Diversity and Nation-Building in Singapore

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ethnic and religious diversity that shapes everyday life and politics in Singapore is the product of its colonial history as a major port city for the British Empire situated between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Out of the migration patterns of the 19th and first half of the 20th century came a society composed of numerous ethnic groups, each with sub-group divisions and ties. What was long termed by political leaders as a commitment to *multiracialism* has over time developed into a commitment to *communitarian multiculturalism* and to pluralism, a commitment that is in many ways quite impressive. If pluralism is respect for and accommodation of difference, then Singapore practises pluralism in many aspects of everyday life, as well as politics and state institutions.

Currently, in Singapore, the commitment to multiculturalism is deep and wide. Indeed, it is a central part of a broader political project to define

Singapore, not as a Chinese-majority state, but as a multicultural society (reflected also in the decision to privilege English over Chinese as the main official language of instruction and administration). This can be seen as a remarkable and largely successful attempt to block the kind of majoritarian nationalism that has threatened pluralism in many other postcolonial societies.

This paper recounts the conscious efforts to institutionalize pluralism from the colonial period to the present. While consistently present, policies to address diversity have changed over time. It was the colonial authorities that first set out the racial grid, dividing Singaporeans into four "racial" groups (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other). Postcolonial leaders took over this representation of the society in order to pursue their goals of nation-building and winning political office, and in doing so have moved from multiracialism to communitarian multiculturalism. The paper first examines the colonial legacies that continued to shape postcolonial Singaporean politics and approaches

to pluralism, particularly the racial grid. It then examines in more detail a key change event, the race riots that led eventually to the departure of Singapore from the Malaysian federation and the creation of the independent Republic of Singapore in 1965. The political jockeying of postcolonialism and independence included debates about pluralism and multiracialism, and positions varied over time as some political authorities were replaced by others. Yet, these were never simply debates about principles; they were implemented through policies and institutionalized. This paper recounts the routes by which multiracialism became today's communitarian multiculturalism.

II. MIGRANT PLURALISM, COLONIAL RACIALISM AND DECOLONIZATION

Singapore was not a nation when the city became an independent state in 1965—it had to be imagined and constructed as such. Singapore had been the primary city of British Malaya, the colony that was composed of the Malay states of the Malayan Peninsula and the Crown colony of the Straits Settlements. By the time it celebrated the centenary of its founding as a colonial settlement in 1919, Singapore was a thriving port city teeming with diverse migrant communities from Asia, the Middle East and Europe. It exemplified what J.S. Furnivall, a colonial official turned scholar, termed a plural society, where disparate communal groups did not cohere socially and politically, and were only loosely integrated in the mercantile economy and

interacting in the marketplace.[1] Singapore's plural society had its origin in the use of convict labour for building the city and then the use of prison-like physical segregation to manage the population in the early decades.[2] The racial grid that colonial authorities instituted, more pervasively in Singapore than in other parts of British Malaya, did not just influence urban planning, but also pervaded the overall governance of the diverse local population.

At the highest level of abstraction, the racial grid classified the diverse communal groups into four categories: Malay, Chinese, Indian and Other races. The grid evolved from experimentations with ethnic classifications in the colonial census, which began in earnest in the Straits Settlements in 1871 and were carried out every decade until 1931. While the meanings of ethnicity shifted with social, political and economic developments, the racial grid became the organizing framework for classifying and understanding the population into the postcolonial period.[3] The censuses provided the colonial officials a concrete sense of demographic reality to capture the changing migrant pluralism of the rapidly growing colony.

The racial grid was more than just an information tool to categorize the diversity. It was also a disciplinary tool used to prevent trans-ethnic solidarities from forming due to inter-ethnic interactions.[4] That there was an incipient inter-ethnic acculturation and cooperation in the colonies became very evident when two broad multiracial alliances encompassing Chinese, Malay and Indian secret societies and warlords battled each other over urban territory and control of tin mines in the 1860s and 1870s. The emerging inter-ethnic relationships

were countered and eventually contained, however, by the colonial ideology that had produced the racial grid and continued to shape the political economic realities of race.[5] Ethnic stereotypes that had existed before colonialism were transformed by European racial theories into an ideology built on pseudo-scientific beliefs about innate biological tendencies, which then informed government policies toward the colonial political economy.

Nationalist responses to this colonial ideology ranged from the conservative to the radical across the spectrum of ethnic groups. Among Malays, for example, conservatives sought to preserve their ethnic culture and language against any form of acculturation. Sometimes these views descended into racial supremacy, especially among ultra-nationalist Malays who saw Malaya as their land and birthright, and the Chinese and Indians as usurpers and thieves. At the other end of the spectrum, left-wing radicals sought to transcend race by forging an acculturated Malayan people from a position of multiracial equality. In the centre were liberals and moderates (some of whom preferred a compromise between Malays and non-Malays), and others who preferred a slow march to independence so as to first secure a viable multiracialism under protection of the British Empire. No group, however, rejected the racial theory outright. Most sought to transform the racism into some kind of racialism, oftentimes rejecting the discrimination while accepting the colonial myths concerning racial weaknesses as mentalities or even biological facts that they needed to overcome through disciplinary practices or social engineering.

After the Second World War, the politics of decolonization gathered pace. The communists revolted in a long insurgency. The intensification of urbanization, socialization and government management of everyday life accompanied the anti-communist military campaign. Extensive education programs were put in place to forge Malayan citizens who would understand and accept their racial place in the multiracial nation.[6] In the meantime, communities were mobilized in discrete racial silos and inter-ethnic bargaining among communal leaders on behalf of their communities was institutionalized as the dominant model of multiracial political rule, which came to be termed "consociational democracy" by political scientists.[7] In preparation for independence, at the highest level of party politics, conservative Chinese and Indian leaders formed the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress, joining with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) to coalesce in the Alliance Party. Through the coalition, the non-Malays accepted recognition of the special position of the Malays in exchange for equal citizenship rights for their communities. The coalition also provided the platform for inter-ethnic bargaining over political and economic concerns. The Alliance won the general election in 1955. Malaya became independent in 1957, but without Singapore.

