NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

GES1011/GESS1009 – THE EVOLUTION OF A GLOBAL CITY-STATE

(Semester 1: AY2022 / 2023)

11 November 2022

Time Allowed: 24 Hours

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

1. Please write your **name and Matric number**.

2. This paper contains **6** questions and comprises **11** pages.

3. Candidates must **attempt any 2 questions**.

4. Please start each question on a new page.

5. This is a Take Home **OPEN** book test.

1. **Read the article below and respond to the question that follows:**

Commentary: Here's how far Singapore has come in making 'regardless of race' a lived reality for all

Mathew Mathews
Samantha Nah

4 March 2022

"Regardless of race, language or religion" – we affirm our collective aspiration for Singapore every time we recite the national pledge. More than 55 years after the pledge was rolled out, how far have we come?

A series of high-profile racist incidents in 2021 shook Singapore, including a former lecturer making racist remarks to an interracial couple and a man charged over a racially aggravated attack against a 55-year-old Singaporean Indian woman.

We aren't the only ones struck by the gap between our aspiration and lived reality. These incidents put minority experiences in the workplace, on the rental market and other parts of daily life back into the spotlight and renewed public discussion
.
Still, we think there is reason to believe our society isn't that far from making "regardless of race" a lived reality for all in Singapore.

About half of respondents believe there is no longer racial discrimination in Singapore or that this can be achieved within the next 10 years, according to data from the recently concluded 2021 CNA-IPS Survey on Race Relations.

Crucially, this view was consistent across Chinese, Malay and Indian respondents.

Where racial discrimination can take on myriad forms and be felt in everyday aspects of our lives, it's worth taking a closer look at where we've made progress (or not) since 2016,when this survey was first conducted.

Significantly, more people have become accepting of other races in various roles in the private and public spheres, such as a new family member, a business partner or positions of public office.

Minorities have generally been more accepting of the Chinese in such roles, partly as a matter of proportion of the population. The Chinese tend to be less accepting of minority races in such roles, but even then, the 2021 data shows progress. Almost twice as many Chinese respondents would accept a Malay (47 percent) or Indian (48 percent) person marrying into the family, up from 24 percent and 21 per cent respectively five years earlier. More Chinese would also accept a Malay (52 percent) or Indian (53 percent) person helping to manage their business, up from 38 percent and 42 percent respectively in 2016.

One important finding is that a large majority of the Chinese are now comfortable with a

Singaporean Malay (79 percent) or Singaporean Indian (80 percent) President. This marks a rise from 59 per cent and 68 per cent respectively in 2016. The reserved presidential election in 2017 sparked many conversations about minority representation in politics. At the time, much was made about how the Chinese were not accepting of a non-Chinese leader.
But over time, seeing President Halimah Yacob on the world stage and weighing in on topics of national interest may have helped galvanise this shift towards greater acceptance and put earlier apprehensions to rest. We cannot underestimate how signals from government policy can shape racial sentiments and help society achieve greater equality.

Greater acceptance certainly does not mean discrimination no longer happens. Respondents were still most accepting of Singaporeans of the same race, but this can be problematic when about a fifth of Malay and Indian respondents indicated they had lost out on a job due to their race at least once (for example by requiring Mandarin speakers when it is unclear if this is a genuine business requirement), compared to 5 per cent of Chinese respondents saying the same. Workplace discrimination needs to be dealt with head-on and legislation is one such systemic way.

So the recent announcement that the Government will enshrine anti-discrimination is significant. There are currently no specific laws which directly regulate workplace discrimination.

Though our survey shows that 38 per cent would not report being treated unfairly in any context to the authorities, new legislation gives the guidelines “more teeth”.

It increases awareness of actions that can be taken against workplace discrimination, provides clarity of process and protections for those who level complaints against employers. Ultimately, laws focus on bad behaviour. We can only progress to be more racially equal if we also challenge and address the underlying racist tendencies in our society. More people (56 per cent) now consider racism an important problem, compared to 46 percent in 2016. This does not necessarily mean racism is on the rise, but that there is greater awareness of racial bias and injustice in our lives and possibly, greater will to challenge it.

Since 2016, in fact, people perceive the level of racism to have fallen, with 39 percent indicating that most Singaporean Chinese were at least mildly racist (down from 56 percent) and similar drops in this sentiment toward Singaporean Malays and Indians. We seem to have become both more likely to be aware of and account for others’ cultural needs and are able to determine what constitutes racism per se in our local context.

Fewer of us think it is never acceptable to offer food to someone of another race without considering if they have dietary requirements, likely chalking it up to being impolite instead of racist.

