself and the immigration debates in the UK, becomes understood through nationality:

'But the NHS is the biggest pull of people back to the UK. Me and my wife have, touchwood, been healthy over here, but if one of us was to get sick then we might consider returning...But it is not the country I left—immigration and economic migrants have changed it. This shouldn't have been forced on the population of the UK. And asylum seekers jump to the top of the list for council housing (March 2012).

We can see Archie's comment here as being part of a resentment that some British people towards groups of people who are seen to contribute little to society gaining benefits. But this statement in conjunction with his wish to go back to the UK to seek treatment on the NHS, despite the fact he has not been paying tax in the UK for 12 years, shows a lack of reflection on his part about the parallels between his migrant life and that of others. However, he construes himself, by virtue of his nationality, as being a different kind of migrant—an expatriate.

Skill is something that another respondent also highlights to make comparisons between British migration to Singapore and migration to the UK:

‘you have to have a profession,... you can’t just wander in, umm, and then expect to go to schools and this that and the other...The UK has just been way too open and then not protecting its own people really’ (Katie, Accompanying Partner, March 2012).

Differences here are being made between countries like Singapore, where the British migrant is assumed to be a professional, and the UK which is open and lets anyone just come in—hence British migrants in Singapore are highly skilled and migrants in the UK are just anyone. Therefore, we can see the ways in which British migrants again place themselves as highly skilled migrants, and other migrants, in the UK as less so. Hence, again it is the British migrant body that becomes marked as skilled, and thus ‘good,’ as Katie is distinguishing her family as ‘professionals’ and other migrants as people who ‘wander into the UK.’ It is through talk like this, that we can again see the way in which the ‘expatriate’ becomes conflated as a highly skilled migrant, one whose contribution to society means that they are entitled to the benefits that the state offers and again any hostility directed towards them as being misguided.

Therefore, the ways in which my British migrant respondents felt that the hostility directed towards them was misguided reflects the way in which white migration, highly skilled migration and British migration is constructed as being ‘good’ migration and hence not an important issue: ‘unproblematic in host countries due to their “adaptability” and “acceptability” (Knowles & Harper, 2009, p. 16). This ‘good’ status is produced in relation to other migrants in Singapore and in comparison to immigration debates in the UK, with the term ‘expatriate’ coming to denote this distinction. It is something that is clearly racialised in the Singaporean context, with the white body coming to embody the category of the ‘good’ migrant. Hence, the expatriate as an identity—the good migrant—is produced not only in relation to Singapore, but to other migrant groups. Whilst the way in which this is talked about is primarily in relation to the perceived level of skill, it becomes enmeshed with understandings of race. In Singapore, British migrants, in becoming bodily visible distinguish themselves as expatriates, highlighting the way that the white body becomes embodiment of certain types of skills—and thus desirable to the Singaporean economy. Comparing themselves to migrants in the UK, British migrants in Singapore, often unreflexively again highlight how they as ‘expatriates’ are not like these other migrants who are in their opinion problematic in the UK. The expatriate then is produced in relation to its Other, not the place of stay abroad, but different groups of migrants. Expatriates produce themselves as ‘good’ migrants, with nationality being conflated with race. The white migrant becomes seen as desirable, unproblematic, ‘expatriates,’ not like other migrants who are perceived as problematic in the labour force, economy and society.

## 5 Conclusions

This paper has illustrated the way in which British migrants in Singapore use the term ‘expatriate’ to denote themselves as a good migrant. This type of analysis is important for the ways in which we understand migration as a whole, and how we do research on highly skilled migration.

