In order to engender loyalty, this country would need to make you feel welcome. (You) Can’t feel loyalty to a country that hasn’t truly accepted you. During apartheid, we were not white enough. Now, still no. We are always on the outside looking in. The Chinese are always on the fence. We are neither ‘black’ nor ‘white’. Debbie, 48

It would have to recognise us – that we are also South Africans. Tammy, 44

**Introduction**

Walker Conner, amongst others, draws a distinction between nationalism and patriotism, arguing that the former is an emotional attachment to one’s people or one’s ethno-national group, while the latter is an emotional attachment to one’s state or country and its political institutions (Conner 1993, 1998). He also points out that as most states are not nation-states but multinational states, nationalism and patriotism are not synonymous. Should the two compete for the allegiance of the individual, when people feel they must choose between them, he argues than nationalism customarily proves the most potent (Conner 1998:41-43). Do Chinese South Africans feel either nationalism or patriotism toward South Africa? If not, why? This chapter will examine the South African-ness of the Chinese South Africans; it will focus on how Chinese South Africans feel about South Africa, particularly in the first five years after the 1994 democratic elections.

This chapter will explore issues of citizenship, belonging (versus exclusion), nation building, and political and national identity in a country marked by its racial and ethnic diversity and a highly racialised past, in an era characterised by the end of apartheid and the implementation of affirmative action, and within the context of a global marketplace of skills as it examines the South African-ness of Chinese South Africans. It will examine, in particular, issues of apartheid-era exclusion, affirmative action in the post-1994 era, and emigration. Affirmative action, some argue, has resulted in a re-racialisation of South Africa (Gqola 2001, Distiller and Steyn 2004, Nuttall and Michael
2000, Posel, Hyslop, and Nieftagodien 2001, Erasmus 2004/2005). Competition theory (Nagel 1986, Olzak and Nagel 1986, Young 1986) explains that such policies often result in increasing the tenacity of ethnic boundaries. In the South African case, it would appear that racial boundaries have thickened as formerly ‘non-white’ groups compete over the resources allocated through affirmative action programmes. Chinese South Africans, officially excluded from current affirmative action legislation, argue that they are being excluded from equal participation as full citizens in the ‘new’ South Africa.

The first section will examine their feelings about South Africa past, present, and future, focusing primarily on their claims of exclusion. The second will examine Chinese South Africans and affirmative action policies; this discussion will necessitate further reference to the literature on state and racial formation, competition theory (mentioned above), as well as current debates on South Africa’s nation-building project. The last section will explore the emigration of Chinese South Africans, past and present, as a possible indicator of low levels of allegiance to and identification with South Africa. The chapter will provide evidence that Chinese South Africans in large numbers have, indeed, emigrated. Amongst those who remain, the vast majority identified themselves as South African but claimed that they were not particularly patriotic; to use Connor’s distinctions set out above, South Africanness had become a national identity of sorts, but did not engender their patriotism. Nonetheless, there were also a few tentative signs of growing patriotism within this community, especially amongst the community’s leaders and some of the young Chinese South Africans.

**Invisibility and exclusion = no patriotism**

Most Chinese South Africans were quick to say they were South Africans and South Africa was home; however, almost all of the respondents qualified their responses by saying they were not particularly patriotic or proud of South Africa. For the oldest respondents, those of the shopkeepers’ cohort, their lack of loyalty to South Africa was rooted in their apartheid experiences. Their South African-ness was a default position – almost an accident of birth. They were born here, they hold South African identification cards and passports, therefore, they were South African. They also expressed concerns
about the future of South Africa under a black government and their continued feelings of invisibility and exclusion.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, discrimination and racism during apartheid redirected Chinese South Africans loyalties away from South Africa and toward China. They identified themselves as ‘Chinese’, in part, because they felt rejected by South Africa. Their treatment as second-class citizens, felt most intensely by the older Chinese South Africans, produced a notable lack of loyalty and patriotism toward South Africa. Several of the interviewees contrasted their situations with the researcher’s own, growing up as an Asian immigrant in the United States. Rick, aged 60, for example, explained that while I grew up swearing my allegiance to the American flag, the Chinese South Africans were being discriminated against. He said,

I think it’s different from the way you were brought up with the American constitution. You swear allegiance. But I don’t know this allegiance. We don’t have that here where we were brought up and treated very badly…because we know what it is like to be discriminated against, although we were not as bad (off) as the other minority groups.

Cyril, 70, stated that he was a South African, but not a particularly patriotic South African. He spoke, with some anger, of his father’s treatment in this country. He, too, compared his upbringing with that of my own:

During apartheid, everyone was divided into ‘white’ and ‘non-white’. ‘Non-whites’ had no rights. Therefore, Chinese cling to their Chinese identity, not their South African identity … I, myself, personally, I accept that I’m South African. But I’m not patriotic…because of what they did to my father. My father built the whole of Kimberley…what they did to him …You see, in America, if you’re born within America, irrespective of what nationality you are, you are American because they’ve given you the right. As you’re born in America, you get the right to vote, you get everything. We never had that. We were born in this country, but we didn’t’ get those rights.

Many of the shopkeepers recalled various discriminatory practices – practices that humiliated them and served to remind them that despite some concessions all Chinese South Africans were legally ‘non-white’ and second-class. Highly trained professionals experienced, perhaps, the highest levels of dissonance between their professional achievements and their daily lives. Joseph, 56, like many of the other medical professionals, was still angry about the discrimination and humiliation he
endured. Discrimination during training and later in medical practice was offensive, but he experienced the highest levels of humiliation outside of the workplace where qualifications and professional status were ignored, overshadowed by racial identity and legal classification as ‘non-whites’.

For example, Andrew K, 63, said:

I think, because we were oppressed, I never regarded myself as a South African, as such, because how can you accept that you are South African if you are oppressed by South Africa? Now South Africa oppressed us because we were Chinese, because we were people of colour. Now because of that we had to turn to the Chinese to help you, and that is where we got our help. So you were Chinese in South Africa fighting South Africa. So, naturally, if you grow up in this environment, then you’re not proud to be South African. You are actually fighting the South African government … you wouldn’t say it because you didn’t feel South African at all. You didn’t have any loyalty to South Africa. That is my point… I mean, why should I go everywhere to tell people…all the good things about South Africa when I haven’t had good treatment from South Africa for most of my life? So, you tend to accept South Africa because you were born here – without that sense of loyalty where you are saying, “this is my country.”

In contrast, other, younger Chinese South Africans spoke about their pride in recent South African sporting achievements or their excitement about participating in their first elections in 1994; however, they also expressed concerns about the future of South Africa. In 1999, when the field research was conducted, the initial euphoria surrounding the end of apartheid had faded and there was a general air of uncertainty about the political, social, and economic future of South Africa. Many Chinese South Africans felt this uncertainty and expressed concerns about corruption in government, the decline in service delivery, and the rise in violent crime. Many of their concerns were couched in their expectations of a functioning citizen-state pact within a newly

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1 Here he refers to the utilization of the Chinese Consul-General’s offices by the South African-born Chinese South African community. More details about the representation of ‘local’ Chinese by the Chinese government was provided in Chapter Five.
2 These will be discussed later in this chapter.
3 A multi-year HSRC study found, in contrast, that 1999 was characterised by an overall increase in optimism about the future, as compared to 1994 and 1995; however, the same study found that whites had become more pessimistic while coloured, Indians and blacks became more optimistic (HSRC media release, “Am I a South African?” 2 December 1999). In many ways, these findings correspond with the general finding of this dissertation research, that Chinese South Africans have most in common with white South Africans, including their feelings about government.
democratic society. Some feared that South Africa would go the way of Zimbabwe and other independent African countries. These fears mirrored those of white South Africans who also looked north and saw military coups, corrupt leadership, and economic decline (Boynton 1997:269). Others, mostly amongst the younger respondents, tended to compare South Africa to other developed countries. There was, in some cases, clear evidence of racism in their lack of confidence in the ANC-led government.

In 1994 Chinese South Africans had held great expectations of the newly democratic state; they believed in a ‘pact’ or understanding between the state and citizen. They expected that the first democratically elected government of South Africa would execute its part in this state-citizen pact: if taxes were paid, certain services were to be delivered; if these services were delivered to their satisfaction, then the citizen would pledge her allegiance to the state. If not, the state would not benefit from their patriotism. Interviewees had expectations of decent education, quality healthcare, municipal or residential services (streetlights, water & electricity, garbage collection, etc.), and the provision of safety and security. Most Chinese South Africans interviewed believed that the ANC-led government was not meeting their expectations in terms of service delivery.

_Fence-sitters_ were particularly concerned about the future of South Africa. Deborah (44) said that the state had not been providing good education or safety and security; she saw no return for the high taxes dutifully paid. Veronica M (41) was agitated about the lack of services. She complained that both the apartheid government and the present government were guilty of offering little in return for the high taxes demanded and paid. She said:

> But we always paid taxes and we’ve never got anything for it. I mean, we never got pensioned or anything like that…we never got any of those things, so therefore, why should we feel this loyalty to whatever? … In return for taxes, government should provide healthcare, pensions. (If you) pay residents’ tax on property, (you) should have proper streetlights, clean streets, cut grass…I mean, where are all our rates and taxes going to? So what are we paying for? That’s what we are saying: we are paying for nothing!”
The bananas’ greatest concerns were about safety and security, the perceived drop in standards, and limited economic opportunities. In the second half of the 1990s, particularly in Gauteng province there were increased reports of violent crime. Veronica V (26) expressed her lack of faith in government in dealing with crime and providing her with a sense of safety and security. She said:

I don’t feel safe in this place…even here in Pretoria…the government is…I mean, I’ve lost faith in the government. The government isn’t doing anything about the crime and rape. And all of the stories you read in the newspapers…they’re just talking about it and not doing anything. It’s like getting worse. The government doesn’t think so, but the people, they do. Some people are talking about taking things into their own hands, forming vigilante groups, finding suspects and beating them up. People have been doing that because they don’t feel the government is doing anything.

