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Privileged migrants and their sense of belonging: Insider or outsider?

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ABSTRACT

Asia is gaining prominence as a destination for millions of migrants, totaling to about one-third of total international migrants. The privileged migrants (highly skilled and affluent) make up a large part of this group. They remain a fertile ground for scholarly examination owing to the fact that extremely scarce research attention has been paid to this group. Within this context, this paper focuses on the sense of belonging of this migrant group in the host countries. We argue that professional hierarchy; socioeconomic and sociocultural factors contribute to the privileged migrants' positionality as an insider or outsider in the host country. In this research, four Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and Thailand) are selected. Via multiplex communication (WhatsApp, email, and phone calls), a total of 27 interviews were conducted. Findings suggest that most of the privileged migrants position themselves as an outsider for multifaceted factors.

1. Introduction

International mobilities have become one of the most significant realities in this modern world. The processes of globalization (Harvey, 1989; Ullah, 2010a) have resulted in all places around the world to become accessible for many people, creating an environment of compulsion and limitless desire and opportunities to migrate out (Urry, 2000; Ullah & Haque, 2020). Skille migration is emerging as the new wave when the migrants begin to flow between countries both in the Global North and in the Global South (Table 1). A talent hunt globally is underway, but the outcomes are evidently asymmetric (Pekkala et al., 2017). Many countries are launching new policies (for example, point system in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, H1B in the United States, etc.) in order to attract high-skilled migrants. Of course, fresh demand, new policy and emerging economic factors define the skill migration flows (Czaika and Parsons, 2017; Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Southeast Asia (SEA) is an important player in global migration constituting a significant portion of the total international migrants. Migration in SEA is diverse and is evolving. In recent years, several ASEAN countries have themselves become important destinations for migrants from within and outside of the region. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand have developed into regional immigration hubs that receive migrants from within the SEA region and beyond (Huguet, 2014; Ullah & Huque, 2019). At the same time, a few countries in SEA remain a net exporter of migrants with 60%–70% of ASEAN's international migrant workers residing outside the region (Takenaka, 2019). The volume of migration within the region is increasing substantially and the intra-ASEAN migrants have more than quadrupled, from 2.1 million in 1995 to 9.9 million in 2016 (Takenaka, 2019; Ullah, Mohamad, Hasan, & Chattoraj, 2019).

Lifestyle migrants, a case in point, make up a large part of this international migrant group. Despite the growing size and presence of the privileged migrant group, studies that have been done to account the affective dimension of their lives are extremely limited. In fact, the migration of relatively affluent people, in general, has been largely disregarded in the migration literature (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009:609). There are a range of studies on various categories of migrants, however, the paucity of research on privileged migration is evident (Botterill, 2017; Kunz, 2016; Carling et al., 2014; Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014). We concentrate particularly on privileged migrants who do not experience difficulties pre and postmigration (Ullah, 2010; Knowles and Harper, 2009). We document the everyday life of lifestyle migrants, which we call 'privileged migrants' (PM) by examining their position within the current migration debates in relation to the issues of what makes them privileged. To that end, we engage in a nuanced approach to positionality of migrants in terms of the insider–outsider divide and the belief that migrants cannot become the insiders in the host community. It is understandable that the economically independent and high-skilled migrants enjoy a privileged treatment in origin, transit and in destinations and they are not a threat to the peace of the host societies (Ullah, Hasan, Mohamad, & Chattoraj, 2020). Assimilation, theoretically, enables migrants to be the insiders, eventually, in varying degrees. Though, assimilation policies, to some extent, have upturned this longstanding belief, the anti-immigrant far right nationalists still hold on to this belief and brand them as 'outsider' in most immigrant countries.

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Table 1
Snapshot on the global migration.

Global mobility dynamics	As of January 2020
Estimated number of international migrants	272 million
Estimated proportion of world population who are migrants	3.5%
Estimated proportion of female international migrants	47.9%
Estimated proportion of international migrants who are children	13.9%
Country with the highest proportion of international migrants	UAE
Number of migrant workers	164 Million
Number of refugees	25.9 Million
Number of internally displaced persons	41.3 Million
Number of stateless persons	3.9 Million
Global international remittances (USD)	689 Billion
International migrants in Asia	84 million

Source: World Migration Report, 2020.

Theoretically, insider and outsider denote the degree to which a person positions himself/herself within or outside the society depending on their common lived societal experiences (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015; Ullah, 2013). The common ambivalent expressions of some [im]migrants '*my heart is there [i.e. in the place of my origin] and body is here*' establishes the fact that the notion of insider and outsider has deeply rooted insinuations. This is an expression that leads the authors to question whether the insider-outsider dynamics could determine the level of the sense of belonging. Yet, an insider can still see him/herself as an outsider due to the physical differences he/she has or belief systems that they uphold (e.g., differences in national ideology and sociocultural practices etc.).