Despite close historical, cultural and demographic links to Malaya, Singapore was excluded from this process of decolonization. Including it and its large Chinese population in the Federation of Malaya would have tilted the demographic balance between the majority Malays and the non-Malay minorities. The exclusion from the Federation

and continued colonial status became increasingly untenable. Left-wing nationalists led by Chinese-speaking unionists and students had become the dominant political force in the city in the 1950s. As suffrage was gradually expanded and political autonomy increased, it became evident that the conservative Anglophone Chinese leaders supported by the British had no influence among the masses. With the decolonization of Singapore becoming inevitable, the British were caught in a bind. Full independence would hand the city-state to Chinese-led leftists with suspected links to the communists in Malaya.

In the escalating conflict, a group of English-speaking moderate socialists maneuvered into power. Led by a young lawyer, Lee Kuan Yew, the Anglophone group allied with the Sinophone leftists to form the People's Action Party (PAP). The Anglophone wing of the party was multiracial and provided respectability to the leftists. Together they sought British agreement for universal suffrage and the granting of self-government. The PAP won the general election in 1959 and Lee became Singapore's first prime minister. Lee's faction quickly moved to outmaneuver the Sinophone leftists, and worked with the British and the UMNO towards the merger of Singapore and Malaya into a new Federation of Malaysia that would also incorporate the two states of British North Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak, so as to maintain the demographic balance between Malays and non-Malays. Opposed to merger, which would dilute their power, the Sinophone leftists broke away from the PAP to form a new party called the Socialist Front and split the unions, grassroots organizations and political associations in the city right down the middle.

The PAP responded with two moves that would come to define Singapore's postcolonial multiracialism. First, the PAP government crippled the Socialist Front with crackdowns and the administrative detention of its leaders and unionists on charges of communist subversion. Second, the draconian authoritarian action was justified on grounds that the Front was not just opposing the merger, but also seeking to subvert society and the march towards the formation of a multiracial nation. The Front's leaders were not just depicted as communists, but also as being "too Chinese" and likely to lead the country into internecine racial conflict between Malays and the Chinese. Therefore, they could not legitimately represent the multiracial interests of the young nation.

III. KEY CHANGE EVENTS: RACE RIOTS AND INDEPENDENCE

In September 1963, the Singapore electorate voted on the merger. Five days later, in the first general elections as an autonomous state in the Federation of Malaysia, the PAP was returned to government, but with less than half the popular vote and a reduced parliamentary majority. The UMNO had reneged on its agreement with the PAP not to campaign in each other's turf and had supported the Singapore Alliance Party, a multiracial coalition of communally organized parties that mirrored the Alliance on the Peninsula. It came third in the popular vote. With the common enemy, i.e., the leftists, neutralized by crackdowns, the Malay-led

elites in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore's leaders clashed over the type of multiracialism that would define the new nation and how pluralism would work.

The UMNO-led Alliance promoted the inter-ethnic bargaining model, based on recognition of Malay political primacy in exchange for political rights for non-Malays. The Singapore leaders favoured a revision of this model, one already developed in their battle against the leftists. Racial equality and the creation of a Malaysian people and nation would be the constitutional foundation of the nation, although the Malays' special position was to be acknowledged as a historical fact. Singapore's Minister of Culture, S. Rajaratnam, described the PAP's vision as one of gradual and equal acculturation towards a national culture based on enlarging the overlapping areas of cultural beliefs and practices shared by the Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures.[8] Instead of political and economic bargaining between ethnic-based parties and a sort of constitutional bargain exchanging rights, common interests in economic development and political purpose were to be forged in the multiracial PAP.

These two divergent visions of multiracialism were conditioned by the history of patchwork colonial state formation in British Malaya. As ports ruled as a Crown colony under direct administration, the Straits Settlements, with Singapore as the seat of colonial government, had developed the notion that as British subjects all persons born in-colony were equal before the law, regardless of race. The same legal status was not accorded to non-Malays born in the Federated Malay States and un-federated Malay States. The legal innovation of "British Protected Persons" had been applied to them in the 1930s, thereby affording the non-Malays certain legal rights.

Such legal equality in the Straits Settlements had moderated the effects of the racial grid and permitted the idea that, while the races might be separate biological realities, they could nonetheless relate to each other as political equals and could coalesce as a nation over time. On the other hand, the ambiguities surrounding the status of non-Malays as non-subjects of the Malay sultans and as British Protected Persons lay at the root of the citizenship question in post-war Malaya.

The difference in visions of multiracialism was also grounded in divergent political economies faced by the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore elites. The peninsular economy was primarily agrarian, driven by commodity exports and post-war development deepened the Malay agrarian economy even in the midst of urbanization and the growth of commerce among the Chinese. The Alliance bound its legitimacy to the promise to reduce the economic inequality that existed between Malays and non-Malays, particularly the Chinese. Economic development was therefore a political imperative for the Alliance. However, the peninsular economy faltered due to the lack of Malay smallholding development and administrative expertise, capital and experience. From independence in 1957 through the 1960s, economic inequality increased, as inter-ethnic bargaining failed to change the economic ownership structure. Preferential treatment for the Malays in public sector recruitment, awarding of scholarships and business grants, and rural

development programs was begun, but such policies took time to reshape the economy and society. Indeed, they largely benefitted the Malay elites in the beginning. Inter-ethnic tension due to economic stratification was exacerbated by Chinese and Indian resistance to national programs for educational integration and the use of Malay as the national language. By the mid-1960s, consociational multiracialism was breaking down and growing communalism presented what scholars would later call "democracy without consensus," an updated postcolonial version of Furnivall's plural society.[9]

Merging Singapore into this situation created an explosive situation. Compared to the lethargic peninsular economy, Singapore was industrializing and was well placed to become the primary port for Malaysia once the post-merger common market agreement was implemented. The PAP championed multinational investment in manufacturing and the transformation of Singapore's population into an industrial labour force, in preparation to lead the new nation into the economic future. Electorally, the PAP responded tit for tat to the Alliance's entry into Singapore politics in 1963; it contested constituencies in the West Malaysia general election in April 1964. Its campaign slogan championed a "Malaysian Malaysia" based on a multiracialism of equal rights against the "Malay Malaysia" racialism of the Alliance. This slogan was a gross simplification of the divergence in multiracial ideology between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, but it tapped into the widespread apprehension among the Chinese of assimilation into Malay culture. In the elections, the PAP won a seat in the suburbs of the federal capital.