As young people starting careers and families, the bananas were also concerned about the provision of quality healthcare and education, and economic opportunities and growth. Barbara F (31) said, for example: “in order to engender loyalty, (the country) would have to have a commitment to economic growth.”

The bananas also exhibited a general tendency to view South Africa not in the context of Africa but vis-à-vis the developed, democratic, Western world. They often compared South Africa with the United States, Australia, Canada, or England; in doing so, they often found South Africa lacking. They often expressed ‘grass is greener over there’-type yearnings. Peter M, 26, spoke of the differences between the United States and South Africa and about the general lack of pride in South Africa. He also pointed out that he did not support the current government or its representatives. He stated:

America is well known. It’s a strong country. A lot of Americans are proud to be American. But if you go to Australia and a South African has immigrated there, I don’t think he’ll be proud to say, “I’m a South African.” Basically I think it’s just because they’re not proud of the country. I don’t know…Am I proud to be South African? Umm. Yeah…I guess so. Well, look. I’m not

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4 There are continued debates about whether there was an actual increase in violent crimes or if the reported increases were the result of increased reporting, increased media perceptions, and a re-labelling of crimes from political to economic. There is no question, however, that car-jackings, armed incursions into private homes, and life behind razor wire and electric fencing, especially in Johannesburg’s suburbs became almost commonplace.

5 Generally Johannesburg was seen as “crime capital” whereas Pretoria had been considered relatively safe. Toward the late 1990s, however, crime syndicates had targeted Pretoria and car hijackings were on the rise.
ashamed to say I’m South African. But just because I’m South African doesn’t mean that I support the ideas of the government and the politicians.

For older generations of Chinese South Africans, including the shopkeepers’ cohort and older members of the fence-sitters cohort, their treatment during apartheid, as ‘non-white’ and second-class, remains the greatest hurdle on the path of conciliation with their South African-ness. For others, there are issues of confidence in a newly elected and inexperienced black government that stand in their way. For many, however, it has been their exclusion and invisibility within the greater South African story that prevent them feeling from a sense of belonging in the ‘new’ South Africa. Lisa Lowe writes that it is through “the terrain of national culture” that the individual subject is politically formed as a citizen (Lowe 1996:2). The Chinese South Africans, however, have been conspicuous in their absence from South African history and culture. Even a cursory glance through South African history texts reveals that Chinese are either entirely missing or mentioned only in the context of the contract labourers brought over to work in the gold mines of the Transvaal. While the dearth of information on Chinese in South Africa can be partly attributed to their tiny numbers, such invisibility and exclusion, nevertheless, has had a tremendous impact on Chinese South African identity as South Africans.

During apartheid, in order to continue to receive their concessions, Chinese South Africans had to remain virtually invisible; they had to keep quiet and could not be seen to be actively participating in the anti-apartheid struggle. The pressure from parents and the broader community to keep quiet, not to get involved politically, not to jeopardise the future of Chinese South Africans coming up behind them, was tremendous. This pressure is partly cultural – a version of Chinese Confucian ideology of family collectivism that emphasises family (or in this case, community) obligation (see Thai 1999). Their acceptance of concessions from the white government also turned them into unofficial ‘honorary whites’ – an awkward position under any circumstances. They feared that other (struggle activists and other ‘non-whites’) had judged them as having been co-opted by, or worse, having collaborated with the apartheid government.
Veronica (41) wanted to educate today’s South Africans about Chinese suffering under apartheid. She wanted the Chinese community to be recognised and acknowledged as South African:

Most South Africans don’t realise that Chinese lived under harsh conditions. Everyone assumed that we all had white privileges … We need somebody or a body to voice the fact that we haven’t been identified. (We) Want to be politically recognised, but don’t want to be in the limelight. (We) Want an acknowledgement that this community exists… But the worst thing is people thought we were better off, but we are not. What the blacks don’t realise is that we also voted for the first time four years ago. You know, they don’t think that. They thought that we had all these rights before… my parents lived in Sophiatown. I mean, my parents grew up there. They were poor…I also worked for whatever I got and my parents also worked hard, as well… I don’t have any loyalty to this country. Why should I? When I bought my flat in 1985, I had to get permission to go and live in the stupid flat…because I wasn’t white…That’s what I’m saying – a lot of people are not aware of these things, you know?

A number of interviewees were convinced that because of their acceptance of concessions and privileges from the white government and because of their lack of visible involvement in the struggle against apartheid, the current government was intentionally punishing them by excluding them from affirmative action policies. James L (42) was one of these. He also explained that ‘invisibility’ was used as a survival tactic by his grandparents’ generation and that its continued use by the Chinese community during the apartheid years had been detrimental to their position in South Africa. He said:

But it (the Chinese community) finds itself in a very bad position now, because they didn’t stand up and say we don’t want anything to have to do with the apartheid state. And I don’t know if you can pin this down on some kind of cultural behaviour – always being invisible. That’s one of the things that always comes up – that the Chinese community is always invisible. Survival tactics… It’s a very practical approach… They’ve got to bring home the bacon, one way or another… The invisibility is probably more of that survival stuff… used by my grandparents and my parents… I think most Chinese in this country have taken the line whereby they wouldn’t actively support the apartheid government… Yes, they have been very good at rendering themselves invisible… It comes from fear.

Michael T (66) believed that the Chinese, as such a small community, were generally ignored in policy-making. The only hope, he said, was that with the increased numbers
and increased visibility of Chinese in South Africa due to the recent immigration from China and Taiwan the Chinese might start to ‘matter’. He said,

I think, when it comes to the broader plan of the South African government, Chinese are non-existent. If they plan anything in the country, I don’t think the Chinese play a role in it. (However, with the new immigrants) even as far as the government is concerned, the Chinese are more noticeable now.

Albert (73) opined that the Chinese were still being excluded. While the previous government put them in a very ambiguous position during apartheid, he was concerned that the current government was simply ignoring them. These perceptions have had a profound and negative impact on his identity and his loyalty to South Africa. He wrote these words in an e-mail communication after our interview:

There are no real changes for Chinese South Africans. We lived in a ‘no man’s land’ under white rule and we remain in a ‘no man’s land’ under black rule. Subtle discriminatory acts are still being applied to us. For instance, whenever reports are made about (previously) disadvantaged ‘non-white’ groups, the Chinese are never mentioned; the mayor never attends important Chinese functions when invited, the Employment Equity Act discriminates against us. It seems to me the present government is not living up to its declaration of forgiving, forgetting, and reconciliation. I end my comments with the following quote by the Minister of Transport, Mr. Dullah Omar: “It’s a question of identity. South Africa recognises a diversity of identities. I am many things at the same time; I am South African, I am African; I am Muslim. It’s part of the richness of South Africa’s culture and it allows me to express myself.” These are great words, but in the final analysis, action speaks louder than words.

In Albert’s final analysis, Chinese were still being excluded. Feelings of exclusion and invisibility affected Chinese South Africans of all age groups. One of young bananas stated, quite insightfully, that one’s identity was related to a sense of belonging. According to Patricia (29) “the less you feel you belong, the less you’ll do politically and socially.” Jane (21) also expressed her feelings of exclusion:

What I mentioned before was that I recently realized that I don’t fit in anywhere. Not here in South Africa – being a ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘Indian’ country… I am sad when political speeches are given and they mention the ethnic groups – ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘Indian’, and ‘coloured’ – and they always leave us out. Now I am wondering if we are too much of a minority to pay attention to or whether it is because they don’t see us. Because I always hear it, the four put together, and we are always never there (sic.). So are we part of the ‘coloured’ group or are

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6 To be discussed in the next chapter.
we hanging around? It is very annoying… the white government didn’t notice us and now, with the black government, … where does that put us?

Others mentioned that while the apartheid-era government gave the Chinese some privileges, they never granted full recognition. Many of the Chinese South Africans spoke about their current exclusion from the affirmative action policies as yet another example of their continued exclusion from South Africa.

**Chinese South Africans and affirmative action legislation**

I found that there were a lot of feelings of anger toward the South African government for apartheid because they were excluded then … the Chinese people were excluded then because of apartheid. And now that there’s this ‘African Renaissance’ and affirmative action … Chinese people haven’t been included either … so both ways they’ve lost out. Eleanor, 25

This section of the chapter focuses on a question crucial to Chinese South African identity today: Who belongs in / to post-apartheid South Africa? The national framework of citizenship and access to rights and resources has been contested. Former President Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the constitution advocate rights for all. President Mbeki and his Africanist school and current affirmative action policies tend to exclude and re-racialise groups in competition over post-apartheid resources and benefits. In the midst of these debates, some Chinese South Africans have exhibited a commitment to fighting for recognition of their past, and rights in the present and future as South African citizens. As argued earlier in Chapters Two and Three, states continue to wield considerable power as the principal actor engaged in defining citizenship rights. But during the first few years of the 21st century, Chinese South Africans have played an increasingly prominent role in contesting the official government positions on affirmative action. In doing so, they have been claiming their rights to equal South African citizenship.

