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# **Taking Group Rights Seriously: Multiracialism in Singapore<sup>1</sup>**

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For the past close to two decades, the idea of multiculturalism has been popular with two sets of intellectuals in the West, namely political philosophers and Cultural Studies scholars who think that cultural rights of minority groups are worth and need to be protected against domination and erasure by dominant cultures. Both groups are motivated by concerns of the need to redress the histories of erasure or suppression of cultures of minority groups in the developed societies of the West; ‘minority’ is thus extended beyond ethnic and racial groups to others who are marginalized, such as gender and sexual minorities. This concern with redressing past oppressions are tied to the liberalism of both groups of concerned scholars, who see the issue ultimately as one of civil and human rights. One would expect that the issues related to multiculturalism would take on different shapes and contours in a context where liberalism is not the prevailing social and political norm, such as Singapore.

In contrast to Western settler nations, such as Canada, Australia and the United States of America, where ‘official multiculturalism’ is generally involve supporting voluntary cultural activities undertaken by the ethnic groups themselves and to police racial discrimination and racism, in Singapore, multiracialism is written into the Constitution in the very founding moment of the nation in 1965; the Constitution declared that Singapore is a multiracial nation with equality for the three primary races – Chinese, Malays and Indians. Since then multiracialism has been embedded as the core rationale for many public policies. While ostensibly aimed at ‘preserving’ the cultures of the racial groups and maintaining racial harmony, the same public policies are, as shall be argued in this paper, also by the same token policies of social control.

## **SINGAPORE STATE FORMATION**

In contrast to Canada and Australia which had adopted official multiculturalism, in the 1970s, after severe ideological crisis caused by secessionist tendency in the former and waves of non British immigrant arrivals in the latter, Singapore embraced multiracialism as a matter of several necessities upon independence, making it the first post-colonial state to declare itself as a constitutional ‘multiracial’ country, inscribing the ‘impolite’ concept race rather than ‘ethnicity’ into the core definition of the new nation. The explicit recognition of ‘race’ as difference is by now part of the everyday consciousness of Singaporeans.

The island, known in its earlier history as *Temasek*, had had its place as a trading post in archipelagic Southeast Asia. Within the archipelago, an island would flourish as a trade centre under an able leader and wither just as quickly when the leader died or his power waned; trade would decline and the residents would move on to other emergent islands. The

archipelagic geography was, and perhaps continues to be, unstable ground for the idea of nation-state defined by continental geography. Consistent with the archipelagic development pattern, between approximately the fifteenth century (Miksic and Low 2004) and the arrival of the British in 1819, there were scant permanent settlements. Consequently, a peculiar feature of Singapore's colonial history is that colonization was never a suppression of a local population but an establishment of stable settlements. Raffles, an officer of the British East India Company, first installed a prince of the Riau-Johor sultanate as the Sultan Hussein of Johor, subsequently bought the island from him for a fixed sum of money and a pension, and established a free port.<sup>2</sup> The political stability so established drew waves of immigrants in search of economic opportunities from China, South Asia and neighbouring locations.

The Chinese immigrants quickly formed the majority of the island's population by the mid 1820s. Immigrants from mainly south India were brought, first as convicts and subsequently as indentured labour, to feed the need for unskilled public works labour. Malays arrived from the neighbouring islands. These three groups constituted from the start the stable population of Singapore. Present day Singapore is thus a British postcolony with a multiracial population of more than 75 percent Chinese, Malays 17 percent and 8 percent South Asians. To the extent that Singapore is geographically contiguous with the Malaya peninsula, the Malays were 'indigenous' to the island<sup>3</sup> and also indigenous of the region, of '*Nusantara*' (Malay world). The majority Chinese is neither descendent of the colonizing White people nor pre-colonial indigenous people. This fact has determining effects on the political development of Singapore as an independent city-state.

