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MIGRATION AND THE POLITICS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN SINGAPORE

Summary

Using the post-colonial case study of Singapore, this paper examines the intersection of migration and multiculturalism to ask why there has been increased racist and xenophobic sentiment in public discourse on social issues. The paper discusses policy implications in the state’s conception of race, the social representation and incorporation of migrants, and citizenship. Based on the theoretical model of this paper, the effectiveness of policies is dependent on all three players (state, citizen, migrant) working together. To effectively assess and improve present policies, this paper encourages examining the complexities of overlapping layers of identity, such as class, ethnicity and nationality.

The Singaporean government cannot rest on evidence supporting racial harmony without taking into account how additional layers of identity, such as citizenship status and the macro socio-political climate, change the understanding of ethnicity and multiculturalism. Hence, the state cannot dismiss the possibility that xenophobic sentiments can still be expressed racially in a largely racially harmonious society.

Methodology and Theory

This paper analyzes secondary research, using a range of print and online material from both local and international sources. Empirical data is supplemented by six qualitative interviews with first-generation migrants.

Instead of the one-way assimilation or two-way incorporation model, I expand the theoretical model of incorporation to a three-way process to include the state as a player. With this model, research can appreciate the unique historical relationship between the state and its citizens, as well as its present response towards migrants.
This paper focuses on the state’s “corporatist” multiculturalism, specifically through the race-categorizing Chinese-Indian-Malay-Other (CMIO) model. I identify three tenets of the CMIO model that contributed to racial harmony in Singapore:

1. the depoliticization of race/ethnicity
2. a powerful and authoritative government that is able to effectively influence its people ideologically
3. the principle of egalitarianism across all ethnic groups.

The paper is structured according to these three tenets, showing that the unprecedented speed and scale of migration since 2005, and the increasing dissonance between the Singaporean government and its people, have weakened the efficacy of these three tenets in maintaining racial harmony.

Repoliticizing Ethnicity

The surge of ethnicity in public discourse is examined using a culturalist and racialist binary, suggesting dissonance between state and citizen. The state’s racial categorization still conflates the notions of race, ethnicity and culture whereas society has reacted with nuance to cultural differences. If racial categories such as “Chinese” or “Indian” become more heterogeneous and inflected by factors like class and nationality, then the CMIO model should no longer be pivotal in shaping national identity. The tension between national identity and incorporation would be a continuous balancing act, instead of relying on the CMIO monolith. However, an evolving national identity will need to incorporate immigrants as well, instead of using it to further exclude them.

Waning Central Authority

The increase in social anxiety towards foreigners today is sustained by a paradox. There is increasing dissatisfaction with central authority but also a continued over-reliance on top-down policing to sustain inter-ethnic peace. The problem is institutional; not in the sense that only the state is to be blamed, but that citizens, as state subjects, have been conditioned in how they approach unhappiness. The state is not solely responsible for creating opportunities for the citizen and immigrant to interact. It is essential that all three players concurrently take ownership of incorporation. One way of encouraging ownership is to increase state transparency of discourse on
migration and ethnicity. The hypersensitive culture around migration and ethnicity, especially in the selective release of national statistics and the bureaucracy involved in contacting national agencies leaves little incentive for citizens to support and/or be part of the project of incorporation.

Inequality and Exclusions

When identity categories are modulated to reflect complexities of socioeconomic status, nationality and immigrant status, segregation becomes salient: physical segregation in housing policy and symbolic segregation in legal immigrant status. Knee-jerk responses to placate citizens may exacerbate segregation, rather than encourage mutual interaction. It is thus important for the state to persuade citizens and foreigners to enter the “zones of encounter” to be engaged with current incorporation initiatives. The state, in its rhetoric and policies, needs to reflect that they appreciate the emotive aspect of citizenship, instead of justifying migration entirely on economic rationality and demanding compliance. The rigour of the citizenship naturalization process can be reconsidered.
Section 1. Introduction

As the “ethnoscape” (Appadurai, 1994) of states becomes increasingly diversified due to globalisation and immigration, immigrant incorporation has become an important point on government agendas. The phenomenon has sparked debates worldwide about immigration, such as increased demands for tighter immigration control in the UK, and the public display of ethnicity and culture. For example, headscarves were banned in France in 2004, as was the building of minarets in Switzerland in 2009. World leaders like the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel (BBC, 2010) and British Prime Minister (PM), David Cameron (BBC, 2011) have declared multiculturalism in their countries a failure because policies of coexistence have led to more fragmentation, instead of cohesion.

This paper analyses the intersection of multiculturalism and migration using the case study of Singapore. Multiculturalism was institutionalized after Singapore’s political independence in 1965 through policies such as national education and housing quotas. The People’s Action Party (PAP), the democratically elected party that has been in power since independence, implemented the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model, a census quadratology that has since defined all state and common usage of race. In Disciplining Differences, PuruShotam (1995) described how the state constructed the four racial categories and rigidly equated ethnicity with skin colour and language. As a consequence, some scholars argue that the government and people of Singapore conflate the definitions of race, ethnicity and culture (see Lian, 2006; Clammer, 1985; PuruShotam, 2000; Lai, 2004). Multiculturalism is, therefore, ideologically perceived as being synonymous with being multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual. This should be kept in mind when reading such terminologies in this paper.

Although some scholars criticize Singapore’s multiculturalism as favouring the majority Chinese, Singapore’s ethnic management is generally regarded as a success. Many Asian and African states have sought to emulate Singapore’s “corporatist” model of multiculturalism (Goh, 2008). A 2001 Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey on ethnicity and national identity showed that 80% of participants supported the multicultural principle of different races living in Singapore (cited in Tan, 2004). In the IPS-OnePeople.sg national survey on racial harmony held in 2013 that surveyed over 4000 Singaporeans, 6 out of 10 participants agreed or strongly agreed that the country is free from both racial and religious tension (cited in Lim, 2013). Though this represented a fall from 2001, it nevertheless suggests that Singaporeans largely favour and display harmonious inter-ethnic relations.

However, especially in the past five years, racist and xenophobic language has increasingly been used in the media and when commenting on social issues involving migrants. In 2012, for example, Ma Chi, a wealthy Mainland Chinese migrant, was drink-driving when he crashed his Ferrari, killing himself and a Singaporean taxi driver. Andrew Jacobs (2012) reported that bloggers accused Ma of being “spoiled and corrupt” and one of the more measured comments read “Good riddance and enjoy hell you piece of mainland [China] trash”. More recently, 400 South Asian migrant workers were involved in a riot triggered by the death of an Indian construction worker in a road accident (Cheung, 2013). This was Singapore’s second riot since independence, the other being in 1969. The Singaporean online community responded with comments harboring anti-migration sentiments on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. For example, the #LittleIndiaRiot stream on Twitter (2013) had remarks ranging from race-directed anger, like @sinchita’s “Die banglas die”, to racist jokes, like
@hilmi_official’s “Indians no longer flipping pratas¹, now flipping cars like a pro!” In addition, Daniel Teo (2012) reported that 80% of participants on an online poll by Yahoo! News that surveyed nearly 20,000 people agreed that “Singaporeans are turning xenophobic”.

