Chapter 2
Multiculturalism in Singapore: Concept and Practice

Kwen Fee Lian

Abstract Multiculturalism first appeared as a political and intellectual issue in Britain, Canada and Australia in the 1970s, when these countries accepted significant numbers of migrants of non-Anglo Saxon origin. In contrast, Singapore, because of its colonial origins, was a multicultural society long before it became a modern nation-state. For this reason multiculturalism is deeply entrenched in the society, not only in the private and everyday lives of Singaporeans, but also in its governance. This chapter examines how multiculturalism is conceived and practiced in the city-state. In its original formulation CMIO multiculturalism was premised on the recognized founding races. In the past 25 years, the multiethnic character of Singapore has grown in complexity in the face of migration and the globalization of the economy. The challenges posed to existing policies on the management of multiculturalism are discussed.

Keywords Multiculturalism · Migration · Singapore · Race · State

In those parts of Asia that have had a colonial past, particularly Southeast Asia the archetypal representation of plural societies, departing colonial powers left behind two important legacies that have had a profound effect on the working of post-colonial societies. These were colonial racialization and authoritarian governments, which were quickly embraced by local political elites as they struggled to preside over fractious polities and economic redistribution. Post-colonial governments for much of the second half of the twentieth century paid little heed to the civil and political rights of individuals, but they could not ignore without consequences the rights and sensitivities of ethnic communities. They were left with two recourses, incorporate ethnic minorities in unequal power-sharing governments or repress them; a third was to assimilate them. Any of these posed fundamental

K.F. Lian (✉)
Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei
e-mail: kwenfee.lian@ubd.edu.bn

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challenges. However, it should be noted that the multicultural character of these societies preceded independence and their formation as nation-states.

One of these, Singapore was and is quintessentially a multicultural society. Founded as a free port in 1819 by Raffles for the purpose of establishing a staging post for the burgeoning British trade between India and Canton and to break the Dutch monopoly of and influence over the Indonesian archipelago, it almost immediately attracted sojourners and settlers from South Asia, the Malay and Indonesian archipelago, and South China, and a lesser number of Arabs, Europeans and Eurasians in the mercantile and administrative community. Soon, British colonial administrators found themselves planning and administering the port city on the basis of ethnic enclaves assigned to the Chinese, Indians, Malays and Europeans. Indeed the physical layout of the town centre was planned by a committee appointed by Raffles in 1822; specific quarters were to be allocated to immigrant groups on the basis of races and their perceived occupations (Hodder 1953, p. 27). Europeans resided adjacent to the government centre, the Arabs and Bugis sharing trading and religious interests were placed close to Malay royalty further away, and the majority Chinese and Indians were concentrated in the centre of mercantile activity south of the Singapore River. The local Malays who lived outside of the town limits along the coast and upriver, depending on fishing and cultivation, were largely left alone. By the late eighteenth century more than 80 % of the population lived within municipal boundaries; 74 % were Chinese from various dialect groups, 14 % of Malay or Javanese origin, 8 % Indians, and the rest mainly Eurasians and Europeans (Yeoh 1996, p. 38). The ethnic composition of the population has remarkably been largely unchanged for the past century.

The responsibilities of the colonial government did not extend beyond maintaining law and order and maintaining basic infrastructure to ensure that Singapore operated as a free port and commercial centre. Between the 1850s and 1950s, the major ethnic groups were left to their own devices to mobilize resources and develop their own community organization to look after the welfare and religious needs of its members—including building temples and mosques, hospitals and setting up vernacular schools. The owners of wealthy ethnic businesses played a critical role in funding and sponsoring these activities. On the initiative of their leaders, these groups established self-reliant communities with significant levels of institutional completeness. The colonial authorities were content to leave these leaders alone to sort out the affairs of their respective communities; occasionally consulting them and appointing the more prominent representatives to the legislative council. The Chinese, Malays, Indians and the open-ended Others were subsequently recognized by the PAP government as the 'founding' races of post-colonial multicultural Singapore.

Political Origins of Multiculturalism

The historical and political origins of multiculturalism in Singapore may be traced to the British proposal for a Malayan Union in 1945–46, in preparation for the colonial disengagement from the peninsula in a manner that would not jeopardize

British capital interests after independence. The proposal sought to establish a unitary state and rationalize administration in Malaya, and introduce an inclusive citizenship for all its settlers including the Chinese and Indians. The British rightly anticipated that Singapore's inclusion in the Union would be unacceptable to the Malays because of its Chinese majority, but did not rule out the admission of the island at a later date. Despite the concession, widespread and vociferous Malay objections, arising from the fear that they may lose political power, persuaded the British to abandon the plan. Its replacement in 1948, the Federation of Malaya Agreement, bestowed citizenship to Malays as entitlement and privileged their political and economic status as indigenes. Non-Malays were given limited citizenship status, subject to them fulfilling residential and language requirements. The next 9 years was a period of protracted negotiations between Malay representatives who sought to entrench their political position and their Chinese and Indian counterparts seeking concessions, until the British were satisfied that a viable coalition of ethnic-based political parties was ready to share power in a government of independence in 1957.