### **DISRUPTED INDIGENEITY**

Political independence for Singapore came through a circuitous path. Local election with contesting political parties for advisory members to a legislative council under a British colonial governor was instituted as late as 1954. In 1959, the colony was granted 'self-government' of all domestic affairs except finance, defense and international relations which remained in the hands of the colonial regime; a local parliament with a Prime Minister and a cabinet of ministers was fully elected for the first time. The general election was won by the People's Action Party (PAP), which has governed Singapore ever since, without ever being displaced from parliamentary power.

In 1963, when it was apparent that the political left, allegedly with close affiliation with the Malayan Communist Party, could win the upcoming election, the then Malayan Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, proposed the formation of the Federation of

Malaysia, to be constituted by independent Malaya, self-governing Singapore and the two small British colonial territories of Sarawak and North Borneo (now Sabah); the rest of Borneo is part of Indonesia. After a controversial referendum in which choices for Singaporeans were restricted to different conditions of merger and 'no' to the merger was not an option, Singapore became part of Malaysia in the same year. However, after two brief years of constant disagreement between the ruling party in federal Malaysian government and the PAP in the 'state' of Singapore, the two separated peacefully. Singapore became an independent city-state on 9 August 1965.

Until the late 1950s, practically the eve of political independence, the residents of Singapore were either descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Each racial group looked towards their respective homelands rather than the island for their emotional investment and life trajectories. The economic demands of making a living common among all were deemed as 'necessities' for long term interests that lay in the homelands. Each immigrant/racial group had its own sense of indigeneity. Politically, the Chinese were focused on foreign invasions and civil war in mainland China and the subsequent division into the PRC and Taiwan, the Indians on the struggle for independence in then British India and the subsequent politics of partition into India and Pakistan, the Malays were oriented to decolonization developments in peninsula Malaya and Indonesia (Rahim 1998: 14). At the political discursive level, until political independence which enabled the investment in the idea of permanence through Singapore citizenship, Singapore was politically an 'empty' sign.

The final parting of ways with Malaysia had radical consequences on the development of the Singapore state. Without the territorial link to a Malay nation, the minority Malay population, in spite of its constitutional status as indigenous people, did not have undisputed rights to the land, nor did Malay leaders had undisputed rightful claims to power and governance.<sup>4</sup> With a Malay minority population, there was no suppressed pre-colonial vibrant local tradition, applicable to the majority let alone all of the new Singaporeans, to be recovered as resources to reinvent a 'culture' or 'civilization' for the new nation. There had never been a pre-colonial political structure that could be resurrected as the new state structure. In sum, there were no local pre-colonial past to be excavated and recuperated for a national cultural narrative that would legitimize a reinvented 'traditional' form of government with legitimate traditional leaders for the newly independent state, which would rendered all others, including long term residents and local born as aliens. Without these pre-colonial cultural resources, the foundation of state formation of the island nation had to be laid on 'modernist' terms. The PAP leadership had to gain its legitimacy to rule through

procedurally democratic elections, govern with rational civil service bureaucracy and judicial administration and build a new competitive industrial economy that is essential to the daily life of the new citizens. The first order of the day was to declare the new nation a constitutional ‘multiracial nation’, ideologically turning the empirical reality of a multiracial immigrant population into ‘national’ character and the other-homeland oriented individuals into citizens without erasing their racial marker.

### **ASSEMBLING ADMINISTRATIVE RACIAL CATEGORIES**

On political independence, the racial composition of the population was approximately 78% ‘Chinese’, 15% ‘Malays’ and 7% South Asians. The British colonial legacy of separating Singapore from peninsula Malaya had left Singapore as a demographically overwhelmingly Chinese city-state carved out of the ‘Malay’ world of archipelagic Southeast Asia, which was itself divided by postcolonial national identities of Malaysians, Indonesians, Moro Filipinos and Thai Malays. This regional population is in recent years increasingly ‘homogenized’ through the religion of Islam, albeit with internal divisions of beliefs and ideologies. This ‘Malay-Muslim’ world would not have accepted the establishment of a ‘Chinese’ nation in its midst with equanimity. Singapore, therefore, had to politically turn a necessity into a virtue. With its demographic multiracial reality within this very particular geopolitical context, instead of remaining silent and leaving ‘race’ as a private matter, as in most modern state constitutions, the Constitution of Singapore gave explicit recognition to race by declaring the new state a ‘multiracial nation’. Furthermore, in reference to the larger Southeast Asia archipelago, the Constitution explicitly recognizes Malays as the indigenous people of the new state. Geopolitics has since remained one determining element in national politics.