Why are we concerned about the high-skilled migrants in relation to the sense of belonging? The answer is straightforward: unskilled migrants in general migrate out with short term contract (generally with 2–3 years) and have minimal chance to obtain root in the destination countries for a number of possible reasons. For example, high-skilled migrants can sign in for citizenship in Hong Kong if he/she has lived in the country for 7 years, however, an unskilled migrant cannot be a citizen regardless of the length of stay. Privileged migrants move either 'part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life' (Benson and O'Reily, 2009:621). They are most often relatively affluent and privileged (Croucher, 2009; Benson and O'Reilly, 2016), indicating that considerations over lifestyle are framed around consumption and moral dimensions (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016).

In this article, we take an approach to deconstructing and reconstructing the privileged or lifestyle migration in relation to the questions of why privileged migrants are privileged; how are they different from other migrant categories; and how different are their sense of belonging in their new country of residences? We seek to unravel the different ways in which the privileged migrants relate to their present society in the SEA. This research has advanced based on the assumption that not all high skilled-migrants are privileged. We portray high skilled migrants as those who contribute to economic competitiveness; benefit development outcomes in their countries of origin; and are easily integrated in labor markets and societies at large. They usually receive privileged treatment in the host country regarding their immigration, access to its social services, and sometimes in regard to their personal freedoms (Baas, 2017) (e.g., having a choice about the place of residence, the right to marry, giving birth, etc.) (Meier, 2016). They still may face other forms of institutional and social discrimination in the specific places (Lim et al., 2016).

Within this context of privileged migrants' sense of belonging in their respective SEA host countries, this paper offers a two-fold contribution: one, the understanding about how the 'privileged migrants' feel and deem themselves as privileged; and two, how they negotiate the 'insider or outsider' dynamics. In doing so, we delve into their integration strategies in the host society; identifying the cultural gaps and the privileges this group of migrants enjoys. The fundamental rationale of the research lies in the fact that extremely scanty research has been conducted systematically that deals with this category of migration. This research to some extent fills in the void that exists in the scholarship.

2. Methodology

In order to answer the question of whether the insider-outsider dynamics could determine the sense of belonging of the privileged migrants, we interviewed 27 privileged migrants selected through a snowball technique. The privileged migrants, in this research, are categorized into two: 10 elite (see Table 2) and 17 high-skilled migrants. In this article, we introduce a new group of privileged migrant that is 'elite' – to denote a group of multi-millionaire migrants who are bringing their wealth, not skills into the host country. While high-skilled migrants consist of businesspersons or professionals including academics, medical doctors, and engineers. The respondents were from all over the world and have migrated and settled in their destination countries for about 10–15 years. In-depth, informal and semistructured interviews were conducted with privileged migrants from Europe (Italy, Germany, France, and Switzerland), Asia (India, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Bangladesh), and North America (U.S. and Canada). We encouraged our respondents to talk about their lives, their experiences, aspirations, and challenges in the host countries in relation to the attachment they feel for their home of origin and adopted homes. Here, it is relevant to ask what is a "home" and what is a house? A house is something that is physical while a home involves emotions attached and meanings given resulting in a sense of meaning and belonging (Routely, 2019; Papastergiadis, 1998; Yee, 2017). We narrate their experiences, which varies according to their country of origin: developed and developing country. To capture the level of sense of belonging and the affective dimension of their everyday life, we portray a detailed view on their experiences about the feeling of 'insider/outsider' in relation to their home countries socially as well as emotionally.

For this research, we have chosen Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei purposively for a number of reasons. Singapore is an immigrant receiving country, and its multicultural yet nationalist society has experienced substantial inflows of Asian and Western professionals, low-skilled migrants from across SEA, and new immigrants from non-traditional sending countries. Malaysia attracts elite immigrants under second home projects (see Table 2). Thailand attracts elite migrants through Thai elite residence scheme for wealthy buyers and entrepreneurs while Brunei offers jobs to higher-end high-skilled foreigners (Arcibal, 2019; Ullah & Azizzuddin, 2018; Ullah & Kumph, 2019). This means that all these countries attract elite/privileged migrants but with different strategies and for different reasons. The process of analyzing our data predominantly involved coding or categorizing the data in order to reduce the volume of raw information, followed by identifying significant patterns, and finally drawing meaning from data and subsequently building a logical chain of evidence. The coding was conducted manually. We conducted narrative analysis of the data and interpreted the meanings that were extracted from the data.