The significance of the events leading to independence in the Federation was not lost on political parties in Singapore in the 1950s, led mainly by middle-class English-educated professionals and intellectuals. Indeed the Malayan Union proposal precipitated the formation of the first local political party on the island, the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) in 1945, which advocated multilingualism and the creation of integrated schools offering several language streams (Turnbull 1996, p. 225). Political leaders and supporters of Chinese education grew increasingly anxious over developments across the causeway throughout the 1950s, namely the Malay political elite, riding on the tide of ethnonationalism, had seized the initiative in evolving a pro-Malay constitution for the Federation. In 1950, the Barnes Report, in the interest of forging a common community in the impending Federation, recommended the use of only Malay or English in schools. In response to the consternation of the Chinese community that the recommendation would spell the death of Chinese language and culture, the government commissioned the Fenn-Wu Report in 1951. The authors took the view that the educational system of co-existing English and vernacular languages preceded the concept of a 'Malayan' nation, believing that a Malayan community could not be created by fiat as implied in the Barnes Report (Hill and Lian 1995, pp. 73–74). They accordingly counter-proposed that English and vernacular education be given equal treatment. Subsequently the Barnes recommendation was adopted by the government as the basis of education, but with the concession that vernacular languages be taught where there were sufficient demand.

The political developments of the Federation and Singapore have been largely determined by the contrasting demographic make-up of the two territories. Both the Malays and Chinese constituted significant communities in the peninsula and posed a real risk of racial conflict. The 1947 Census classified nearly 50 % of the population as Malays, over 38 % as Chinese, and the rest as Indians and Pakistanis. In order to achieve an orderly transfer of power, the British nurtured communal political parties to effect a consociational government, and in the process racialized political development through patronage—a practice UMNO, the

dominant party in the Alliance government, inherited from Malay feudal society. In contrast Singapore was overwhelmingly Chinese, they constituted about 70 % and the Malays 15 % of the population. As a Crown Colony under British tutelage, the English-speaking population was favoured. Fledging political parties such as the Progress Party, the Labour Front and the PAP, led by Anglicized lawyers and trade unionists, had the tacit support of the British. However, a significant section of the urban population, Chinese-educated wage workers, students and unemployed, was deprived of political representation. The Communist Party of Malaya, who would have been in the best position to mobilize them, had been banned in 1949. By proxy the Chinese-speaking urban population was represented by leftwing anticolonial union and student leaders and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (CCC).

What is also remarkable is that none of the political parties active in Singapore at that time advocated racial politics. The first political party formed in Singapore, the MDU, was led by English-educated middle class intellectuals fighting for a united and independent Malaya. Included in its manifesto was the removal of the colour bar in the civil service (Yeo 1973, p. 90). Other political parties that emerged subsequently, also led by the English-educated middle class, espoused a Malayan identity multicultural in orientation and included the official recognition of the vernacular schools (Chinese, Malay and Tamil). Indeed, many of the leftwing leaders active in the union movement in the early 1950s viewed the struggle for workers' rights as a political one. They believed that the only way that the unions could improve the position of workers was through political independence; hence, the leaders regarded their movement as both anti-colonial and anti-racist. Many of these activists later played a significant role in the PAP, sharing with the moderate faction an anti-racist and multicultural outlook.

Political developments in the Malayan peninsula in the 1950s undoubtedly contributed to racial polarization and to the anxiety of the Chinese in Singapore—both Chinese and English-speaking—over their political and economic aspirations. On the one hand the CCC, representing Chinese business interests, strongly advocated a multilingual legislature. The young Chinese population who could only access an education in Chinese schools sponsored by clan associations, guilds and philanthropists in colonial Singapore grew restive over their impression that the Chinese language would be relegated after independence. The effectiveness of the leftwing leaders in mobilizing students from the Chinese middle schools by linking the anticolonial struggle with the language issue and organizing a student strike in 1955 precipitated the convening of the All Party Committee by the Labour Front-Alliance government to address the problem of education (Yeo 1973, pp. 166–69). The Report of the Committee in the following year formally recognized that Singapore was a multiracial society and recommended that equal treatment be given to the four streams of education in practice—Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil. The Report reaffirmed the Fenn-Wu recommendations, and established and institutionalized multiculturalism as the guiding principle of governance and the management of ethnic relations in Singapore until today.

Multiculturalism as Public and Private Discourse

In contrast to the preoccupation of Western scholars with debates over the challenges multiculturalism poses to the practice of liberal democracy, those who have reflected on post-colonial Asian societies have been more concerned with how multiculturalism is interpreted and used for the purpose of management and government; much less attention is paid to the equally important issue of how people live in essentially multicultural settings and their resistance or accommodation to state management. Hence, it is analytically useful to make the distinction between multiculturalism as a tool for governance, at the level of official and public discourse; and multiculturalism as everyday life, at the level of private discourse.

The sociology of multiculturalism in Singapore began with the seminal piece by the anthropologist Geoffrey Benjamin in 1976 on "The Cultural Logic of Singapore's 'Multiculturalism'," followed by a 20-year hiatus until the appearance of the contributions of Brown in 1994 and Hill and Lian in 1995. Since then two contributions have been made by Chua (2003) and Goh (2008).

Multiculturalism, Benjamin (1976, p. 116) baldly asserts, is the clearest expression and cognition of a functioning Singaporean culture. The culture that has evolved, he contends, is not a synthetic or hybrid creation but a mosaic consisting of separate Chinese, Malay, Indian and European cultural traditions. In everyday interactions, Singaporeans deal with each other on the basis of whether he or she is a Chinese, an Indian, or a Malay and secondarily in relation to class, occupation or educational attainment. This ethnoracialization is reinforced in the state bureaucracy, the first point of contact for all Singaporeans in many significant areas of their lives—from education and the recognition of 'mother tongues,' housing, health, census and registration for official purposes to food courts, religious worship and community/national celebrations—through the constant reiteration of the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Eurasian categorization. One of the other interesting features of multiculturalism in Singapore is that it is used interchangeably and unconsciously with multiracialism. In official discourse, in the early years of nation-building in Singapore the PAP government regarded the relationship between society, culture, race, ethnicity and the individual as unequivocally interchangeable (Benjamin 1976, p. 118).

