CHAPTER 2

Singapore as "Straight Space"

"Someday," begins the 2012 campaign video for Pink Dot, the event that has brought together LGBT Singaporeans and their supporters for an annual public assembly in the city-state's Hong Lim Park since 2009.[1] "Someday, it won't matter to the world if I'm gay or straight," says a teacher who dreams of another place in time when his colleagues and students accept his same-sex relationship. He is snapped back from this reverie as a photo on his desk of the teacher and his partner, smiling and holding their dog, is replaced by a photo that closes in on the dog alone. Next, a trans woman overhears unkind chatter as she leaves a public restroom. She states, "Someday, nobody will stare or point fingers or call names." Then we move to a family gathering, where a young woman enjoys a meal with her parents and female partner. That fantasy is broken by a cut to a scene of the same parents instead wrapped in an anguished embrace while they sit across from their daughter, with a pamphlet titled "understanding homosexuality" resting on the table between them. The daughter states, "Someday, our partners will be a part of our families." The video goes on to invoke a "someday" when "gay people will be free to express themselves without censorship," a "someday" when "a new chapter will be written for the gay people of Singapore." But "while we wait for someday to arrive," says the voice-over, "we can do our part today to make society more inclusive and open-minded. We can take a stand against discrimination and prejudice. We can join hands to support the right of every Singaporean to love. Every year with Pink Dot, we celebrate a solidarity in diversity. Every day with Pink Dot, we bring that someday a little closer. And as more and more of us stand up to be counted, the sooner that someday will come. So see you at Pink Dot 2012. Let us make someday happen." This video unfortunately speaks to an all too common situation in the global scheme of things. While LGBT rights gains in certain contexts over the last few decades have been remarkable, sexual minorities still endure legal and policy inequities in most of the world's countries, including Singapore. Activist efforts to instigate legislative and policy changes that would institutionalize LGBT

nondiscrimination have been definitively dismissed by the PAP government. As such, Pink Dot makes a necessary plea for equity and open-mindedness with its call for the "freedom to love."

From another angle, however, Pink Dot's vision of the future, and indeed this activist organization's very existence, is quite extraordinary. As recently as the late 1990s, Singapore's government went to great lengths to stamp out same-sex sexual activities and discourage LGBT community building. The removal of liquor licenses of several bars frequented by gay and lesbian clientele were rumored to be ordered by the government; police raids of gay bars and cruising grounds were well publicized and led to multiple arrests, caning sentences, and the publication of entrapped men's pictures in local newspapers; and censorship restrictions pertaining to literature, film, television, and theater kept representations of LGBT persons largely out of the public sphere (Heng 2001). Furthermore, in 1997, members of the LGBT advocacy organization People Like Us were brought in for police questioning after their application for registration as an official society was flatly denied.[2] So the existence of Pink Dot as an activist initiative that has gone from drawing a crowd of twenty-five hundred in 2009 to twenty-eight thousand in 2016 and is able to make a public call for LGBT inclusion evidences a significant change.

This change began in the early 2000s. Shortly after the publication of his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002, urban economic policy advisor Richard Florida visited Singapore to give public talks and meet with policy makers in various government ministries. Around the same time, a spate of articles on his ideas about creative cities as tolerant cities appeared in the main daily newspaper the *Straits Times*, a media outlet that like all those in the city-state is run with strong government ties and oversight.[3] One representative article, titled "Making Room for the Three T's," states, "For Singapore to thrive economically, it must accept immigrant talent, artists, and homosexuals. . . . The creative class wants to be where there is a happening scene, a pulsating music and arts environment, and a tolerant and diverse population. . . . [A] city needs to focus on getting the right 'people climate'" (*Straits Times* 2002).[4] In subsequent months and years, as part of the fostering of a new knowledge-based, creative economy and accompanying efforts to create a cityscape that has "buzz," and despite the critiques of Florida's approach that I discussed in chapter 1, the city-state government embraced Richard Florida's mantra that tolerance attracts talent in part by liberalizing its stance on sexual difference to project a global image of gay-friendliness.[5]

As a result, although the disenfranchisement of sexual minorities persists in Singapore, local LGBT subcultures and community/activist organizations now flourish and the city-state has quite surprisingly come to be popularly known as Asia's "new gay capital" (Yue 2007). In other words, as PM Lee stated in a speech to Parliament in 2007 to announce his government's decision to reject activist

calls for the repeal of Section 377A of the Singapore Penal Code (a colonial-era statute prohibiting "gross indecency" between two men), "the tone of the overall society . . . remains conventional, it remains straight" and, as such, "there is space, and there are limits." In this chapter, I examine this impasse. I interrogate why in this time of LGBT tolerance in Singapore's history it is still represented by the PAP as an officially "straight" space, and what specifically this designation means in the context of this contemporary city-state and leading "global city."