The problem with anecdotal evidence is that it may not be representative of the population, especially when online opinions may be more polarized. In the anecdotes above, there were diverse opinions and calls against xenophobia too. For example, Internet users also used the #LittleIndiaRiot stream to appeal for calm or to chastise racism. On the other hand, the evidence cannot be disregarded either. There has been increasing quantitative evidence for corroboration, specifically showing discontent with migration. The IPS-OnePeople.sg survey, which provided encouraging results about racial harmony, ironically also showed that Singaporeans discriminated against foreigners in the workplace and as neighbours by ethnicity (cited in Saad, 2013). I will discuss this in section four. Additionally, the report of Our Singapore Conversation (2013), a government-led initiative in 2012, stated that 49% of Singaporeans agreed or strongly agreed to “reducing the inflow of foreigners even if it translated to slower growth and jobs” (23% neutral; 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed). Also, when the White Paper in 2013 indicated that non-residents would represent 45% of Singapore’s population by 2030, 5,000 Singaporeans gathered at Hong Lim Park to protest, a rare occurrence in Singapore (Au, 2013). Without overstating the problem of xenophobia in Singapore, the expression of such sentiments must still be accounted for.

This paper does not claim that Singapore’s multiculturalism has failed, and further research is required to assess the real extent of xenophobia in Singapore in light of recent developments. While I do not presume that the available evidence is conclusive to indicate widespread xenophobia, the presence of increased anxiety cannot be denied either. Instead, this paper addresses the question of why there is increased racist and xenophobic discourse when commenting on social issues involving migrants. While Singapore’s multicultural strategies have fostered a multi-ethnic national identity, I will argue that many Singaporeans now embody this identity, which excludes migrants, though this conflict is also being expressed in ethnic terms, thereby implicating multiculturalism.

My thesis is that the socio-political conditions that contributed to the success of Singapore’s multiculturalism since independence are presently qualitatively different. As such, the CMIO model’s tenets do not achieve the intended objective of social harmony. This paper fills a research gap, as existing literature on Singapore’s multiculturalism is mostly limited to inter-racial equality, instead of the intersection across migration and multiculturalism. While the government is currently deliberating about this issue, which will take time to effect, I am concerned with framing the problem accurately for policy makers.

**Methodology**

My research has used mainly secondary data from journal articles, books, government reports, newspapers, online commentaries, and the social media to form the empirical base of this case study. In addition to local sources, I have read international theoretical literature and other case studies. To supplement the above sources, since they include few migrant accounts, I conducted four semi-structured and two informal interviews with first-generation migrants to Singapore from various parts of India and China (Appendix A). These are two of the largest countries from which migrants to Singapore come, and they correspond directly to the racial categories of “Indian” and “Chinese”

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¹ Traditional flat Indian pancakes.
in Singapore. I then analysed them thematically and extracted the salient points with regard to how they perceived their ethnic identity vis-à-vis Singapore’s racial categorization, as well as their experience of incorporation. This was a purposive sample for occupation and legal status diversity, ranging from low-skilled labourers to professionals, and a permanent resident (PR) applicant to a naturalized citizen of 18 years. The small sample size was constrained by resources and will not be representative of each sub-group.

Structure overview

The next section will place Singapore within the global theoretical literature on multiculturalism. I will introduce the “corporatist” model of state multiculturalism in Singapore and argue for the need to conceptualise immigrant incorporation as a three-way model instead. The third section will examine the context of migration and the politics of multiculturalism in Singapore. I will identify and elaborate on the three tenets that have contributed to racial harmony in Singapore: 1) the depoliticization of race/ethnicity, 2) a powerful and authoritative government that is able to effectively influence its people ideologically and 3) the principle of egalitarianism across all ethnic groups. Sections four, five and six will each examine one tenet to analyse how they have been undermined over time. I will argue that there is a need to rethink how the Singaporean government manages issues of race, ethnicity and citizenship and will conclude each section with policy implications.
Section 2. Conceptualising State Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the political ideology that recognizes “group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity” (Modood, 2011:2). However, it is difficult to pin down a precise definition as states manifest multiculturalism in policy differently: civic-secularism (France); melting-pot (America); mosaic (Canada and Australia), minority affirmative action (UAE) and majority affirmative action (Malaysia). Since multiculturalism is vitally linked to politics, I will focus on the state’s conceptualisation of it in this paper.

However, as Singapore is a post-colonial Asian country, there is a need to extend beyond the liberal multiculturalism theoretical school, espoused by scholars like Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor, because it is difficult to apply to all types of states. This school was derived from Western political systems aligned with the democratic “liberal idea that the ultimate unit of moral worth is the individual” (Levey, 2010:20). The objective is thus focused on according political rights to national minorities, as with Kymlicka’s (1995) multicultural citizenship. However, post-colonial multiculturalists, like Monica Mookherjee (2010:181), have challenged the paradigm’s “falsely universal ideals” of liberal norms and the neglect of economic or cultural spheres.

Post-colonial Multiculturalism

Post-colonial multiculturalism, an offshoot from liberal multiculturalism, takes into consideration the differentiated impact of colonial experience when analyzing ethnicity, culture and citizenship (see Gunew, 2004). In this theoretical school, the questions scholars ask will be different, depending on the case study. For states that were previously colonial masters, the question follows from the liberal school to ask “how is inclusion of cultural diversity possible without endangering or diminishing liberal democracy” (Goh, 2008:247)? For post-colonial states, the focus of study “is how to forge a national unity given the pluralist division and multiple national consciousnesses” (Goh, 2008:248).

An African example of post-colonial empirical work is by Mahmood Mamdani (1996), who analysed the impact of colonialism on current state-citizen relationships in African countries. He linked colonial British’s authoritarianism to the perpetuation of similar regimes even after independence. His discussion of indirect rule (local people as administrative intermediaries) is applicable to post-colonial Asia, which explains the state’s reliance on bureaucracy to maintain hegemonic power over fragmented societies. However, though more research has since been conducted in Asia in response to Baogang He & Will Kymlicka’s (2005) call for more Asian-based empirical work, Asian scholars themselves reject an essentialist Asian theory and emphasize the need to analyze multiculturalism and migration on a case-by-case basis (see Collins et al., 2013).

There are several other reasons why Singapore warrants a study of its own. First, Singapore’s unique geography as a city-state has political bearings on migration. Mamdani (1996) focused on rural-urban migration but there is no rural-urban distinction in Singapore. In a 2014 speech in London, Singaporean PM Lee Hsien Loong (LHL) compared both cities, emphasizing that Singapore has “no larger country which is our hinterland. Our city is our country. Hence we must get the balance just right – between national identity and cosmopolitan openness, between free market competition and social solidarity” (Lee, 2014). Second, W.E. Willmott (1989) emphasized Singapore’s unusual trajectory of attaining political sovereignty before developing national identity in his comparative analysis of nationalistic movements in Southeast Asia. The PAP thus had the opportunity to mould
the nation’s policy on race after independence. By minimizing the complexity of culture and eliminating the possibility for hybridity, it removed the threat of racial differences.

The Corporatist State

Singapore’s strategy of multiculturalism can be theoretically represented by the corporatist model (see Brown, 1994). Lian Kwen Fee (2006) argued that for inter-group harmony to be achieved under this model, a strong, autonomous elite to set well-defined social norms and have a firm political authority over a consensual electorate was necessary.

Corporatism is distinct from consociationalism, a model popularized by Arend Lijphart (2008) to examine countries like India and Malaysia. Although there are some similarities, Singapore has distinct conditions that do not fit the consociational model: an overwhelming Chinese majority, the lack of a grand coalition and no institutionalized proportional ethnic representation. David Brown (1994) argued that proportionality of groups was not necessary in Singapore because the ethnically neutral corporate state was believed to be working for the good of all citizens. Also, consociationalism assumes a liberalized, multi-party political system. Drawing the distinction between both models broadens the question beyond Lijphart’s (2008) primary concern of power sharing, to examine if state multiculturalism strategies are representative of their multi-ethnic demographic. The centrality of state authority in the corporatist model also explains my focus on state multiculturalism, as opposed to simply identifying xenophobic or racist trends.