From colleagues speaking in Mandarin or non-halal food at parties, sensitivities about race can be stoked by small things, says Sabrina Shiraz on CNA's Heart of the Matter.

But one glaring potential blind spot is that we tend to see ourselves and our close circles as less racist than others in society. A pessimistic view of this might be that people are deluded when evaluating their own level of racism. But it’s not new that context and familiarity can influence whether we perceive people and actions as racist.

The challenge will be in how we, as individuals, view unacceptable actions with more maturity and address them even if they come from those closest to us. As a society, we need to continue soliciting views from diverse groups, including those who bear the brunt of racial discrimination.

Another contradiction that we've observed is that some, though slightly fewer in 2021 objected to having more conversations about race, on the basis that it may cause unnecessary tension to arise in society. Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated they were tired of talking about race and racism.

But we can take heart that a large majority want political leaders to talk openly about racism to help work through societal problems, and that younger respondents tend to want more public dialogues.

Between increased public attention to and personal reflection on racism, we are in an ideal position for making further strides toward racial equality. But we also have to be clear about what being "regardless of race" really means to most people.

When presented with a variety of potential future developments to do with race, survey respondents generally favoured multicultural policies over those that can be characterised as "post-racial". For example, 63 per cent welcomed deeper intercultural understanding but a lower proportion was comfortable with policies moving in a "race-blind" direction.
It seemed important to respondents that race not limit anyone's opportunities, but that it could still be appreciated and acknowledged.

In other words, Singaporeans want to look beyond race, but also continue to hold it in high regard as something that roots us in our communities and cultures. This is the paradox of living in a multicultural and meritocratic society.

It may seem like a fine line to walk, but it hasn't and should never stop Singapore from trying to do this together.

In light of Mark Frost's historical research considered in Tutorial 5, what do you think of the contention of the authors (Mathews and Nah) of the article above that "still, we think there is reason to believe our society isn't that far from making "regardless of race" a lived reality for all in Singapore. Elaborate on your response.

2. An established global news agency is interested in developing a featured series of podcasts tentatively entitled "Singaporean Pasts" with a budget for eight (8) episodes. Each episode will be an hour long. Imagine that you are an expert on Singapore's society and history and that this agency has approached you to consult on this project. They welcome your input on all aspects of this undertaking.

You have agreed to help them. Write out your initial response to this proposed series. Your response must include an overview of the topics, themes and timelines of each episode and how they come together in a series.

3. "The period of Japanese rule between 1942 and 1945 is rightly referred to as an occupation. It was short-lived and has barely any long term implications for the polity now designated the Republic of Singapore".

Do you agree? Why or why not? Elaborate on your response.

4. Read the excerpt below and respond to the question that follows:

"Income distribution will become more equal, thanks to heavy investments in building human capital and skills as well as a tax and transfers system that has become more progressive over the years. In 2015, the Gini coefficient after taking account of taxes and transfers was 0.41. In 2065, it will be 0.36. Wealth inequality will remain more stubborn though. In 2065, the top 1% and 10% of wealth holders in Singapore will own around 20% and 60% of total wealth respectively. This is little changed from 1985, when we first started to collect this data. Given the dim prospects for reversing inequality in Singapore, the government and people need to come together and make some hard choices about its future trajectories. Principally, instead of investing in and thinking of itself a nation-in-the making, Singapore should nakedly declare itself to be an economy, Singapore Inc. and not a political society. Such clear-eyed vision is the best way to guarantee Singapore's continued existence."

Imagine that you are a second-generation Singaporean who traces the arrival of your forebears to the late 1990s. What do you think of the comment above given your family's relatively recent roots in Singapore? Would it have any influence on whether you will continue to call Singapore home in the future? Elaborate on your response.

5. "Narratives of Singapore encountered in heritage centres, galleries and museums in Singapore have abjectly failed to include women in their stories. The only way to redress this glaring neglect of more than half its human population is to establish a heritage gallery wholly dedicated to women."

Do you agree or disagree? Elaborate on your response. You must mention at least two heritage spaces that you have visited (in person or virtually) in your response.

6. Read the article below and respond to the question that follows:

Misremembering the British Empire: How did the British become so blinkered about their nation's imperial history?

On a cloud-spackled Sunday last June, protesters in Bristol, England, gathered at a statue of Edward Colston, a seventeenth-century slave trader on whose watch more than eighty thousand Africans were trafficked across the Atlantic. "Pull it down!" the crowd chanted, as people yanked on a rope around the statue's neck. A few tugs, and the figure clanged off its pedestal. A panel of its coat skirt cracked off to expose a hollow buttock as the demonstrators rolled the statue toward the harbor, a few hundred yards away, and then tipped it headlong into the water.