Because ethnoracialization is well institutionalized at the official level and effectively internalized at the private level, to be a functioning Singaporean the individual must be able to claim membership of one of the four major 'races'. The consequence is that multiracialism in Singapore puts pressure on the Chinese to become more Chinese, Malays to be more Malay and Indians to be more Indian (Benjamin 1976, p. 124). Any signs of the emergence of a hybrid culture and identity could be interpreted as a threat to the mosaic model of multiracialism (Benjamin 1976, p. 127).

Contrary to the view put forth earlier by Joppke and Lukes that official multiculturalism in post-colonial societies is promoted as a national myth by default, it is a functioning political culture in Singapore, 'Everyday social behaviour

as observed ethnographically is best understood as emerging from a situation in which cultural factors emanating from the national system as a whole weigh just as heavily as factors pushing up from the lowest domestic levels (Benjamin 1976, p. 116).' There is a particular congruence between the public/official articulation of multiculturalism and its private/everyday expression; the consequence is that the dissonance between the two is minimal.

Benjamin treats multiculturalism as discourse. It is cleverly articulated officially or publicly by the PAP government in a way that strikes a chord with the ethnic communities in Singapore. However, he fails to explain why this is the case; this requires us to trace the practice of multiculturalism to the particular historical and political conditions that gave rise to its institutionalization, as I have discussed earlier. While he has explicated multiculturalism as state and public discourse it is also *realpolitik* in Singapore.

Multiculturalism and *Realpolitik*

In expounding this view, Brown (1994, pp. 70–71) introduced the concept of the corporatist state. Such a state is perceived as independent of society, committed to maintaining stability, unity and development through efficient management. It is not subject to challenge from either popular or particularistic demands. In the absence of a natural collective cohesion, the corporatist state co-opts and secures the support of various groups. Its dominance and autonomy are legitimated by representing the nation as a consensual and organic community. For Brown, the politics of the corporatist state in Singapore are circumscribed within three premises. First, the state demands and expects of its citizens to be loyal to the nation-state. In return the government assumes the role of moral guardian and competent manager of the community. Second, the cultural identity of the nation is based on the ethnic mosaic model, cultural pluralism. Third, for purposes of national unity and development the interests of all socio-economic groups, including ethnic communities, are mobilized through monopolistic and ideological channels created by the state.

By virtue of being a one-party state since gaining full independence in 1965, the politics of race are managed and legitimated in several ways. Ethnic candidates are selected for election as MPs, who are then designated as representatives of the Malay-speaking, Tamil-speaking and Chinese-speaking communities. Since 1988 the representation of ethnic minorities has been institutionalized through Group Representative Constituency (GRC), a system which regroups several constituencies into one larger one represented by several MPs—including a minority member. Ethnic-based self-help associations were instituted to address the problem of underachieving Malay, Indian and Chinese students and dropouts in schools in the 1980s and early 1990s. The management of minority religious affairs is now overseen by the state-appointed Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) and Hindu Advisory Board (HAB), both playing a significant intermediary role between the state and the religious minorities. The members of the HAB are drawn from local

Hindu professionals in the civil service and private sector. It acts as a link between the local Hindu community and the government with a view towards guiding Hindu religious practices in ways that are appropriate to a multiethnic and progressive society (Sinha 2006, pp. 159–62).

The politics of the corporatist state is no less the *realpolitik* of multiculturalism. Its consequences are no less than that of a racial state. Racial states, Goldberg (2002, p. 242) argues, engage in a range of institutional, definitive and disciplinary practices that racialize their populations. They regulate social, political, economic, legal and cultural relations between those racially defined.

The political significance of adopting multiracialism as a strategy of governance and management of ethnic relations by the ruling PAP is highlighted by Hill and Lian (1995, p. 93). For much of the 1950s and early 1960s when the PAP was caught up in a bitter struggle for power between a left wing faction and a moderate faction both appealing for support from a largely Chinese-speaking electorate, the moderates led by English-speaking leaders like Lee Kuan Yew resisted the temptation to be populist. This was partly because the moderate leaders were strongly committed to multiculturalism—which will be elaborated later—and partly because they did not think the British would willingly hand power to a government that promoted radical policies. Furthermore, the moderate leaders believed that Singapore should merge with an expanded Federation with Malaya in the future. In these political circumstances, it was necessary to appease and contain the Chinese-speaking and Chinese-educated population. Although its full significance was not appreciated at that time, multiculturalism gave the moderate PAP leaders the formula to assure the Chinese that their language would not be relegated but at the same time blunt any appeals towards Chinese chauvinism by incorporating the former into the nation-building project.

Ironically the corporatist politics of multiculturalism in the 1980s, Hill and Lian (1995, p. 107) suggest, facilitated the ethnoracialization of Singaporeans and led to the revitalization of ethnicity. I earlier referred to how the state incorporated the Chinese, Malays and Indians as the 'founding races' of multiracial Singapore by creating 'legitimate' channels of ethnic group participation. In official discourse a fourth category of 'Others' was articulated to refer generally to other races such as the Eurasians who constituted less than one per cent of the total population. However, because of their privileged status in colonial society they could claim significant contributions to Singapore society, particular in public service. Uncertain of their future in the decolonization period of the 1950s, many migrated to white Commonwealth countries (Pereira 2006, pp. 16–24). Those who remained felt that they were being marginalized by a PAP government that appeared to encourage cultural mobilization and gave political recognition exclusively to Asians. By the 1990s the Eurasians who grew up in post-colonial Singapore felt they could no longer remain an invisible group. As membership of the Eurasian Association grew, they called on the government to recognize them as a racial category and asked for official representation on par with the founding races. In representing themselves as an ethnic community, they rediscovered their culture by returning to their Portuguese origins in Malacca and laying claim to traditional practices in language, food and dance.