Towards a Three-way Model

Many international scholars, such as Modood (2011) and Alana Lentin & Gavan Titley (2011), only emphasized immigrant incorporation as a two-way process: both the immigrant and the citizen have to be engaged. This was vital to deter policy makers from amalgamating incorporation with one-way assimilation. Since the state is vital to Singapore’s multiculturalism, I expand the theoretical model of incorporation to a three-way process to include the state as a player too.

For the three-way model, I adapt political sociologist Sidney Tarrow’s (1994) opportunities model in which he suggests social movements are influenced by the political structure of a country. It is not possible to study agency without seeing how the state allows or restricts citizens to act. For example, Ruud Koopmans & Paul Statham (2003) compared the case studies of the UK, the Netherlands and Germany to theorize that whether the state frames migrants as “foreigners” or “minorities” influences how citizens respond to the migrants and whether migrants cling to their ethnic communities. By situating the study of multiculturalism in politics with a three-way model, research can appreciate the unique historical relationship between the state and its citizens, as well as its present response towards migrants.
Section 3. Setting the Context

The evidence in section one suggests a new form of ethnic tension in Singapore that is not straightforward as race against race, but between local and foreigner. As existing race categorizations within the Singaporean populace is intersected with foreigners of corresponding “race”, the notion of the “Other” is nonetheless articulated vis-à-vis ethnicity. In The Semantics of Race, David Goldberg (1992) redefined “race” to also include class and culture. With increased ethnic heterogeneity due to migration, and the added complication of resident and non-resident labels, the study of “us” and “them” in multiculturalism must be broadened beyond citizens to include residents and non-residents. In response to the trend of xenophobia, LHL promised to “put Singaporeans first” in his 2011 National Day Rally Speech (Lee, 2011). Several policies were passed, such as tightening the foreign workers’ levy and dependency ratios in 2010 (Lee, 2010), and decreasing the number of citizenships and permanent residence (PR) being conferred in 2013 (Singapore Government, 2013).

Migration in Singapore

In Singapore, migration is liberal but targeted; it is limited to migrants who enter for economic or educational reasons, or if they are familial dependents of existing citizens. This differs from other countries, such as the UK, which allow refugees and asylum seekers. With the government’s expressed interest to mould Singapore as a cosmopolitan city-state (see Yeoh, 2004), migration rates have been increasing exponentially, especially in the past five years.

Through analysing migration trends since 1980, Lai Ah Eng (2012) pointed out that migration in the past decade (2000-2010), especially since 2005, was unprecedented in scale and speed. Her data showed that the annual growth rate of the non-resident population peaked with 19% (2007-2008) compared to 9% (1990s); and 11.5% (2008-2009) compared to 2.3% (1990s) for PR growth. From 2000 to 2010, the total population had increased by more than a million people. Out of the total population of 5.4 million people in 2013, the Department of Statistics (2013) recorded that 71% are residents, defined as citizens and PRs. Specifically, only approximately 47% of the entire population in 2013 was born locally; 24% were born abroad although they are now naturalized citizens or PRs; 29% are non-residents (author’s calculation from Department of Statistics Singapore, 2011; 2013; Saw, 2012). Comparatively, non-residents only took up 19% of the total population in 2000 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2001). By 2030, non-residents are projected to represent 45% of the total population (National Population and Talent Division, 2013).

The migrants who enter Singapore can be divided into two distinct groups, even though there is an increasing influx of middle class workers (Yeoh & Lin, 2013). This paper addresses both groups. The first group is the “foreign talents”, which refer to skilled workers or professionals. Statistically, new citizens are generally wealthier than the average Singaporean and are better educated (Chong, 2013). They traditionally come from the West (US, UK, France), Australia and Japan. However, since the 1990s, Singapore has actively encouraged Chinese and Indians to remain as citizens and PRs (Yeoh and Lin, 2012).

The second group comprises “low-skilled workers”, typically from China, South-east Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand) and South Asia (Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh) (Yeoh, 2004). A population report in 2013 showed that 59% of the non-resident workforce is low-skilled labourers (Singapore Government, 2013). They are typically in the construction, domestic labor, services and manufacturing industries (Yeoh & Lin, 2012). Unlike the first group, this group is emphasized to be
transient. However, the presence of this migrant group is perennial and increasing, described by Maruja Asis & Graziano Battistella (2013:44) as a “permanent temporariness”. While the rate of growth of low-skilled labourers had decreased, the 2013 population report showed that the absolute value was still substantial: 60,000 additional foreign workers (2012-13) compared to 65,000 (2010-11).

Since the 1980s, the government has chiefly justified the high rates of migration with two reasons. First, LHL mentioned that there is a need for additional labour “to supplement our local pool” and continue being economically competitive (Lee, 2010). Second, Singapore faces the demographic challenge of a shrinking birth rate. According to the Department of Statistics (2013), the last time it was above replacement level was in 1976.

Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others Model

Ethnic diversity has been a social reality for Singapore since immigration existed in early Singapore colonial history. J. S. Furnivall (1948), a British colonial government official, stated that ethnic segregation was a popular social engineering technique used by the British to organize their colonies. The Jackson Plan in 1822 segregated Singapore by ethnicity; the European Town was for the European, Chinese Kampong for the Chinese, Chulia Kampong for the Indians, Kampong Glam for the Malays and Bugis for the Arabs (Ministry of Education, 2007). Through historical analysis, Carl Trocki (2006) also found that ethnic divisions were clustered by employment.

While the Singapore government had explicitly sought to reject Furnivall’s model of pluralism in favour of multiculturalism and meritocracy, when thrust into political sovereignty, it fell back on the census taxonomy of colonial days to articulate racial identities, as seen in the CMIO model. Under the model, citizens were allocated into one of the four racial groups based on their geographical origin. Through focus group discussions and school observations, Christine Lee (2004) and colleagues noted that children as young as six years learned to unquestioningly identify with one race for administrative purposes. Till today, race is reflected on national identity cards and the notion is regarded as commonplace.

Race has been a required item in the census since 1871 (Saw, 2012). However, the Department of Statistics (2011) now uses the label “ethnic group”. By comparing several post-colonial states, Sneja Gunew (2004) found that it was a trend after 1945 to replace the term “race” with “ethnicity”, to avoid the latter’s implications of a discredited scientific racism. Ironically, the Singapore Department of Statistics’ (2011) definition of “ethnic group” is still “a person’s race”. It proceeds to define “ethnic group” as based on geographical origin.

In practice, Fred Ong & Brenda Yeoh (2013) concluded that categorization was highly dependent on visual cues like skin colour as their interview participants equated the term “migrant workers” with darker-skinned migrants. The Chinese were seen as people with “yellow-ochre skin tones”, the Malays “warmly browned” and the Indians a “richer, darker brown” (PuruShotam, 1995:2). Allocating an official religion and dress for each category further entrenched ethnic stereotypes.

2 “Chinese” as persons of Chinese origin such as Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas, Hainanese, Shanghainese; “Malays” were the Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis; “Indians” were Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origin such as Tamils, Malayalis, Punjabis, Bengalis, Singhalese and “Other” comprised the remainder, such as the Europeans, Arabs, Japanese.
These images were ritualised in celebratory forms at events such as National Day and Racial Harmony Day (Lai, 2004). The government also allocated a mother tongue for each category, namely Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for Malays, Tamil for Indians, and English being the lingua franca since it does not privilege any one race (Chua, 2007). These four languages are Singapore’s four official languages. All students have to learn English and their respective mother tongue in schools.