Relations between the two electoral groups soured to the breaking point and spilled over into Malay-Chinese relations in Singapore. In July 1964, the annual Malay procession to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday degenerated into deadly riots between Chinese secret societies and Malay ultra-nationalist gangs. Curfews were imposed, but less than two months later, riots broke out again, resulting in more deaths and injuries. Chinese-Malay tensions continued to brew. UMNO and PAP, with their competing visions of multiracialism, could not come to terms. The federal parliament of Malaysia decided to expel Singapore from the Federation to calm the tensions. On 9 August 1965, Singapore became an independent country.

The 1964 riots were the worst violence seen in post-war Singapore. They traumatized a society that had seen civil political strife during decolonization in the 1950s, but not racial conflict between the two main communities constituting more than 90% of the population. To many, the conflict pitting the leftists against the colonial government and conservatives, and between the Anglophone PAP leaders and the Sinophone socialists, had been difficult, but was seen as political. But the racial riots appeared to endanger the very existence of society and the nation, as indeed they ultimately did.

The riots and their aftermath was a change event that shaped postcolonial multiracialism in definitive ways. It generated both negative and positive outlooks on the multiracialism to be forged and institutionalized after independence.

For many citizens, the 1964 riots were hard evidence that racial sentiments were absolutely innate and

tending towards division, strife and violence. Matters of cultural and communal diversity were therefore treated as reflecting incontrovertible racial sentiments, and necessitating strong governmental management and social discipline. Where communal groups and their leaders exploited the racial sentiments to champion their own communal interests and agenda, such communalism came to be seen as the chief obstacle to the building of the nation. This negative outlook became an ideological common sense, such that the preservation of racial harmony became a key justification to keep communalism out of the political realm and oftentimes the public sphere. Politically, it allowed the PAP to claim moral leadership and tag political opponents who mobilized along ethnic lines as communalists who did not have the national interest at heart.

There was also, however, an equally important positive dimension to postcolonial multiracialism, resting on the notion that the moral values and heritage of cultural traditions could be selectively developed to produce a forward-looking people and united nation. One important implication of the belief that racial sentiments were innate and inevitable was that communal groupings and their interests had to be taken seriously and could not be repressed. Therefore, the natural existence of communal groups had to be acknowledged, and the state had little choice but to actively use communal groups and tap their social energy for nation-building, so that communal interests would not be manifested as communalism and the social energy would not be misdirected into inter-communal enmity. For the ruling elites, the 1964 riots showed that communal interests were unavoidable and

could not simply be countered by the politics of negotiation and the electoral process of convincing individuals to vote for a multiracial party. Communal groups had to be actively cultivated and politically managed to align their interests to nation-building. Riots in 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, which threatened to spill over into Singapore, reinforced this view.

In both the negative and positive outlooks on postcolonial multiracialism, any emphasis on the individual and the discourse on rights were distinctly missing. In their place, the community is treated as the natural means of social inclusion and the end in itself, in which individuals' responsibility to uphold social bonds and moral values are seen as necessary for the collective good, and their rights secured by the community that protects and nurtures them. Society is seen as composed of cascading layers of communal belonging and responsibility, with the nuclear family as the basic block building upwards to interlocking neighbourhood and ethno-religious communities, and then to racial communities, all still framed by the racial grid. Ultimately, this hierarchy is topped by the nation as a community realized by the party-state. In this sense, postcolonial multiracialism was already developing from a communitarian position before it became ideologically defined and institutionally transformed as such.

IV. FROM POSTCOLONIAL MULTIRACIALISM TO COMMUNITARIANISM

The newly independent state pursued its postcolonial multiracialism with the single purpose of building a nation from a plural society that did not yet imagine itself as one. Singapore was essentially a port city with a limited geographical space and different communal groups living in close proximity and interacting economically, but separated from each other in political and cultural life.

In addition, each category of the racial grid was an ideological convenience papering over the diverse migrant realities of a city that had experienced waves of migration for over a century and a half. The Chinese did not form a single community, but comprised communal groups divided along linguistic, regional, ancestral, religious and class lines. The Malays were almost all migrants from the surrounding archipelago, divided too into the diverse ethnic groups of that archipelago. Tamils from South India made up the majority of Indians, but diversity similar to the Chinese prevailed.

This situation meant that, even if the PAP had wanted to manage diversity by pursuing a majoritarian policy to favour the Chinese, such a policy would find little resonance with the social realities of the city. Although by the measure of the racial grid, the Chinese formed the clear majority in the city, realities were such that few Chinese thought of themselves as possessing a cohesive

racial identity. Nor did the Malays, although given special standing as the indigenous race, unanimously support the UMNO nationalists and act as a corporate group. Moreover, the PAP had already campaigned on a specific multiracial ideology that treated the racial grid as the starting point for a progressive vision of equal racial communities marching to nationhood. Abandoning this key political platform that brought them electoral success would mean the PAP leaders conceded the racialist argument to their opponents, especially the Malay nationalists.

Communal diversity thus became both a challenge and an opportunity for nation-building. The postcolonial state disciplined as well as mobilized existing community organization and energy, channeling them into new institutions giving expression to the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) multiracialism that was its approach to pluralism. This method involved extensive state takeover and control of four institutional spheres for social engineering through the 1970s: grassroots organizations; parades and processions; schools and language policy; and welfare and charity groups. The social engineering successfully cultivated a national multiracial identity, but at some costs involving the exclusion of specific communal groups and the general erosion of communal identities, to which the state responded with more social engineering in the 1980s. Spurred by liberalization and democratization pressures, the state transformed multiracialism into communitarianism in the 1990s.