Two dominant and contradictory schools of thought have prevailed in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa on questions of race, nation building, and identity to date. Non-racialism was the predominant camp in anti-apartheid thinking during the apartheid years; some would argue that it was more aspirational than real, it was seen as the
necessary glue to hold together the disparate, racially diverse political elements in the struggle against apartheid. The non-racialism school — of the ‘rainbow nation’ and ‘many cultures, one nation’ — has been espoused most prominently by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. These metaphors for the ‘new’ South Africa have not been without their critics. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2001) argues that the ‘rainbowism’ discourse “foregrounds racial variety even as it does not constructively deal with the meanings thereof” (in Distiller and Steyn 2004:1). Distiller and Steyn also point to Cock and Bernstein’s (2002) criticism that gender and class as categories of difference are ignored by the rainbow metaphor. Further, Nuttall and Michael (2000) suggest that the image of the rainbow nation is in direct opposition to the creolised nature of South African cultural realities and perpetuates apartheid conceptual structures of separation (in Distiller and Steyn 2004:1). In short, the critics argue that the image paints over ongoing tensions and inequalities. These criticisms notwithstanding, in general discussions, these slogans and ideals are understood to be inclusive of the nation’s ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. In a speech for a conference on ‘coloured’ communities in the ‘new’ South Africa, the former president, Nelson Mandela, articulated these ideals:

Freedom, justice and fairness are the ideals we must strive to fully realise… Non-racialism is one of those ideals that unites us. It recognises South Africans as citizens of a single rainbow nation, acknowledging and appreciating difference and diversity (in James, Caliguire, and Cullinan 1996:7).

The current South African president, however, comes from a different camp; one that espouses Africanism and an ‘African Renaissance’ in which South Africa positions itself to take a leadership role on the continent, as an African country. “The President’s agenda allowed some previously restrained notions around race to come to the surface” write Posel, Hyslop, and Nieftagodien (2001:xi). While this agenda has created more dialogue about race and racism in South Africa, it has also left unanswered mounting questions about who, in fact, belongs to and in post-apartheid South Africa. Makgoba,

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7 D. Posel, J. Hyslop, and N. Nieftagodien in their editorial, “Debating ‘race’ in South African scholarship” write that there was a clear tendency to steer clear of the subject of race and the language of race as this was the language of the apartheid state; apartheid’s critics, therefore, positioned themselves as advocates of non-racialism. They also write: “the ideological commitment to non-racialism was also a tool of organisational discipline to prevent the emergence of deep racial fault lines on the left…one of the most striking features of opposition ideology and politics in South Africa has been the resilience of its commitment to non-racialism” (in Transformation 47 (2001): viii).
Shope and Mazwai (1999) argue that access to ‘Africanness’ depends on a commitment to the continent and the concept of ‘Africa’, which carefully excludes neither diasporic black Africans nor white South Africans; however, this view of South Africa remains “one of the sites of contestation within which different groupings struggle for their sense of social identity” (Distiller and Steyn 2004:8). President Mbeki has paid lip service to non-racialism; however, policies of transformation and redress enacted under his tenure have continued to utilise the same racial categories used during apartheid. In addition, the President has, on occasion, used the ‘race card’ as a defence against his critics (see Z. Erasmus’s essay on race and identity in the State of the Nation 2004-2005: 26) illustrating the continued (and perhaps mounting) salience of race despite all of the non-racial language and imagery.

Contestation surrounding race and identity inform the on-going tensions between two important government (and societal) projects: (a) the need to construct a strong national identity out of South Africa’s divided past and a diverse population and (b) the need for transformative and redistributive policies, necessary to address past injustices and inequities. The government’s plan for the nation-building project is not entirely clear nor without controversy. For example, recent reports about government plans to install the national flag at every school and tertiary institution in South Africa have drawn criticism from various camps (Sunday Times September 11 2005). The government, however, has embarked on a clear plan for righting past wrongs and preventing further discrimination in the economic sector through affirmative action legislation.

Affirmative action policies were put in place through two primary vehicles: the Employment Equity Act (EEA) No. 55 of 1998 and Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (or BEE) Act, No. 53 of 2003. The EEA prohibits discrimination, provides guidelines of affirmative action for employers, and gives certain advantages to previously disadvantaged individuals and communities in terms of job preference, training, and contracts. These policies are, by their very nature and purpose, racial.

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8 In the preface to the World Economic Forum’s South Africa at 10, Mbeki writes that in the past ten years South Africa has moved from a “past marked by oppression, racism, conflict and instability, and a continuously deepening economic crisis” to “the current reality of freedom, dedication to non-racialism and demonstrable stability, and robust economic recovery” (2004:11).

9 The Employment Equity Act specifically states that the purpose of the act is “to achieve equity in the workplace by a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination
However, scholars criticise the acts because (a) they utilise the same racial categories used under apartheid laws without serious question or critique, and (b) they conflict with the ideal of non-racialism. Historian Hermann Giliomee points out the ironies in the ANC’s continued use and promotion of non-racialism and these redistributive policies:

The further irony is that affirmative action, as a policy pursued by the ANC will continue to racialise our society. The African middle class put in place by way of affirmative action has everything to gain by maintaining racial boundaries and a racially structured system of promotion. In view of our history these responses are understandable. What is less understandable is how all this can be called non-racialism (in James, Caliguire, and Cullinan 1996: 96).

Race continues to be, by far, the most salient factor in the distribution (and redistribution) of resources in South Africa. Given the history of apartheid, this is inevitable. Resources were allocated on the basis of race, with a clear hierarchy of whites on top and black Africans at the bottom. The current government, in its redress efforts, must also consider racial difference and racial position in redistributing resources. However, this EEA and BEE-method of transformation has many critics. The Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition party, in particular, has argued (somewhat defensively) that affirmative action has led to reverse discrimination and the re-racialisation of South Africa. While the opposition may have less-than-pure motives, the EEA and BEE legislation has many more serious detractors. Some scholars have noted, with concern, that affirmative action policies reassert apartheid-era systems of classification, that they have had little impact on improving the lot of poor blacks, and that the ANC has failed to come to terms, in a critical, reflective way with race (see D. Posel, J. Hyslop, and N. Nieftagodien 2001; Erasmus 2005; also Gilroy 2001, and other contributions to Transformation 47: 2001). Various ethnic communities in South Africa have also voiced concerns about affirmative action. Because of “their intermediate and somewhat ambiguous position” during apartheid,
many ‘coloureds’ had fears that they would be subject to discrimination under a black government; these fears led to distrust and a sense of insecurity (Caliguire 1996:12-13).

A number of scholars have noted that in some ways race is more salient today than it was during apartheid, at least amongst those who participated in the struggle against it. For example, during the apartheid / struggle days, the political usage of the term ‘black’ to encompass African, ‘coloured’, and Indian activists was common. Today, however, the racial differences between and amongst the various racial groups have become more salient.\(^{12}\) Competition theory accounts for the tenacity of ethnic boundaries, the rise of spontaneous and organised ethnic movements, or demobilisation as a result of declining levels of competition (Olzak and Nagel 1986:ix). Olzak and Nagel point out that processes of state building that implement policies targeting specific ethnic populations increase the likelihood of ethnic collective action. Competition theorists propose that policy changes focused on specific ethnic groups, such as ethnic/racial civil rights laws, designating official lands, or implementing language rules, result in increased ethnic awareness and the likelihood of ethnic movements Olzak and Nagel 1986: 4; see also James and Nagel 1986). Anthony Marx’s comparative study of race in Brazil, the United States, and South Africa similarly concludes that in the two nations where specific racial policies were implemented – the US and South Africa – race became more salient than in Brazil, which steered clear of racially-specific policies (Marx 1998).

In South Africa, boundaries between race groups have hardened as various groups now compete for resources being (re)distributed through EEA and BEE channels; competition theory provides one explanation of the government’s role in the paradoxical process. These policies, as they are currently written, understood, and presently being

\(^{12}\) In her PhD thesis on Indian Teachers in the Witwatersrand, Subera Surtee points out that during apartheid when teachers were in the employ of Indian Education, the majority of them did not share common notions about their class interests. However, with the disintegration of apartheid, Indian teachers began to close ranks and formed a unitary identity with teachers from other race groups. This solidarity, at the time of her study, was showing signs of fragmentation due to a resurgence of ethnic identity (Surtee, unpublished thesis 1998: 9-4,5). Also see Wilmot James, Daria Caliguire and Kerry Cullinan’s 1996 publication, \textit{Now That We are Free}. Coloured communities in a democratic South Africa, for example “A supreme irony asserts itself in post-apartheid South Africa: the funeral of formal apartheid has been accompanied by the increasing legitimacy of ethno-racialism” (Adam & Moodley, “Diversity Management in Canada” in James, \textit{et al}, 1996: 110-117).
implemented result in increased ethnic, racial, and class cleavages. These cleavages, in turn, continue to hamper the construction of an inclusive, pluralistic, and strong national South African identity. In addition to the whites, ‘coloureds’, and Indians, the Chinese, too, are feeling excluded.