This model is by no means perfect. Its emphasis on discrete categories and internal homogeneity is not an accurate representation. For example, the Chinese are often seen as homogenous when there are as many as 54 ethnicities in Mainland China (Zhang 2009). The Chinese participants in my interviews (Sun & Chao) highlighted differences in personality, habits and accent even amongst the ethnic majority of Han Chinese. The participants attributed these differences to geographic origin. The assumption of internal homogeneity was likewise a problem for the Indians (see Rai, 2009). Yet, Singaporeans have become so accustomed to racial self-identification that scholars like John Clammer (1985) and Ong & Yeoh (2013) predict the model to be a permanent feature of society. Instead of questioning whether the model should be kept, this paper aims to reframe the notion of race and ethnicity in light of changing times.

I will now present three tenets of the CMIO model that have contributed to racial harmony: 1) the depoliticization of ethnicity, 2) a powerful and authoritative government that was able to effectively influence its people and 3) the principle of egalitarianism across ethnic groups.

1. Depoliticizing Ethnicity

The depoliticization of ethnicity was not to eliminate awareness of race. In fact, the reverse happened. Highlighting the sensitivities of race caused heightened awareness and deterred engagement, relegating ethnic identity to a solely private matter. In his political commentary of Singapore, Geoffrey Benjamin (1976:124) suggested that the CMIO model put “Chinese people under pressure to become more Chinese, Indians more Indian, and Malays more Malay”. For example, it was the private responsibility of the Malay or English-speaking Peranakan Chinese to become more ethnically Chinese as they were now made to officially study Mandarin. Brown (1994:83) described the depoliticization process as “remov[ing] ethnicity from the political arena and defin[ing] its location in the non-political social realm”.

Depoliticization also involved the state excluding ethnicity through defining the parameters of public discourse. For example, legal frameworks like the Internal Security Act, Penal Code, Sedition Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act criminalised any attempt “to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes” (Tan, 2012:10). The impact of this was argued by Daniel Goh (2010) to have generated a hypersensitive culture that naturally avoided these issues publically.

As part of corporatism, the state wanted to be perceived as wholly secular and responsible for national economic development. To emphasize its neutrality, ethnic matters were outsourced to ethnic self-help groups, such as MENDAKI (Council for the Education of Muslim Children), Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) and the Eurasian Association (Chua & Rajah, 2003).
2. Strong Central Authority

As mentioned, the ability of the corporatist state to successfully persuade a nation predicates on the state’s mandate and its ability to wield authoritative power. After depoliticizing ethnicity, loyalty was successfully converted from one that was ethnically based (towards countries of origin) to one that is civic minded (towards the Singapore government). Brown (1994:91) recorded that a public survey indicated “four-fifths of Singaporeans were willing to die (at least hypothetically) for Singapore”. He also argued that the Singapore state elite was perceived to be trained and professional, and not bourgeois promoting their own class interests.

One of my interviewees, Mr. Chao, commented that he viewed race categorization as a “reality”. This comment shows the extent to which race has become ingrained as natural and unproblematic. All my participants offered a Singaporean-version of their racial identity, in which they showed both knowledge of the country’s racial categorization, and a submission to it. This affirms Brown’s (1994:76) argument that ethnic affiliations had been modified to be “compatible with … the organic national identity”.

3. Promoting Egalitarianism

The CMIO quadratomy could have been divisive if not for the complementary government-sent message of egalitarianism. Lee Kuan Yew (LKY), the first PM of Singapore, announced a few days after independence that “no one is higher than the other. Every one is equal” (cited in Rodriguez, 2003:131). This notion of egalitarianism was constitutionalized in Article 12(2): “there shall be no discrimination against citizens of Singapore on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth”.

In addition, Brown (1994) recorded that government rhetoric espoused meritocratic ideals for education and the economy, which gave hope of social mobility and personal success that transcended ethnic divisions. Egalitarianism and meritocracy were convincing in a time of economic, political and social upheaval. Chan Heng Chee argued in The Politics of Survival (1971) that the urgency of economic and physical survival caused the different races to work towards a common aim within a political and legal framework that guaranteed their freedoms and equality.

Changing Times

Interviews carried out between 2002 and 2005, in which Singaporeans were asked about the government’s construction of ethnicity, led Michael Barr & Zlatko Skrbiš to conclude that, while there was “dissonance” (2008:256) between the Singaporean government and its people, it was not yet a “gulf” (2008:256). However, I argue that, by 2014, this gap has grown. I will examine how changing socio-political circumstances have rendered it difficult for the state to continue to rely on the three traits – depoliticization, authority and egalitarianism.
Section 4. Repoliticizing Ethnicity

Ethnicity has become repoliticized as it is increasingly implicated in public discourse, as described in section one. I will explain this resurgence of ethnicity in public discourse by examining the state-citizen dissonance through a culturalist and racialist binary. The government’s racial categorization still conflates the notions of race, ethnicity and culture whereas society has reacted with nuance to cultural differences. This begs the question of what constitutes Singaporean culture. I will then argue that the government has been reluctant to accept a distinctly Singaporean culture, which is seen to contradict its cosmopolitan vision.

Culturalist versus Racialist Perspective

Racism need not involve biological race. Stephen Castles (1996) coined ‘cultural racism’ to describe a situation in which cultural differences are viewed as incommensurable. The IPS-OnePeople.sg survey, for example, indicated tensions between Singaporeans and migrants that were split along cultural-ethnic lines (cited in Saad, 2013). 93.8% of non-Chinese respondents were comfortable with a Singaporean-Chinese boss but this figure dropped by nearly 20 percentage points if he was Mainland-Chinese. This was also the case for neighbourly relations, with 95.4% of non-Chinese respondents being comfortable with Singaporean-Chinese neighbours, though there was a 14.2 percentage points drop if they were Mainland-Chinese. This trend was the same when distinguishing between a Singaporean-Indian and Indian boss, and a Singaporean-Malay and Malay neighbour.

The culturalist perspective is not only marked by an increased demarcation from the ‘Other’ but also the redefinition of ‘Us’. In 2011, a Mainland-Chinese family complained about their Singaporean-Indian neighbours, who liked to cook and eat strong smelling curry. This angered Singaporeans, including those who were ethnically Chinese. One of them even said that she was “incensed with a People’s Republic of China family telling my fellowmen not to cook curry” (Moore, 2011). Here, she included herself in this imagined community that she termed “Singapore’s way of life” whereby “almost all Singaporean homes cook[ed] curry” (Moore, 2011).

In contrast, the government’s racialist perspective does not fully appreciate the dichotomy between race and culture. Upon becoming a PR or citizen, an immigrant is seamlessly slotted into one of the four racial categories. Mainland-Chinese, Taiwanese-Chinese, Hong Kong-Chinese, Malaysian-Chinese and Indonesian-Chinese are all Chinese, along with Singaporean-Chinese. When the state views them as “Chinese”, devoid of a nationality prefix, political loyalty and social integration is assumed, eliminating the need for any active integration policies for residents believed to have culturally naturalised. The danger is that the model’s broad strokes create an administrative blind spot, such that nation-wide assessment of incorporation is rendered difficult.