State Takeover and Control of Four Institutional Arenas: Doing Pluralism From Above

Urban redevelopment, involving the extensive resettlement of close to 90% of the population from slums and villages into public housing towns, gave the state the platform to reorganize society using existing communal units. Slum and village communities were resettled in housing estates close to their former homes. This policy preserved existing social networks and practices embedded in local communities. In turn, these local communities were brought together to interact with each other by the community centres and residential grassroots organizations of the state organ, the People's Association. The Association was formed in 1960, the same year as the Housing Development Board, with the mandate of fostering racial harmony and social cohesion in the new housing estates. The Association's work focused on community centres, which formed the cultural heart of each town, sending out its heartbeat of cultural programs via its citizens and residents committees. Each community centre offered festival celebrations, cultural courses, sports facilities and the screening of national television programs. Existing clubs and societies, especially those involving traditional sports, arts and dances such as the Chinese Lion Dance and the Malay Silat, were integrated into the community centre organization and their practices into the cultural programming. The content of the cultural programs encouraged inter-ethnic exchange and cross-cultural experience. They were timed according to a calendar of ethnic festivals and anchored in the National Day Parade.

The National Day Parade is a rather unique event among postcolonial states. Singapore's Parade has a military theme. Organized by the Singapore Armed Forces, it showcases the capabilities of the country's citizen army to defend the small state against potential enemies and expresses the citizenry's resolute spirit of independence in the face of bigger countries surrounding the island state. It is also a grand show that displays the multiracial development of the nation, through the procession of representative floats and performances by community centres across the island.

Adding depth to the national imagination, the moribund Chingay Parade, a local religious carnival suppressed by modernist reformers in the late colonial period, was revived in 1973 as an annual event that complemented the National Day Parade. The two occur approximately six months apart. The Chingay Parade is held during the Lunar New Year celebrated by the Chinese, and often involves tours of the city centre as well as in the public housing heartlands. Organized by the People's Association, Chingay provides a greater and more focused celebration of the cultural heritage of the diverse communities making up Singapore society. More importantly, Chingay brings the processional arena into the ambit of the state and plugs the gap caused by the restriction of ethnic and religious processions after the 1964 riots (which, as mentioned above, had originated from the procession celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday). Processions and parades were a key feature of communal life on the island, and, with the revival of Chingay, communal groups could again take part in this cultural practice, albeit in a state-organized procession, and with other communities to celebrate the multiracialism of the nation.

The national education system was the third institutional arena for the making of postcolonial multiracialism. The state nationalized most of the existing schools that had been founded and managed by religious and ethnic associations, although allowing them to preserve cultural elements in their curriculum and the practice of their religious or ethnic identity. The state also established many secular schools alongside existing ones, and through the creation of a uniform national curriculum, and the use of English as the medium of instruction, sought to establish a common meritocratic field of achievement without privileging any ethnic group. Reinforcing the approach to communal resettlement so as to preserve communities and using community centres to cultivate inter-ethnic common spaces, children were encouraged to study in schools in their immediate neighbourhood. Multiracialism was reinforced in the schools, explicitly through civic education, the celebration of ethnic festivals and special occasions such as Youth, Children and Friendship Days, when multiracial ties were emphasized through the cross-cultural learning of songs and dance. There was also the daily performance of rituals such as flag raising, national anthem singing and national pledge recitation, sometimes in the different official languages, so as to emphasize pluralism within nation-building.

Another way this plural society made its diversity felt was in the voluntary sector, where charities were operated along communal, ethnic and religious lines. In 1968, the postcolonial state brought under its control the Singapore Council of Social Service , which had been set up 10 years earlier to coordinate and support the fragmented welfare sector. The charities were mobilized to help with welfare problems that were becoming more visible as the population was resettled into public housing estates and industrialization accelerated. One result was to bring social workers and volunteers out from their church, temple, mosque or clan house, and to make them extend their services to citizens of other faiths and allegiances. In 1983, state control was further enhanced over the welfare sector through the establishment of the Community Chest to centralize fund raising. The PAP's own Community Foundation charity filled a gap in the social welfare system, providing kindergarten and nursery services that brought the ruling party directly in contact with the population via preschool education and care. In doing so, the PAP sought to give concrete expression to the party as a multiracial nationalist movement that rose above communal interests and cared for the people.

The outcome of state-led social and cultural engineering in these institutional spheres was the emergence of a multiracial Singaporean identity. This identity was still centered on a primary ethnic and communal identity, but increasingly incorporated cultural elements from other ethnic identities and modern popular culture to make for a multiracial and cosmopolitan national imagination. Multiracialism was no longer a political ideal or an abstraction in terms of the CMIO racial grid, but a lived reality of local practices embedded in the shared settings of school and neighbourhood. The emotional bonds forged in the inter-cultural interactions taking place in national processions and welfare outreach enhanced the everyday lived reality of multiracialism.

Political Economic Exclusions and the Rise of Individualism

After separation from Malaysia and the loss of the hinterland, economic development was put on an emergency footing, couched in a discourse emphasizing the survival of a city-state thrown into the winds of global capitalism and the Cold War. Without a large domestic market, import-substitution industrialization was no longer viable; thus, following Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, an export-oriented industrialization model was adopted. The developmental state moved to urbanize the island, participate directly in industrialization, and resettle the entire population. This was social engineering to create a modern citizenry and workforce. Politically, the PAP-led state became increasingly autocratic, justifying autocratic discipline on the need for political stability and social order to facilitate rapid development for the survival of Singapore. Labour unions were coopted and brought under state control when the National Trades Union Congress became closely linked to the PAP. In addition, industrial action was severely curtailed.