My ability to explore these questions stems from the fact that unprecedented recent public debates on homosexuality in the city-state have opened up space for critical reflection (and note that I use the term "homosexuality" here because, as demonstrated in what follows, the public debates that I highlight focus on the topic of the merits and demerits of homosexuality versus heterosexuality). Furthermore, my drive to explore them stems from a desire to build on the remarkable activist and community efforts that congeal in Singapore's local LGBT movement. The mere existence of Pink Dot and many other Singaporean LGBT organizations is heartening, and their joint efforts to improve the plight of sexual minorities deserve much praise. These groups offer necessary and vibrant critiques of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism, they play a pivotal role in putting issues of equity on the basis of sexual and gender identity into mainstream public debate, and they doubtless enrich the everyday lives of many LGBT Singaporeans in profound ways. Even though there is still a long way to go in terms of effecting legal and policy change, these are no small feats. In what follows, I build on the work of these organizations, and on the small body of existing queer studies work on the city-state (see, for instance, Lim 2005a; Lim 2004; Lo and Huang 2003; Tan 2009; Weiss 2005; Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012) to contribute to the advocacy efforts on behalf of LGBT people in Singapore and more. I say "and more" because while there is no doubt that homophobia and transphobia are real and rife and need combating (even in contexts in which equal rights have been won for LGBT persons), queer scholars and activists caution the need for scrutiny rather than straightforward celebration. For sexual politics is never only about the policing of a heterosexual-homosexual binary, and the march of progress thus entails the pitting of the properly domestic against the "queer" even when LGBT people make it in from the margins.[6]

In this chapter, I consider the debates over the place of homosexuality in Singapore, describing their unfolding, contextualizing them within the government's plans for a bright future of creative urbanism, and outlining the broad contours of critical activist and scholarly responses to date. It is worth noting here that throughout the chapter, I focus on setting out the PAP government's response to calls for LGBT equality. I do so not to suggest that the government and LGBT organizations are the only actors involved. There has also been anti-LGBT mobilization in Singapore society, particularly from evangelical groups. But while the Singapore government does take some heed of this countermove-

ment's claims, as I point out later in this chapter, it states that its policy is guided more by socioeconomic concerns than by this faction's views. After discussing the sexual-identity-based project that has so far been the focus of local activism and critical commentary, I shift gears to think through what these debates over the place of LGBT persons in the city-state illuminate about the broader politics of intimacy that drives its global city project. In other words, in this chapter I think both with and against existing debates over the place of homosexuality in the city-state to move from their focus to date on sexual identity politics as a single issue to a broader set of concerns about the governance of family, home, kinship, love, and more.

Progress Narratives

Increasingly, critical commentators seeking social justice for sexual minorities in Singapore have asked where LGBT Singaporeans fit into the progress narrative. On this question, there have been direct answers from each of the three men who have held the city-state's office of prime minister. In 1998, Lee Kuan Yew, in his capacity as senior minister, was being interviewed live on CNN when he was asked the following question by an unnamed man in the call-in portion of the program: "I am a gay man in Singapore. I do not feel that my country has acknowledged my presence. As we move into a more tolerant millennium, what do you think is the future for gay people in Singapore, if there is a future at all?" Lee responded,

> Well, it's not a matter which I can decide or any government can decide. It's a question of what a society considers acceptable. And as you know, Singaporeans are by and large a very conservative, orthodox society, and very, I would say, completely different from, say, the United Sates and I don't think an aggressive gay rights movement would help. But what we are doing as a government is to leave people to live their own lives so long as they don't impinge on other people. I mean, we don't harass anybody. (quoted in Peterson 2001, 129–130)

He could have added "anymore" to his last sentence. As noted above, the PAP government went to considerable lengths to limit same-sex sexual activities and efforts to build LGBT community through much of the 1990s. But Lee was right; by 1998, these forms of government harassment had ceased. Furthermore, his response to the caller's question marked the first time that a senior government official had spoken about sexual minorities in a noncondemnatory tone.

Singapore's second prime minister, Goh Chok Tong, made a much bolder pronouncement some years later. In July 2003, a *Time Asia* magazine article written by author and journalist Simon Elegant and titled "The Lion in Winter" detailed the Singapore government's efforts to shake off the city-state's authoritarian

image and foster an entrepreneurial, creative spirit in the face of changing global economic conditions and rising local unemployment rates. Toward the end of the article, Elegant writes,

> Repressive government policies previously enforced in the name of social stability are being relaxed. The city now boasts seven saunas catering almost exclusively to gay clients, for example, something unthinkable even a few years ago. There are a sprinkling of gay bars, and many dance clubs set aside one night each week for gay customers. Prime Minister Goh says his government now allows gay employees into its ranks, even in sensitive positions. The change in policy . . . is being implemented without fanfare, Goh says, to avoid raising the hackles of more-conservative Singaporeans. "So let it evolve, and in time the population will understand that some people are born that way," Goh says. "We are born this way and they are born that way, but they are like you and me." (Elegant 2003)