Table 2
Elite and skilled migrants.

Sample countries	Policies on elite migrations
Malaysia	MM2H, or the Malaysia My Second Home programme, is a visa initiative introduced by the Malaysian government to promote Malaysia as a positive place to live for potential residents from abroad (Abdul-Aziz et al., 2014). The MM2H scheme provides a renewable ten-year maximum, multiple-entry visa for successful applicants from around the world.
Singapore	Millionaires place: 108,000 millionaires around the world migrated in 2018, and Singapore is among the top 10 places they moved to (Tay, 2019). With a net inflow of 1,000 HNWIs, Singapore was ranked the eighth most popular destination for millionaire migration in 2018 (Ullah et al. 2019).
Thailand	Top-end Thai property developers are in the making of several major high-end projects in order to meet the growing interest among rich Chinese, Singaporean, Japanese and Hong Kong buyers (Corben, 2017). In order to attract more wealthy global citizens to live in Thailand, the country has made an aggressive push on extending its visa schemes, including allowing foreigners to live in the country for up to 20 years (O' Connor and Nguyen, 2018). Since 2003, 4,800 special visas have been issued under its exclusive residence visa programme (Li, 2017).
Brunei	The level of elite migrants here vary in high degree especially for Brunei's case where Brunei is not bringing in high flyer millionaires as much as skilled in particular professions e.g. doctors, lecturer, engineers in the oil and gas industry, etc.

Sources: Embedded in the text.

2.1. Underlying conceptual reflections

Conceptualizing high-skilled migration is not an easy fix. We view skilled migration from three approaches: migrants' education level, occupation and salary (Pekkala et al., 2017). Undoubtedly, educated migrants can end up in a low-skilled job (Mattoo et al. 2008), generally, however, the salary and the occupation determine the skill level (Dumont et al., 2007). These comprise of scholars and highly skilled professionals, such as doctors, accountants and engineers (Cabañes, 2009; Ong, 2009). Elite migrants tend to immerse themselves in other cultures (Hannerz, 1990) and are distinguished on the basis of income, social status, mobility, and identity (Dong, 2017). Elite migrants are generally on special invitation from host countries. They maintain their own enclave.

Privileged migration tends to fall under the category of highly skilled migration. This frames privilege around two perspectives: an economic-led approach focusing on highly skilled migration and a social and cultural approach focusing on tensions of privilege, lifestyle, and migrant belonging (Fechter and Walsh, 2012; Fechter, 2007).

3. The nomenclature of the sense of belonging

Sense of belonging is a human need and is associated with so many positive outcomes. It helps understanding how individuals and collectives construct and experience their position within a society (Chattoraj & Gerharz, 2019). Therefore, a shattered sense of belonging increases the risk for psychological and physical dysfunction (Allen, 2019). We argue that socio-economic, and socio-cultural factors determine their sense of being as an 'Insider' and/or 'Outsider'.

Does integration or assimilation overlie or intersect with sense of belonging? Assimilation is the way of adoption of another culture and becoming part of another society and whereas integration refers to incorporation of individuals from different groups into a society as equals. Assimilation process makes outsiders, immigrants, or subordinate groups indistinguish-able within the dominant host society and integration, in contrast, involves adding to the existing culture which in turn transforms a society (Ryabichenko and Lebedeva, 2016). However, in order to build a successful multicultural society, integration is inevitable (Dusi et al., 2015), and for enhancing motivation and happiness, the sense of belonging is an engine helping us to feel less alone.

The sense of belonging denotes the attachment to particular social groups (Calhoun, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006; 2011; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013), however, it is difficult to theoretically explain (Youkhana, 2015). People can belong to a seemingly endless number of social groups (Halse, 2018; Osterman, 2000; Carson, 2006; Arnot and Swartz, 2012; Pinson et al., 2010; Maher, 2014; Hayes and Skatterbol, 2015). Of course, in a world of increasing racial, religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, the meaning of belonging is not straightforward (Gilroy, 2000). Belonging is something that operates on multiple scales, ranging from the home (Walsh, 2006) to the nation state (Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000), through transnational networks (Beck, 2003; Wartmann and Purves, 2018).

