

# GES1041/GESS1029

## Migration in Singapore

LECTURE 8

DARYL OOI

## Week 8: Are we cosmopolitan yet?

Mon, March 7, 2022 - Sun, March 13, 2022

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### Required reading:

- \*Jaclyn Neo 2015. 'Riots and rights: law and exclusion in Singapore's migrant worker regime'. *Asian Journal of Law and Society* 2(1): 137-168.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2015.1>

### Supplementary resources:

- Upneet Kaur Nagpal 2016. 'Poets on permits' (documentary).  
<https://youtu.be/FM3YrR-j7xk>
- Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh 2019. 'Who defines you? Identity and multiculturalism in Asia'. (The Economist talk)  
<https://youtu.be/zzNuXzf7rqY?t=5899>
- Tan Qiuyi et al. 2020. 'Crisis and connection: Unpacking Singapore's migrant worker issues'. *Lien Centre for Social Innovation*.  
<https://lcsi.smu.edu.sg/research/crisis-and-connection>
- Charanpal Bal 2017. 'Myths about temporary migrant workers and the depoliticisation of migrant worker struggles.' In *Living with Myths in Singapore*. Ethos Books  
<https://newnaratif.com/research/myths-and-facts-migrant-workers-in-singapore/>
- Chin Chuan Fei 2019. 'Precarious work and its complicit network: migrant labour in Singapore'. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49(4): 528-51.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1572209>
- Noorashikin Abdul Rahman 2010. 'Managing labour flows: foreign talent, foreign workers, and domestic help'. In *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*. ISEAS Publishing.  
<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3282838>

# Overview

1. **Review: equality in multiculturalism**
2. Ethical toolbox: values, norms, strategies
3. Analysis: models of migrant labour
4. Assignment: Journal Entry 4

# Another model of ethical analysis

1. **The resigned Singaporean**
  - Invisible injustices
  - Dynamics of multiracialism
2. Social analysis
  - Structural discrimination
  - Discriminatory practices
  - Power differentials
3. Ethical analysis
  - Sources of inequality
  - Responses to micro-aggressions
  - Negotiations between communities

# Two ethical dilemmas

1. **Diverse cultures:** ‘When we take legitimate cultural differences into account, equal treatment is likely to involve different or differential treatment, raising the question as to how we can ensure that the latter does not amount to discrimination or privilege.’ (Parekh 2000, 261)
2. **Inherited cultures:** ‘Every society also has a historically inherited cultural structure which informs its conduct of public life. While it has a duty to modify it to accommodate the legitimate demands of its minorities, it cannot do so beyond a certain point without losing its coherence and causing widespread disorientation, anxiety and even resistance.’ (263)

# Parekh's procedure

1. **General rule:** 'Different treatments of individuals or groups are equal if they represent different ways of realizing the same right, opportunity, or in whatever other respect they are intended to be treated equally, and if as a result none of the parties involved is better-off or worse-off.' (261)
2. **Case-by-case consideration:** 'We need to consider the nature and purpose of the right or the rule involved, and show that the differential treatment is justified in terms of it.' (261)
3. **Risk management:** 'The danger that such a contextualized view of equality might encourage discrimination and disingenuous reasoning is real.' (263)