It must be noted that this "change in policy" was not a literal change in policy. Meredith Weiss quotes from her correspondence with a representative of the Public Service Division of the Prime Minister's Office who explains that the comment "was not a shift in policy . . . but an elaboration of the Singapore Civil Service's position on the employment policy of homosexuals," a position that they can be employed, as everyone else, based on "the principle of meritocracy" (Weiss 2005, 271n24). Regardless, this unprecedented and unexpected statement of tolerance was a watershed and spurred on a tremendous amount of local and international public debate.

Furthermore, unlike Lee Kuan Yew's 1998 statement, Goh's 2003 statement was not off the cuff, and its appearance in the "Lion in Winter" article made evident the rationale behind the government's deliberate move toward tolerance. The article deals in a general sense with the then new initiatives to transform the manufacturing base that spurred on Singapore's early economic growth into a postindustrial, knowledge-based economy. More specifically, it lays out the pivotal role that "talent" plays within this broad strategy. Indeed, the text that directly precedes the quote above is this: "Singapore will do 'whatever it takes' to attract talent, says Vivian Balakrishnan, the government official in charge of the Remaking Singapore Committee."[7] And the text that directly proceeds from it expands on this assertion as follows: "Authorities are trying to diversify the island's gene pool so that spontaneous change can occur. Once notoriously picky about whom it allowed into the country to live and work, Singapore has opened the floodgates in recent years through its 'foreign-talent' program. Foreigners, gay or straight, will be critical to carving out the niches in which the government hopes Singapore's new economy will thrive." The assertion that both "gay and straight" foreigners would be equally welcome has proven incorrect. Foreigners are allowed to migrate with opposite-sex dependent partners only (at least those in the "talent" category; see chapter 4 for discussion of the fact that those in the

"worker" category are not allowed to bring any dependents). But the drive for "talent" in the context of Singapore's creative city push has indeed reshaped the city-state's economic and urban landscapes in multiple and profound ways, not least spurring on a move toward an official stance of tolerance toward sexual minorities.

This official statement of newfound tolerance led to much public debate. In fact, as Chris Tan notes, the public debate "became so heated that Goh had to order the local media to stop reporting on it a month later during his annual National Day Rally speech" (Tan 2009, 134). During that August 2003 speech, Goh qualified his earlier comments:

> As for my comments on gays, they do not signal any change in policy. That would erode the moral standards of Singapore, or our family values. In every society, there are gay people. We should accept those in our midst as fellow human beings, and as fellow Singaporeans. . . . That said, let me stress that I do not encourage or endorse a gay lifestyle. Singapore is still a traditional and conservative Asian society. Gays must know that the more they lobby for public space, the bigger the backlash they will provoke from the conservative mainstream. Their public space may then be reduced. (Goh 2003)

Thus the public sphere for gays and lesbians was pried slightly open, while LGBT activists and individuals were clearly told to stay in line.

In the mid-2000s, LGBT organizations and community groups, many of them nascent, tested the limits of the new tolerance. In the wake of Goh's statement, several small events and functions were held without censure; most notably, IndigNation—also known as "Singapore's Pride season"—was launched as a series of events in private venues in 2005, and it continues annually. But many highly publicized and visible events drew official attention and rebuke. For instance, permits were denied for the gay circuit party "Nation" in 2004, for various public talks relating to gay and lesbian rights, and for a "Pink Picnic" that was to be held in Singapore's botanic gardens in 2007. In all of these instances, and more, police stated that the granting of permits would be "contrary to the national interests." The Registrar of Societies gave the same reason when it refused the second attempt by LGBT organization People Like Us for registration as an official society in 2007. Furthermore, censorship restrictions on homosexual content in film, television, and theater were in many cases loosened but by no means dropped.

Limits were most directly and dramatically tested in 2007, when activists launched a lobbying campaign to repeal a colonial-era sodomy law. The campaign was undertaken as Singapore's Penal Code underwent a comprehensive review to bring it "up to date and make it more effective in maintaining a safe and secure society in today's context." As part of the reform, Section 377, prohibiting "carnal intercourse against the order of nature," was repealed so that "anal and oral sex, if done in private between a consenting adult heterosexual couple

aged 16 years old and above" would no longer be criminalized (Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs 2006).[8] But Section 377A, prohibiting "gross indecency" between men, was left intact.[9] At this point, current PM Lee Hsien Loong stepped fully into the fray. In response to the presentation of two petitions to Parliament, one that called for the statute's repeal and the other that called for its retention, he delivered a dedicated speech on the issue: "They too must have a place in this society, and they too are entitled to their private lives. We should not make it harder than it already is for them to grow up and to live in a society where they are different from most Singaporeans. And we also do not want them to leave Singapore to go to more congenial places to live. But homosexuals should not set the tone for Singapore society" (Lee 2007). In the same speech, he further states,