**Exclusion of the Chinese from affirmative action policies**

The Chinese South African community has been excluded from the very specific language of the EEA, which identifies ‘blacks’, ‘coloureds’, and ‘Indians’ as ‘black people’ as previously disadvantaged.\(^\text{13}\) Read broadly, the Chinese might fit into the ‘coloured’ category, as they did in some instances during apartheid. The Chinese were, in fact, classified differently under different laws during the apartheid era and under some pieces of legislation they were a subcategory of the ‘coloured’ group.\(^\text{14}\) However, because the Chinese are not specifically mentioned in either the EEA or the BEE legislation, employers and government officials have been left to use their discretion. In some instances, Chinese have been included as previously disadvantaged and in other instances, they have been excluded.

The Chinese, like the ‘coloureds’, were placed in an awkward in-between position from the earliest days of apartheid. While legally ‘non-white’, they were often granted concessions and privileges, as discussed in earlier chapters, and often viewed as ‘honorary whites’. Should they qualify as previously disadvantaged? Chinese were not permitted to vote. They had no rights, as such; however, they were allowed, by special permit, to live, study, and socialise with and amongst white South Africans. If they do not qualify as ‘black’ and previously disadvantaged, then what of the experiences of the Chinese who came of age in the 1950s, 60s and 70s? Does their current exclusion from the employment equity legislation deny them their history of discrimination,

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\(^\text{13}\) In the definition section of the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 it states: ‘black people’ is a generic terms which means ‘Africans’, ‘coloureds’, and ‘Indians’. ‘Designated groups’ means black people, women and people with disabilities.

\(^\text{14}\) Under the Electoral Act, Chinese were classified as ‘black’ and so could not vote. According to the Department of Community Development they were classified as ‘Asian’ and according to the Group Areas Act there were included in the general ‘Coloured’ group. Proclamation 73 of 1951 placed the Chinese in a separate population group.
humiliation, and suffering? Do these acts deny them equality in post-apartheid South Africa?

Tiffany Sakato’s June 2005 article was one of the first to point out the confusion surrounding Chinese South Africans and BEE legislation to a national audience. She writes that government officials at the Department of Labour and the Department of Trade and Industry were concerned “that the Chinese were never discriminated against consistently” and that “The departments would have to assess how they were discriminated against, if the discrimination was sustained, and if it equalled the discrimination experienced by other ‘blacks’.” (in “Race classification causes confusion” in the Mail & Guardian, BEE section, June 24-30 2005: 6).

The Chinese South African community, itself, has remained divided in their feelings about affirmative action and their exclusion from these remedial policies. Since the introduction of the EEA in 1998, a few Chinese South Africans expressed concerns about their exclusion. In particular, Chinese South African architects, engineers, and other professionals who stood to gain from ‘previously disadvantaged individual’ (PDI) designation raised concerns with their local Chinese associations. After much internal discussion and debate within and amongst the regional Chinese associations over a period of several years, the Chinese Association of South Africa (or CASA) made a presentation and submission to Parliament, explaining their legal status during apartheid.

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15 Segments of the Indians and coloured communities have also expressed fears that in implementation the legislation will favour black South Africans. Many of the chapters in James, et al, 1996, Now That We are Free, address these fears that affirmative action, RDP projects, and other corrective actions will favour Africans. Nelson Mandela, in his opening address of a conference entitled, National Unity and the Politics of Diversity: The Case of the Western Cape” held in August 1995, tried to allay these fears by stating that these policies “belong to all who have been disadvantaged” (James, Caliguire, and Cullinan 1996:7).

16 Being included on the approved government list of PDI architectural firms would guarantee a greater frequency of receiving government contracts, which are given out in turn; for other sectors, inclusion on such a list translates into a certain number of ‘points’ added onto the PDI firm’s tender for government work, beyond the other points given for merit, pricing, etc.

17 CASA is the national representative body made up of regional Chinese South African associations. Membership is open to all Chinese in South Africa; however, in most provinces members are predominantly South African-born. The two exceptions are the Natal Chinese Association and the Free State Chinese Association whose members are almost entirely new immigrants from Taiwan.
and protesting their exclusion in May 2003.\(^{18}\) Annex B of CASA’s submission to Parliament is clear: the Chinese were the only group in South Africa that has never been able to vote at any level. They were subjected to racial discrimination under apartheid laws, and the current wording of the EEA does not specifically include the Chinese under affirmative action. The submission further states: “The amendment to the Employment Equity Act would allow us as South Africans to believe that we are part of one nation” (CASA 2003: 3). Their exclusion from EEA and BEE legislation is seen as symbolic of their exclusion from the nation of South Africa.

Some members of the community remained uncertain about their position on their affirmative action exclusion. These interviewees expressed both awareness and concerns about their position of relative privilege over other ‘black’ South Africans. Nelson, 42, felt that because the Chinese were relatively advantaged and because they did not fight for their rights during apartheid, they should not reap benefits of affirmative action. He also pointed out that most Chinese had used the ‘system’ to their best advantage during apartheid and that they were attempting to do so again with these calls for inclusion in affirmative action policies.

It’s a difficult one. If you’re going to be honest with yourself, it’s a difficult one…there’s disadvantage, but…the Chinese has some advantages…In the long run, were they disadvantaged? I think it’s very relative…I don’t believe it’s right. Because it’s not a matter of conscience that they’re doing anything. It’s because of how much bucks (sic.) they can get in their pocket… But did he fight before? Did he fight when he didn’t have the vote? Did he fight when everyone else was fighting? We would prefer to sit and reap the benefits that the can under the system. He was using the system to his best advantage at that stage. Now the system’s turned against him. Now he’s fighting the system, again, to the best financial advantage…I don’t operate that way…In my personal experience, the Chinaman was under the tip of the shoe, under gentle pressure, whereas blacks and others were under the heel…from my point of view, I was a bit under the tip.

\(^{18}\) Debate over CASA’s handling of the employment equity issue has led to some serious in fighting within the national body. The Kimberley Chinese Association (KCA) resigned its membership from CASA, due in part to frustrations that CASA was not adequately addressing the employment equity issue and that they were taking too long in doing so. The KCA have also considered bringing a class action lawsuit against the government for what they view as discrimination. Because of financial constraints this lawsuit has not, as yet, been pursued. CASA, on the other hand, has not accepted the withdrawal of KCA from CASA citing that they have not consulted their entire community and that they did not follow procedure. The leadership at CASA claims that KCA is being ‘led astray’ by only two individuals who have their own interests at heart with regard to the employment equity issue.
Nelson’s views were at one extreme of a wide range of opinions held by Chinese South Africans about affirmative action. The Chinese exclusion from the employment equity legislation was one of the most controversial issues unearthed during the course of this dissertation research; it has continued to create confusion and conflict for the Chinese South Africans. Support or disagreement with CASA’s stance that Chinese workers should, indeed, be included as ‘black persons’ varied depending on age, profession, and general experience.

While legally ‘non-white’, Chinese South Africans who are now middle aged and younger, were not materially disadvantaged, apart from their lack of franchise; as mentioned in earlier chapters they benefited from various concessions and privileges. They attended white schools and universities, lived in white neighbourhoods, had access to public amenities, and socialised within white circles. Those who did not suffer many deprivations are understandably uncertain about whether they should now receive the benefits of affirmative action. The younger interviewees were often the most ambivalent about affirmative action. As with Nelson, they realised that they were, relative to other ‘non-whites’, advantaged.

Most of the older Chinese South Africans, however, still recalled the many humiliations they suffered during apartheid – of being refused service at restaurants and accommodation at hotels, and of having to apply for special permits in order to travel between provinces, to purchase homes in white areas, and to attend white schools and universities. They argued that Chinese were, in fact, disadvantaged but that today, no one seems to remember their earlier disadvantaged position. James, 42, is a member of the fence-sitter cohort. While he did not personally suffer from many deprivations, he was incensed on behalf of his elders and the Chinese South African community, in general, about their exclusion from EEA and BEE. He referred to these policies as another form of racism that ignores all other previously disadvantaged groups:

With the whole push toward equalisation, etc., equal employment…one term to describe it, which I don’t like using…is reverse racism, whereby Chinese are

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19 However, it should be noted that these were never rights; privileges and concessions were always dependent on the discretion of the bureaucrats, neighbours, school principals and parent advisory bodies. Chinese never had any security of their position in South Africa until 1994.
excluded because black people are given jobs. Cyril Ramaphosa’s big black empowerment scheme is specifically directed towards racially black people and it’s that kind of racism that ignores other previously disadvantaged people, which included Chinese, on the basis of race, really.

While he acknowledged that the Chinese had some advantages, he stated that legally they were no better off than blacks under the ‘old regime’. He contended that this government must acknowledge the discrimination, the suffering, and the hurt of the Chinese, especially those of earlier generations:

A lot of my relatives had corner shops … and they find themselves discriminated against now, or their children find themselves discriminated against simply because the bureaucrats that implement public policy now apply a…bludgeoned kind of crude racism…Well, look, the Chinese didn’t have to carry passes – that was one big thing. But they were treated by government exactly the same as black people in terms of owning property, owning businesses in white areas and for all intensive purposes, they were ‘black’…So, for the record, yes. To put it on the record that the Chinese were discriminated against under the old regime. To prevent future discrimination… To say my father and his father were discriminated against. No question about it. It may have been a different level to black people or coloured people, but it was discrimination. If you do not recognise that, you do not recognize the suffering, the hurt, the preclusion of opportunity for my parent’s generation… Chinese were excluded from the vote. We weren’t allowed to go to the movies, buy property. There’s a whole list of things.