In terms of migration, the paper shows that migrants understand themselves as migrants not just in relation to place, but also through comparing themselves to other migrants. This of course does not suggest that place is not important, clearly, the ways in which white British migrants understand themselves as migrants in Singapore will be different from how British migrants understand themselves in Spain or other countries where whiteness is a racial majority. However, more widely when carrying out research on migrant identities, it shows a way to go beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002) and to think relationally by paying attention to the migratory context of the migrants. In this so-called ‘age of migration’ (Castles, et al., 2013) we need to think more widely about how migration is framed in terms other migration,

not just in reflection of encounter with the ‘local’ of the host society. This will first, contribute to our understanding of the intersections between race and migration. As the paper has shown, looking at how British migrants in Singapore understand themselves as ‘expatriates’ in relation to other migrants highlights other ways in which whiteness is produced, and the often privileged status this confers, in relation to other groups of migrants. Second, an understanding of the ways in which migrants produce themselves to other migrants illustrates the way in which words and terms can be used to order and categorise, a way in which ‘we’ are sorted from ‘them.’ The term ‘expatriate’ operates through power, the power to determine whose body is seen to fit within this category. This is important to note as the way in which this term is used is exclusionary, and thus seems antithetical to arguments that suggest that highly skilled migrants are cosmopolitan by virtue of their mobility (van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015). Again, understanding the ways in which migrants discuss themselves to other migrants helps us appreciate the privilege that some groups of migrants have, contributing to our understanding of the ways in which cosmopolitanism and class operate. Third, more generally, thinking beyond encounter with the local helps us to embrace the complexity of contemporary global mobility and how some groups of migrants are positioned within this—that is it is no longer appropriate to frame arguments about migrants that look solely at their interactions with an assumed ‘local’ host society.

For the ways in which we do highly skilled migration, as Findlay and Cranston note (2015, p. 26) we can see that ‘researchers have played a role in producing precisely the geographies that they imagined they were trying to explain.’ That is, researchers looking at migrants as expatriates have contributed to fixing who we understand expatriates are. In part, this is down to the way in which ‘expatriate’ is deployed in the social sciences literature. For example, section two illustrated that the way in which the term ‘expatriate’ was used within social sciences, often utilised the term ‘expatriate’ in an axiomatic way. Alongside the lexicon utilised, we can see ways in which this literature does not merely describe, map and model this category, but produces notions of expatriation. For example, the typologies of different international assignment patterns of professional workers to define the limits of expatriate migration, with Millar and Salt (2008) outlining a eight-part typology based upon knowledge transfer. These typologies have resulted in studies of specific types of highly skilled migration that contribute to naturalised assumptions about what expatriation is: ‘mobility types, therefore, are closely associated with the different acquisition and deployment activities required to transfer particular forms of knowledge and integrate them into corporate, country, project and market-related contexts’ (2008, p. 47). The expatriate as a skilled international migrant here is seen as the carrier and disseminator of knowledge, transferring Western knowledge into new contexts. This knowledge is seen as desirable as it advances the local economy in which the expatriate finds himself. While this is not disputing the contribution that skilled migrants make to the economy, it is questioning the ways through which it becomes labelled as being different from migration through the expatriate label. Labelled as expatriate, this way in which the expatriate is seen as disseminator of skills and desirable, and contributes to understandings of the expatriate as a desirable migrant, which as section 4 has illustrated, is a notion that is reflected and reproduced by British and other Western migrants abroad.

Therefore, we can argue that academic research on expatriates does not recognise the role it has played in constructing what it seeks to explain. We can see these categories used to describe the expatriate as acting like tautologies, with the parameters used to describe the expatriate being the ones that are looked for. Jennifer Robinson notes in the context of theorising global cities, the global cities concept ‘becomes a regulating fiction. It offers an authorised image of city success (so that people can buy into it) that also establishes an end point of development for ambitious cities’ (2006, p. 111). Modelling the expatriate as category, rather than just describing this group of migrants, often works to produce an ‘authorised image’ of the expatriate, one that works to produce our understandings of expatriation. While this fixing of categories has been challenged

by those looking at how expatriate identities are performed and practised as privilege (Fechter, 2007; Walsh, 2011; Yeoh & Willis, 2005), in much research on white migrants, the term expatriate is still utilised in an unreflective way. We as researchers must also recognise and think about the power relations implicit and explicit in the terminology we utilise in our research. It is through understanding and challenging labels that work to differentiate people, such as 'expatriate,' 'migrant' or 'refugee' that we open up the possibility of confronting the privilege that underpins the ways in which these become determined.

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