While the practice of multiculturalism may precipitate ethnic revitalization, the unintended consequence is social fragmentation within groups. Officially, the state recognizes four ethnoracial groups in Singapore. Currently only the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians are deserving of full representation. Implicit in this recognition is that these communities possess a high level of institutional completeness. However, such a broad categorization disguises the diversity of these groups and understates the complexity of relations between sub-communities, as Sona's contribution on the Tamil Muslims in this book illustrates.

The public incorporation of leaders from minority communities in the practice of multiculturalism raises several relevant issues (Vertovec 1996, p. 60). By co-opting ethnic leaders and incorporating ethnic associations into state-sponsored organizations, the former are made to share responsibility for the administration of state policies. Such a policy may function to reproduce the status quo. However, Vertovec proposes, 'It should be possible to create frameworks allowing for the maintenance of complex, multiple (regional, linguistic, religious … and other) identities, along with a renewed place for group representatives and organizations within and in relation to the public domain'. Within a more innovative participatory framework, regional and linguistic complexities among specific ethnic groups can be maintained and bridged. On the one hand a degree of self-determination and autonomy for the group will be realized; on the other the state achieves its objective of collective political mobilization. This appears to be an unlikely possibility given the long tradition of authoritarian rule in a one-party state in Singapore, inherited from colonial practice and maintained by a firm conviction that ethnically plural society is best managed by authoritarian governance.

Recent Contributions

The starting point of any discussion of multiculturalism in Singapore must begin with Benjamin, treating multiculturalism at the level of public discourse, and Brown, who explicates how a one-party state has cleverly depoliticized potential racial and ethnic conflict by deploying a corporatist strategy. Both are important contributions to the conceptualization and practice of multiculturalism, but not always given its due recognition. I now turn to two recent attempts in addressing multiculturalism.

Drawing on the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Chua (1995, p. 128) argues how the ruling PAP has been able to promote its ideas and values to significant sections of the public to the point that it enjoyed mass support. In the early years of the late 1950s and early 1960s when it was consolidating its political position, it engaged in anti-colonial mobilization while at the same time articulating a non-Communist national identity; and later on becoming an independent government, it steered attention away from the political struggles of the past to economic development which would benefit all Singaporeans (Chua 1995, pp. 15–16). An integral part of the nation-building project was its commitment and promotion

of multiculturalism as a common good. The political hegemony wielded by the PAP government together with its readiness to resort to coercive measures has enabled it to foreclose public discussion of potentially divisive issues such as race to pre-empt possible disruption of public order (Chua 2003, pp. 74–75). Multiculturalism, the real or symbolic recognition of and respect for cultural differences and rights, is presented as critical to social and political stability. Any attempt to publicly racialize contentious issues—such as racial discrimination or inequality, religion or language—is quickly suppressed and even criminalized in order to maintain 'racial harmony'. In this way multiculturalism is seen as disciplinary. The origins of Chua's contribution may be traced to the politics of the corporatist state adumbrated by Brown.

A recent contribution locates the discussion of multiculturalism in Singapore in the context of widespread interest in issues of multiculturalism and citizenship in Western societies in the 1990s and postcoloniality. Goh (2008, pp. 243–470), following Chua, argues that post-colonial societies were largely formal democracies and the post-colonial state resorted not only to authoritarian measures but devoted its efforts towards establishing hegemony on the ground. Post-colonial multiculturalism, unlike Western liberal multiculturalism, was directed towards manufacturing consent in the nation-building project. This consisted of a simultaneous three-part process. First, in contrast to liberal multiculturalism in Western societies where cultural identities—private or public and broadly defined—are given due recognition, only the ethnic identities and interests of significant communities identified by the state were officially accepted. Over time such identities were scripted by the state, with the consequence that post-colonial multiculturalism came to be bureaucratic, authoritarian and essentialized. Secondly, multiculturalism conceived in this way fitted nicely into the communitarian practices of the state. In providing political legitimacy to ethnic groups or communities, the interests of individuals were largely subsumed. By incorporating plural society into a communitarian order, the state works itself into the position of final arbiter. In Brown's words, the government assumes the role of moral guardian and competent manager of the community. The displacement of an ethnic identity by a nationalist one constitutes the cost of citizenship as Chua (2003, p. 66) describes it. The cost of membership does not only mean that Chinese, Malays and Indians surrender those parts of their cultural identities not officially scripted. The cost is also borne by individuals who opt out of ethnic membership and by groups located in the interstices of the recognized CMIO script, such as the Tamil Muslims and Ceylonese Tamils. Thirdly, the nation-building project and the practice of multiculturalism are conceived, articulated and implemented by a nationalist elite that is both transcultural and multicultural.