Within host countries, the social order is placed by the dominant group (locals) that is ascribed to the migrants (Anderson, 2015). Therefore, when agreeable to the migrant, this can activate a sense of belonging by the dominant group and opens up the possibility for the migrants to feel a sense of belonging. We may see the development of 'China town' or 'Little India' where people with the same cultural and social background attract each other due to similarities. There are two layers of trying to be an insider within this context: (1) Insider to the dominant local group; (2) Insider to the already existing immigrant group that has existed for example, presence of enclaves of first generation migrants. While a privileged migrant may be accepted as an insider to the dominant group because of his/her wealth and skills for example, rich neighborhoods in the United Kingdom and United States consisting of diverse sociocultural background. These people have a common denominator that is wealth (economic class) but are they insiders? This may be so within their gated community but perhaps not to the wider society.

The notion of belonging, thus, is subjective depending on people and place. Emotional bond with the others becomes necessary for an individual's overall development (Skinner et al., 2008). If sense of belonging is socially constructed then who determines it? Thus, we take up the theory of manifold attachments (Chattoraj, 2017) to analyze the different kinds of belonging that can be dependent on socioeconomic and cultural factors.

4. Culture and assimilation: Southeast Asia in perspective

Migrants of all categories from different parts of the world are choosing Asia to move to (Kawate, 2018) constituting about 30 per cent of the total international migrants (about 84 million) (WMR, 2020). Highly skilled foreigners from Australia, Britain, France, Japan, South Korea, United States, China, and India are hence a burgeoning sector of foreign labor force in Singapore (Yeoh and Lam, 2016). The question of integration rings hard in a country that accepts migrant workers and immigrants.

With rapid globalization and the growing significance of the knowledge-based economy, SEA (especially, Singapore and Malaysia) attracts the brightest talents (Yahya and Kaur, 2010; Ullah & Ho, 2020; Ullah & Kumph, 2019). In SEA, 'foreigners' are understood through two distinct lenses: 'foreign talents' and 'foreign workers'.[1] The history of SEA, especially Singapore has become closely intertwined with migrants

[1] The foreign talents are those who are at the higher end of the income and earn at least S$3600 (about US$2600) per month and have acceptable qualifications (Singapore Ministry of Manpower 2020). As of mid-2019, there are about 189,000 people in this category (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2020). Available at: https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers (Accessed on March 04, 2020).

and migration (Yeoh, 2007; Ullah & Ho, 2020). Ranked third, Singapore retains its top position on INSEAD's Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2020 (GTCI, 2020).

Migrants meet with different culture, ethnic, social, economic and political ideologies (Rai and Sankaran, 2011:5) in the destination countries, where they adjust to the differences (between origin and destination). Ullah (2017) demonstrated that high-skilled migrants and diaspora emergence and integration have influenced their lifestyle because integration, attachment, and sense of belonging all make huge difference in the performances. In regard to Brunei society, they further highlighted some pathways such as marriage, business, work, religious conversion, and ethnicity through which one can integrate in the Bruneian society, pointing to the significance of cultural ties in assimilation (Ullah, 2017). However, the migrants do not lose their identities rather they are deeply interlinked with their own identities. Hence, societies formed by immigrant cultures, religions, and ethnic groups produce new hybrid social and cultural forms (Adams, 2000).

Culture plays a fundamental role in building and holding the connection between the origin and the destination. The denser the connection, the higher is the likelihood to feel at home in the host country (Ullah, Lee, Hasan, & Nawaz, 2020). The privileged populations tend to hold the influence of the homeland language and culture alive in their new land. In relation to this, Thomson (2007) simplifies the fact that one is born into the community first then comes culture and religion. Bruneau (2010) argues that family bonds, which are a part of culture, constitute the fabric of the migrant community, especially those who stem from Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean. This is because of the extended family nature is the core to the values of most Asians.

The nation states are geographic, political, and legal entities, but their cultures extend beyond boundaries to encompass the virtual community of people (Kilduff and Corley, 1999). Cultural ties and networks are the defining characteristics of migrant community as newer notions emphasize cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Simonis, 2012).

One goal that unites all migrants is to support their homeland (Gueron and Spevacek, 2008:3; Lucas, 2001:3). They reinforce multilayered links between countries of origin and destination. Responses from four of our respondents from Brunei resonate the same. For them, language and culture have nothing to do with obtaining roots here. Learning the language, religious conversion and marriage with locals (two of them married to locals) have not made them feel local; they do not have a sense of belonging in Brunei. Immigrants like any other people may carry multiple identities and belong to several social groups. Postmodernists would argue that identity becomes flexible and subcultures emerge. Memberships into subcultures can be based on their consumption typologies and cultural norms and values. A migrant may carry a certain social identity or way of life in his/her home country (some voluntarily while others may not agree with the norms of their home). Similarly, when they migrate out some may forcefully adapt to their host country's norms and values while some willingly change into their new "skin".