## Video: ‘Multiculturalism and identity’



<https://youtu.be/zzNuXzf7rqY>

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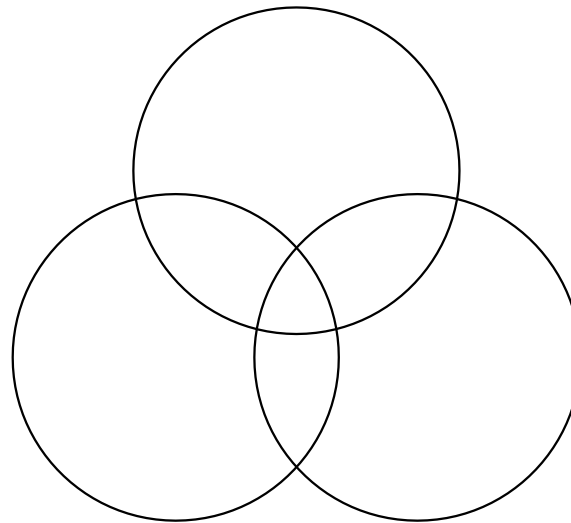
<i>Ethical analysis (8)</i>	Analyses two or more main points, with thorough use of the ethical clusters and other concepts. (8)	Analyses two or more main points, with clear use of the ethical clusters and other concepts. (6)	Analyses two or more main points, with limited use of the ethical clusters and other concepts. (4)	Analyses less than two main points, with poor use of the ethical clusters and other concepts. (0-2)
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<i>Norm use (5)</i>	Uses dialogue norms insightfully, with some assessment of difficulties. (5)	Uses dialogue norms clearly, with some specification of difficulties. (4)	Uses dialogue norms adequately, with reference to vague difficulties. (3)	Uses dialogue norms poorly, with no acknowledgement of difficulties. (0-2)
<i>Strategy use (5)</i>	Uses conflict strategies insightfully, with some assessment of difficulties. (5)	Uses conflict strategies clearly, with some specification of difficulties. (4)	Uses conflict strategies adequately, with reference to vague difficulties. (3)	Uses conflict strategies poorly, with no acknowledgement of difficulties. (0-2)