Many second-generation Chinese South Africans, especially those over 60 of the shopkeepers’ cohort, firmly believe that the Chinese have every right to special affirmative consideration for jobs, training, and contracts. At the same time, the majority of Chinese South Africans in this age group continue to make their living as shopkeepers, an occupation that is ultimately not affected by employment equity, affirmative action, or black economic empowerment policies. Nevertheless, these matters are important to them; they are seen as matters of equality and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. Inclusion in these affirmative action laws are also critical to affirming their history in South Africa; perhaps they were not the most oppressed during apartheid, but they, too, have their stories of exclusion, discrimination, and humiliation.

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20 Most Chinese shops are quite small and have only a few employees, if any, so they would not fall under those companies having to comply with either act; and because they are self-employed, they will not be affected as job-seekers or employees of companies either.
What has been the impact of these feelings of continued exclusion? The oldest members of the Chinese South African community felt that their exclusion from affirmative action legislation was ‘yet another slap in the face’. Many of them repeat the refrain oft-heard from the coloured community: “We were not white enough before, and now we are not black enough.” In short, they felt that they are being discriminated against, yet again. Their current exclusion from affirmative action policies affirms their lack of loyalty or patriotism to South Africa. They were South African by virtue of birth only; their ties to this country ended there. The Chinese Association of South Africa (CASA) was still awaiting an official response from the Labour Committee of Parliament, at the time of writing this thesis.21

In 2003, the Chinese South African rumour mill spread news that changes to legislation were imminent. However, as two years passed, it became clear that Parliament as well as the principals at the Department of Labour and the Department of Trade and Industry, the two government departments charged with implementation and oversight however, were moving slowly on this latest Chinese question.22 In response to government’s inaction, the Chinese South African community consolidated their position and intensified and accelerated actions on this matter. CASA and the regional Chinese associations held a number of open community meetings in around the country23, and made repeated calls for affidavits from Chinese South Africans regarding how they were treated (prior to 1994 and post 1994). Several media articles covered the confusion of race classification with regard to the “tiny Chinese minority of South Africa” and BEE initiatives.24 Private sector companies contracted private legal and

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21 Part of the delay is that since CASA made their presentation in Parliament, the various Parliamentary committees have experienced changes in membership, so that many of their existing advocates no longer sit on the relevant committees and new members are not as well-informed nor as interested in the plight of Chinese South Africans.
22 According to Tiffany Sakato, Lionel October, Deputy Director General of the Department of Trade and Industry, explained that “the thrust of BEE was to correct past inequities of people ‘commonly understood’ as African, Indian, and coloured … ‘changing the [EEA and BEE] acts would be difficult and [would] require Parliament to reopen the matter. It would take a massive public exercise to reopen the debate two years later.’” Sakato says that government officials are concerned that they could open the floodgates for other claims by minority groups (Mail & Guardian, BEE section, June 24-30 2005:6).
23 One was held in Pretoria on 6 August 2005 and another in Johannesburg on the 31st of August.
consulting firms to study the question of Chinese legal status in South Africa, pushed, in part, to do so by their Chinese South African employees.\textsuperscript{25} The online Chinese Discussion Forum, www.chineseforum.org.za, dedicated a section to BEE at the top of every e-newsletter with active links to various related reports and letters, including an active link to a statement made by Nelson Mandela in 1998 at the Investment against Crime Seminar hosted by China Express, the local Chinese language newspaper (see below for partial text.). Finally, CASA contracted the services of well-known human rights advocate, Mr. George Bizos, to represent their interests. It appeared that, barring timely legislative changes to include the Chinese in EEA and BEE legislation, the Chinese community was prepared to pursue these matters on a case-by-case basis and, possibly, take the matter to the Constitutional Court.

In the meantime, the private sector moved forward, on the assumption that legislative changes in favour of the Chinese would eventually come. Chinese were included amongst those who qualify as ‘black people’ under both employment equity and black economic empowerment policies within a number of private companies in 2004 and 2005.\textsuperscript{26} For example, a Unilever Bestfoods Robertsons SA memorandum listed the Chinese in its definition of “Black people meaning all previously disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged groups or individuals in South Africa.” Nedbank, Old Mutual, and the First Rand Group – all major South African financial institutions – came out with announcements in mid- to late 2005 that Chinese customers would be eligible to participate in their employee share schemes.\textsuperscript{27} CASA responded to the first two of these announcements saying:

\textsuperscript{25} Linda Human was asked to prepare a special report in 2004; Cliffe Dekkar Inc. prepared another similar report for Empowerdex (Proprietary) Ltd. in 2005; and Qunta, Inc. prepared a third document for Nedbank. Rand Merchant Bank is also currently looking into the question of their Chinese South African employees vis-à-vis BEE and EEA legislation. All of these have concluded that Chinese South Africans were, indeed, legally non-white during apartheid.

\textsuperscript{26} In a memo to its suppliers on black empowerment dated 6 August 2004 Unilever Bestfoods Robertsons SA clearly lists the Chinese in its definition of ‘black people’; Standard Bank SA also confirmed that the Bank would allow Chinese to classify themselves as ‘Coloured’ for the purposes of the employment equity act (Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA) website – www.tcagp.co.za – July 2004); the TCA August 2003 newsletter also states: recognition was finally given that Chinese should be classified as PDI (previously disadvantaged individual).

\textsuperscript{27} This announcement was made in September 2005 on www.chineseforum.org.za
While other corporates still toy around with academic debates regarding the HDI\textsuperscript{28} status of SA Chinese, Nedbank and Old Mutual have acted according to their social conscience and gone ahead with the progressive step of including us in their transformation plans… We believe that both institutions will reap long-term rewards for restoring economic justice to a community, which has suffered untold discrimination up until 1994. (News release, www.chineseforum.org.za 27 September 2005).

The collective actions of the Chinese South African community appeared to be showing results. In the third quarter of 2005, the Department of Labour appeared to be supporting the Chinese community’s requests to be included for affirmative action. In a response to a query from Rand Merchant Bank, Mr. Festus Mphomane of Department of Labour sent the following reply: “We, the Department of Labour, assert that the Chinese people should be classified, with their consent, as ‘coloureds’ in the workplace for purposes of employment equity, as they were classified as such previously, until such time that the Act is amended (E-mail dated 14 September 2005).

In the aftermath of the 1994 elections, a number of Chinese South Africans stated that they finally felt that they were a part of this country. However, as illustrated above, the 1998 Employment Equity Act and other affirmative action policies have, to some extent, quashed nascent feelings of belonging. Any growing sense of national identity as South Africans has also been threatened by their conclusions that the state has not been meeting their obligations of the state-citizen pact. The provision of quality education and health care systems, job opportunities in a growing economy, and basic safety and security, as well as a sense of belonging, were viewed as requirements for which they would give their allegiance to South Africa. In the absence of these, and in light of their continued feelings of exclusion and neglect, many Chinese South Africans seemed to see little reason to pledge their patriotism to South Africa. One extreme response to this neglect, chosen by large numbers of Chinese South Africans, has been to leave the country in search of ‘greener pastures’ and a greater sense of belonging.

\textsuperscript{28} Historically Disadvantaged Individual
Emigration as an indicator of ambiguous national identity

Emigration was one of the initial responses of the Chinese South African community to apartheid-era discrimination. The Group Areas Act (1950) and the insecurities related to it led to the first wave of emigration from South Africa.29 The second wave was led by the first generation of Chinese South African professionals in the early 1960s; facing discrimination in the workplace, they opted to leave in search of better opportunities both for themselves and their children. Linda Human states: “90% of young Chinese emigrated from South Africa to countries where they could pursue their careers with no fear of discrimination and with no sense of insecurity (quoting Collins 1970, 2003). The third wave of emigration, which took place in the late 1970s and 1980s, were precipitated by civil strife, increased violence, and growing political instability. The period immediately before and after the 1994 elections also witnessed a great deal of Chinese emigration from South Africa; these Chinese left due to fears of future uncertainties. From the 1950s and through the next four decades, large numbers of well-educated, professional Chinese South Africans left the country. It has only been in recent years, since the late 1990s, that this mass exodus of Chinese South Africans has ended.

There are no exact figures on the total number of Chinese emigrants and numbers vary greatly; however, all reports give high estimates of the numbers and rates of emigration:

- At the time when South Africa is suffering chronic shortage of skilled labour, there is an enormous brain drain of graduate Chinese. In the past 10 years, 40 doctors alone have emigrated because of lack of opportunities (Pretoria News, 12 October 1977)
- Already 500 Chinese have left the Port Elizabeth community (Collins 1970:69)
- Natal has never had more than 140 Chinese and today only about 60 of these are left (Collins 1970:69)
- It would appear that South Africa’s small Chinese population was and probably still is rapidly dwindling and that over the last 40 years scores of Chinese graduates have emigrated to Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, England, and Hong Kong. (Human 2003).
- In 1951 there were approximately 850 Chinese in Pretoria; in 1966 there were only 500. Some moved to Johannesburg; about 120 emigrated. (Smedley 1980:208)

29 Linda Human (nee Smedley) claims that the threats of the Group Areas Act on the livelihoods of Chinese South Africans, too small to constitute a group in their own right, were responsible for the emigration of many professional Chinese South Africans (L. Human 1984, 2003).
By 1967, an estimated 30-40% of Chinese graduates had emigrated in search of greater professional freedom (Yap and Man 1996:390).