The Black Lives Matter movement has accelerated a reckoning across Europe about the legacies of slavery and imperialism, nowhere more urgently than in Britain, which presided over the largest empire in world history. The Colston statue stood on Colston Avenue, in the shadow of Colston Tower, on Colston Street, around the corner from Colston Hall. Scratch almost any institution with roots in Britain's era of global dominance and you'll draw imperial blood—from the Rhodes Trust, established by the fervent expansionist and white supremacist Cecil Rhodes, to the British Museum, whose founding collection was funded by profits from Jamaican plantations worked by slaves, and the Booker Prize, launched by a food company once notorious for its exploitative practices in the cane fields of British Guiana. Every year, the Queen honors hundreds of citizens with the Order of the British Empire. (A 2004 parliamentary committee recommended changing the name to the Order of British Excellence, to no avail.)

Public discussion in Britain about the imperial past has pivoted on a reductive question: Was the empire good or bad? The Labour Party has pledged to "ensure the historical injustices of colonialism, and the role of the British Empire" are "properly integrated into the National Curriculum," while Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, decries a "cringing embarrassment about our history." A March, 2020, poll found that a third of Britons believed that their empire had done more good than harm for colonies—a higher percentage than in other former imperial powers, including France and Japan. More than a quarter of Britons want the empire back.

Asking, today, whether empire was good or bad is, as a historical matter, about as useful as asking whether the Atlantic Ocean is good or bad. When, what, where, for whom? Britons have been left ill-equipped to say. Unlike most other European countries, Britain stops requiring students to study history when they reach the age of fourteen, which leaves little room for nuance in a national curriculum designed to showcase "our island story." The public narrative about Britain's imperial past matters because it is keenly felt to license present injustice. "Our collective amnesia about the legacy of our colonial past is not getting any better," the writer and broadcaster Afua Hirsch observes in her podcast "We Need to Talk About the British Empire." "We're engulfed in a sense of denial."

How did the British get to be so blinkered about their own history? In "Time's Monster: How History Makes History" (Harvard), a probing new book, the Stanford professor Priya Satia argues that British views of empire remain "hostage to myth" partly because historians made them so. In 1817, the utilitarian philosopher James Mill provided a template when he published his three-volume "History of British India," which became a textbook for colonial administrators. Civilization evolves in stages, the logic ran; Britain had reached a higher stage

than its colonies; therefore Britain had a moral duty to lift them up. Mill soon got a job drafting dispatches in the East India Company's London headquarters. (Mill's eldest son, John Stuart, who at the age of eleven had helped correct the book's page proofs, joined him at India House as a junior clerk in 1823 and stayed until the East India Company was dismantled, in 1858.)

Satia, whose earlier books described British surveillance of the interwar Middle East and the eighteenth-century origins of a British military-industrial complex, is well attuned to the echoes of historical scripts. Mill's basic premise that imperialism brings progress reverberated in a series of moral claims. The parliamentary act abolishing the transatlantic slave trade, in 1807, was held up as proof of the British Empire's commitment to freedom, effacing its shameful past as the largest slave trader in the eighteenth-century world. Colonial independence, in the twentieth century, was depicted as the culmination of a selfless mission to spread democracy, something "given" or "granted" to colonies, rather than something long denied by force. The Second World War became the British Empire's triumphant last stand as the bulwark of global liberty in the face of fascism, eliding Britain's violent suppression of anticolonial resistance. "In the end, the British sacrificed her Empire to stop the Germans, Japanese and Italians from keeping theirs," Niall Ferguson wrote in 2002. "Did not that sacrifice alone expunge all the Empire's other sins?"

"Time's Monster" joins a dense body of scholarship analyzing liberal justifications for empire. By the early twentieth century, critics were growing skeptical of British claims about progress. Consider Edward John Thompson, who travelled to Bengal in 1910 as a Methodist missionary and befriended the anticolonial poets Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal. The Great War, in which Thompson served as an Army chaplain in Mesopotamia, soured him on the much touted promises of British civilization. He started writing history to expose the unsavory truths that propagandists had left out. In "The Other Side of the Medal" (1925), a revisionist history of the Indian rebellion of 1857, Thompson described British atrocities passed over in earlier accounts. It was time, he said, to "face the things that happened, and change our way of writing about them."