Hence Goh juxtaposes state multiculturalism and liberal multiculturalism as contrasting practices of ex-colonial and metropolitan societies respectively. The contributors of the latest volume on multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore (Goh and Holden 2009: 4) seek to explore areas that the two perspectives have foreclosed. In particular, drawing from cultural studies and postcoloniality, they examine how civil groups, citizens and residents negotiate the colonial legacies of

racialization—asserting and representing their 'vernacular' positions around the narrative of the post-colonial nation project. In the past 20 years the political elite in Singapore has reinterpreted multiculturalism—traditionally conceived in essentialized terms as the contributions of the founding 'races' to that of a cosmopolitan multiculturalism that values not only old migrants but also new migrant talent—in their drive to transform the city-state into a global metropole (Goh 2011). The trend towards a hybridizing multiculturalism, Goh and Holden (2009: 10) suggest, may be seen as a form of neoliberal multiculturalism linked to the logic of developmental state participation in neoliberal capitalism. The emphasis in these recent contributions is on the 'performative' and representational elements of cultural differences. The problem with framing multiculturalism within cultural and post-colonial studies (Santos 2007: xxiv) is that it:

> tends to be dealt with through a focus on mobility and migration, with an emphasis on intellectuals, while ignoring forced or subordinate mobility…or those who have not moved but have been subjected to the effects and consequences of translocal cultural, economic, and political dynamics. The focus is evident in the post-colonial theories of hybridization…and in the emphasis placed on the use of literature and other 'expressive' cultural forms that can be studied drawing on Eurocentric academic disciplines. The privilege awarded the "migrant condition" denies the specific histories of migrations…

Although such a critique may appear to be overly harsh it is a timely caution that the 'culturalist' turn in examining meanings, representations and identities as the basis of social behavior should not be taken to its extreme. On the other hand, there is much to gain from investigating the form and content of cultural performances and representations as they reveal the significance of power relations embedded within the politics of identity (Hill and Wilson 2003: 5).

Multiculturalism: Inclusion or Recognition?

I have so far not addressed what multiculturalism means in concept and in practice. Referring to Western Europe and North America where large scale migration driven by labour shortage occurred after 1945, Rex (1995: 245) posed the problem faced by multicultural society: to what extent immigrant minorities should have citizenship rights and whether they should give up their own culture in exchange. This involves having to deal with two related but separate problems, namely the question of political, social and economic equality and the accommodation of cultural difference (ibid. 247); challenges faced by any government concerned with nation-building in such societies. How far governments are willing to go to tackle both problems depends on how serious they regard ethnic differences will pose to the challenge of nation-building. How governments respond to these issues will determine the form in which the practice of multiculturalism will take. Rex's preference is for what he calls 'egalitarian multiculturalism', which is based on the understanding taken from the British home secretary in 1968 that integration is not a flattening process of uniformity (assimilation) but equal opportunity

accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance (ibid. 248–9). Multiculturalism, Rex asserts, involves the recognition of two separate domains: a public one that strives for political and economic equality and a private one where language, religion, customs and family practices operate.

This rather neat separation of a domain in which migrant minorities accept and participate in the public institutions of the host society—where they will be treated equally—and one that confines their cultural practices to the private will presumably prevent potential problems and tensions arising from living in a multicultural society. This dichotomization of multicultural society, Wieviorka (1998: 887) points out, raises an important issue of logic: one that tends towards examining multiculturalism as a social and economic question as opposed to treating it as a cultural problem. In his view the two cannot be treated separately in practice—as Rex has done. For Modood (2008: 17):

> multiculturalism is not about separate communities, peaceful co-existence or mere toleration. It is about civic engagement which unpicks the negative treatment of 'difference' – stereotypes, racism, Islamophobia and so on – and the reform of institutions and public culture so minority identities are not ignored or confined to a private sphere but woven into a multicultural Britishness.

In reference to my earlier discussion of conceptual contributions to understanding multiculturalism in Singapore, Benjamin's treatment of multiculturalism as public discourse is obviously culturalist. On the other hand Brown regards multiculturalism as integral to the strategy of the corporatist state, a social and economic problematic.

Practice of State Multiculturalism: A Comparative View

To reiterate there are two critical issues relevant to examining multiculturalism, whether analytically or practically. In those societies that regard themselves as multicultural, the efficacy of multiculturalism in managing differences can be evaluated by how well they are able to promote equal opportunity and/or advance cultural recognition. Most Western societies acknowledge that they are multicultural societies but multiculturalism, as conceived by governments, take different forms and are contingent on historical and political developments. Official multiculturalism in various societies may be viewed as a continuum, from the recognition of cultural pluralism to the protection of minority rights as the polar extremes.

Pearsons' (2001: 129–153) comparative discussion of the U.S., Britain, Australia and Canada is particularly relevant to how multiculturalism has evolved differently in these societies. For the sake of brevity I have omitted the details. Black slavery in the early origins of the American colonies laid the foundation for the practice of racism and racial discrimination for much of the history of the U.S. The rise of black politics in the 1960s, in particular the civil rights movement, together with the growing influence of American liberalism eventually resulted in the introduction of legislation and programmes for affirmative action to promote

the individual and collective rights of African Americans. This set the tone for how other racial minorities were subsequently treated, including Asian and Hispanic Americans.

Relative to the U.S., ethnic diversity in Britain is a recent development which began with the arrival of racially and ethnically distinct migrant workers from the Commonwealth countries—the West Indies, India, Pakistan and former British colonies in Africa—in the 1950s and 1960s. As the coloured population increased and concentrated in the depressed parts of several major cities, where there were high unemployment rates, urban unrest and riots occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. The British government's response to managing racial and cultural diversity (the so-called 'race problem') was not to view it as an issue of equal opportunity and rights but one of maintaining public order. It introduced immigrant controls that were considered to be the most restrictive in Western Europe then. It changed its position after the Brixton riots in 1981 by allowing the establishment of independent schools in recognition of the different cultures and curricula required for its multiethnic population, and the employment of more Asian and black teachers. This marked the official shift to multiculturalism in Britain.