The belief is that it is not easy for migrant communities to assimilate into the mainstream host culture. In general, when people migrate out, they bring their culture with them (Ullah & Nawaz, 2020). They go on to say that cultural similarity serves as a crucial mean for empowerment required in situations of separation anxiety, trauma and financial crisis. And, in SEA, the presence of migrants contributed to the emergence of a dynamic culture through melting pot or blending since the last three decades. In a different context, Ormond and Nah (2019) termed it 'desirable' migrants who are specifically targeted to advance national economic development objectives.

Elite migrants generally live in elite enclave (Ullah, 2010). High-end condominiums are generally targeted for these migrants. This might be the Singaporean and Malaysian's strategy to attract them. To some extent, they turn as gated communities. In Brunei, although no such enclave exists but a professional boundary to alienate unskilled migrants from the high skilled privileged migrants has always been maintained.

5. The insider or outsider perspectives

Migration of high-skilled professionals has received renewed academic attention and are termed in different ways. For example, Lowell and Findlay (2001) and Föbker et al. (2016) call it 'highly skilled migration', Beaverstock (2002) terms it the migration of transnational elites, Benson and O'Reilly (2009) and Vered (2007) life-style migrants and Findlay et al. (1996), Yeoh and Khoo (1998), Thang et al. (2002), Fechter and Walsh (2010), Wong (1997), Teng (1999), Low (2002), Iwasaki (2015), Bork-Hüffer (2016) and Beaverstock (2011) call it 'foreign talents'. Privileged migrants are those who are in privileged positions. We have been pushing for the new concept of elite (separate from high skilled ones). We demonstrate how the elite and high-skilled migrants feel about being insider/outsider respectively (Fig. 1).

There are differential professionals into "migrant professionals with privileges" and "middling migrant professionals" based on economic indicators (i.e., contract status, income, and special economic benefits; Baas, 2017). Skill, here, refers to education attainment or someone with money because someone may be a footballer or a graphic or software designer who may not have the necessary formal educational background but has talent. Some of these people may be privileged in their home country but end up underemployed in the host country for example, the broken American dream where engineers end up working as taxi drivers. Different skill attainments would have different levels of economic impacts on individuals, employers, regions and whole national economies (Green, 2011). The invention of ICT has pushed the discourse on skills toward the ICT side. Therefore, its complexity is often ignored.

Of course, the term 'privilege' may sound derogatory and condescending (Föbker et al., 2016; Bork-Hüffer, 2017). According to Meier (2014), privileged migrants are those whose qualifications and skills are recognized and are in employment as per their skill levels in the host country. Their experiences are rarely characterized by economic or political hardship, and whose motivation to cross borders lies primarily in a desire to enhance their quality of life (Croucher, 2012:2; Ullah, Hasan, Mohamad, & Chattoraj, 2020).

A profound question we ask, 'being an outsider in heart, does one feel or have a lesser sense of belonging than being an insider in heart'? Irrespective of destinations and origins, most of the respondents think that being an insider in heart is more important than being an outsider in heart to feel the sense of belonging. Simmel (1950) contends that a stranger in heart who is a member of a group may still experience social distance from other members. In connection with this, Cohen and Leung (2007) framed insider-outsider metaphor in the way that 'seeing oneself through other people's eyes or taking other people's perspective' implies something about how people act in relation to others. Do the privileged migrants care or need to care about being outsider or insider? Do the host societies feel worried about it too? Is it necessary at all? A few respondents said, it was important to them because they really thought if they felt the sense of belonging, they would not return to their place of birth.

The relatively rich and powerful have a more fully developed capacity to aspire because of their advantageous position in the society to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration. According to a respondent, "I feel privileged here being a British-American and whenever people hear me speaking Mandarin fluently, they are overwhelmed. I get a different kind of treatment [privileged] from them. So why not enjoy this warm attitude?" Does this make them feel the sense of belonging? In fact, no. "This makes our stay comfortable and leads to prolong our stay. That's it".