Moreover, the government explicitly aims to maintain the ethnic ratio, believed to be the “golden ratio” since it has led to rapid economic progress and social order in the past, as conceded by LKY (2012). The governmental psyche is presently still entrenched in the notion of race. In a government population report in 2013, the Chinese represented 76.2% of the Singaporean citizens, followed by Malays (15.0%), Indians (7.4%) and Others (1.4%). This was very similar to 1990: Chinese (77.8%), Malays (14.0%), Indian (7.1%), Others (1.1%) (Statistics included PRs; Saw, 2012). Since the birth rates of Chinese and Indians have been consistently lower than the Malays since independence (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2011), precise management of race when conferring citizenship and PR is used to complement natural births, as a way of maintaining the ethnic ratio.
However, despite being of the same race, the new immigrant is markedly culturally different from the Singaporean the government hopes the immigrant will become. Historically, most of the early Chinese immigrants came from the South of China whereas most of the Chinese immigrants today come from Northern cities. The problem extends to other races. Not all Indians speak Tamil, although it is their official language in Singapore, and Indian-Muslims are left in the grey zone between being Malay and Indian. Both LKY and my interview participants (Chao, Kirtri, Sun and Gangadhar) were aware of intra-race differences. In an interview, LKY stated that the new Indian immigrants were “highly-educated products of their best universities and institutes” and through his experiences argued that they “consider[ed] themselves superior to the Singaporean Indians” (cited in Han et al., 2011:279-280).

The difference is that LKY did not see intra-race differences as problematic when he presided over the government’s racialist stance at independence, whereas my interview participants did. Mr. Chao and Mr. Sun, both well-educated Northern Chinese immigrants, emphasized the cultural differences between North and South China, and how that translated to problems in everyday life. They did not speak any of the dialects that Singaporeans do, such as Hokkien and Teochew, nor did they engage in religious rituals, such as those practised by most Singaporean Chinese Buddhists. That said, Mr. Chao mentioned that it was easier for a Chinese to integrate into Singapore, compared to Europe or Australia. However, he also emphasized stark differences that are unlikely to be bridged. Mr. Kirtri, who still considered himself a “guest” even after 11 years in Singapore, shared this sentiment. Mr. Gangadhar and Mr. Kirtri, both Northern Indians, were quick to clarify without me asking that they did not speak Tamil. They found it difficult, and sometimes annoying, that they were expected to fit into the “Indian” stereotype. For example, this also affected Mr. Gangadhar’s work because his company automatically enrolled the Indian nationals for training courses conducted in Tamil. However, the reasons for not attaining full incorporation varied across participants. Despite being in Singapore for a substantial period, Mr. Chao and Mr. Kirtri’s accents still distinguished them from locals, while Mr. Sun believed that his working style is fundamentally different from Singaporeans because it is culturally based.

The theme of incommensurable cultural differences from my interviews shows why migrants find it difficult to be fully incorporated into the Singaporean community, and why Singaporeans similarly find it difficult to imagine the new community as a cohesive unit. While these differences do not render incorporation impossible, they prove that incorporation cannot be expected to happen naturally simply because migrants share the same race as Singaporeans. The complication from migration is that “race” becomes inflected by differences in other categories, such as nationality and culture. The “politics of sameness and difference” within each race thus becomes more complex (Ong & Yeoh, 2013:91).

**Defining the Singaporean Culture**

The government is reluctant to take on a more culturalist stance because it is wary of cultivating a distinctly Singaporean identity. Historically, the state aimed for Weberian bureaucratic neutrality above all ethnicities within the system of egalitarianism and meritocracy (Chua, 1995). Cherian George (2000) examined the history of state action to argue that the government’s paternalism in cultural matters is not in identity construction but confined largely to the censorship of content deemed harmful to the existing social fabric. Analysing state policy of multiracialism, Kuo Pao Kun (1998:53) argued that the CMIO was “more [of] an exercise to keep the different communities
peacefully apart”. The political elite feared that the issue of race would dominate a distinctively Singaporean culture, or that the races would be represented unequally to thereby disrupt the tenuous racial harmony.

Instead, the government regularly talked about the Singaporean culture as “something that will come in the long run” (Kwok & Ali, 1998:116). However, anthropologist Clammer (1985:134), a “participant-observer” in Singapore for over a decade, argued in his sociological and historical account of Singapore’s state of multiculturalism from 1965 to 1990 that “there is such a thing [as a distinct Singaporean culture] now; the vital question is – how do we want it to develop?”. This theme also recurred in my interviews as participants (Chao, Kirtri, Sun) mentioned that being in Singapore had irreversibly altered them, often in ways they were unable to articulate.

An example of the state’s wariness of local culture is in its demonization of Singlish, a local vernacular that hybridises English with Chinese, Malay and Indian dialects. Singlish is not officially recognized, and discouraged in business, education and the media, for fear that foreigners will be unable to understand the language (Koh, 2010). During the 1999 National Day Rally speech, ex-PM Goh Chok Tong defined cosmopolitans as those who spoke English, were “international in outlook … and able to navigate comfortably anywhere in the world” (cited in Yeoh, 2004:2435). Goh mentioned this in contrast to “heartlanders”3, who spoke Singlish, were “parochial in interest and orientation, [and made] their living within the country” (cited in Yeoh, 2004:2435). Goh’s favourable description of cosmopolitans, in light of the government’s aim to become a world city, characterized what the government sought to create in Singaporeans. It is, therefore, prudent to distinguish between the culture the government wishes citizens to have and the grassroots definition of Singapore culture, though they may not always be exclusive to each other.

**Policy Implications**

There is a need to reconsider the development of a national identity with the CMIO model when existing categories, such as “Chinese” or “Indian” become more heterogeneous. In line with Bhikhu Parekh’s (2000) criticism that multiculturalism is too static to recognize the fluidity of cultural identity, ethnic identity cannot be merely imposed as an administrative category, but should allow for the expression of the multiplicity of identities. To reconcile the contrasting culturalist and racialist viewpoints, it is essential for the government to investigate the extent that race has been inflected by differences in nationality and culture due to migration, and to address it without glossing over cultural nuances.

It should be expected that the tension between national identity and incorporation would be a continuous balancing act, instead of relying on the CMIO monolith. Some scholars like Terence Chong (2010:517) argue that public anxiety is “a grassroots attempt to articulate a Singaporean narrative”. The government’s response to these attempts of organic national discourse, as to issues like Singlish, will alter its course of growth. However, the evolving national identity will need to incorporate immigrants as well, instead of using it to further exclude them.

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3 “Heartlanders” are defined by Ho (2006:388) to be the “conservative majority in Singapore who live in public housing estates”.

PAGE 15
Section 5. Waning Central Authority

The legitimacy of the PAP came from the fact that “the nation [was portrayed] as a consensual and organic community” (Lian, 2006:228-229) because “Singaporeans chose material wealth and physical comfort” (Trocki, 2006:139) in exchange for political submission. The PAP has dominated the Singapore Parliament since it was set up*. However, in the 2011 General Election, the PAP received 60.1% of votes, the lowest since independence. Consequently, the PAP adopted a major resolution in 2013 that laid out the mission for a new generation, which promised to be more responsive and to strengthen the Singaporean identity (Chang, 2013). This political move was in response to the rising opposition voice in Singapore, of which immigration was a contentious issue for the 2011 General Election (Wong, 2011). From the World Values Survey (2000-2002), Goh (2010) noted that, compared to other Asian countries, Singaporeans wanted more say in government, when asked what their country should prioritize besides economic development.