By the 1980s Canada and Australia, both migrant-receiving societies, committed themselves to a stronger version of multiculturalism relative to the U.S. and Britain. Both adopted an inclusionary ideology and integrative framework to facilitate the entry of migrants. Once accepted into the countries, the governments recognized immigrants as a disadvantaged group and introduced policies and made resources available to create opportunities for their eventual integration and acceptance as full citizens. In summary, Pearson concludes, the U.S. adopted legally-sanctioned affirmative action policies but was content to let a multicultural society evolve without state intervention. In the absence of strong racial and ethnic political lobbies in Britain, less stress was put on positive discrimination. 'British multiculturalism', he comments, 'was more an incremental, pragmatic state strategy of containment—of immigrant flows and the actions of racist and anti-racist extremists'. On one extreme the U.S. is committed to the protection of its racial minorities, and on the other extreme the British government is willing to concede some recognition to cultural diversity. Canadian and Australian multiculturalism is in between and significantly incorporates elements of both: the rights of migrants as citizens are to be protected and their cultural origins respected and encouraged. Multiculturalism in Canada and Australia approximates the Singapore model.

What do these two countries share in common? Their governments recognized the critical role of migrant communities in developing their societies and the importance of incorporating ethnic differences in the nation-building project in the post-War era. The Canadian and Australian governments initially believed that British later European migration would serve their needs but by the 1970s, they realized that the traditional sources had a limited supply of immigrants. They turned to the Asian countries whose populations were so phenotypically and culturally distinct from European settlers and migrants that it was no longer possible to avoid the issue of ethnic diversity and its place in public institutions. While Canada and Australia are latecomers to the cause of multiculturalism, Singapore

owes its origin to its colonial establishment as a regional centre of trade linking the Malay peninsular and the Indonesian archipelago with China, India and Europe—migrants were the singular source of its labour and entrepreneurship. It was fundamentally a migrant society right from its beginning, thriving on cosmopolitanism and ethnic diversity. Its political foundation was laid after the War, precipitated by the Malayan Union proposal in 1946 and the British commitment to gradually evolve independence to the island. The MDU, the Progressive Party, the Democratic Party, the Labour Front, and the PAP—the only significant political parties to emerge in the lead up to independence—were all led by moderate English-educated professionals or trade unionists espousing non-racial politics. In part they were responding to a white-dominated colonial administration that had ruled Singapore for well over a hundred years; and even more importantly representing a non-Malay population on the island, they viewed with great anxiety the rise of UMNO across the causeway and its advocacy of Malay political supremacy. In the historic All Party Committee on Education convened in 1955, the parties formally recognized the principle of multicultural education by according equal treatment to all the four streams of education, laying the institutional foundation of multiculturalism in Singapore.

While Canada and Australia practice a multiculturalism that recognizes cultural pluralism and the rights of migrant communities towards the full realization of citizenship, neither have gone as far as Singapore in institutionalizing these rights. As I have referred to earlier, the PAP government assiduously pursues the practice of multiculturalism in much of the lives of Singaporeans, to the extent of being doctrinaire. This includes bilingual education, electoral representation, management of religious matters, race-based self-help/welfare associations targeted at disadvantaged members, and ethnic quotas in public housing and food centres. In reality, it is not always possible to implement multiculturalism consistently for practical or political reasons. Mother tongue education is not always available to students of all ethnic groups in the same school because of varying demands. Malays eligible for national service are usually assigned to the non-sensitive civil defence or police rather than the army or air force. Grillo (2007: 987) makes the useful distinction between weak multiculturalism and strong multiculturalism. The weak version refers to a situation where cultural difference is recognized in the private sphere, with acculturation in many areas of life and assimilation to the local population in employment, housing, education, health and welfare. Multiculturalism is strong when there is institutional recognition of cultural difference in the public sphere, with special provision in language, education, health care, welfare, etc., and the organization of representation on ethnic lines. A weak multiculturalism, he states, is practiced across Europe. Multiculturalism in Singapore in my view is distinguished by its strong version, well ahead of Canada and Australia.

Furthermore, multiculturalism in Western Europe is generally viewed as a cultural problematic. For example, the problems of South Asian migrants in Britain were explained in terms of cultural rather than racial difference (Rex 1995: 248). In North America, Australia and Singapore multiculturalism was framed in terms

of political and economic opportunity simply because the foundation of these societies was laid by migrant communities in search of a better life. Societies of migrant origins were more committed to the idea of a level playing field. In my discussion earlier I highlighted that the origins of multiculturalism Singapore can be traced to anti-colonial political activities which focused on demands for equal opportunity in response to colonial privilege. In contrast, the Europeans considered themselves as hosts tolerating or accepting migrants who have chosen to live in Europe, and were therefore less inclined to place political and economic equality high in their priorities.