> Homosexuals work in all sectors, all over the economy, in the public sector and in the civil service as well. They are free to lead their lives, free to pursue their social activities. But there are restraints and we do not approve of them actively promoting their lifestyles to others, or setting the tone for mainstream society. They live their lives. That is their personal life, it is their space. But the tone of the overall society, I think remains conventional, it remains straight, and we want it to remain so.

Thus Lee distanced the government from the anti-gay arguments made by those in the pro-retention camp by stating that the government does not "harass gays" or "act as moral policeman" and that it would not "proactively enforce Section 377A on them." Yet the statute stands as Lee affirmed that Singapore society is "still conservative" and fundamentally "straight."[10]

All government statements made on "the gay issue" since this 2007 speech have been consistent with it, and the Singapore Supreme Court rejected two constitutional challenges against Section 377A in November 2014. So the city-state's creative city project rolls on with a rhetorical commitment to tolerate sexual minorities but nothing more.[11] Full citizenship remains the preserve of Singapore's heterosexual subjects, while the LGBT community and its allies figure out what to do next. In this camp, there is certainly much frustration that LGBTs continue to live their lives on the margins in the city-state. There is also resentment over what Eng-Beng Lim has described as "the state's new—if volatile—attitude toward its queer citizenry: we'll leave you alone so long as homosexuality is not encouraged and is no more than a marketplace commodity" (Lim 2005b, 297–298). But there is simultaneously a sense of accomplishment. On the heels of the retention of Section 377A, journalist Janadas Devan (2007) stated, "I did not like one bit the upshot of the Prime Minister's speech—that 377A will stay because the majority, especially Christians and Muslims, are opposed to its scrubbing. But I was proud of what he had to say, and how he said it." Also, prominent activist Alex Au characterized the unsuccessful repeal campaign as one of "huge gains," noting that PM Lee, in his speech to Parliament,

"spent time demolishing some of the arguments of the anti-gay side, thereby distancing his government from their agenda." He continued,

> Look closely, feel the vibes in society, and you'll see we achieved a lot. Countless straight men and women stood up to be counted, some making even better arguments in their blogs and speeches than gays themselves. Three ruling party MPs spoke up for repeal when previously, we all assumed the People's Action Party was monolithic on this question. Thousands of ordinary Singaporeans, faced with the headlines, have had an opportunity to think about the issue and clarify their thoughts on it.[12]

Despite the maintenance of the status quo in legislative and policy terms, there has certainly been much change since Lee Kuan Yew's first lukewarm public statement about gay Singaporeans in 1998.

Furthermore, the shift in official rhetoric has enabled the consolidation of an LGBT movement in the city-state. In this new, kinder, gentler environment in which the "promotion" of gay and lesbian "lifestyles" is nonetheless discouraged, Pink Dot, IndigNation, and many other organizations and initiatives have quickly emerged alongside the few longer standing groups like People Like Us. Gay activists have definitely found their feet, and they contribute to efforts to foster civil society and push for the liberalization of Singapore politics (see Chua 2015; Tan and Jin 2007). These many and varied efforts now make a claim on the social and cultural space that rather suddenly opened up for sexual minorities in the 2000s while making a careful plea for equity on the basis of sexual orientation. In the case of Pink Dot, the press release announcing the first event in 2009, boldly titled "Singaporeans to Make a Stand Against Prejudice and Bigotry," highlighted "discordant laws and policies" that force LGBT Singaporeans to live "secret lives" and then launched a sweeping appeal for "open-mindedness and understanding" in pursuit of "the freedom to love." Its organizers pitched the event as neither a protest nor a parade: "Pink Dot Sg is a non-profit movement started by a group of individuals who care deeply about the place that LGBT Singaporeans call home. Pink because it's a blend of red and white—the colour of Singapore's national flag. Also, it is the colour of our national identification cards. More importantly, Pink Dot Sg stands for a Singapore in which all Singaporeans, regardless of their sexual orientation, are free to love and be loved." This agenda has remained unchanged. Pink Dot works toward a Singapore "in which all Singaporeans are free to love and be loved."[13] It is "a symbol of Singapore's more inclusive future."[14] Thus LGBT activists mobilize to try to bring a gay-friendlier future into being.