In her political analysis, Rachel Chang (2013:B4) situated the PAP’s 2013 resolution renewal in the party’s history. The last time it adopted a major resolution to set a new vision and persuade swing voters was in 1988, also done in response to an unsatisfactory election result*. The difference is that with the burgeoning civil society demanding greater democratisation today, Chang argues that “the PAP no longer has free rein to set the agenda for the country, and then to bring the people along”.

I will use the three-way model mentioned in section two to argue that a vicious circle of resentment has formed at the intersection of political opinion and citizens’ experiences of migrants.

Vicious circle of resentment

I argue that disgruntled citizens conflate migrant behaviour with government failure. At the White Paper protest against immigration, speaker Vincent Wijeyshingha claimed: “One, the government doesn’t understand what it means to be an ordinary Singaporean; two, it does not seem to care” (cited in Au, 2013). Wijeyshingha expected the government constantly to be the panacea, which is also George’s central thesis when he labelled Singapore the Air-conditioned Nation (2000). George (2000:15) stated, “Democracy is a means to an end, and the end is a high level of material security for Singaporeans”. While the government had been successfully responding to these demands, “Singaporeans’ needs and wants [have become] more and more diverse, and therefore harder to satisfy” (George, 2000:16). This expectation that the government would alleviate citizen discomfort from xenophobia is a responsibility that politicians seem to accept too, which perpetuates the expectation. When asked to account for why the PAP performed poorly in the 2011 General Election, LKY said that “many citizens felt uncomfortable seeing new, strange faces on overcrowded trains and buses” (Wong, 2011).

Therefore, the increase in social anxiety towards foreigners today is sustained by a paradox. There is increasing dissatisfaction with central authority but also a continued “over-reliance on top-down policing to sustain inter-ethnic peace, rather than on developing citizens’ sensitivity towards cultural diversity” (George, 2000:166). Since independence, the nation had relied on the highly interventionist governmentality of the Singaporean state. The CMIO model and housing ethnic quotas were examples of successful measures that led to social calm but they were top-down restrictions. Rituals of racial harmony, such as reciting the National Pledge that has enshrined

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4 The PAP won all seats from 1968 to 1980 and has since won the majority of seats.
5 The 1984 General Election saw a 12.9% vote swing against the PAP.
multicultural ideals or celebrating Racial Harmony Day every 21\textsuperscript{st} July, are argued by George (2000:166) to have become so routinized that “no deep commitment of multi-racialism is required, either in thought or action”.

![Figure 1: Vicious circle of immigrant-state-citizen resentment](image)

Figure 1 shows a vicious circle, in which public resentment against the government is attributed to the disapproval of its policies, such as that of immigration. Disgruntled citizens take it out on the policy’s subjects – immigrants, which then feed into anecdotal evidence justifying further resentment against the government for its policies. The symbiotic relationship between the conduct of immigrants and the ability of the government is evident from the comments made in response to the 2013 Little India Riot. Some online forum comments included, “Fuk u p.a.p for bringing in tis people into singapore” and “it was just a matter of time. And there will be more if pappy\textsuperscript{6} is still dreaming” (STOMP, 2013). Waning central authority therefore undermines the goal of multiculturalism and works against successful incorporation of immigrants.

**Policy Implications**

The citizen, immigrant and the state should share ownership of incorporation projects. Additionally, it is not solely up to the state to create opportunities for the citizen and immigrant to interact. Instead, it is essential for all three players to concurrently create opportunities and to include other actors like companies, schools, religious groups and not-for-profit organisations like Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2). Through content analysis of state rhetoric, Yeoh (2004) showed how the Singapore government presumed that Singapore was already a cosmopolitan city. Believing this to be the case by virtue of a heterogeneous demography mistakenly negates the need for action and asserts that it is sufficient for just the elite to be cosmopolitan. If cosmopolitanism is defined as the “quality of the mind … [in] outlook to the influx of foreign talent” (Yeoh, 2004:2436), then it is a trait all Singaporeans need to possess.

\textsuperscript{6} Local slang for the PAP government.
International scholars like Anthony Giddens (2006) have characterized “trust politics” as citizens regarding the state as an expert. In his commentary about Singapore's multiculturalism, Daniel Goh (2014:77) identifies another form of trust lacking in Singapore – “it is the political leaders who will need to trust the reflexively awakened energies of the diverse groups of people if Singapore is to realize its collective capacity.” Deliberative governance breaks down when there is little effort to communicate persuasively. For example, citizens have long questioned the extent of economic pragmatism in Singapore, such as in the Our Singapore Conversation (2013) where participants favoured lower migration rates over economic progress. However, LKY clearly championed economic progress when he said that “some Singaporeans do not understand what slow growth means” (cited in Han et al., 2011:167). While it may be true that citizens will not have access to the information and expertise that the government does, the emphasis of my argument is on the importance of communication within the three-way model.

One key way of encouraging ownership is to increase state transparency of discourse on migration and ethnicity. There is no Freedom of Information Act in Singapore. There are little or no public statistics on the nationalities of non-residents (Chan et al., 2013) or the ethnic/citizen breakdown in non-public housing estates. Little is known about the NIC or the procedures behind PR and citizen selection. The hypersensitive culture around migration and ethnicity, especially in the selective release of national statistics and the bureaucracy involved in contacting national agencies (as was the case for this paper), leaves little incentive for citizens to support and be part of the project of incorporation.
Section 6. Inequality and Exclusions

The tenet of egalitarianism was not a promise of equality. After five decades of laissez-faire meritocracy, social inequality was inevitable. As LHL (1998:5) conceded, “equal opportunities generate unequal outcomes”. Today, Singapore’s Gini coefficient is one of the highest in the world (Han et al., 2011). This section will show how social exclusions and disparity in legal status obstruct Singaporeans from transcending ethnic differences towards the common aim of nation building.

Reverting to pluralism

In Rethinking Ethnicity, Richard Jenkins (2008) theorized that citizens do not confront race, culture and economic status as discrete variables, but as intersections. Singapore is reverting to a plural society as ethnicity and legal status become inflected by socio-economic status. Foreign talents who are offered PR or citizenship are generally more educated and/or wealthier, privileged to be distinct in physical proximity and lifestyle from the local community. In 2011, 69.7% of “new citizens” had post-secondary education, in comparison to 44.1% of “existing citizens” (cited in Chong, 2013). That said, low-skilled labourers are also excluded from mainstream society, albeit in a different manner – as I will later discuss.

Additionally, foreigners have become the scapegoats of Singapore’s “first world problems”. The Republic’s first experiences of public train breakdowns, a bus strike (see Wong, 2013) and a riot by foreigner workers (see Cheung, 2013) all happened within the past five years, and coincided with global recessions. Immigrant Joel Cooper (2013) described his experience in a newspaper article: “from the crowds clogging up the MRT to the sky-high price of housing, it seems that everywhere I look, people like me are considered part of the problem.” In the presence of social and economic conflict, Singaporeans easily latch on to visual identifiers, like skin colour, as cited in Ong & Yeoh (2013) earlier. This tendency stems from the CMIO model, as “Singaporeans are already well-trained in racial stereotyping. They’ve had a lifetime’s training,” (Barr, cited in Fenn, 2014).

“Zones of Encounter”

Phil Wood and Charles Landry (2008) proposed a theoretical inter-cultural model to encourage interaction, instead of physical co-existence. They identified seven zones of encounter to maximize the advantages of diversity in policy design. Due to space constraints, I will only explore housing.