To constitute the multiracial nation, the PAP government extended and intensified the British colonial administrative practice, used throughout its extensive colonies in Asia and Africa, of erasing social cultural differences among the immigrant population, and regrouping them into a smaller number of categories with bigger numbers of individuals (Purushotam 1998). Under the multiracial Constitution of the independent city-state, social cultural differences among the citizenry were radically simplified to three main racial groups plus one residual; Chinese, Malays, Indian and Others (CMIO), a residual category that includes Eurasian Singaporeans and everybody else. Obviously, each of these categories is a discursive and administrative simplification and homogenization of differences that inhere within it. This was done in the interest of the state for convenience of social and political administration (Scott, 1998: 1-8), as the fact that no consistent criteria were used in delineating the three

major racial groups testified. Different social, cultural and geographical elements were used to constitute the three 'homogenized' groups.

In the case of the Chinese, 'language' was used to reassemble its 'members'. Among the Chinese were significant linguistic differences between different people hewed from different provinces of primarily southern China, such as Hokkiens from Fujian province, Cantonese, Teochews from Guanzhou province and Hakkas from both provinces; in addition, there were further sub-regional linguistic differences among those from the same province, such as Hokchews and Hinghua among the Hokkiens. The differences in linguistic groupings were suppressed in public spaces by banning the different languages, ideologically reduced as 'dialects', in all broadcast media and official transactions. Mandarin was adopted as the only official race-language of the Chinese and taught as the 'mother-tongue' in school. The absence of reinforcement of the other languages in the mass media confined the other Chinese languages to home languages. Furthermore, in the interest of helping their children's academic achievement, parents began to speak Mandarin at home, with different levels of facility. The overall result has been the complete destruction of communication between grandchildren who speak no Chinese other than Mandarin and the illiterate grandparents who speak no Mandarin. The entire Chinese population was thus forcefully 'homogenized' over time.

Among the 'Malays' were Javanese, Minangkabau, Boyanese, Bugis and of course, Peninsula Malays. Although these categories continue to be enumerated in the census, the ethnic-cultural differences were suppressed under a singular category of 'Malay', settled by PAP Malay MPs, for electoral purposes: a Malay is 'someone who is Malay, Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, Arab or any other person who is generally accepted as a member of the Malay community by the community' (Rahim 1998:18), with Malay as the race-language to be taught in schools. This Malay identity is further linked to another 'defining element' of Islam as the religion of all 'ethnic' Malay population; constitutionally, all Malays as Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Malays, particularly those who were descendents of Indonesian extraction, who were Christians became an anomaly and 'declared' out of existence. Since then, a very small number of Malays have converted into Christianity; these individuals are excluded from the national 'Malay' community.

Finally, the single element selected to define 'Indians' was geography. Unlike the Malays, in addition to the exclusivity of Hinduism, Indian followers can be found in Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, similarly for the Chinese. Thus, religion could not serve as a homogenizing element of these two 'racial' groups. Regional linguistic differences among