Other critical scholars have told similar versions of this story about the changing place of homosexuality in Singapore in recent years, and some have offered conjecture on the prospects for the achievement of more thoroughgoing change for LGBTs in the city-state. In general, the present impasse is understood to be

the result of a contradiction between the "traditional" "Asian" values to which the government clings in order to continue to assert its moral authority and maintain stability, and pragmatic economic concerns that require a more "cosmopolitan" outlook. If Singapore's government is indeed serious about opening up and fostering a creative, diverse city-state that stays ahead of the game, one common line of thinking proceeds, change will follow. For instance, Chris Tan asserts, "The state knows that it must cosmopolitanize, but the embracing of difference contradicts the sexual exclusivity inherent within normative notions of citizenship. The resolution of this contradiction presents an important challenge that Singapore has to face in the future" (Tan 2009, 150). Similarly, Meredith Weiss argues,

> The coupling of economic motivations for pluralist tolerance (specifically, per Richard Florida, toward gays and lesbians) and heightened conscientization and mobilization among queer Singaporeans seems likely to . . . favor . . . tangible improvements for the GLBT community. . . . Singapore's government may increasingly find that maintaining the discourses, norms, and policies apropos an attachment to the cultural relativism of "Asian values" appears increasingly incompatible with the nation-state's cosmopolitan economic dreams. (Weiss 2005, 288)

Thus various activists and critical commentators alike hold out hope for "progress" in a purportedly liberalizing Singapore.

On whether or when social justice for sexual minorities will follow as Singapore's government continues to balance its social and economic priorities, unfortunately I have no unique insight to offer. Instead, I turn now to argue for the need to advance another sort of counterdiscourse. In the next section, I provide further analysis of the events I have described here, taking seriously the government's unusual willingness to "stay behind" on the gay issue.

Staying Behind

Critical commentary highlighting the apparent contradiction between Singapore's cosmopolitan aspirations and its continuing discrimination against sexual minorities may very well be onto something. Activist strategies based on arguments that LGBT people deserve the "freedom to love" because they are Singaporeans first and foremost, and because they want to be able to contribute to the nation's progress and development, may—indeed, hopefully will—eventually bring results. But no matter how things turn out on this front, it is worth looking closely at the government's justifications for maintaining Singapore as a "straight space" while tolerating, but only tolerating, sexual minorities. Activists and other critics of the PAP's stance on homosexuality have by now well aired the position that Singapore will "fall behind" if it maintains its discriminatory

stance. Alex Au, in an article arguing for gay marriage for Singaporeans, puts this plainly: "Singapore has to keep ourselves an attractive place for wealth and talent. We are already handicapped because countries like China, India, Thailand and others have huge domestic markets and low-cost resources. To compensate, we have to make our physical, legal, social and cultural environment—in addition to the economic—more attractive than theirs. We can't just keep pace. We have to be ahead of the pack."[15] Au, an outspoken critic of Singapore's progress narrative on a number of fronts, obviously advances this position as a strategic alignment with the values of competitiveness and success that the PAP government holds dear. Consider the striking similarities between Au's declaration and the following statement made by Goh Chok Tong, in his capacity as senior minister, just a few years later:

> We are on the right track to become a truly global city. . . . However, it is very much a work in progress and there is no room for complacency. Many other cities in Asia and the Middle East are vying to catch up with and overtake us. They are investing billions to make themselves attractive. Even well-established cities are reinventing themselves. We have to continue to learn from them and other vibrant cities, and reinvent ourselves to stay relevant and ahead of the competition. (Goh 2007)

The major difference between these two statements, however, is that Goh was not talking about LGBT rights.

In Singapore government discourse on the "gay issue," the language of "staying ahead" is strikingly absent. Au wrote the words above because this so thoroughly adaptable, rational, forward-looking government has instead explicitly chosen to "stay behind" on the issue of gay and lesbian rights. PM Lee Hsien Loong made this clear during his parliamentary address on the retention of Section 377A in 2007, in which he states, "When it comes to issues like the economy, technology, education, we better stay ahead of the game, watch where people are moving and adapt faster than others, ahead of the curve, leading the pack. And when necessary in such issues, we will move even if the issue is unpopular or controversial. . . . On issues of moral values with consequences to the wider society, first we should also decide what is right for ourselves. . . . So, we will let others take the lead, we will stay one step behind the front line of change" (Lee 2007). This is no trivial assertion, especially since, as intimated by PM Lee here, the Singapore government has indeed been very willing to move on certain controversial issues with significant societal implications for the sake of the health of the creative economy. Notably, it went ahead with plans to develop two prominent downtown "world-class resort and casino" complexes despite very strong and unusually vocal opposition from civic and religious groups in 2004 (see *Straits Times* 2004a, 2004b). It has also moved forward with aggressive recruitment of immigrants to expand Singapore's population base in the face of declining fertility rates, again despite considerable social pushback (see