There were about 55 million high skilled migrants in the world, and about 27 million reside in OECD countries in 2010 (ILO, 2018) (more in Table 1). Of the estimated migrant workers in 2013, 11.5 million were domestic workers (ILO, 2015; Ullah, Mohamad, Hasan, & Chattoraj,

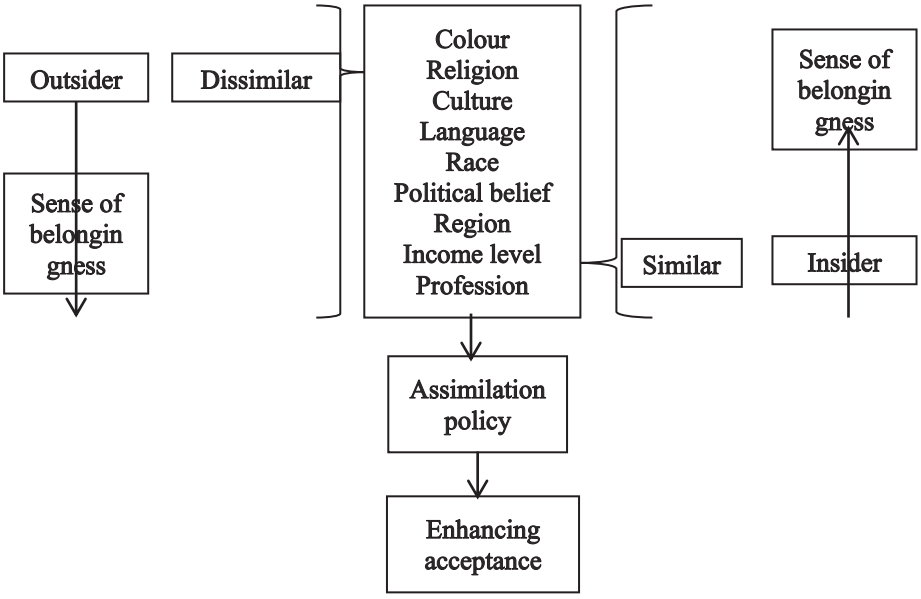

Fig. 1. Insider-outsider dynamics. Source: Authors.

2019). The US leads the list of countries that host the most migrants with 51 million. Germany is the second-largest host with 13 million migrants followed by Saudi Arabia (13 million), Russia (12 million), the United Kingdom (10 million), the UAE (9 million), France, Canada, and Australia (around 8 million each) and Italy (6 million) (IOM, 2018) There are about 4.8 million international students (Ullah & Azizzuddin, 2018), about 70.8 million individuals are forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or other reasons by the mid 2019 (UNHCR, 2019; Ullah, 2013aa). There are 50 million irregular migrants and about 102,800 went missing in 2017 (IOM, 2018) and 24.9 million were subjected to forced labor in 2016 (ILO, 2017) and of those, 5 million may have crossed international borders. Despite all these adversities, migrants contributed US$6.7 Trillion to global GDP in 2015 – a share of 9.4% of the total global GDP (IOM, 2018).

Resources have been devoted to determining whether immigrants take away jobs and depress the wages of 'native' workers. Several studies have focused on the potential economic benefits of migrants' cross-border ties—primarily in terms of the remittances that immigrants send back to their cash-strapped home countries (Levitt, 1998; Yong et al., 2014; Ullah, 2017). With the privileged mobility, there is an indication that they are displacing native-born workers in popular settlement sites, as the locals are not appropriately qualified. O'Reilly (2002) uncovered evidence of an 'informal economy' among the British in southern Spain and the same exists among Americans and Canadians in Mexico (O'Reilly, 2002).

The privileged migrants in their host countries (e.g., Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Spain, Portugal, and Morocco) are welcomed; yet, they do not assimilate in the host society and live within their 'expatriate bubble' (Fechter, 2007). They maintain close social, cultural and political ties with their compatriots, other foreigners and the homelands. One excerpt from a respondent explains it all, "*I am least bothered about this culture, […]. We are not so much exposed to the Singaporean culture […]as we stay inside the [NTU] campus and here almost 80% are foreigners […]*" We always have good conversations and banters.

He seemed to be comfortable in his bubble with other migrants. He practices his own culture (food, religion, way of life, belief, dressing etc.) from home and does not try to adjust to the new culture in Singapore. Though he is away from his own country, he maintains a strong sense of attachment with the left-behind country. This concurs with the argument by Authors (2017) that living in a place is not a prerequisite for a sense of attachment. His migration decision is driven by the aspiration to better their position and to enhance his lifestyles (Appadurai, 2004). However, to us, this does not make someone disintegrated from the hosts' society. Maintaining connections with their origins is one of the diasporic behaviors. According to the locals, picking the host countries accent is an important criterion for assimilation.