the Indians were even more pronounced than those among the race-Chinese. Consequently, after a prolonged period in which Tamil, the south Indian language spoken by the majority of Indians in Singapore, was imposed as the official Indian language, other South Asian languages, such as Bengali, Hindi and Urdu, have been accepted as mother-tongues for 'Indian' students. The race-Indian category assembles all who were descendants of immigrants or themselves immigrants from geographically defined South Asia, including the present day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The different bases for assembling the three 'racial' populations show clearly the politically constructed character of these categories, which are far from being 'natural'. The governmental simplification and homogenization obviously operated instrumentally on a set of convenient elements – language, religion and geography - rather than with a consistent singular principle of 'race'. This 'inconsistent' mode of organizing the population into three race-groups was entirely for the ease of governance. The categorization scheme accepts no 'hybrids', no mix-races. Instead of having to deal with multitudes of smaller, more organic social units and/or disparate individuals, the administrative convenience which guided the constitution of the racial groups was determined by the imperatives of the larger context the new nation formation. As will be shown below, the imperatives of the 'nation' continue to determine the ways different races are administered with different rules and strategies, belying the political ethical claim of equality of groups in national governance.

### **DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS**

The Constitution promises formal equality for all racial groups. One might thus be led to presume that all policies and administrative practices of the state will be applied equally on all three groups. However, this is not necessarily the case. Administrative practices of the state address themselves pragmatically to a particular ruling government's construction of 'political reality' and its contextual contingencies. As long as the practices may be rationalized as not in violation of certain abstract principles, in this case group-equality and racial harmony, they are political defensible, if not entirely justified. Thus, once the general principle of race-group equality is affirmed, the actual management of the different groups may operate along different organizing logics.

#### *Dispersion and Collectivization*

The first set of binary strategies of organizing the race-groups is 'aggregation/collectivization' and 'dispersion', in both spatial and social terms.

Spatial distribution of racial groups is a crucial determinant in the race relations of a nation. For example, the new establishment or historical presence of a racial enclave provides the particular demographic minority group with a geographically bounded space, a physical territory, which enables the group to segregate itself from others and which can be ideologically transformed into a 'homeland' that needs to be defended and a base to launch attacks on other groups in the event of racial violence. Spatial arrangement of race-groups is thus a material and political resource of the incumbent government of a state. The spatial dimension of management of race can be operationalized with a pair mutually exclusive binary logic, aggregation/dispersion. The deployment of either strategy is dependent on the ruling government's calculation of whether it stands to gain in electoral support and political legitimacy. For example, if aggregation of a racial group increased its chance of winning the electoral constituency, then it would likely act accordingly, and vice versa.

In the case of Singapore, with its overwhelming more than 75% race-Chinese population, dispersion of this majority is logically and materially impossible; everywhere one turns there will be a Chinese majority. Spatial consideration is only relevant to the other two smaller race-groups. In the process of physical reconstruction of the entire island through the national public housing program, all the semi-rural villages throughout the island were demolished and their residents resettled into public housing flats. No one was spared the resettlement process; consequently, currently, about 85% of the national population lives in public housing flats. The resulting improvements of housing and public health standards among the population are indubitable. However, given the vastly unequal demographic numbers, the dismantling of Chinese villages did not have the same consequences as that of dismantling the Malay kampongs. Within the high-rise public housing estates the resettled Chinese continued to be the majority population, while the Malay majorities in their own kampongs were dispersed within the same housing estates and become permanent minorities in all housing estates. Nevertheless, Malays continued to favour certain housing estates closed to their previous residential locations in the east and west coasts of the island, leading to higher concentration than is proportional to their presence in the national population, in several housing estates.

In 1989, the government supposedly fearing the reestablishment of Malay 'enclaves' instituted strict quotas on housing distribution along race-lines. Since then, every block of public housing flats is regulated by a quota system that roughly corresponds with the proportion of the three race-groups in the total population; 75% Chinese, 17% Malays and 8% Indians. While the quota system appears readily justifiable as 'fair' and 'rational', the



consequences are however grossly unequally distributed. Whereas the Chinese unavoidably continue to be the majority in each block, hence each housing estate, the Malays and Indians are now completely minoritized. This has very significant negative effects on the daily life of these two race-groups. For example, a Malay household will now have greater difficulty in finding an immediate Malay neighbour who would understand all the religion based cultural practices to come to its assistance in case of emergency. The Chinese of course would not face similar difficulties.