chapter 4). So, there is something in particular about the LGBT issue that causes Singapore government officials to fear that moving forward on rights provisions for this group will arrest development. Tracing PM Lee's argument further, this particular something becomes clear. He affirms, "The family is the basic building block of our society. It has been so and, by policy, we have reinforced this and we want to keep it so. And by 'family' in Singapore, we mean one man one woman, marrying, having children and bringing up children within that framework of a stable family unit" (Lee 2007). Not insignificantly, other major issues on which the Singapore government has chosen to "stay behind" also relate to the governance of familial, reproductive life. For instance, activist calls for better employment conditions for foreign workers go largely unheeded, as do calls for public provision of day care and more generous maternity leave policies that would make childbirth and child-raising more affordable and just generally easier for those below middle- to upper-income brackets. Who gets to reproduce Singapore's future, in a literal sense, is very much on the minds of PAP decision makers, and the "gay issue" is read through this preoccupation in key ways.

Of course, critical scholarship on sexual politics in Singapore has long highlighted the link between "family values" and discrimination against LGBT people. For instance, Laurence Wai-Teng Leong notes that "heterosexuality and the nuclear family are privileged by the state" (1995, 18); Kenneth Paul Tan states that homosexuality has been cast as a "threat to the traditional Asian family, which has been held up as the basic unit of Singaporean society" (Tan and Jin 2007, 185); and Meredith Weiss suggests that the "institution of the family" is "framed as necessary to Singapore's well-being and national survival, particularly to sustain a sense of local identity and moral standards as Singapore casts its lot as a global node" (Weiss 2005, 285). Furthermore, many local LGBT organizations, having likewise identified this stumbling block, have responded to the assertion that homosexuality is a threat to "family values" by very explicitly casting the gay and lesbian agenda as family friendly. In a 2006 press release, People Like Us stated that the maintenance of the sodomy law "damages family and public life by encouraging deception and dishonesty when people try to avoid discrimination and social or family conflict" and "creates pressure to emigrate, thus . . . splitting families when we say at the same time that stable and supportive families should be the bedrock of our society."[16] Pink Dot, as noted above, also frames its mission as one of helping gays and lesbians to fit into the national family, figuratively as well as literally. Among Singapore's pro-gay faction, such positions exemplify a frequent refrain that responds to the assertion that gays and lesbians are disenfranchised to protect the heterosexual family by imploring that they are not a threat to that norm and can and ought to be integrated within it.

Scholarly and activist responses to Singapore's exclusionary mode of sexual citizenship to date have therefore been largely trained on seizing the shift in

government discourse to create new opportunities to fit in to the national family. This is a commonsense and strategic position. But it is also critically limited, as detailed in two recent groundbreaking works on Singapore LGBT politics—Lynette Chua's (2015) *Mobilizing Gay Singapore: Rights and Resistance in an Authoritarian State* and the edited collection *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012).

The former is the only book-length treatment of the history of Singapore's LGBT movement, tracing its existence from an early secretive bar culture in the 1970s, through private meetings in individual activists' living rooms in the early 1990s, and to the open, public resistance of the last decade. Chua coins the term "pragmatic resistance" to frame her analysis: "Under . . . authoritarian conditions, gay activists in Singapore learn to be creative as they find alternative ways to advance their movement while ensuring its survival. Even though they aspire toward legal reform and greater protection of their rights, they often do not deploy strategies and tactics familiar to activists in liberal democracies, especially street demonstrations. The result is a strategy of pragmatic resistance" (Chua 2015, 5). She provides an excellent account of the legal restrictions on collective mobilization and civil liberties in Singapore that effectively hamstring LGBT organizing, and indeed all other social movements in the city-state. She details severe legal obstacles to public assemblies and associations, limits to freedom of speech through the use of the Sedition Act and Internal Security Act and media licensing and management systems, and the conversion of single-member constituencies into group representation constituencies, which makes political turnover in individual districts difficult to achieve and helps the PAP maintain a firm grip on electoral politics. Furthermore, Chua highlights political norms that affect social movement organizing in Singapore, such as the principle of nonconfrontation, emphasis on the preservation of social stability, and the state's use of legal means to suppress and control dissent. Taken together, the legal and political environment in Singapore, she shows, is geared toward the preservation of the status quo, as "basic civil-political liberties are seen as tradeoffs for engineering [a] particular vision of social stability and its fruits of economic progress" (Chua 2015, 34). In this climate in which asking for rights is nonconformist behavior and activist organizations face real threats of censure and disbandment, she shows how LGBT activists have learned to "toe the line as they push the boundaries" in order to make impressive inroads (Chua 2015, 44).