Therefore, if one does not want to take part in the local culture and so forth, what does that make the person? Fig. 2 explains the differences between the acceptances of privileged migrants and how easily they can be part of the insiders group as opposed to lower skilled migrants who more often continue to be outsiders. This section shows how easily privileged migrants are welcomed by the locals, but the deeper question posed is whether the privileged migrants themselves want to be part of the insider. Nonetheless, growing number of people are taking up citizenship in a new land while keeping their transnational ties with their original homeland. They also learn to speak to the locals and engage in a range of social practices in order to integrate with the local culture and establish rapport with them (Ullah & Nawaz, 2020). This particular group demonstrates cosmopolitan self unlike those previously mentioned. In this context, the notion of privileged migrants as a cosmopolitan, usually assumed as one, is contested. Being a privileged migrant makes it easier for them to up and leave, therefore, their sense of belonging in this respect is questionable.

Living in a transnational space, migrants tend to connect their diasporic practices between origin and destination (Ullah & Nawaz, 2020) and acquire cultural practices (Ullah, 2013a)), which mix as it travels with migrants. Thus, (Ullah & Nawaz, 2020) show that in the process of migration, the individuals carry with them (both material and emotional belonging) and leave behind a cultural bereavement related to loss of culture, values and norms, so that they can adjust to the new cultural setting (language, food, religion, way of life, belief, dressing etc.). One of the respondents says "*We really feel Singapore to be home. We have applied for PR and are really optimistic about it. We are here since 2012, […] and really happy to be here […]. It is so close to India […] and if we have been to any other Indian cities, it would have been the same feeling […]*". This feeling of being at home at their host country, however, is not the case for a few informants who are not bothered participating in the local culture.

High-skilled migrants occupy a rather ambivalent position: on the one hand they are victims of racism, and on the other they themselves reproduce rigid boundaries between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' migrants, reflecting their privileged positioning in global power hierarchies (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2019). High-skilled migrants

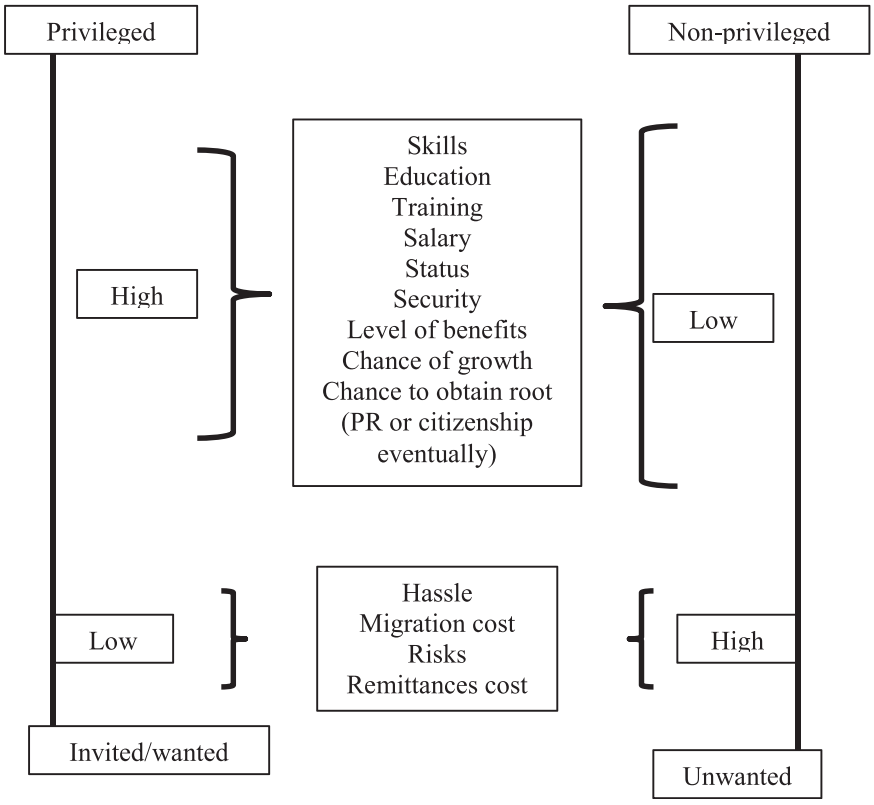

Fig. 2. The way they are privileged. Source: Authors.

followed the existing neoliberal imagery, in which migrants were associated with economic development, while others invoked negative connotations and were perceived as the embodiment of "otherness" (undocumented migrants, refugees, low-skilled migrants) (Glick-Schiller and Salazar, 2013). In contrast, Houshmand et al. (2014) and Lamont et al. (2016) demonstrated that high-skilled migrants predominantly embraced individualist strategies of coping with racism. "I don't feel comfortable either in Little India or in Geylang. Some of the elderly (locals) there, really don't like white people and you can hear "ang mo" (white people) which makes you feel even more uncomfortable".