There are also greater financial costs to the Malay and Indian households in this quota system. A Malay household who is interested in selling its housing unit will have to sell it to another Malay household, if the quota for the Chinese and Indians in the block is already filled. This would not only reduce the market size of potential buyers but also potentially lower selling price because of the generally relatively poorer financial conditions of the Malay population; often the Malay household is not able to accept offers from Chinese buyers who are able and willing to pay higher price for the flat.<sup>6</sup>

The management of a population, however, cannot be effectively done when the population is spatially spread out into individualized units. Thus, a strategy that counters the scattering of Malays needs to be devised. Administratively, this can be achieved by bringing the entire Malay population into a centralized hierarchical administrative structure with clearly demarcated division of powers. First, the Muslim population is brought under the jurisdiction of a specific set of the laws, the Administration of Muslims Act, a consolidation of several administrative regulations of the British colonial administration. At the apex of the power structure, which is also a structure of administrative units, is the Minister for Muslim Affairs, a member of the parliamentary cabinet. Organizationally, behind this Ministerial Office is the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), a 'religious bureaucracy that sought to administer and manage the community'. The management of all the mosques in Singapore is brought under its control. Meanwhile, as part of the British colonial legacy Muslims, hence all Malays are governed by the *Shariah* courts and a separate Registry of Muslim Marriages. In addition, with the government's financial assistance, the Malay MPs established a centralized organization that aims at improving the academic performance of Malay-Muslim children from needy families (MENDAKI). All these regulatory mechanisms govern every Muslim individual regardless of residential locations. Consequently, the ruling government has very direct means to governing Muslims, both individually and as a collective. The importance of this structure to the ruling government became apparent when MENDAKI was criticized as being less than able to fully represent the interest of the Malay-Muslim community because

its leaders are members of the PAP government and are thus bound to place the interest of the nation as a whole ahead of particularistic Malay-Muslim community interests. When an alternative community leadership structure that can potentially better represent Malay-Muslim interests more fully was mooted by the Association of Muslim Professionals, in 2003, it was immediately dispensed with by the government as a sign of threatening 'racial harmony'.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the re-centralization of the administration of the race-Malay group, the PAP government had to dismantle the existing community political structure of the Chinese community that was built up and consolidated under the British colonial administration. As a consequence of the neglect of the colonial administration, the Chinese population had had to provide for themselves education and other social services through different community organizations, from organization of local residents to clan associations organized around different principles - similar villages to linguistics and provisional social relations - to finally, at the apex, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC), the association of the Chinese business community which provided the substantial funds for all the social services found in the community. By the time the PAP came to power on the eve of independence, the ability and power of the SCCC to galvanize the Chinese population was palpable. This was demonstrated in its spearheading of the establishment the Nanyang University in 1955, the only Chinese-language medium university outside of China and Taiwan, with a substantial enrolment of politically left-leaning students that had been active during the decolonization mobilization of the 1950s.

The newly elected PAP government slowly but surely dismantled this hierarchical community power structure through both direct and indirect measures. The rapid expansion of English-language medium primary and secondary schools undermined the enrolment in Chinese vernacular schools, as English language proficiency becomes increasingly economically advantageous in the developing economy. The expansion of health and welfare services displaced the role of clan associations in the provision of such services. The closing of Chinese language newspapers, under the allegation of its Chinese 'chauvinism', removed the open channels where the community's sentiments could be freely expressed. Finally, the closing of Nanyang University removed an institution that was capable of producing future Chinese community leaders. The economic power of the Chinese business community also declined as the government embarked on industrializing the economy through state enterprises and foreign investments of multinational corporations. The dismantling of the community power structure and the enervation of its component institutions brought the

individuals in the race-Chinese community directly under the control of the government as ‘citizens’, defined in terms of civil responsibilities *sans* culture.