The collection *Queer Singapore*, edited by Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow, also grapples with the specificities of LGBT culture and politics in Singapore. It analyzes the emergence of LGBT activism and culture in a political context they call "illiberal pragmatism," a milieu that "facilitates state regulation of social identity while also creating new subjectivities for the new neoliberal economy" (Yue 2012, 2). Like Chua, the editors and contributors admire the "tactics of negotiation" that have led to the building of a vibrant LGBT movement and

subculture in the city-state "against a contradictory backdrop of sexual repression and cultural liberalization" (Yue 2012, 1). They also examine the negotiation that Chua calls toeing the line while pushing boundaries, as the chapters "explore how local LGBT communities have thrived underground and above ground through pragmatic modes of resistance and complicity" (Yue 2012, 25). They dwell, in other words, on the ways in which activist and community groups struggle against a regulatory state apparatus while they are inextricably intertwined within the new neoliberal economy. Overall, the contributors show "how contemporary queer Singapore has emerged as a self-aware, action-oriented and entrepreneurial culture that has worked within and twisted the illiberal logic of State control," and thus the collection takes on a justifiably optimistic tone (Yue 2012, 25). But Yue's caution that the emergent queer public culture is caught up in "the country's irrational and ambivalent modes of governance" is nonetheless extremely significant as it forces us to be cognizant of the broader social forces within which LGBT struggles are bound up (Yue 2012, 9).

The predominant trend within LGBT Singapore to build on the gains made within the realm of cultural citizenship to subtly push for tangible political gains for sexual minorities may eventually pay off. This would be an extraordinary accomplishment. But shifting the notion of the national family to encompass both heterosexuals *and* homosexuals will make little dent in the heteronormative logics that cultivate the narrow family norms underpinning socially unjust notions of development. In Singapore, as everywhere else, heteronormativity and notions of the proper national family are complex, deeply rooted, and tied to a range of structural forces such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism, ableism, and more. They thus cannot be countered solely through appeals for LGBT inclusion. Again, the identity-based, assimilationist stance adopted by many local LGBT organizations makes much sense. These organizations exist precariously in the slightly liberalized but still illiberal city-state, and their actions are highly circumscribed since the shadow of the still strong state is a long one.[17] But here I do not face those constraints and can begin to at least imagine a different sort of queer political challenge to Singapore's exclusionary sexual citizenship and intimate governance regimes. As Chua notes, "In authoritarian Singapore, to speak out is to mount the first act of resistance" (2015, 5). So I want to push the conversation on sexual politics in Singapore to address not just hegemonic heterosexuality but hegemonic heteronormativity, even though activists and local commentators cannot afford to advance such a broad-based critique at this juncture.

We know that Singapore's gays and lesbians are disenfranchised to protect "the family." Multiple government officials have clearly and repeatedly made this clear. But what has been strikingly absent from discussions of "family values" in the context of debates over the place of homosexuality in the city-state is the fact that "the family" and "heterosexuality" are terms that do not map neatly or

completely onto each other. What has not yet been discussed, because doing so is too politically risky, is the fact that "the family" that Singapore's government seeks to protect regulates sexuality, and much else, along more than the heterosexual-homosexual divide. In my reading of PM Lee's 2007 speech, he tacitly suggests as much. Rather than dismissing the concerns of LGBT people by denouncing homosexuality outright as a threat to some sort of universal heterosexual moral framework, Lee took pains to clarify that the gay and lesbian community "include[s] people who are responsible and valuable, highly respected contributing members of society." On the basis that "among them are some of our friends, our relatives, our colleagues, our brothers and sisters, or some of our children," Lee saw fit to prescribe that "they too must have a place in this society, and they too are entitled to their private lives." But while he downplayed fears of homosexuality per se and strongly encouraged Singaporeans to adopt a "live and let attitude" toward gays and lesbians, Lee also insisted that "homosexuals should not set the tone for society." He insisted that "the overall society . . . remains conventional, it remains straight," and he did this for the very specific reason that "the family is the basic building block of our society" (Lee 2007). In other words, PM Lee complicated the polarizing heterosexuality-homosexuality binary by asserting that queerness is not a threat to heterosexuality per se, but a threat to a specific heterosexual family norm. The contest does not, in other words, entail simply a struggle for dominance between sexual identities but involves the maintenance of heteronormativity. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the heterosexuality-homosexuality issue that has so far dominated public debate over sexual citizenship in the city-state to examine the cultural politics of intimacy in global city Singapore.