This concurs with Kern (2005) saying that "whiteness and other privileged social locations construct a sense of belonging", resulting in their feeling of safety (Kern, 2005:367). And the discomfort derives from being marked as an outsider or raced, as Fechter (2007) argues, as being "deviant" from the norm. White people from developed regions and countries like Europe and USA are privileged in their racial identities (Ullah, Hasan, Mohamad, & Chattoraj, 2020) and in SEA (especially in Singapore), it is their visibility that marks them as the Outsider. "My company transferred me with comfortable incentives. Initially, it was for 3 years assignment. It's now about 15 years. […]. I stayed on because it's easy and safe. I am retiring in 4 years time and will return to my home in Manchester. Though, there is nothing wrong with Singapore, yet I cannot have the feeling of belonging here, always feel like a foreigner."

Despite a comfortable living in Singapore, he was not able to conjure a sense of belonging to the place. Here, the informant has self-administered a more outsiders' approach though society would perhaps prefer him to be part of the insiders group compared to the semi or unskilled migrants. The government welcomes privileged migrants. Therefore, in most immigrant receiving countries, governments design a process to make them integrated and or assimilated. However, it is entirely on the incumbent how he or she considered her/himself in the society. The fact that the privileged migrants themselves do not want to assimilate or become an insider – a choice they made on their own rather than because of the social/political or economic order of the host country—is more prominent.

Existing literature on insider/outsider positionality has mostly defined it as a dichotomy. The problematization of the insider versus outsider debate is, of course, not a new phenomenon (Merton, 1972). We agree with Irgil (2020) that 'insider of the host community' should take a different category than being considered as an insider by the migrant community because they treat and are treated differently. Some of the respondents think that the underlying reasons for them to become an outsider could be multiple: for whites, because they are not whites; and for Westerners, because they are not westerners. In order to deal with some issues of being an outsider, some of them sought to create some sense of insider status by finding other migrants [of identical status] with whom to associate that is, they look for expatriate bubble. Working in places where other immigrants work, living in the same neighborhoods, ate familiar food, and spoke the same language [where applicable] for the purpose of feeling at home culturally. This dialectic of simultaneously being an insider and an outsider is a familiar situation for the majority of migrants (Kusow, 2003).

6. Conclusions

The contribution of this paper is to unravel how the privileged migrants strategize to integrate to the host society to feel at home. The convention has been that integration and assimilation policies are enough to make the immigrants feel at home. However, this does not necessarily mean that this will work as a deterrent for leaving the culture of the origin country. Does this mean that the naturalized citizens lack the sense of belongingness? Do most people adapt and accept the norms and values of the host country in connection with their jobs? The findings dispel this and reveal that sense of belonging is all about the mindset of the incumbent. Policies may make someone's stay comfortable but do not guarantee that they would feel at home at heart. One of our arguments was that migrants staying for long periods in an adopted country could

feel a sense of belonging. This implies that they can feel themselves as an insider. However, our study reveals a different result indicating that most [im]migrants do not feel that their heart is in their host or adopted countries. Their heart has always been in the country of origin, regardless of their duration of stay in host countries.

One cannot presume that privileged migrants easily adapt to local conditions or are immune to locally embedded problems such as the racial prejudices routinely faced by low-skilled migrants. Of course, experiences of being privileged migrants sometimes depend on the countries of origin. This means, in some cases, skill outsmarts the nationalities. For example, a high skilled migrant from a poor country in Africa or Asia may bear xenophobic treatment but a reverse case is possible. Unskilled migrant from Western countries may receive a privileged treatment.

In addition, is sense of belonging only for their "home" or country of origin? Is sense of belonging can only be for one place can one have a sense of belonging in several places? For instance, a student who came back from the United Kingdom will always see Brunei as 'home' and will have that attachment or sense of belonging to Brunei but he/she can also have a sense of attachment or belonging to the United Kingdom and see it as their second home although they do not own a second house (physical home) in the United Kingdom. They have a stronger sense of 'dual' belonging (Salih, 2001); one to their home country and another to the United Kingdom – a positive emotional attachment because of memories created with friends and experiences. In the context of SEA, foreigners are marked as the 'Others'.

The privileged migrants from developing countries are more inclined to the concept of becoming 'us' and getting assimilated to the host culture. We observed that they have given up some of their traditional norms and values in order to assimilate. They even try to recreate their home-culture, which is influenced by transnational norms and values. The reason behind this is their fear of uncertain future at their places of origin. Thus, this article shows that the privileged migrants are reproducing their privilege onto the landscape of SEA.

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