Since 1989, the Singapore government has set ethnic quotas for each public housing estate and residential area to promote inter-racial interaction (Chua & Kuo, 1995). However, the real impact on foreign talent expatriates is minimal. In a face-to-face questionnaire survey with over 500 foreign talents in Singapore, Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang (2004) found that 60.5% of foreigners would rather live in expatriate neighbourhoods than in public housing estates. For example, locations in central Orchard and Upper Bukit Timah are widely known for large populations of expatriates and expensive private housing.

Since foreigners are not well disposed to living in public housing districts, adding obstacles based on differentiated citizenship status worsens the situation. This is, however, what the government has

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done. To placate citizens, housing subsidies are only provided to citizens, and foreigners are not allowed to purchase public housing. They are only allowed to rent certain flats (Saw, 2012). From newspaper analysis, Chong (2013) observed a rising trend in foreigners buying private homes instead. The 2008 Sample Household Survey by the Housing and Development Board (2010) showed that 96% of the public housing population was residents (comprising 88% citizens and 8% PRs).

The problem of exclusion is not automatically solved when foreigners become PRs or citizens since legal status does not naturally lead to successful incorporation. Due to the increase in foreigner enclaves in public housing, the government had to impose a separate quota for PRs and foreigners when purchasing resale flats in 2014 (Siau, 2014). However, state intervention is difficult and limited with regard to private property. LKY admitted this in an interview, “We can’t stop them. So there will be a disproportionate number of North Indians among condo dwellers in the East Coast” (cited in Han et al., 2011:277).

Physical segregation and housing inequalities affect social representation. First, a culture of elitism is associated with foreign talents. In his study of private property in Singapore, Robbie Goh (2005) observed how condominiums were named – Costa del Sol and Casafina – to reflect cosmopolitanism, alienating heartland districts like Ang Mo Kio or Jurong. Also, the association of foreign talent with wealth fueled the speculation that migrants were profiting at the expense of Singaporeans (Goh, 2005) or being priced out (Chong, 2013).

In comparison to the foreign talents, housing segregations between locals and low-skilled labourers is even more overt. In 2008, residents of Serangoon Gardens petitioned against a dormitory compound in the residential area8. The petition cited “security and social problems and spoil the ambiance of the estate” as reasons (cited in Ng, 2008). Government rhetoric also promotes exclusion instead of the egalitarian principle that has propped up the CMIO model since independence. In 2013, for example, Ramesh (2013) reported that the National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan was open to the possibility of housing low-skilled foreign labour on offshore islands.

Political Loyalty

Rogers Brubaker’s (1992) agenda-setting work first analysed the intersection of immigration and citizenship when he recognized its dual function of being internally inclusive and externally exclusive. In Singapore, there is a clear ascending hierarchy from non-residents to PRs to citizens. My interview participants (Kirtri, Gangadhar & Sun) were either already PRs/citizens or applying for this status. They acknowledged they were applying because of the symbolic status and tangible benefits the PR accorded them, such as ease of finding housing and employment.

The government has taken great pains to differentiate each strata of legal status. For example, there are incentives, like “subsidised sales for public housing, upgrading, medical savings, CPF top ups, educational preferences” (George, 2000:186) for residents; and threats, like deportation and prohibiting low-skilled labourers to marry Singaporeans. One of the largest differences between existing and new residents is that of the mandatory two-year conscription. This is waived for first generation immigrants (Chin, 2013). Second-generation PRs have the option of giving up their

8 The compound is physically isolated, fenced up with barbed wire in the midst of freestanding public housing blocks. Companies also hire private buses to ferry the workers to and from work.
residency before they turn 18. However, the Ministry of Defence revealed that one-third of male PRs left Singapore at that age (cited in Leong, 2013). Despite this, locals have generally endorsed the citizenship hierarchy. In a door-to-door interview with 1,000 local-born residents conducted by Leong Chan-Hoong (2012), 57% of the participants answered “Yes” to the question if “benefits of citizens are enough to feel that they matter more than others?”

Besides trying to rationally persuade residents of the economic benefits of migration, or further differentiate citizenship strata to risk greater alienation of immigrants, the government will benefit from appreciating the non-tangible aspects of citizenship, such as through identity politics. Wendy Brown (2005) traced the emotive aspect of citizenship to Socrates, describing this aspect as intense civic loyalty and love. In 1959, LKY declared, “But in one thing, we cannot afford diversity – diversity of loyalty” (cited in Rodriguez, 2003:11). However, LKY later defined in 2011 that being Singaporean was that “whoever joins us is part of us” (cited in Han et al., 2011:292). The group of “whoever” assumes unproblematic naturalization. It begs the question if loyalty is simply being “attached to actual existing political communities, their laws and polices, or to the political ideals we hold out for these communities” (Brown, 2005:21). Prominent statistician Saw Swee-Hock (2012:267) argued that “slowing down the growth of the foreign population constitutes only one part of the solution; there is still the disquiet emanating from the presence of foreigners that the government has to deal with”.

In the past decade or so, several Western countries have started imposing more requirements on the citizenship application process, such as citizenship tests in the Netherlands (2000), Britain (2005) and Denmark (2007). The Netherlands Civic Integration of Newcomers Act in 1998 made learning the Dutch language and sociocultural orientation programmes for immigrants compulsory (Lentin & Titley, 2011). From October 2013, all British citizenship applicants have to take an English test (BBC, 2013). In 2011, the National Integration Council (NIC)9 in Singapore initiated the Singapore Citizenship Journey (SCJ), an enhanced orientation programme for new citizens. However, there is no minimum pass criterion because the government believes that “a test does not secure or guarantee a person’s commitment to Singapore” (Narayanan, 2011). Notedly, the SCJ is not extended to PRs, of which the state approves about 30,000 new applications a year (National Population and Talent Division, 2013). There is also currently no language requirement to be a citizen/PR.

The lack of structures to ensure political loyalty in immigrants, especially after being accorded PR or citizenship status, is a great worry for Singaporeans. Richard Sennett described the new global cosmopolitan elite as people who want to “operate in the city but not rule it; it composes a regime of power without responsibility” (cited in Yeoh & Huang, 2011:683). In Leong’s (2012) survey, 60.2% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “immigrants use Singapore as a stepping stone to other developed countries”. Many examples in recent public memory have also added distrust towards immigrant political loyalty. For example, a Mainland Chinese Singapore PR, Zhang Yuanyuan, professed her love for China on national television during China’s 60th anniversary in 2009 (The Economist, 2009).

If the state continues to make executive decisions about migration on largely economic grounds, it runs the risk of alienating its own citizens. While political loyalty is demanded from local-born citizens, the selection process for naturalization emphasizes other attributes, like productivity. This

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9 Launched in 2009.
makes sense in the open economy of Singapore, as Wendy Brown (2005) characterised neoliberalism to be the movement of economic rationality pervading all aspects of the polity and individual action. As a result, Kwok Kian Woon & Mahizhnan Ali (1998) argued that when the national culture the state emphasises is based solely on productivity instead of factors like political loyalty or culture, “knowledge” and “talent” become universal traits, rendering able Singaporeans to emigrate and be easily replaced by foreign talents.

Policy Implications

It is important for the state to persuade citizens and foreigners to enter the “zones of encounter” to be engaged with current incorporation initiatives. From surveys conducted with foreign talents and Singaporeans, Yeoh & Huang (2004) argued that deeper foreign-citizen relations are vital but lacking. They used the failure of clubs intentionally set up to facilitate immigrant incorporation as an example. While the clubs like Club Cosmopolitans and Han Yuan were technically open to Singaporeans and foreign talent for membership, in practice they attracted clustered membership.