# Three clusters of moral values

**Person-centred values**  
 $\approx$  the good owed to a person

Calculations of **well-being**  
 $\approx$  what's good for a person

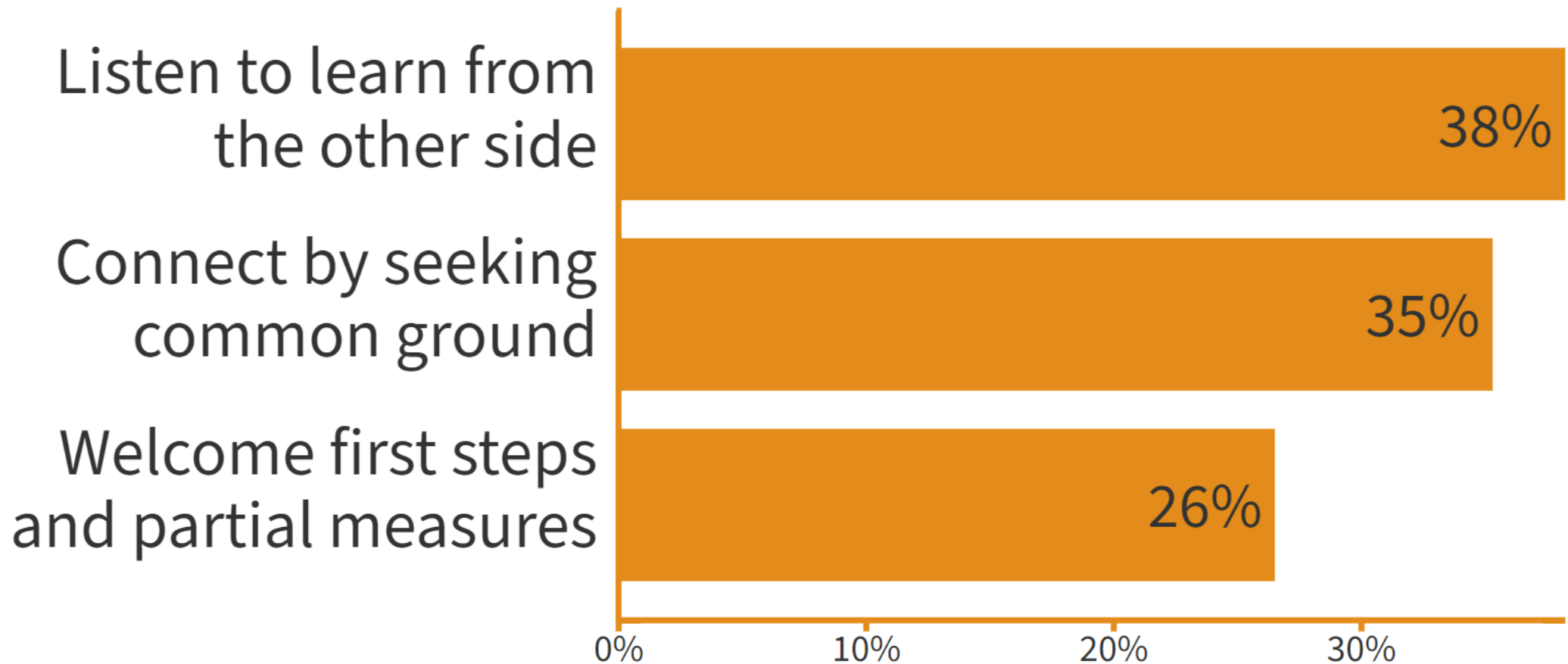


**Virtues** of character  
 $\approx$  the good in a person

# Three norms of moral dialogue

1. <b>Listen</b> to learn from the other side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify different values and interests</li><li>• Clarify different cultural meanings</li><li>• Develop space for <u>mutual understanding</u></li></ul>
2. <b>Connect</b> by seeking common ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify background of agreement</li><li>• Clarify points of disagreement</li><li>• Develop space for <u>social negotiation</u></li></ul>
3. <b>Welcome</b> first steps and partial measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Propose constructive changes</li><li>• Highlight neglected possibilities</li><li>• Develop space for <u>practical compromise</u></li></ul>

# Which norm do you think is hardest to honour?



# Two strategies for multicultural conflict

1. <b>Nurture</b> cultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarify different cultural meanings</li><li>• Distinguish constitutive norms and practices</li><li>• Determine permissible range of cultural diversity</li><li>• Avoid cultural stereotypes and empirical assumptions</li></ul>
2. <b>Negotiate</b> practical compromises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify non-identical forms of equal treatment</li><li>• Distribute burden of accommodation fairly</li><li>• Balance equality with other values</li><li>• Balance inherited and emergent cultures</li></ul>

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# Neo's approach to migration

1. **Legal discrimination:** 'The current legal framework discriminates against these [unskilled and low-skilled] migrant workers and conceptualizes them as undesirable for inclusion in the wider society.' (137)
2. **Social impact:** 'The exclusionary aspects of the legal framework encourage social and economic discrimination against them. Where the law sanctions unequal rights, this often leads to unequal treatment and discrimination in society.' (154)
3. **Practical entanglement:** 'A neat delineation between the interests of the local population and the interests of the migrant worker population is simply not possible. The two interests are intertwined, economically and socially.' (162)

# Four models of migrant labour

1. **Vulnerable subjects:** 'Migrant workers are today recognized as a vulnerable group, with vulnerability understood here as “a social condition of powerlessness...” (140)
2. **Economic actors:** 'These restrictive regulations construe these migrant workers as mere economic actors, whose other human attributes could be suspended for the duration of their economic engagement in Singapore.' (142)
3. **Social scapegoats:** ““The migrant worker” has become a scapegoat for discontent against the government...The immigration issue has also been politicized to the detriment of the migrant workers.’ (149)
4. **Rights bearers:** 'Migrant workers are no longer regarded as mere tools of production with no relation to the general population, but recognized as having rights, the violation of which affects the economy and the workforce.’ (159)



# Model 1: Vulnerable subjects

1. **No political participation:** ‘As non-nationals, they are usually excluded from the political processes which produce decisions that directly affect them.’ (140)
2. **Cultural alienation:** ‘Their unfamiliarity with the host state, whether due to language or cultural differences, or due to their lack of knowledge about the legal system and administration, may create conditions of apprehension, anxiety, or even fear.’
3. **Social discrimination:** ‘Migrants are also more likely to suffer from stereotypes, prejudices, racism, xenophobia, ignorance, and discrimination... Their vulnerabilities are exacerbated by the type of economic activity that they are engaged in, which tends to command little respect.’