In an incisive recent study of anticolonial dissent, "Insurgent Empire", Priyamvada Gopal, a professor of English at Cambridge, places Thompson in a long line of critics of imperialism. She and Satia agree that public outcries against injustice—such as the brutal suppression of the 1865 uprising at Morant Bay, Jamaica, and the 1919 Amritsar Massacre, in which soldiers under British command fired into a crowd of nonviolent Indian protesters—often amounted to a scapegoating of individuals and the laundering of the nation's conscience. Yet, through a process of what Gopal calls "reverse tutelage," colonial subjects consistently pressed their British interlocutors to adopt more radical stances against empire. One might see Thompson as a sort of real-life Fielding, the British teacher at the center of E. M. Forster's "A Passage to India," who learns from the Indian doctor Aziz that, in Gopal's words, they "would have to be allies in the project of driving the English out of India before they could be friends." "Insurgent Empire" demonstrates how often critics have hacked at the pedestals of imperial pieties, and how consistently voices outside Britain have inspired them. Nine decades ago, the Scottsboro case prompted anticolonial activists to confront racism; five years before Colston tumbled down, Rhodes Must Fall, a student movement at the University of Cape Town, inspired an affiliated campaign at Oxford to remove a statue of Cecil Rhodes and "decolonize" the curriculum.

In the same vein, one of Britain's preeminent historian, Eric Hobsbawm, a secular Jew born in Alexandria and raised in Vienna and Berlin, Hobsbawm, a lifelong Communist, wrote panoramic histories that unfurled the international ramifications of British industrialization. And empire was an ever-present frame for the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, another co-founder of The New Left Review, who came to England from Jamaica as a Rhodes Scholar, and argued that "the very notion of Great Britain's 'greatness' is bound up with empire." In the nineteen-nineties, practitioners of a "new imperial history" (including Hall's wife, Catherine, a distinguished feminist historian) picked up this thread and stitched the stories of the British Empire and the British Isles together again.

Historians, whether mythmaking or record-righting, draw on sources that are themselves shaped by historical pressures—and these, too, played a role in distorting the picture of the imperial past. For while Thompson and his contemporaries were performing their acts of archival recovery, the imperial officers of the British government were doing their best to leave little for posterity to find.

On a showery Friday in August, 1947, citizens of the new nation of India crammed into the ceremonial avenues of New Delhi to celebrate their first day of independence. "Jai Hind! Jai Hind! " they cheered as the new tricolor was run up the flagpole, and a rainbow broke over the clearing sky. But for days beforehand, it was said, a haze of smoke had blanketed the city: the British were burning government documents en masse, lest anything that might compromise His Majesty's government get into the wrong hands.

At the empire's late-Victorian apogee, Rudyard Kipling had enjoined his compatriots to contemplate the ruins of fallen powers with humility: "Judge of the Nations, spare us yet, / Lest we forget—lest we forget!" In the event, an apter motto for Britain's imperial retreat was "Best we forget." In one colony after another, as the former Guardian journalist Ian Cobain details in his 2016 book, "The History Thieves," the British went down in a blaze of documents. A reporter in Cairo during the Suez Crisis recalled standing on the lawn of the British Embassy "ankle deep in the ashes of burning files." Twelve days before Malaya's independence, in 1957, British soldiers in Kuala Lumpur loaded trucks with boxes of records to be driven down to Singapore and, a colonial official reported, "destroyed in the Navy's splendid incinerator." In 1961, recognizing that "it would perhaps be a little unfortunate to celebrate Independence Day with smoke," the Colonial Office advised the governor of Trinidad and Tobago to get an early start, and told him that he could also pack files into weighted crates and drop them into the sea. In British Guiana, in 1965, two women hovered over a forty-four-gallon drum on the Government House grounds carrying out what their boss described as "the hot and wearing work" of cremating files. What colonial officials didn't destroy, they hid. In Nairobi, nine days before Kenya became independent, four packing crates of sensitive papers were hustled into a plane and flown to London Gatwick, where a government official supervised their transfer into storage. These, along with thousands of other colonial files, ended up stashed behind the razor wire of Hanslope Park, in Buckinghamshire, an intelligence facility dedicated to communications security—that is, to keeping secrets.

"Erasing history" is a charge invariably lobbed at those who want to remove the statues of contentious figures. But taking down a statue isn't erasing history; it's revising cultural priorities. Those who pulled down the Colston statue were, in a way, making history—by insisting that public space reflect the values of postcolonial Britain, just as citizens of former

colonies have renamed, removed, and reframed imperial symbols. (In the nineteen-fifties, a British diplomat in India discouraged the idea of sending dismantled monuments to England, wondering "what use a series of somewhat weather-beaten and not uniformly first-class statues could be put to in the United Kingdom. I thought we had too many already!")