The practice of official multiculturalism in Singapore has an interesting twist in the connection made between economic parity and the cultural problematic. The economic and educational underachievement of the Malays, the most significant 'indigenous' ethnic minority, has been explained through a long held stereotypical perception that their laziness and complacency, relative to the Chinese and Indians, may be attributed to shortcomings in their culture. The ideology of cultural deficiency has colonial origins when British administrators believed that Malays were not suited to commercial agriculture and activities in contrast to the industriousness of the Chinese migrant population. This view, Rahim argues (2001: 53–61) has been sustained and embedded in post-colonial Singapore, in the minds of a Chinese-dominated PAP government and Malay MPs even till today; and has had an important influence on the practice of official multiculturalism and its policies towards the Malays. By ignoring the historical, structural and institutional circumstances that have contributed to Malay underperformance and marginality and perpetuating the cultural deficit thesis, the government has been able to justify a minimalist approach in providing assistance to ethnic minorities. The clearest illustration of this is in its steadfast refusal to commit to any affirmative action programme since independence. A culturalist explanation, she maintains, has served to legitimize a regime committed to a capitalist-driven and competitive economy and meritocratic society. Hence the practice of multiculturalism is underpinned by the PAP ideology of meritocracy. For Rahim as it is for the government, multiculturalism for the Malays is fundamentally about economic parity. Unlike the government she believes that attributing Malay marginality to cultural deficiency is a fallacy, hence the issue is not about cultural recognition. In contrast Lai (1995: 178–187), in her study of ethnic relations in Singapore, sees multiculturalism as central to the nation-building project: the recognition of the sacrosanct charter races Chinese, Malay, Indian and the all encompassing Others (CMIO) as the cultural foundation of the nation.

Singapore has been a one-party state since independence and the absence of a strong civil society and political opposition have resulted in very little debate about what form multiculturalism should take, in contrast to Canada and Australia. Multiculturalism is largely state-sponsored and operates as a top-down process. For example, the Eurasians have been a dormant community since large numbers migrated in the 1960s to European Commonwealth countries, at a time when the colonial government handed power to the PAP. Their significance as an ethnic community disappeared into the 'Others' category as they were not officially

acknowledged as one of the 'founding' races of Singapore. In the 1990s a generation of Eurasians who chose to remain felt that they were being marginalized and decided to take a visible profile by participating in public life (Pereira 2006: 20–23). In response, the government appointed a representative for the Eurasians in cabinet, co-opted the Eurasian Association as one of the self-help ethnic group to look after the welfare of the community, and recognized Eurasian culture and heritage as a constituent of Singapore's multiculturalism.

Liberal Versus Communitarian View

Since multiculturalism has appeared as a real alternative for governments to manage culturally diverse societies 20 years ago, it has been in the centre of a debate between two diametrically opposed positions in normative political theorizing, the liberal which privilege the autonomy of the individual and the communitarian promotion of group rights. Chua (2005), espousing the communitarian view, argues that in Asian societies such as Singapore, it is possible to make the case for privileging the group or community instead. The communitarian model of multiculturalism assumes that the individual is simultaneously a member of a larger social unit, to which he or she has obligations and responsibilities towards—whether this is the family, the religious or ethnic group ascribed by birth, or even a neighbourhood community. In Singapore ethnoracial groups have evolved in the colonial period as immigrant associations that have had a significant influence on people's lives, and it is through them that the colonial administration had been able to exercise indirect rule. This practice has been taken to a higher level by the post-colonial government after 1965 by exercising direct influence through a corporatist strategy that recognizes ethnoraces as units of governance for the purpose of policy-formation and the delivery of public goods. The state assumes that group affiliation is the basis of society but acknowledges that such affiliations are multiple and layered. In the state's view the affiliations that matter are the family, ethnic or religious group, the neighbourhood community and the nation. This hierarchy of communities, as Chua describes it, underpins communitarianism as conceived by him. Accordingly, multiculturalism is not incompatible with the communitarian polity. The challenge for the communitarian state, in contrast to the liberal state is not in mediating between the rights of individuals and the claims of collectives but in reconciling the conflicting demands multiple membership within the hierarchy of communities may impose on the individual.

The liberal view need not necessarily be presented in stark confrontation with and hostile to those promoting communitarianism. Ten (2004) argues that the liberal society is not incompatible with the practice of multiculturalism. Critical to the functioning of a liberal society is the presence of a political community with a shared political morality that everyone, including immigrant groups, must accept (ibid: 1–4). In his view such a morality must include a conception of justice that provides guidelines to how social resources are to be fairly distributed. It goes

almost without saying that the state is responsible for delivering justice to its citizenry. Second, a unitary political culture is also needed. Such a culture provides the framework for individuals and groups to flourish and includes acceptance of procedures in which decisions are arrived at. Migrants are subject to such a political assimilation but no more. In a liberal society the state respects its citizens by giving them a fair share of resources and the freedom to pursue without hindrance what projects they value so long as they do not violate the similar rights and freedom of others (ibid: 17–18).

What constitutes justice in a society depends on its political origins and socioeconomic conditions. In Singapore as in Malaysia, the indigenous Malay community is accorded special treatment to improve its economic position while the rights of migrant communities are guaranteed in the constitution in a 'social contract' agreed upon by representatives of the ethnic communities, in an independence settlement negotiated by the British in 1957. Over the years consociational governments have evolved—more explicitly in Malaysia than in Singapore—that includes power-sharing by the charter ethnic communities and the acknowledgement that resources should be distributed proportionate to the ethnic composition of the population. While consociation underlies the practice of multiculturalism in Malaysia, this is less apparent in Singapore. The maturation of a shared political culture and morality, which respects and accommodates differences, is a distant reality in the two societies. Recent political development in Malaysia following the loss of significant political influence by the coalition government which has monopolized power since independence has precipitated debates over what constitutes the social contract. This will have significant ramifications for the evolvement of a shared political culture and morality in the country.

Multiculturalism, Globalization and Migration

So far I have examined multiculturalism in Singapore as a post-colonial development. While the colonial government was content to maintain a plural society and readily resorted to coercive rule to manage interethnic conflict, the post-colonial state incorporated multiculturalism in its nation-building project without relinquishing authoritarianism. Both governments relied on racialization, the former to divide and the latter to integrate. Little if any attention has been paid to the impact of globalization on multiculturalism in Singapore. Its relevance is not in question. The economic origins of the island has forced it early on to come to terms with the free flow of labour and capital; globalization since the 1980s was a natural progression. What are its ramifications for the future of multiculturalism?