Beyond Limits

LGBT movements have gained unprecedented traction in many sites around the globe. As human rights protections for sexual minorities have been achieved in numerous (though by no means most) countries and the purported economic benefits of gay-friendliness have appealed to some urban and national boosters, LGBT persons are now at least tolerated in a range of sites, including Singapore. The city-state's long-standing PAP government has slightly altered its mode of rule in its era of creative urbanism, and as it allows for more public participation while still expending much effort to maintain social control, a new governmental rhetoric of limited openness toward sexual minorities has led to unprecedented public debates on the place of homosexuality in the city-state and enabled the growth of a nascent LGBT movement. But tolerance for the sake of attracting and retaining "talent" has not disrupted the teleological and fundamentally heteronormative logics of progress and social reproduction

that guided Singapore's transformation from "third world to first" (Lee 2000). Singapore is still a "straight space," as PM Lee asserts, in that full citizenship is the preserve of heterosexual subjects. Some LGBT persons, those whose activities contribute to the new economy, can step tentatively into the public sphere (at least for as long as they are seen to be creating value), but enfranchisement is off the table as the state is wary of fundamental social and cultural change. LGBTs may have a role to play in the productive sphere, the state allows, but their public and private lives remain curtailed to keep them out of the sphere of social reproduction, out of the sphere of that "basic building block" of Singapore society, the family.

Pink Dot and other activist organizations and critical commentators have responded to this government position by staking a claim for more space in the city-state while hoping for and working toward a more inclusive future for LGBT Singaporeans. Yet, considering the economically forward-looking PAP government's willingness to "stay behind" on LGBT rights and other social issues, it is apparent that the terrain is much more complicated than the dominant focus in Singapore public discourse on a heterosexual-homosexual dividing line suggests. The government's position is clear. The nation's future depends not just on sound economic policies but also on sound population policies, and this project involves more than the preservation of a heterosexual norm in the city-state. It involves the preservation of a specific notion of "the family," one that excludes many more than sexual minorities. To envision and enable a socially just global city future, therefore, the debate must be pried further open. Critical responses might venture well beyond arguments for LGBT equality to advance a more extensive political challenge to the logic of reproductive futurism that underpins Singapore's urban and national developmental strategies. For while the establishment of heteronormativity as a central aspect of Singapore's colonial and postcolonial modernization projects has produced sexual exclusion to be sure, it has also and inextricably constructed an intimate sphere bound up with a relentless progress narrative that has implications for the workings of citizenship along lines of race, class, gender, and nationality. As Carla Freccero argues, a queer approach that goes beyond single-issue identity politics requires that we think "'queer' as a critique of (temporal) normativity tout court rather than sexual normativity specifically" (2007, 489).

On queerness and temporality, Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) is perhaps the best known text. In a provocative Lacanian analysis, Edelman challenges the logic of "reproductive futurism," at the center of which he locates the figure of the Child. Edelman declares that for a queer ethic to be truly oppositional it must refuse the embrace of acceptance via participation in circuits of kinship and reproduction; it must disavow the future. He declares the "proper task" of queer theory to be "the ceaseless disappropriation of every propriety" (2004, 24), and thus, for him, "*queerness* names the side of

those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (2004, 3, emphasis original). Notably, it has also attracted much critique. For instance, José Muñoz's analysis in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) begins from a similar starting point to Edelman's—that is, the dominance of reproductive futurism and the political impoverishment of a countermovement framed narrowly around the demand for same-sex marriage. Though inspired by the polemic of *No Future*, he forcefully writes against its antisocial, antirelational political proposition. Muñoz, rather than disavowing the future, advocates its utopian recasting. Forgetting the future, Muñoz argues, is not a political option since only a very privileged few can afford to do so. Edelman, as he writes against what he identifies as a universal politics of reproductive futurism, invokes a universal "queer" subject. But as Muñoz states, "imagining a queer subject who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience is an ineffectual way out" (2009, 96). "Queer" subjects are multiple and are differently positioned in relation to the dominant heteronormative order along lines of race, class, gender, and more. They cannot, in all their variability, simply opt out. We must therefore reenvision (see also Smith 2010; Winnubst 2010).

To envision alternative futures for Singapore, I suggest that we must look back. To understand how we got to this era in which LGBT persons are tolerated in the "straight space" of Singapore, and to chart ways of achieving social transformation, how the heteronormative logic came to take root in the city-state must be excavated. The next two chapters dwell in good measure on Singapore's late colonial and early postcolonial years, as I argue that this is the period to which we must look to gain a fuller understanding of the present-day government's stubbornness to do any more than tolerate sexual difference, and to shed light on the ways in which recent debates about sexual citizenship in the city-state are connected to a much wider array of issues than has been widely acknowledged to date. They move out from the debates on homosexuality versus heterosexuality that have been so well aired in Singapore to instead grapple with the politics of intimacy in the city-state, especially highlighting the family's function as a regulative governing fiction in colonial and postcolonial Singapore, and detailing the ways in which a "proper family" norm has been carefully cultivated throughout its history. Through analysis of deployments of family, housing, and migration policies, the next chapters demonstrate this norm's role in producing both a stable population of "quality" citizens as well as multiple "queered" others who fall outside the very particular heterosexual family norm upon which Singapore's developmental aims have come to rest.