The forced resettlement, corporatist cooptation of unions and suppression of dissent represented nothing less than an imposed social and cultural revolution that in one generation transformed Singapore society into an urban proletarian society. For Goh Keng Swee, the PAP's social and economic architect, this result was inevitable. Speaking in 1967, Goh cited Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (1905) and the historical examples of Victorian England and Stalinist Russia, writing that there is "no easy way to grind out of the mass of poor

people the economic surplus or savings needed to finance capital accumulation." Yet, in 1972, Goh also refuted the notion that a government seeking to promote adjustment to modernization should set norms of good behaviour for individuals because "in a multiracial community, there are different criteria by which good conduct is assessed."[10] These two positions represent the careful path trod by the PAP's social engineers. They sought to cultivate new generations of workers loyal to the nation by building on the social sensibilities and solidarity of communal groups and by preserving communal groups' cultural capital and internal coherence even in the face of state-driven economic modernization.

On the whole, the state managed to walk the tightrope between social engineering and cultural preservation, but there were weak points to the strategy of state control of the communal arenas. In essence, it caused the overall decline of established grassroots networks such as Chinese clan associations and other associations centered on religious institutions. Thus, while the communal groups' cultural capital was preserved, the expansion of state control ate into the social capital of the communal groups. Nor could the new state-led institutions replace the organic function played by the old civic associations for two reasons. First, the People's Association was ultimately a bureaucracy. It did not express the people's response to real problems they faced in their communities. Instead, it led to greater technocratic elaboration of state-run grassroots organizations antithetical to democratic life. Second, the Association's local organizations suffered from political capture by the PAP. As the ruling party's political instrument that competed

and displaced leftist communal organizations, the Association allowed the ruling party to monopolize the grassroots sectors against political opponents and, ultimately, all dissenting voices. The broader effect of the strategy can be illustrated by examining the fate of two important groups that were excluded from the multiracialism, one being Chinese and the other Malay.

The first group was the Sinophone intelligentsia that fought trenchant cultural battles with the Anglophone elites of the ruling party from its base in Nanyang University in the 1970s. These battles were lost through confrontation sheer legal force, despite the fact that there was no inherent reason the modern Chinese high culture advocated by the intelligentsia could have a place in postcolonial multiracialism, nor any prima facie reason why the intelligentsia could not play a leadership role through its organic links to Chinese associations. However, the Anglophone elites of the PAP could not overcome their suspicion that the Sinophone intelligentsia had links to the leftist movement. Nanyang University was compelled to close. Its campuses were vacated and then reopened as a technical college run by the state. Chinese language presses were also severely circumscribed and eventually brought under state control. The Sinophone intelligentsia was isolated and lost its social power to influence the cultural life of the nation.

Ironically, during this period of crackdown on the Sinophone "communalists," the Anglophone elite was championing compulsory bilingualism, where schoolchildren were required to learn the language of their ascribed official race as a second language in addition to learning English as the primary language of instruction. Established in 1966, this compulsory bilingualism significantly altered the course of the learning and use of Malay as the national language from the direction it had been following in the decade before independence. Before 1965, the PAP government had promoted Malay as the foundation of a postcolonial Malaysian identity. After independence, however, compulsory bilingualism expressed the multiracialism of formal equality. It did this first by placing Mandarin, Malay and Tamil on par with each other, and second by replacing Malay with English, which became the neutral language of a multiracial common space that would be generated in interactions among the communities.

The problem was that language would only take hold in the deep cultural setting of the living literary and oral tradition of the people. When the Sinophone intelligentsia was undercut, decades of development of local Chinese traditions were also undermined. Freed from being embedded in the grassroots of Chinese associations and society, the emerging Chinese middle classes, instead of becoming steeped in Mandarin and Chinese cultural history, were English-speaking individuals turning to the West for their cultural moorings. The more conservative PAP leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew saw this as imminent social disintegration and believed that the pendulum of social cohesion had swung too widely from the problem of ethnic mob conflict to the collapse of ethnic moral orders caused by Western individualism.

In 1975, the government organized a conference with academics to explore the identification and

preservation of "Asian values." If the architect of postcolonial multiracialism, S. Rajaratnam, rejected this initiative as ludicrous,[11] nevertheless, the other PAP elites moved to stem what they feared as a moral collapse. Doubling down on Mandarin, in 1979, Lee launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign to replace the widespread use of Chinese vernaculars that mixed Malay and English phrases. Goh Keng Swee led a team to study education system reforms to prepare Singapore for the next phase of industrialization and social development. Among other important reforms, the study team advocated the teaching of religious knowledge to reinforce the "cultural ballast" of Singaporeans.[12] Religious knowledge education was implemented within a few years, with students having to choose to study one of the major religions or Confucianism.

Through the 1980s, Confucianism became the ruling party's focus for ideological exploration. International academic experts on oriental culture were invited to study Singapore society and write the curriculum of the Confucian studies program for students. They also ran seminars to educate young PAP leaders and helped Goh establish the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (later renamed the East Asian Institute) to study Confucianism.[13] Special Assistance Plan schools were established to educate the top students in higher Mandarin and Chinese high culture. Modest efforts were also made to collaborate with Chinese clan and ethnic associations to promote the use of Mandarin and Confucian values, thus rehabilitating the Chinese intelligentsia to some extent. But the Confucianizing movement, if it could be called a movement at all, was strictly limited to a select group of elites who subscribed to a bicultural Anglo-Chinese identity.

While allowing some aspects of the invented Confucianism to flow into the articulation of the National Ideology in 1991, as will be discussed below, the PAP leaders consciously circumscribed the movement to prevent it from becoming a majoritarian Chinese position undermining postcolonial multiracialism. In effect, the movement opened the way for the alienated Sinophone intelligentsia to return to more active public life.

The second group excluded by the practices of multiracialism was the Malays, who for historical and structural reasons faced socio-economic marginalization in the newly industrializing economy.[14] Many Malays lost secure military jobs after decolonization and the new national military excluded Malays for several years because of security fears over their loyalty. The exclusion meant that cohorts of young Malay males could not find regular employment while they waited to be conscripted. By the late 1970s, and after successful industrialization, it became clear that Singaporean Malays lagged behind other ethnic groups in terms of socio-economic progress. The education system, which emphasized race-blind academic streaming, had entrenched the importance of economic and cultural capital to achieve educational outcomes and caused the Malays to be caught in a vicious circle unable to catch up with the other groups.