Based on interviews and survey results of this study and other historical accounts it appears that at least one-quarter to one-third of the entire Chinese population of South Africa has emigrated. According to the survey, 131 of the 141 respondents (or 93%) reported that they had relatives overseas. Interviews revealed that each nuclear family had at least one member overseas as well as several members to the extended family; additionally, everyone knew of a neighbouring family that had emigrated. In some cases entire multi-generational and extended families have emigrated. The main receiving countries for Chinese South Africans, are Canada, Australia, the United States of America, and England; and, more recently, New Zealand.

Entire communities of Chinese South Africans have been decimated by the emigration of their brightest and best-educated members. The accounts of lay historians Yap and Man, historian Karen Harris, and sociologist Human concur. This ‘brain drain’ of the most highly educated from amongst them had a tremendous impact on the size, the development, and morale of the Chinese South African community. “For the South African Chinese the departure of such a substantial segment of the community created a void and represented the loss of talent and leadership which could have altered the course of its development” (Yap and Man 1996:391). Small towns, in particular, have been the most affected by out-migrations, with large numbers moving to South Africa’s bigger cities or out of the country. Sherman, 49, reported that Kliptown, located about 25 kilometres outside of Johannesburg, used to have between 25 and 30 Chinese families. Of these, most have emigrated and a few, like himself, have moved into Johannesburg. He reported that there are only about 10 families left in Kliptown today. James reported that a similar phenomenon took place in Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape. He said,

In the Chinese Youth Club in Uitenhage, they started with 28 families – about 122 people. At one stage, there were as many as 40 families. Many of them have since left the country. Others have moved to PE or larger cities. Now (there are) only 4-5 families left in Uitenhage.
Several of the Kimberley residents also reported that they had lost the most educated members of their community. Cyril, 70, reported that at one stage there had been a big Chinese community in Kimberley, however, “all of them have left. They all went to Canada and they went all over the world.” Based on these interviews, I would venture to say that there are now more Chinese from Kimberley and Port Elizabeth in Vancouver and Toronto than remain in South Africa.

The act of emigration is a physical statement about ‘home’, citizenship, and identity. In the act of leaving, one says that ‘home’ can be moved and citizenship, transferred. Much of the literature on recent migrations and transnationalism argues that ‘home’ has become multiply-sited as ‘astronaut families’ and ‘parachute kids’ create homes in two or more countries (see, for example, Ong 1999, Wang and Wang 1998, and Tu 1991; see also next chapter). Decisions about emigrating today do not carry the same weight as they did when grandparents and parents were making similar decisions about leaving China. One of the results of globalisation is the relative ease with which one can cross borders, temporarily or permanently. Another factor in such decisions today is that they are not irrevocable. This is evidenced in the emigration of Taiwanese from South Africa (to be discussed later in the next chapter) and the return to South Africa of some emigrated Chinese South Africans. It should also be noted that this phenomenon is not unique to Chinese South Africans; in fact, in terms of the continued movements of the over 36 million overseas Chinese, and the emigration of other South Africans, the migrations of Chinese South Africans is a mere drop in the bucket. However, they are nevertheless worth noting, particularly in discussions about identity, nation building, and Chinese South African place in post-apartheid South Africa.

This study’s inquiries into the question of emigration yielded interesting discussions about ‘roots’, ‘home’, and commitment to South Africa. The age of the respondent/interview yielded the greatest differences in responses. Given the high numbers and proportions of Chinese South Africans who have already emigrated, it was surprising to find that, in 1999, very few of the respondents had plans to leave South Africa. Their reasons for staying, however, did not indicate high levels of patriotism.
The survey showed a strong correlation between respondents’ age and emigration status, with an inverse relationship between age and the likelihood of emigration. For example, 67% of those 70 and older, or those of the shopkeepers cohort, had no plans to emigrate, whereas only 47% of those aged between 60-69, and 39% of those 50-59 indicated similar plans to stay in South Africa. Many of the younger and middle-aged respondents were already overseas, definitely leaving, or had considered leaving South Africa. The youngest, third generation respondents, those of the bananas cohort, with higher educational levels and English as a home language were the most likely to be considering emigration. Cross tabulations between emigration status and educational levels also corroborated the fact that older respondents with less education were less likely to emigrate, while those younger respondents with higher levels of education were, in fact, leaving South Africa. For example, 100% of those with below standard six education said that they had no intention of leaving, and a further 52 – 57% of those with between standard six and matric levels of education said they were staying; in contrast, only 13 – 15% of those with some university level education or more said they would definitely stay in South Africa.

These survey results were generally corroborated by the interviews. The interviews provided opportunities to gather more detailed information about rationale for staying or leaving, information which shed more light on Chinese South Africans’ feelings about South Africa as ‘home’.

Amongst the shopkeepers, Michael T, 66, was the only one who had solid plans for emigration.30 He and his wife were preparing to leave South Africa to join two of their daughters and other family members in Canada. Apart from joining his children and other relatives, he reported that his main reasons for leaving were crime, the economy, and healthcare. He said:

Well, firstly, my wife and I are all by ourselves in PE…In Toronto, I have two daughters and two grandchildren; I have got a brother, a nephew and a niece, and my wife has got a sister in Vancouver… I feel that going over there I am less susceptible to crime… I often say that the economy of this country is not

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30 To the best of my knowledge, he did, in fact, leave South Africa several months after our interview.
sound... Oh, and also the healthcare... If I take my retirement money over it is very little (but) we have made preparations.

Only two others in the shopkeepers’ cohort said that they would possibly emigrate, to follow their children who were already overseas.

All of the other shopkeepers had decided to stay in South Africa. For about half of these, the decision had more to do with practicalities than for any love for South Africa. John (61), Albert (73), Aaron (62), and Melvin (72) all mentioned their age – they were simply too old to pick up and move to a new place and start over again. Several of them said that they were comfortable in their homes and their communities. Others said that financially, emigrating was just impractical. Several of shopkeepers reported that they had considered emigrating at some point in the 1970s or 80s; however, practical concerns won out and they decided to stay in South Africa. Steve (61) and Donna (60) had neither the financial means nor the educational qualifications to emigrate in the 1960s when many of their peers left South Africa. They reported that they were now comfortable and settled here. Despite the fact that their children have left or are leaving, they have no plans to emigrate. Donna said that they had discussed emigration again recently, but decided that they were better off staying in South Africa:

We talked about it recently... in South Africa at present we live comfortably, not luxuriously or anything, but we don’t have to worry about the future... and we don’t want to be dependent upon our sons... we don’t know what the future holds, but we feel very comfortable here.

Corroborating the survey data, most of the shopkeepers who had decided against emigrating were those with more limited options: they were shopkeepers with limited levels of education, too old to be accepted on their own merits as immigrants in most receiving countries.31 Albert, 73, for example, said that he considered leaving many years ago, but as time passed, found that his roots went deeper into his South African home. He said,

Many years ago, I did consider leaving South Africa. And then you get busier and busier and your roots went further and further... and it’s hard to uproot. And

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31 Most of the receiving countries tend to select as immigrants young professionals who can contribute necessary skills or make large investments to their growing economies

Chapter Six
Chinese South Africans in Post-Apartheid South Africa
Chinese South African Identities
now, at my age, it is too late to go. I did consider it, but when you practice (medicine), you get busier and busier – (there was) no time to think about it.

Many of the fence-sitters interviewed for this research project had considered emigrating. Several reported siblings and other relatives overseas. However, they made the decision to stay in South Africa. For many, as with the shopkeepers, these were simply practical decisions. They had good jobs here, they realised that the lifestyle they enjoyed in South Africa would be hard to replicate, and in some cases, they lacked the qualifications to be considered attractive immigrants in receiving countries. As international sanctions took effect, it was not economically feasible for them to leave. Eventually, too, stories of difficulties encountered overseas reached them and many fence-sitters realised that the pastures were not necessarily greener ‘over there’.

The bananas cohort was, in many ways, different from both the shopkeepers and the fence-sitters. While they felt most strongly about their South African-ness, they were also the most likely to leave South Africa. Many of the youngest Chinese South Africans have left South Africa or are considering leaving the country. Perhaps the biggest difference between this group and all of the older interviewees is their national identity appears to be transferable. South Africa was ‘home’, but ‘home’ could be transferred. These changes can be attributable to both the changed national political climate and globalisation factors, which appear to have a greater impact on this group more than any other.