Since independence Singapore has consistently maintained a liberal immigration policy. Its rationale is quite apparent and has been articulated by the government since the 1970s. In the absence of land and natural resources, it has put a premium on developing human capital. Defying the odds it maintained a high rate of economic growth throughout the 1970s. The availability of workers with basic

education and training from nearby Malaysia were able to meet the demands of an expanding economy. At the same time because of its past ties with Malaysia and cultural compatibility, Malaysians were readily accepted as citizens. By the 1980s it achieved the status of one of the admired dragon economies of East Asia, and became a migrant-receiving country. The supply of labour from across the causeway could no longer meet its needs and alternative sources were sought, as a consequence of several developments. One was that the total fertility rate of Singaporeans had fallen below the level of population replacement by the late 1970s. The other was that the government was no longer content to restrict its economic role to the region, committing itself to competing in the international economy by working towards fulfilling the status of a global city in the 1990s.

New migration patterns evolved. While migrants from the traditional sources of China and India continued to arrive, other alternatives have been tapped to meet changing needs. Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Myanmar are significant sources of construction workers; domestic workers come from the Philippines and Indonesia. However, the government's class-biased migration policy treats such workers as guest workers on limited but renewable permits. The policy discriminates against unskilled and semi-skilled workers on low income and favours the middle to high income professionals and occupations that require specialized and technical expertise. The latter are viewed as long-term residents, have easier access to permanent residence status, and eventually integrated as citizens. They come from a wide spectrum of English-speaking Commonwealth countries, both European and Asian.

The demographic composition of the population has come a long way from what it was like 40 years ago. In 2013 the total population stood at 5.4 million, out of which more than 3 million were citizens and over 2 million were permanent residents and foreigners (Ministry of Manpower 2013). The total migrant population is more than half of Singapore's total number of citizens. No official data on the ethnic origins of the foreign population are available. However, there is no doubt that the ethnic diversity of the population has significantly altered. What are the ramifications of this for the practice of multiculturalism, which only acknowledges three founding races and an open but selective category of Others, in Singapore?

Unlike Canada, Australia and New Zealand, there is no commitment by the Singapore government that all migrant workers employed here will be integrated in society. Its migration policies are fundamentally driven by economic imperatives, and so finely tuned that it is able to meet the needs of the economy at all levels: from unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled workers to those with professional, specialized, and entrepreneurial expertise. It practices a policy of differential exclusion (Castles 1995, pp. 486–487). Immigrants are accepted in the labour market but excluded from welfare entitlements, citizenship and political participation. They are treated as temporary workers by denying them the rights of residence and family reunion. However, not all foreign workers are equally discriminated. A social distinction is made between foreign workers who hold work permits and foreign 'professionals' who are entitled to employment passes (Rahman 2008,

pp. 152–158). The minimum requirement for the latter are higher educational qualifications and a salary of at least S$1800. Foreigners who hold employment passes are entitled to significant benefits such as family reunion, access to education, and are encouraged to become permanent residents and eventually citizens. Singapore discriminates against workers with lower skills and income by regarding them as transient and privileges those who are middle class and upwardly mobile. Hence the strong foreign presence does not pose a threat to Singapore's existing multiculturalism partly because the state has effective control over its numbers through its class-biased policy, and partly because it is able to maintain the CMIO demographic balance through continuing migration from a resurgent China and South Asia. Indeed a senior Cabinet Minister confidently stated, 'You need 65 % of the population to be born-and-bred Singaporeans, steeped in the culture, with instincts of what a Singaporean is' (Straits Times, 4 October, 2008). Chinese, Malay and Indian will remain the ethnoracial foundation of the post-colonial nation while Others is a sufficiently flexible category to absorb emerging ethnicities that may wish to stake its claim in the future. There will inevitably be increasing cultural heterogeneity in a globalizing environment but not all cultural particularisms, Wieviorka (1998: 901) states, will be incorporated into multiculturalist policy. Multiculturalism, he quotes from Raz, is only suitable to a few stable cultural communities who have the desire and the ability to maintain themselves.

Despite the growing ethnic diversity of the population in Singapore in the face of migration in the period of globalization over the past 30 years, multiculturalism has retained its essential CMIO basis. Its government has continued to draw on the two major traditional sources of China and India to feed its demand for foreign workers, foreign talent and foreign students as Yeoh (in Ortiga 2014) describes its migrant population—the last two groups were until in recent years encouraged to apply for permanent residence with a view to eventually becoming citizens. The dependence on these traditional sending countries was due to the perceived cultural compatibility of migrants from the PRC and India and the government's view that they would easily integrate into the receiving society. However, over the past 10 years, there has been a local backlash against the increasing presence of PRC and Indian nationals, whom they regard as taking away their jobs particularly at the low and middle level of the labour market because they are cheaper to employ. Drawing on postings in print and online forums from 1997 to 2012, a period when Singapore practised liberal immigration policies, Ortiga (2014) documents how Singaporeans reacted strongly to the perceived intolerance of and arrogance of the new migrants towards local cultural practices and economic abilities. Directing their anti-migrant sentiments against Chinese and Indian nationals, they represented the latter as 'as unassimilable because they are not multicultural enough for Singapore society'. Turning the state's public discourse on its head, Ortiga argues, multiculturalism currently serves as the rationale for the rejection of co-ethnic immigrants and a counter-discourse for challenging state immigration policies.

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