In 1982, the state set up the Council for the Education of Muslim Children to fund additional educational programs for the Malays to help them achieve social mobility. This was couched as ethnic self-help that would leverage the cultural capital the Malays had to improve their social standing, and was presented as a way to preserve

communal spirit and racial pride. The state would not assist individual poor citizens directly, but would help their community help them. A decade later, equivalent Chinese, Indian and Eurasian self-help groups were formed to target the uplifting of low-income workers. Coordinated by the state and involving the participation of community leaders and volunteers, these ethnic self-help groups became one of the cornerstones of the communitarian multiculturalism constructed out of postcolonial multiracialism in the 1990s.

Political Crisis and the Communitarian Transformation of Multiracialism

After almost two decades of autocratic state-led intervention into society, by the early 1980s democratizing pressures started to be felt. The PAP began to lose its total Parliamentary monopoly—its percentage vote share dropped from the high 70s to the low 60s. Opposition politicians calling for democratic rights and the liberalization of society trickled into Parliament. English-educated middle-class activists revived a curtailed civil society, and began to build their own networks of support and influence. This movement was influenced by the global wave of democratization that culminated in the liberalization and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 as well as the opening up of Communist China. Democracy movements also brought regime change to Singapore's Asian peers: the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan.

The state responded with its authoritarian reflex. In 1987 and 1988, the PAP government used the same Internal Security Act it had used against the leftists in the 1960s to arrest over a score of Catholic

Church social workers, civil society activists and opposition party members. The arrested activists were accused of engaging in a "Marxist conspiracy" to overthrow the state and placed under indefinite, extra-judicial detention.[15] The need to keep the multiracial peace was used to justify the actions, with the activists accused of using religion as a cover to enter the political realm and staging the scene for a religious free-for-all to follow. Yet, this crackdown elicited a different response than previous crackdowns. Strong protests from international human rights organizations and democratic states around the world were coupled with widespread local skepticism that the English-educated social and church workers were communist subversives. This meant that the justifications for social discipline that had worked in response to the postcolonial crisis were no longer resonating with the public.

As discussed above, with the exploration of Confucianism, implementation of religious studies in schools and setting up of the Malay-Muslim self-help council, the PAP elites had already begun reforming postcolonial multiracialism in response to social liberalization. The democratization pressures and the "Marxist conspiracy" event catalyzed the reforms. Dropping the postcolonial emergency discourse, the PAP elites sought to replace it with a clearly articulated communitarian ideology. Second generation PAP leaders, which included Lee Hsien Loong, a cabinet minister and Lee Kuan Yew's eldest son, spearheaded what was termed the National Ideology movement to articulate this communitarianism.

The Ideology comprised five "shared values"

bringing together the tenets of postcolonial multiracialism and the Confucianism explored in the early 1980s. Public discussions began in early 1989 and the shared values were formalized in early 1991. "Racial and religious harmony" stemmed from postcolonial multiracialism. "Family as the basic unit of society" and "consensus, not conflict" were key Confucian tenets. "Nation before community and society above self" was the new communitarian capstone tenet. "Community support and respect for the individual" was a late compromise added to the original four values after vocal public criticism from the middle classes that the communitarian emphasis went overboard and failed to recognize the value of individual well-being and rights. However, the compromise was still communitarian in thrust, as individuals were not recognized as bearing rights in their own person, but achieved their well being in and through the community.

On the international front, the PAP elites defended the Singapore regime against what they described as the onslaught of Western liberalism and human rights ideology against the pragmatic prerogatives of small developing Asian states. In the 1990s, the Singaporean state successfully brought together illiberal and non-liberal Asian states to champion "Asian values," of which the National Ideology of shared values was a local variant adapted to Singapore. Sympathetic scholars gave this perspective respectability by analyzing the Singapore political system as a "communitarian democracy," distinct from liberal democracy and authoritarian rule, and building on a Confucian tradition of strong government balancing the rights of the individual and the needs of society.[16]

Domestically, the PAP government relied on three institutions to realize communitarian democracy. The first was the ethnic self-help groups mentioned above. A decade after establishing the Council for the Education of Muslim Children to address Malay socio-economic marginalization, the Chinese Development Assistance Council and the Singapore Indian Development Association were established. The ethnic self-help councils were funded with optional voluntary contributions from citizens belonging to the corresponding racial categories and matched government funding. Other than offering additional educational programs to improve the social mobility of children from poor families, the self-help councils began also to provide employment and retraining services and other welfare services to members of their community. As a result, "race" was remade from the primordial sentiments of identification necessitating state discipline into ethnic communities exuding the collective spirit necessary for individuals to be supported and helped.

The racial grid of CMIO multiracialism was remade in two other ways. The Group Representation Constituencies were introduced for the first time in the 1988 general elections, in the face of a strong challenge from the opposition parties in the aftermath of the "conspiracy" arrests. These constituencies were designed to ensure minority representation through the election of teams of Members of Parliament that must include a member certified to be of a stipulated minority. Previously, the party was seen as an inclusive multiracial nationalist movement, within which the racial question was to be settled for the sake of solidarity. By instituting the Group Representation

Constituencies, the state demanded that the electorate treat the racial question as ethnic community interests to be negotiated and related to national interests.

At the same time that race was remade into community and ethnic community interests were brought into the political realm, the government took steps to prevent minority ethnic groups from forming voting blocs based on residential concentrations. In 1989, in response to preferences for localities historically associated with ethnic-based villages that continued well after resettlement, the Ethnic Integration Policy was established to compel multiracial integration and interaction in public housing estates by setting maximum ethnic proportions for each block and neighbourhood.