The bananas gave various reasons for their desires to leave South Africa. Social scientists who research immigration often discuss push and pull factors that influence such decisions. In terms of push factors, apart from their many concerns about South Africa’s new government, many of the bananas also reported that their parents were encouraging them to emigrate. Laura, 25, for example, said:

I think a lot of it (also) has to do with our parents saying, “Oh, I didn’t have a chance to go, so you must go!” And all of our overseas relatives saying, “It’s so unsafe there! You have to come out.” And at my age, just where you’re starting to settle down and starting to plan, the safety of your children, their education, you have to think about things like that. And in this country, we are so paranoid. I know bad things happen everywhere, but…
For others, pull factors were quite strong. Many of them expressed the desire to explore the world, now so open and accessible to them. Patricia, quoted above, has applied to move to Canada. She expressed conflict between her desire to leave and her desire to be part of the ‘new South Africa’. Part of her motivation, she explained lay in her desire to start a family and secure a better education for her future children. But she also explained that, in a large part, she simply wanted a new life experience. She had never been overseas before.32

Several of the other bananas were also interested in exploring the world and exploring their options. There was, with this cohort, a clear departure from the comments of older Chinese South Africans, particularly with regard to emigration as a permanent decision. These young people were interested in new experiences and broadening horizons; decisions to leave South Africa were often open-ended. The attitudes expressed were: “Let’s go and see for ourselves”. Laura, 25, said: “And just being in South Africa, we feel that we’re slightly behind, and I think that’s the main attraction – to go out there and explore.” Similarly, Mary, 23, spoke of her experiences on a recent trip to Australia: “And I love that liberation and exposure to different cultures (in Australia)… The ability to grow and learn.” Carolyn, 26, expressed the optimism and self-confidence typical of (and unique to) her cohort:

There’s nothing stopping me…if I were to get married and go with somebody. But it’s really to go and experience the best. Better things…For me, I think it’s just wanting to experience so much more and know that there’s so much more out there. I would go for those reasons.

As opposed to the fence-sitters, many of the bananas still believe that ‘the grass is greener’ outside of South Africa. As mentioned earlier, they tend to look at South Africa vis-à-vis the rest of the developed world and they want to experience that world first-hand. Carolyn, for example, spoke in glowing terms about a recent trip to Canada:

You know, I went to Canada and met up with a lot of previous South Africans who are now living there. And I saw such a difference in these Chinese. They’re so much more eloquent. They spoke such good English. Educated people. Different from the South African Chinese that I meet here. So, it’s

32 Patricia left South Africa soon after our interview and went to England on a two-year visa. Having lost contact with her, I have no knowledge of whether she is still overseas or if she has since returned to South Africa.
almost like people (there) improve themselves. Because they’re now in the first world, they’re exposed to better things, the best of things, and it improves them and their level of thinking and their level of education…they’ll never come back to South Africa. They were like one step ahead. It’s like a different level.

Deborah, 48, articulated the differences between the attitudes of these younger Chinese South Africans and those of her own and earlier generations. She spoke about the impact of globalisation on the shifts in attitudes about travel and migrations. She said:

The younger generation can move and just as easily move back. If it doesn’t work out, they can come back. And people have come back. It’s not that much of a big deal now to move. It’s the same thing like the internet has made the world so small. You keep in touch daily by e-mail. You are not out of touch with your family anymore. It’s very different. Before, when my parents came here, they came by ship – it’s thirty days by ship, you know…that was commitment. Now you fly and tomorrow morning you are in Hong Kong. So what? It’s not that big a deal anymore… They go hedging their bets.

The youngest Chinese South Africans, the bananas, may have found an alternative to their more narrowly defined identity as Chinese South Africans. Perhaps, with their greater freedoms, increased skills and qualifications, and greater ease of travel, they can re-imagine themselves as global citizens, with both Chinese and South African roots. While they retain strong historical, cultural, and social links to both places, they lack strong political ties to either. They are free to go where the wind blows, where the best job opportunities present themselves, where their friends, extended families, or lovers are. They have more opportunities and alternatives than did their parents or grandparents. With these, there is no longer any need to tolerate what they perceive as inequality, racism, or a lack of opportunities and certainly no need to pledge their allegiance to such a country.

**At home in post-apartheid South Africa, for now**

To freely say that South Africa is my home requires me to be sufficiently comfortable with the values, practices, and words spoken within its boundaries. It must be a source of safety and security both physically and metaphorically. (Ballard in Distiller and Steyn 2004: 51)

Despite concerns about the future and continued ambivalence about national politics and government, many of the Chinese South Africans of all three cohorts expressed a commitment to South Africa, optimism about the future, and a strong sense of ‘home’.
Distiller and Steyn write that various communities in South Africa are responding to the ‘new’ South Africa differently. They write:

> For the past decade, the meaning of ‘South African’, as a description of a space and an identity, or identities, has been undergoing change… It is now a ‘new’ nation working to forge something that is informed by the past, and that seeks to transcend it. Different communities within the country are responding differently, both within themselves and in relation to other communities with which they share physical and discursive spaces, spaces for living and of identity (Distiller and Steyn 2004:1).

Chinese South Africans, at least those who are committed to staying in the country, are beginning to imagine themselves as legitimate South Africans. The renewed efforts for Chinese inclusion in EEA and BEE policies serve as one indication that the Chinese South Africans are attempting to carve a space for themselves in post-apartheid South Africa. This is, in the context of the community’s political history, significant. It is, perhaps, the first time in South African history that the Chinese South Africans are visibly and vocally staking their claim to this place and speaking out about their history and their rights as South Africans. Since the 1994 elections and their first-time rights to vote and legally participate in national politics, there has been an increased sense of belonging. While some of this is marred by their current exclusion from affirmative action policies, it was still palpable in their language of freedom, ‘home’ and roots.

Cyril, 70, spoke, quite emotionally, about his freedom: “Now that the blacks have taken over the country, you feel that this is your country, because they are free – the blacks are free in this country. And now we feel that we have equality like everybody else.”

Other shopkeepers expressed sentiments that South Africa was home, that they were rooted here, and that they are South African. For these interviewees, remaining in South Africa was a matter of identity. Richard, 62, was quite adamant about his home:

> No. (I have) No desires to emigrate whatsoever. I have been in this country: born in the country, lived in the country all my life. And I have built this house. I have got a business. I am rooted. If my children want to go over, let them go over. But I don’t think I’ll go…This is my house and I will stay here forever, until I am no more here (sic.).

Aaron mentioned his age, 62, and his lack of desire to start over somewhere new. He also stated that despite all that he had been through during apartheid, he considered
himself a South African. He stated, “I still regard myself as a South African. I don’t know any other heritage, in spite of (being) discriminated against.”

Melvin is 72. He reported that his wife wanted to move to Toronto to join their daughter and their many friends there. He argued, however, that they are too old to move and have too many roots in South Africa. He said,

She actually wants us to go and settle there…We’re too old. Too old to move. It’s nice to go and visit, but our roots are quite deep here in Kimberley. Our roots are really, really deep. It’s easier in one’s younger days to move from one country to another. Not that it’s a problem with us, because we have a lot of family there and we’ve got a lot of friends there…Molly and I can adapt very easily if we had to go to Canada. There’s no problem. But our roots are deep here. We’ve got our friends here. We’ve got our property. We’ve still got some of our family here.

A number of fence-sitters expressed similar sentiments. Joan, 44, spoke about her participation in the last two national elections. She said that after voting, there was a greater sense of identification with South Africa, especially as compared to the apartheid era.

You feel more South African. There is a sense of identity. Before, it was always them and us – the government. Now, you can identify with a lot of people in the country. Moreover, you can do something to help…I can identify with people or their situations. I feel I can do something to uplift the lives of them. Before, it was the government that had to do things because they were empowered. Now, there’s more a sense that you are part of it all.

Despite some complaints and concerns, ‘home’ was, indisputably, South Africa. South Africa, regardless of their issues with the various governments of this country, past and present, clearly formed a solid part of who they were. South Africa is home because this is where they were ‘born and bred’, as Abel, 37, stated:

My personal viewpoint…the way we see it is that we are born and bred South Africans…I am South African Chinese…So, if you ask me, if I was overseas, how I consider myself, I am born and bred South African…I think it is clear that I am really South African, so I am South African in the way I do things.

Nelson, 42, from Kimberley, expressed a strong sense of ownership of this place and his rightful space here:
This is my place as much as anybody else’s…(Others) they’ve gone. Good luck to them. This is my country. This ground I’m standing on is my ground. I paid for it. And…just stuff the rest…I’m South African as much as the next man.

Nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is an imagined political community: “because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship …(and) ultimately this fraternity generates a willingness to die for it (Anderson 1983, 1991:7). While few Chinese South Africans spoke of their willingness to die for their country, some spoke about their new responsibilities, as citizens, to the nation. Dan spoke of the changes he has experienced in post-apartheid South Africa. Most poignant were his new feelings of belonging, contrasted with his previous feelings of foreign-ness. He said,

That is why with post-apartheid South Africa as it is, I am very proud to say I am South African now…During apartheid we were seen and saw ourselves as foreigners – because we weren’t allowed to say we belong. Even now, with the Blacks, they ask you questions like, ‘when did you arrive from China?’…they still take it that you are a foreigner…I didn’t want to emphasise this all the time. Because I feel I want to belong. I finally can belong…We no longer need to avail ourselves of the ROC or PRC representation to the South African government. As citizens, we can now go to municipal or provincial government, as South African citizens.