It should be apparent that different strategies have been deployed in managing the political implications of the demographic and economic strengths of the Malay and Chinese communities. The consequence is that the smaller Malay community, assembled under their common religion of Islam, is now governed through a clearly articulated, both discursively and organizationally, centralizing, hierarchical structure of organizations, directly under the control of the Minister for Muslim Affairs. In contrast, the majority race-Chinese population is governed directly as ‘citizens’, unmediated by any significant organizational. The smallest population of race-Indians does not seem to require any specific strategies.

#### *Discriminations of specific race-groups*

Beyond the spatial and organizational governance of the race-groups as whole social units, particularities of each group that have serious implications for governance have to be attended to. One such concern is the potential conflict that may result from split loyalties to the race-groups and their counter parts elsewhere in the region and/or globally, for example the globally dispersed Tamil diasporas, segments of which are supporters of Tamil Tigers who are fighting for succession from Sri Lanka, and to the state of Singapore. From the point of security of the state, stresses from split loyalties among the members of a particular race-group may potentially destabilize the country. In the case of Singapore, the race-group that bears the brunt of this state-centred logic is the Malays.

#### **NATIONAL SECURITY – MUSLIM LOYALTY**

The history of separation of Singapore from Malaysia is popularly known in Singapore as Singapore being ‘kicked out’ of Malaysia. This history, especially when it is symbolically represented as expulsion, makes it difficult for Malay/Muslims in Singapore to appeal to their Malaysian counterparts for support over any grievances in the name of race or religious solidarity. The shared racial-religious identity has been displaced and replaced by the primacy of differences of national identities.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that Muslims constitute a regional larger community continues to haunt Singapore’s political leadership, especially those in Malaysia.

By the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) convention of mutual non-interference, the peoples and states of the association are to leave domestic affairs member states well alone. However, Malaysian Malays, whether as citizens and/or politicians, often

will comment on the conditions of the Malays, their 'racial and religious brethren' in Singapore. In such instances, the Singaporean Malay leadership, either in line of official duty, as in the case of Malay MPs of PAP, or as 'ordinary' Malay citizens, would rebut the comments. These gestures are reciprocated. For example, in January 2001, the Prime Minister of Singapore made public a comparison that showed Malays in Singapore to have better academic achievement than Malays in Malaysia. Singapore's ambassador to Malaysia was given a dressing down by the Malaysian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Obviously, politicians in both countries will always exploit such occasions for building political capital.

Beneath the displacement of racial and religious affinities is the above mentioned 'security' concern of loyalties of Malay/Muslim as citizens. Since 1968, in Singapore, every young male is conscripted to the armed forces for at least two years of military service, at the end of high school education. However, Malay youth were not conscripted until late 1970s. The government has not denied the discrimination and justifies it by an imaginable potential 'moral' conflict that might face a Malay military man if Singapore were at war with Malaysia or Indonesia: He could be placed in a dilemma of having to shoot his own 'kin' and/or 'racial and religious brethren' or to shoot fellow Singaporeans. According to Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990, 'it would be very tricky business for the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) to put a Malay officer who was very religious and who had family ties in Malaysia, in charge of a machine-gun unit' (Straits Times February 8, 2001).

The Malay community is quite aware of the logic of the Singapore government, as members of the Association of Muslim Professionals retort to Lee:

What can we do if the Malaysians and Indonesians want to create riots? And as you said, there is always a possibility that the riots can spill over into Singapore and because of that, the Malays, as long as there are riots and the possibility of riots and as long as the communal conflicts in Malaysia and Indonesia are always there, then we will never be accepted and we will always be discriminated against, especially in the SAF.

This very explicit statement points to the position of Malay/Muslims in Singapore and in the region. It is conventional wisdom that Singapore's heavy defense spending of is directed at the neighbours; nevertheless, they remained the 'enemies that cannot be named'<sup>9</sup>, by the government but commonly done by ordinary citizens.