Moreover, with the understanding that ethnic community interests were very often represented by organized religion, the government took steps to draw a strict line between religion and politics. After the implication of the Catholic Church in the "conspiracy" arrests, drawing such a line helped to justify the crackdowns on the basis of the collective good to be preserved in the multiracial and multi-religious society. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony law was introduced at the end of 1989. The PAP elites justified the law by claiming that when a religion "crosses the line and goes into what they call social action," it opens up what Lee Kuan Yew called "a Pandora's box in Singapore" because all the other religions would enter the political fray, leading to the "dismemberment" of multi-religious Singapore.[17]

Yet, in the extensive consultations leading up to the legislative enactment of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony law, the state itself opened up a Pandora's box of vocal debates and disagreements from diverse religious institutions.[18] It was a deft political move to demonstrate that when diverse religions entered the public sphere, chaos and disunity ensued, even if the fray did not descend into violence. The consultations leading to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony law themselves showed that the law was necessary. Thus the state could install itself as the trans-religious arbiter of communitarian interests.

Heretofore, the ruling party occupied the multiracial centre as the peer institution utilizing communal energy for nation-building, seeking to erase the prevalence of racial identity through the expansion of common space. Now, through these new state institutions, the ruling party rose above the communal groups as the communitarian guardian of their interests, striving to protect the ethnic spirit that animates communities and anchors individual well-being. At the dawn of the 21st century, the second generation of PAP leaders seemed to have succeeded in achieving the political legitimacy they sought through this communitarianism. Helped by the disorganized opposition who were unable to present a multicultural democratic alternative, the PAP regained its strong electoral support with 75% of the votes in the 2001 general elections.

V. COMMUNITARIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND THE GLOBAL CITY

Parallel to the communitarianism, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, who succeeded Lee Kuan Yew in the 1990s, promised to liberalize and build a kinder and gentler Singapore, as opposed to the disciplined decades of industrialization and proletarianization. Communitarianism had the consequence of creating hyphenated Singaporeans, whose ethno-racial identification as Chinese, Malay and Indian was assigned to them in education, welfare provision and public housing. This identity was tied to religion in the communitarian reworking of multiracialism. A 2001 government survey revealed that 95% of Malay Muslims, 97% of Indian Hindus, and 90, 89 and 92% of Chinese Buddhists, Taoists and Christians respectively felt a strong sense of racial identity compared with 83% of the Chinese with no religion.[19] After decades of social engineering from multiracialism to communitarianism, the racialisms of colonial pluralism remained as strong as before.

There was, however, an exit for middle-class Singaporeans, usually Chinese and English-educated, who could and did pay the high price of leaving the cultural engineering in public schools and public housing by sending their children to independent elite schools and opting for private housing.[20] The expansion of independent schools and private condominiums that catered to the aspirations of the middle classes took place during Goh's government. Together with the liberalizing arts, cultural and consumption sector, the middle classes could opt out of the communitarianism and enjoy their individualism by becoming consumers of the good life.

Liberalization absorbed the democratizing pressures and redirected middle class energies towards consumption. And PAP leaders, recognizing the consequences of such consumerism, announced they were working towards multiculturalism and a multicultural society that they defined in terms of consumption. In 2003, the Minister for Community Development and Sports said in a landmark speech:

> People felt more comfortable eating each other's food. Chinatown, Geylang Serai and Little India are now thronged by all communities in search of the best bargains and buys. Demarcations of groups by food and other common outward cultural appearances become increasingly less useful.

> The model used these days is that of a multicultural society. At face value, this notion is deemed to be no different from that of a multiracial society. It is argued that in a multicultural society various cultural groups exist and that respect should be accorded to each group and an understanding of each group should be promoted. This definition is certainly apt given the fact that as society becomes more diverse the right of each group to exist is a necessary pre-condition for stability and harmony.

> But multiculturalism is also understood as a description of the types of individuals in that society. In other words, no one can claim to

belong to a separate and distinct group or race. One can appreciate and understand much of one's own heritage. But within every individual there also exist elements and traits reflecting the larger society. When a Malay colleague of mine invited me to his home to have a steamboat dinner, my understanding of what it means to be Malay in Singapore had to be updated. When I visit Komala Vilas with my family and tuck into the vegetarian food, the crowd there is truly varied and Singaporean. While this food example may appear trivial it reflects what multiculturalism means in Singapore.[21]

Chinatown, Geylang Serai and Little India refer to three colonial town areas preserved and remade by the state's total urban planning into ethnic enclaves signifying the racial grid of multiracialism inherited from colonial days. Re-situating these enclaves as ethnic shopping havens visited by everyone represents the consumerist thrust of the state's new multiculturalism. So did the self-acknowledged trivial example of food used by the Minister, with the steamboat dinner referring to the dining practice popular with the local Chinese and Komala Villas, a popular Indian vegetarian restaurant. Importantly, the emphasis shifted from the purely communitarian towards notions of individual choice and diversity, albeit defined in consumerist terms. The state's main program was still communitarian in foundation and thrust, but this new multiculturalism softened its edges and accommodated growing diversity.

Multiculturalism was also functional for the economic reforms taking place through the 1990s and accelerating after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. After moving the economy up the value chain to advanced manufacturing in the 1990s, the state embarked on privatization and internationalization of the state-owned enterprises, and promoted research and development, finance, tourism and service industries. PAP leaders increasingly referred to Singapore as a global city and replaced the focus on nation-building with one of global city-making. This globalization accelerated in the 2000s, bringing in skilled migrants to fuel the labour-starved knowledge economy, and low-skilled migrants to build and maintain the global city, a move that brought down the percentage of Singaporean citizens in the city's population from 86% in 1990 to 64% in 2010.