In contrast to the many who voiced concerns about the future illustrated in the first part of this chapter, there were several Chinese South Africans who held out hope for the future. They commented on some of the changes and were generally more optimistic about South Africa. Paul, 66, argued for a slower transition. He also spoke of the changes he had witnessed in the younger Chinese South Africans and the possibilities for a brighter future for all. He said,

I often talk to these younger ones trying to see if there is a future, and the children (are) integrating with the South African society…democracy of five to six years now…it is still in the early stages…I still like South Africa. It is a beautiful country. If the government can manage better, then it’s better off for everyone.

Erin, at 44 a generation younger than Paul, also felt hopeful:

I don’t know whether I want to be optimistic or if I am just crossing my fingers. We opted to stay here. I guess, in a way, we are all hoping everything will work out. Perhaps it will end up being similar to the type of country we grew up in, you know, the resources available…I just cross my fingers and hope for the best.

Chapter Six
Chinese South Africans in Post-Apartheid South Africa
Chinese South African Identities
We are here; let’s make the most of it. We are just waiting for things to come right. I don’t know how long it will take. I don’t know. I think I will still educate my kids here.

Despite their concerns about the future of the country and their feelings of exclusion, a handful of the bananas, the youngest interviewees, have also maintained a more positive outlook. These few even expressed some pride in South Africa. These young people seemed to look beyond their personal experiences and even the experiences of the Chinese South African community to see some of South Africa’s achievements.

Jane, 21, spoke about democracy and the Constitution:

I think this country is great because we sort of have this wonderful Constitution, great ideas, and so many good intentions. So, I think it is a great way to go about things. You don’t have these people with these great fists pressing down on you and things like that – not like China, Russian, Afghanistan…I must say, democracy is a great thing.

Andrew A, 26, said that he was proud to be South African: “Yes, I am proud to be South African. Although we have our sort of problems, they are unique sort of problems and just because there are negatives doesn’t mean you cannot be optimists.”

Carolyn, 26, echoed his sentiments:

I can definitely say that I’m quite proud to be a South African. When you go overseas and you tell people that you’re from South Africa, you become quite a topical issue. It’s almost like people want to know more. And that’s what makes me quite proud…and you want to share. That makes you quite proud because you have a bit of history to share.

How do we explain this split between those who still feel bitter about apartheid-era injustices and emphasise their concerns about South Africa’s future under a black government, on the one hand, and these others, who seem to be optimistic and proud of the ‘new’ South Africa? In part, it is the difference between those who see the glass as half-empty versus those who see it as half-full. The split is also an indication of the ambiguity and tentativeness of Chinese South African’s national and cultural identity as South Africans; it is an ambiguity, I would argue, that exists for South Africans of all race groups during this fragile period of nation-building. By way of concluding this chapter, I lay out some of the concerns about this nation-building process below.
Conclusion: Achieving transformation, building unity, and engendering loyalty

In post-apartheid South Africa, the state’s nation-building process, the government’s efforts at redress and redistribution of resources, and the ongoing debates between ‘non-racial’ and ‘Africanist’ camps will affect how the Chinese, other ethnic minority groups, and the black majority imagine themselves. Nelson Mandela imagined a more inclusive South Africa and was quite aware of the Chinese community’s past. In a statement to a gathering of Chinese business people in 1998 he said of the Chinese:

> It is a community which has shared the indignities heaped on all those in South Africa who were not categorised as ‘white’, a community which, because of its small size and its own insistence on human dignity, helped expose the twisted logic of apartheid; and which made its contribution to passive resistance, to defiance, and to opposing group areas and segregated political structures … Today, in a democratic South Africa, we can at last draw on all these rich threads as we build a nation in which every community, however small, can flourish while its members are full and unqualified members of the broader South African nation (downloaded from www.chineseforum.org.za).

Unfortunately, President Mbeki has shown little interest in the Chinese community and his imaginings of South Africa do not appear to be as inclusive33. Further, with the Chinese exclusion from EEA and BEE, the South African government runs the risk of further alienating a previously disadvantaged group and losing their allegiance.

Schwarz writes:

> People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture. A nation is a symbolic community and it is this which accounts for its power to generate a sense of identity and allegiance (in Hall 1992b:106).

There is no question that policies of redistribution and redress are still necessary; however, a balance must be struck between levelling the ‘playing field’ and the ongoing project of nation building. In addition, race and racism must be re-visited, critically and reflectively. Without losing sight of the past, a new paradigm for understanding race is required. If South Africa is going to be successful in constructing a unified and strong national identity, the government and South African society must

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33 The official government position on Chinese will likely change in the near future, if not in response to the Chinese South African community’s activism, then because of the government’s aspirations for increased trade with China. As before, economic interests of the state will inevitably determine any changes in Chinese status with regard to affirmative action policies.
find a balance between belonging and difference, diversity and unity. If South Africa truly becomes a citizen state\textsuperscript{34} and lives up to the ideals as laid out in its Constitution and Bill of Rights it may succeed in truly embracing all its citizens and, in turn, earning their allegiance. According to James and Caliguire, the state strategy for addressing the nation’s diversity must look to citizenship:

The only acceptable concept is that of citizenship. This means we all have rights and that these are the same for everyone – including the rights to culture and language. We must claim the rights written into the Bill of Rights … And importantly, we also have responsibilities and obligations tied to the exercise of those rights such as respect for others and treating others consistently with the rights we claim for ourselves. Racial and ethnic diversity must be guided by democratic principles (in James, \textit{et al} 1996: 137; see also Bekker 1996).

At present, the ongoing debates in government and the problematic policies and inconsistent implementation of BEE and EEA have resulted in continued feelings of exclusion amongst South African-born Chinese South Africans, as well as ‘coloured’ and Indian South Africans.\textsuperscript{35} Members of minority groups of colour\textsuperscript{36} feel they are being excluded from rights that they deserve; that they are, again, being discriminated against. Affirmative action, as it is currently being implemented, has re-racialised the workplace.\textsuperscript{37} It has resulted in an increasing salience, a thickening, of racial boundaries, marking ‘difference’ as more important than ‘unity’. One of the material results of the Chinese exclusion has been the ongoing emigration of large proportions of this tiny community.

\textsuperscript{34} Hakan Wiberg explains that a citizen state can create ‘trans-ethnic’ identities in which identification and solidarity with the state is greater than with the nation, class, or any other category. It becomes a ‘super-identity’ or an umbrella, under which the other identities can exist (in Bekker and Carlton 1996: 1-17).

\textsuperscript{35} A multi-year HSRC study found that before 1994, South Africans defined themselves by their subgroup identities; in 1999, however, subgroup identities were shared with a strong overarching national identity. Strong national identity was strongest amongst the black population and lower among all minority groups (HSRC media release, “Am I a South African?” 2 December 1999).

\textsuperscript{36} “Communities of colour” is a term more often used in the US than South Africa; I use it here to distinguish it from “minority”, which has come to mean, in many political circles, a synonym for “white”.

\textsuperscript{37} Previous government policies have had similar impact on South African society. For example, W. James writes that government efforts in the 1980s at de-racialisation, in the incorporation of Coloured and Indian populations into Parliament, resulted in a hardening of ethnic boundaries and intensified competition for resources. As implemented by government, the policy shifts did not amount to a dismantling of racial boundaries but were, in fact, attempts to co-opt two minority groups only (in Olzak and Nagel 1986:137-150).
Amongst those who have decided, at least for the time being, to stay in South Africa, there was a clear sense that South Africa, despite its imperfections, was home for them. A few elaborated on what they loved about South Africa, what they would miss should they decide to leave. They spoke of the sense of space, the weather, the colours or the light, and the lifestyle. Tracy (31) expressed concerns about safety and security but she and her Chinese South African husband have chosen to stay and try to stake a claim to their piece of post-apartheid South Africa. She said:

We love the country. We love the climate. We love the way of life, so far. We’d obviously like a bit more freedom to be able to do things, and come and go, in terms of security. Economically, it’s still kind of stable. We have jobs. Our lifestyle is good. We are reluctant to leave…(Home is South Africa) and that is why we haven’t upped and left a long time ago. I wouldn’t like to have to face the possibility that we might leave, because we really don’t want to leave.

South Africa has definitely become a part of who they are. It is home, at least for the moment. Their South African-ness, however, does not necessarily translate into loyalty to or pride in South Africa; nor does is mean that they are willing to live indefinitely with uncertainty, insecurity, or feelings of exclusion or to die for their country. Nationalism “centers the supreme loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the people upon the nation-state…” (Hans Kohn 1968 in Young 1986:116) and most Chinese South Africans simply do not feel that South Africa, as yet, merits this supreme loyalty. Continued efforts to construct an umbrella ‘super-identity’ (Wiberg in Bekker and Carlton: 1996) may change this in future such that South Africans of all races, ethnic and linguistic groups, and classes can feel proud about South Africa as well as their smaller sub-group.

While older Chinese South Africans may have few options but to stay here, those who are younger, who have tertiary degrees and skills have great options and opportunities due to global changes in job markets, telecommunications, and travel. ‘Home’ is currently sited in South Africa; however, in this changed global environment, home is replaceable, citizenship, transferable, and identity, mutable. And Chinese South African identities, already multiply-layered, nuanced, situationally-determined, and variably positioned, will, inevitably change even further with continued migrations of Chinese South Africans leaving South Africa, new Chinese immigrants daily arriving in South
Africa, and higher degrees of marriage with non-Chinese. The last chapter will focus on some of these continued migrations of Chinese and Chinese South Africans into and out of South Africa and the impact of these movements on their identities.