The state, in its rhetoric and policies, needs to reflect that they appreciate the emotive aspect of citizenship, instead of justifying migration entirely on economic rationality and demanding compliance. According to Chua Beng Huat (2007:64), the government views ‘nationalist’ discourse as the “unending competition of global capitalism in order to preserve […] the citizens’ material life”. In a knee-jerk response to public anxiety, the government targeted low-skilled labourers due to relative positions of power. Making migrant labourers the scapegoat of public dissent does not detract from the problems associated with other categories of migrants that the state must similarly address.

The rigour of the citizenship naturalization process should be reconsidered. In Leong’s (2012) survey, 56.9% said that it was “too easy to become a PR” while only 27.9% disagreed; 53.8% said that it was “too easy for PRs to be citizens” while 27.7% disagreed. In my interview, Mr. Kirtri, himself a PR, expressed his shock that his Indian-national friend was “offered a PR in like three or four months”. He mused, “If you work hard to get something you probably value it more”. There is currently no minimum residency for PR application, while it is a broad bracket of two to six years for citizenship. Moreover, PR eligibility is primarily functional. The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority’s website shows that apart from familial relations to citizens, one is eligible only if he or she holds an employment pass, or is an investor or entrepreneur.
Section 7. Conclusion

Backed by anecdotal and quantitative evidence of social anxiety against migrants, I have questioned why there is increased racist and xenophobic discourse when commenting on social issues involving migrants. Exacerbated by the unprecedented rate and scale of migration since 2005 (Lai, 2012), “race” is inflected by culture, class and nationality, and presents new conflicts. I have focused on understanding how state multiculturalism strategies affect its subjects, and used the CMIO model as the springboard to show that Singapore’s bureaucracy is its own tragedy. It perpetuates the government’s racist spot to cultural nuances, and hinders Singaporeans from transcending discrete categories to embrace the cosmopolitanism that the government assumes is already present by virtue of demographic heterogeneity. One thread runs through the model's stasis in the three tenets – the widening “dissonance” between the government and its people (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008:256). I have argued that the three tenets – depoliticizing ethnicity, strong central authority and promoting egalitarianism – once sustained the CMIO’s veneer of multicultural harmony but do not now effectively address the present social and political conditions.

The analysis is thus one of warning but also hope. I clarified that this paper does not argue that racial harmony in Singapore has imploded, since the real extent of xenophobia and racism has yet to be conclusively established, which is something that warrants further research. Although oppositional voices were also heard, this paper was sparked by the intensified frequency of xenophobic and racist responses in recent years. The strength of this paper is that I have worked at the intersection of migration and multiculturalism instead of merely assessing the state of racial harmony in isolation. The Singaporean government cannot rest on evidence supporting racial harmony without taking into account how additional layers of identity, such as citizenship status, and the macro socio-political climate, change the understanding of ethnicity and multiculturalism; nor can the state dismiss the possibility that xenophobic sentiments can still be expressed racially in a largely racially harmonious society. The hope comes in the fact that by examining the complexities of overlapping layers of identity, widespread xenophobia and racism will not be necessary before the state adapts its policies.

In his analysis of Singapore’s history of multiculturalism, Daniel Goh (2014:77) concludes that the state needs a paradigm shift towards “adaptive governance”, defined when both the state and its people are communicatively and politically involved and responsive to new complexities. Looking forward, the true test is whether the Singapore government, dubbed the “administrative state” by David Lim (1998), is able to enact this shift. The government’s preference for policy and tangible solutions is evident from how it responded to critical events. In the aftermath of the 2013 Little India Riot, alcoholism was blamed and an alcohol ban was swiftly enforced in Little India (Heng, 2013). Critics, such as journalist Weizhen Tan (2013) and TWC2, criticized the state’s response because they believed it avoided the heart of the matter. According to Wood and Landry (2008:6), such pragmatism is a global phenomenon because “there is an institutional inertia to tackle issues of population change and the feelings of disruption, mistrust and even dislike”.

Situating this conclusion within the corpus of empirical and theoretical work, Mamdani (1996:301) similarly emphasised fluidity of governance and “an outcome of social processes [rather] than a state-enforced artifact”. Discourse on multiculturalism (the diversity question) invariably implicates democracy and diagnoses the state-civil society relationship. Using my three-way incorporation model, further research must extend beyond state multiculturalism to focus on societal critique, since the response and participation of citizens and migrants play a significant role in moulding state
policy too. The unique synergy of these three players explains the plethora of ways state multiculturalism manifests. In the academic study of state strategies, I affirm the need for intersectional research as espoused by the prevailing superdiversity theoretical paradigm (Vertovec, 2007). It is necessary for scholars to incorporate the country’s particular socio-cultural, historical and political contexts when seeking to assess the success of multiculturalism projects.
### Appendix A: Interview Participants’ Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview Type</th>
<th>Language Conducted</th>
<th>Length of stay in Singapore</th>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>Job Sector</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chao</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Citizen (1996)</td>
<td>White-Collar</td>
<td>24 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Gangadhar</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>PR (2008)</td>
<td>Blue-Collar (Mid-skilled)</td>
<td>4 Jan 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Sun</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
<td>Soon to apply for PR</td>
<td>Blue-Collar (Professional)</td>
<td>8 Jan 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi Worker</td>
<td>Informal*</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>Low-Skilled Construction</td>
<td>15 Dec 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Worker (from Hebei)</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>Low-Skilled Construction</td>
<td>15 Dec 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Outside Aljunied MRT where workers typically gather for leisure on their day off, every Sunday*

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population1,2,3 ('000)</td>
<td>2,074.5</td>
<td>2,413.9</td>
<td>3,047.1</td>
<td>4,027.9</td>
<td>5,076.7</td>
<td>5,312.4</td>
<td>5,399.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Population2,3 ('000)</td>
<td>2,013.6</td>
<td>2,282.1</td>
<td>2,735.9</td>
<td>3,273.4</td>
<td>3,771.7</td>
<td>3,818.2</td>
<td>3,844.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore Citizens ('000)</td>
<td>1874.8</td>
<td>2,194.3</td>
<td>2,623.7</td>
<td>2,985.9</td>
<td>3,230.7</td>
<td>3,285.1</td>
<td>3,313.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Residents ('000)</td>
<td>138.8</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>112.1</td>
<td>287.5</td>
<td>541.0</td>
<td>533.1</td>
<td>531.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density4 (per sq km)</td>
<td>3,538</td>
<td>3,907</td>
<td>4,814</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>7,146</td>
<td>7,429</td>
<td>7,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

1) Total population comprises Singapore residents (i.e. Singapore citizens and permanent residents) and non-residents.

2) Data for 1970 and 1980 are based on de facto concept (i.e. the person is present in the country when enumerated at the reference period). Data from 1990 onwards are based on de jure concept (i.e. the person’s place of usual residence).

3) Data from 2003 onwards exclude residents who have been away from Singapore for a continuous period of 12 months or longer as at the reference period.

4) Prior to 2003, data are based on Singapore’s land area as at end-December. From 2003 onwards, data are based on Singapore’s land area as at end-June.

Appendix C: Non-Resident Percentage Breakdown

References


• Singapore Constitution. , § 12(2) (1965). Retrieved from http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId%3Acf2412ff-fca5-4a64-a8ef-b95b987728e%20Depth%3A0%20ValidTime%3A23%2F03%2F2014%20TransactionTime%3A23%2F03%2F2014%20Status%3Ainforce;rec=0;whole=yes