## Model 2: Economic actors

1. **Limited economic mobility:** '[These laws] have the effect of restricting the economic mobility and therefore autonomy of these migrant workers. This renders them vulnerable to exploitation.' (143-4)
2. **Limited social integration:** 'These legal conditions...makes it difficult for migrant workers to set roots in Singapore, keeping them transient. It also tends to signal to the general population that migrant workers are generally unsuitable and undesirable for inclusion into the Singapore society.' (146)
3. **Insecure residency status:** 'Regardless of how long the work permit holder has lived in Singapore, he/she has no path to long-term residency or citizenship...Their insecurity is increased by the fact that they may be expelled any time without recourse or due process.' (147)

## Model 3: Social scapegoats

1. **Social prejudice:** ‘Residents cited fears of an increase in crime, worries that he migrant workers would “seduce” their domestic workers, and even that the dormitory would cause their real estate to devalue. These worries reflect a prejudice among some Singaporeans that migrant workers are more prone to criminal and immoral activities.’ (149)
2. **Class discrimination:** ‘These immigrant sectors cover what is often perceived as “undesirable work” that the local workforce is assumed to not want to take up any more by virtue of their higher levels of education and/or affluence.’ (150)
3. **Political backlash:** ‘The backlash stemmed from the increase in migrant workers, who became a scapegoat for an overwhelmed public transportation system, overcrowded public spaces, and depressing low-end pay.’ (152)

## Model 4: Rights bearers

1. **Legal rights:** ‘There is now an increasing realization that socioeconomic gains and the protection of migrant rights are intertwined...Recent legal developments show improvements towards greater recognition for the rights and welfare of migrant workers.’ (158)
2. **Judicial recognition:** ‘[The judgement] recognizes the vulnerabilities of the migrant worker, which in turn justifies providing them with more protection...In affirming their basic rights, and emphasizing their status as a contract-maker and an employee, the court treats them as dignified subjects of the law.’ (161)
3. **Civic mobilisation:** ‘This increasing recognition that migrant workers’ rights need to be better protected is largely a result of persistent and effective civil society mobilization in Singapore in the past two decades.’ (161)

Vulnerable  
subjects

Economic  
actors

Social  
scapegoats

Rights  
bearers

# How has this pandemic changed the lives of migrants?

Top



<https://PollEv.com/discourses/YnCvivc2l5819QBeNsYEN/respond>

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# Prompts on migration

- Which passage in our readings on migration moved or frustrated you most? Write about its ethical significance.
- Assess the entanglement between migrant worker rights and the interests of others in Singapore.
- Reflect on a personal encounter with, or a debate on, migrant-related issues in Singapore during the pandemic.
- Write to one of the poets on permits.



## Video: Poets on Permit



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM3YrR-j7xk>

# Week 8 Online activities

1. Word cloud: defining 'migrants'  
[https://PollEv.com/free\\_text\\_polls/vhfhqcgK64wFj9sdIS8bM/respond](https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/vhfhqcgK64wFj9sdIS8bM/respond)
2. Exercise: impact of the pandemic  
<https://PollEv.com/discourses/YnCvivc2l5819QBeNsYEN/respond>
3. Q&A  
<https://PollEv.com/discourses/40DHOLijLLsoVFlf2xfGW/respond>

# Upcoming assignments

- Reading Quiz 3 (Multiculturalism) 11 March 2022, Fri 11.59pm
- Journal Entry 4 (Migration) 18 March 2022, Fri 11.59pm
- Group Report 21 March 2022, Mon 11.58pm

# Thank you.

Instructor

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Friday 1200-1400 (via LumiNUS Conferencing)