To which Lee replied:

So, we are all prisoners of circumstances. I sympathize with you. I know it's unfair. You're held hostage by events to which you have not contributed. But is it our imagination? Is it unreal? No. If there's an enormous disturbance in Malaysia, we are going to be affected. If there's an enormous disturbance in Indonesia, especially in Batam and the Riau Islands [Indonesia's territory closest to Singapore], we are going

to be affected. It's a fact of life. We have to face the real world and the real world is unfair and unkind. It cannot be helped.<sup>10</sup>

Beneath the oblique talk about 'spill over' troubles from Malaysia and Indonesia is the issue of Islam, especially the 'fundamentalist' strands that have political ambitions of unifying the Southeast Asian regional '*ummah*', such as the alleged pan-Southeast Asian Muslim 'terrorists' group, the Jemaah Islamiyah; some members of which were detained by the government in the 2002. After forty-years of 'nationhood', the national loyalty of Malay/Muslims is still a political issue. The PAP government's blatant withholding of trust in Muslim Singapore-citizens will at best be accepted by the latter under protest, both as part of the social reality and as one of the costs of citizenship.

### **MINORITIZATION OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING CHINESE**

From the very beginning, English, the colonial language, was adopted as the language of government and commerce and from the mid 1970s, the primarily language of all education instructions. English is also ideologically promoted as a 'race-neutral' for all Asian children in Singapore. However, it is certainly not a class-neutral language. Having been a British colony for 150 years, English was already a common language among the privileged local population who worked for the colonial administration and whose children had access to the limited opportunities of learning the language. This included the first generation of political leaders who, being English speakers since young, had access to British university education immediately after the Second World War. The adoption of English as the primary language in all public life obviously accentuated this class dimension. The political utility of the ideological illusion or intentional camouflage of 'neutrality' enables the state to use English to delineate discursive spaces, to articulate its own interests distinctly, away from the interests of all racial groups. It also effects a separation of the state/national interests from those of its racial majority, instead of the state/national interests being captured by the racial majority. The position of monolingual Chinese speakers illustrates this.

As national mass education did not expand rapidly until the early 1970s, there remains in Singapore a sizeable population of individuals, generally over forty years old, who either had never been formally educated at all or had been educated in their respective languages in community schools. Among these are individuals who had attended Chinese language schools up to secondary school level and some had tertiary education in Mandarin, either in Taiwan or at the Nanyang University in Singapore. The latter was the only Chinese language university in Southeast Asia, established in the late 1950s, with funds contributed by the global Chinese

‘diasporas’, particularly the Chinese community in Singapore, from the business tycoons to the proverbial ‘trishaw’ riders.<sup>11</sup> This segment of the Chinese community thus ranges from Chinese-dialect speakers who cannot read or write Chinese or speak Mandarin to those who are well educated and formally knowledgeable in things Chinese. Regardless of education, all non-English speaking Chinese individuals are highly disadvantaged in the political economy of contemporary Singapore which uses English language as the language of all economic and administrative transactions. In this sense, there is a ‘minoritization’ of a segment of the demographic majority of Chinese.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE RACE-INDIANS**

As the smallest of three race-groups, the race-Indians have not been subjected to specific policies which either disadvantaged or privileged them; consequently, the effects of multiracialism on them are the least visible; instead they are seen generally as the beneficiaries of equality of races. There are two exceptions to this general perception.

First, the adoption of English language as the primary medium of public education has, as one of its unintended consequences, eliminated the privileges of members of the race-Indians prevalent during colonial days. Historically, Indians were the first non-white population in Singapore to acquire highest English facility; many present racial-Indian families have used English exclusively as the home languages for more than one generation. If one examined the top ranks of the civil service and in the professions, such as doctors, schoolteachers and principals, during the immediate years after independence, one would find an over-representation of Indians. During the colonial days, most Chinese children went to Mandarin-language schools, which were financed by local communities, as a result of the colonial neglect. They were, therefore, not in competition for jobs in the civil service or the professions. However, once English-language education is available to all through the national education system, over-representation of Indians in civil service and professions disappeared. By mere statistical weight of being more than 75 per cent of the population, top civil servants were almost all ethnic-Chinese within twenty years. Once English-language education is available to all, statistics takes over and does the distribution.<sup>12</sup>

Second, there appears to be a political ‘glass ceiling’, albeit a very high one, for race-Indians in the PAP government. In the early 1990s, at the time when he was ready to pass on the office of the Prime Minister, the former PM Lee Kuan Yew publicly suggested that Singapore was not ready for an Indian-Singaporean prime minister. Whether this is limited to his private

opinion and will change with his passing or it is the policy of the PAP is not known to the public.