Burning documents: now, that's erasing history. By eliminating written evidence of their actions from the archival record, British officials sought to manipulate the kinds of histories that future generations would be able to produce. E. P. Thompson, who struggled for years with the "secret state" to get details about his brother's death during a covert wartime operation, would not have been surprised by the extent of government duplicity. "Reasons of state are eternally at war with historical knowledge," he said. Colonial officials in Uganda, rifling through their files to figure out what to destroy, came up with a name for the process of erasure. They called it Operation Legacy.

The secret stash at Hanslope Park was revealed only in 2011, during a lawsuit brought against the British government by victims of torture in colonial Kenya. (The case was based in part on oral testimony gathered by my Harvard colleague Caroline Elkins.) What came pouring out from the so-called "migrated archives" were records of systematic, wide-ranging, stomach-churning abuse. These accounts flew in the face of the popular British myth that—as a Home Office guide for the U.K. citizenship test currently assures us—"there was, for the most part, an orderly transition from Empire to Commonwealth, with countries being granted their independence."

"The problem with weighing pros and cons is that it presumes there is a point at which the story is over, the accounts are closed, and we can actually tot up the balance," Satia writes. But the reckoning continues. In 2018, it emerged that dozens of immigrants of the "Windrush generation" (named for a ship, the Empire Windrush, which brought Caribbean migrants to the U.K. in 1948), who had legally settled in Britain between 1948 and 1973, had recently been deported by the Home Office because they couldn't prove their status. Their landing cards—often the only record of their legal arrival—had been destroyed in a procedural culling of the archives in 2010.

In 2002, the privately funded British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, which aimed to present the imperial age from multiple perspectives, opened in Bristol after more than a decade of planning. In a slant rhyme to the end of empire, it closed its doors six years later and went into liquidation amid sordid reports about the unauthorized sale of loaned objects. The chairman of the museum's board of trustees said, "I think the time has not yet arrived for the proper story of Empire and Commonwealth to be told."

Satia joins Gopal, Hirsch, and a growing number of historians—many of them scholars of color—in trying to change that storyline. A fuller history of empire and its legacies requires, in part, what Gopal calls "a sustained unlearning." This approach is gaining momentum, at least symbolically. Two days after Colston fell, a crane in London's Docklands hoisted the effigy of another slave trader off its plinth, as Mayor Sadiq Khan launched a review of all public landmarks. The University of Liverpool announced the renaming of a dormitory commemorating Prime Minister William Gladstone, who was the son of a slaveowner and, in his maiden speech in Parliament, in 1833, had argued in favor of compensating slaveowners for emancipated slaves. The governing body of Oriel College, Oxford, voted to remove the controversial statue of Rhodes that, four years earlier, it had affirmed keeping in place, while

Imperial College London, endowed by Rhodes's South African mining cronies, removed its motto, Scientia imperii decus et tutamen: "Scientific knowledge, the crowning glory and safeguard of the empire."

What shall be learned instead? Satia, taking inspiration from the work of Urdu poets, calls on historians to step away from narratives of moral progress and seek fresh ways to connect the present and the past. A good example of what that might look like in practice is University College London's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership. The center (which Catherine Hall chairs) has compiled a database of every slaveowner in the British colonies at the time of emancipation, in 1833, and has wrinkled the sanctimonious tale of British abolitionism. Its researchers have shown that government payouts to slaveowners following emancipation seeded fortunes inherited by generations of prominent bankers, writers, engineers, and politicians—sustaining slaveowners' privilege right down to the present. Last year, the University of Glasgow, scrutinizing its own imperial gains, announced a twenty-million-pound project to explore the history of slavery and its consequences, in partnership with the University of the West Indies, whose vice-chancellor, Sir Hilary Beckles, has been at the forefront of the Caribbean reparations movement. A myth countered, a history deepened, and a gesture of recompense. There may never be an end to reckoning, but such beginnings might help historians imagine broader forms of recovery and repair. That, too, could be a kind of progress.

Maya Jasanoff is a professor of history at Harvard. She is the author of three books, including "The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World"

(adapted from https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/11/02/misremembering-the-british-empire)

Use the article above to reflect on Singapore's British imperial past. To what extent does it compel you to question and strongly reconsider Singapore's British imperial narratives and legacies? Suggest and describe at least two specific interventions in contemporary Singapore that can help support your position on the matter.

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