Outside the public housing heartland where communitarianism still dominated, the multiculturalism of cosmopolitan consumerism reigned. The ideal Singaporean in the eyes of the PAP government was now the cultural code-switcher, able to be both a cosmopolitan and a heartlander, moving between the public housing estate and the global city centre, between Singapore and the world. While the CMIO racial grid remained at the institutional-political level, in the organization of Group Representation Constituencies and in the Ethnic Integration Policy of public housing allocation, it was increasingly softened at the grassroots level to allow for the expression of diverse and cross-cutting identities. In part, this adjustment involved recognition by the PAP elites that communitarianism, while serving its political purpose, might harden ethnic identities too much and thereby undermine the national solidarity of citizens. A pernicious problem was Malay socio-economic marginality which, coupled

with communitarianism, led to Malays identifying themselves self-consciously as a defensive minority community. Emphasis on reviving Chinese traditions and heritage had also encouraged insularity and possibly a sense of privilege among some Chinese groups. Diagnosis of these two problems led to the creation of new networks facilitating interracial interaction between existing institutions. The ethnic self-help groups came together to set up the Joint Social Service Centre to facilitate and coordinate multiracial activities. The Centre was rechristened OnePeople.sg in 2007 and tasked with coordinating the promotion of racial and religious harmony nationwide. In addition, drawing from existing government-led grassroots organizations, Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles were established, one in each electoral constituency, to coordinate local multiracial efforts and link up Harmony Circles established in schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

A third challenge was the influx of immigrants, of which an increasing number have been naturalized as citizens. They were accepted as a way to tackle the persistently low birth rate and the aging society. Many of the naturalized citizens originated from other Asian societies. In addition, skilled migrant families were increasingly entering the public housing heartland as tenants, because the smaller private housing sector could not accommodate the influx. The integration of naturalized citizens and migrants has become an issue. While their cultures could be accommodated through the invocation of multiculturalism, their subscription to the communitarian features of the CMIO racial grid was not guaranteed. The Ethnic Integration

Policy has been extended to them to prevent the formation of migrant enclaves. In addition, the People's Association grassroots organizations are endeavouring to integrate them into the heartland through consumer practices such as parties, shopping, and eating tours and food festivals. Yet, success has been limited, as tensions between long-time citizens and recent migrants have intensified in recent years. These tensions were visibly expressed as xenophobic diatribes during large protests at a downtown park designated as Speakers' Corner in 2013. The focus of criticism was against the PAP government's policy for migrant inflows to increase the population from 5.3 million to 6.9 million in 2030.

Today, a new plural society has therefore emerged in Singapore that combines migrant pluralism and colonial racialism of old. History seems to have come full circle, with the accretion of national institutions directed by a strong state always seeking to discipline the diversity and manage the racialism. The question is whether the Janus-faced communitarian multiculturalism, invented as the political solution to the democratizing pressures in the 1980s and 1990s, will resolve today's issues and institute a viable form of pluralism.

VI. CONCLUSION

It has often been said by commentators and the PAP leaders themselves that the success of Singapore in managing and overcoming its myriad social, political and economic problems lies in its non-ideological approach of pragmatically

borrowing ideas and practices for problem-solving. Multiracialism and multiculturalism, the former being an idea expounded in Asian and African countries experiencing decolonization in the 1950s, and the latter being an idea promoted in Western democracies to accommodate immigrants, were adapted to address specific problems of diversity in the context of nation building and globalization. In the Singapore case, multiracialism is the belief that different groups with entrenched racial sentiments and political interests arranged along racial lines could and should band together in solidarity to build a nation with a common purpose. Multiculturalism is the idea that the cultural practices of each group are constantly evolving, as group members not only tolerate the practices, but also cross boundaries to participate in the practices of other groups, and even adapt and adopt them as their own practices in hybrid forms.

This paper has argued that postcolonial multiracialism based on communal mobilization for nation-building has been adapted to become communitarian multiculturalism where cultural interactions and expressions are validated. However, in this, the only reference point is the community. Thus the claim to being non-ideological is not wholly true; both multiracialism and multiculturalism have been strongly group-based in Singapore and little oriented towards the individual and liberal rights. In liberal variants of both multiracialism and multiculturalism, there is a concern about the protection of individuals from discrimination on the basis of their group membership. While there is accommodation of group-based cultures voluntarily practised by individuals, these individuals also retain the right to leave their groups and abandon their cultural practices. Individuals do not possess such rights in Singapore and can only make claims in the public sphere for equal participation and accommodation within the framework of community representation.

This does not mean that the communitarian systems in Singapore have been fundamentally exclusionary. In fact, postcolonial multiracialism and communitarian multiculturalism sought to foster inclusive citizenship by harnessing historical forces of exclusion, but not without contradictions. In the context of the colonial racial grid and the divisive politics of decolonization, postcolonial multiracialism accepted and deployed the racial categories imposed on society to foster an inclusive citizenship of multiracial equality. Communal diversity was embraced, and also organized through the racial grid, so that it could be mobilized for nation- building. In the process, the Sinophone intelligentsia and the Malays suffered political and economic exclusion, although the exclusions were belatedly ameliorated by institutional innovations that contributed to the communitarian transformation of multiracialism. Communitarianism was elaborated in the face of democratization pressures and the demand for individual rights. Under pressure from globalization, individual freedoms, particularly in the economic sphere of consumption, were accommodated by the development of multiracialism into multiculturalism, but the communitarian emphasis was retained when it came to representation and recognition in the political domain and state-controlled public sphere.

Ironically, the success of multiracialism and nation-building now haunts the transition of the city-state to a cosmopolitan global city, as disgruntled citizens feeling excluded from the globalizing economy shout down migrants in the name of the national community and communitarian norms. The problem now is redoubled, as the forces of exclusion cut both ways, against the disgruntled citizens and the new migrants. More than ever, the innovative pragmatism of Singapore's political leaders is needed. The question is whether the communitarian basis of Singapore's management of diversity—and its pluralism—can survive the ensuing politics.

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The Global Centre for Pluralism is an applied knowledge organization that facilitates dialogue, analysis and exchange about the building blocks of inclusive societies in which human differences are respected. Based in Ottawa, the Centre is inspired by Canadian pluralism, which demonstrates what governments and citizens can achieve when human diversity is valued and recognized as a foundation for shared citizenship. Please visit us at **pluralism.ca**