It should be noted that from the view of governance, the presence of the race-Indian group is extremely, strategically important. Its presence gives substance to and thus credence to the logic of multiracialism in governance. If not for the group's presence, the politics of Singapore would be reduced to one of two constitutive races of an overwhelming majority race-Chinese and the minority race-Malays. This would reduce the politics nakedly into a dominant-subordinate dyadic politics with vastly different outcomes in every sphere with every act of the government. The ideological and strategic importance of the race-Indians is thus to make 'multiracialism' as national policy credible.

## **WHERE RACE IS IGNORED**

### *English as the primary language*

The eraser of over-representation of racial-Indians in civil service and professions provides support for another ideological consequence of adopting English as a 'neutral' language. It 'demonstrates' that Singapore is a 'meritocracy' as English language learning is part of the 'open' competition. 'Racially neutral' English both 'contributes' to and 'shores' up the government's insistence that Singapore is a 'meritocracy'. However, whereas English may be constructed as 'racial neutral', it certainly has never been 'class neutral'. Children with tertiary-educated English speaking parents of upper middle class background are advantaged in the use of English as the primary language of instruction, giving them a head-start in the race, undermining claims to meritocracy. In contrast, children from non-English speaking families are disadvantaged. This is most apparent in the politics of 'Singlish'.

English is now the language of everyday life for overwhelming number of, if not most, Singaporeans below fifty years of age. While those who are tertiary educated generally speak grammar proper, if not grammar perfect, English, there has emerged a patois of English, locally known as 'Singlish'. In addition to containing many exclamation sounds, such as 'lah', 'mea' and 'loh', when spoken, Singlish can be described often as Chinese dialect sentences, particularly Hokkien, with English words. Singlish has been defended by middle class, proficient-English-speakers as an identity marker of being 'Singaporean'. For them, it may be said that Singlish is just another code, in and out of which they can slip easily and, of course, when the occasion calls, revert to grammatically proper English. However, for Singaporeans who are Chinese educated or primary or secondary school dropouts and, consequently, know no other English language code except Singlish, the economic disadvantages are obvious.

Thus, the government has recently criticized the use of Singlish and those who support its popularity. It has instructed the state-owned television station to cease using Singlish in its popular entertainment programs and has begun to promote 'good English' campaigns.

Within Singapore's multiracialism/multiculturalism, English language has become an important element in supporting the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis the three major racial groups of Singaporeans. It has a further ideological function: English as an Asian-race-neutral language provides the government with an ideological assistance to institute 'meritocracy', and to continue to insist in spite of increasing evidence of hardening of economic and social class divisions, as the basis of the educational and economic competition.

### **MERITOCRACY AS ALLOCATION DEVICE OF REWARDS**

Successful industrialization of the economy required the institutionalization and inscription of certain values on to the individuals, transforming them into disciplined wage workers. One inducement for individuals to so transform themselves voluntarily is to develop social competitiveness among them by promoting comparative advantages in material consumption. Thus, in tandem with industrialization has to be expansion of consumer culture which can be maintained at both social and individual levels through sustained fulltime employment. In this context of generalized competition, individuals are encouraged to use education principally as a means of attaining higher incomes and other materialist and status rewards. On its part, the government has insisted that this competitiveness in education and subsequent rewards are conducted 'fairly' and based on individual merits; that is, competitions are underwritten by the ideology of 'meritocracy'. This ideology has in turn enabled the government to rationalize the consequential social and economic inequalities under industrial capitalism by 'individualizing' failures and successes. The discourse of meritocracy has come to play a significant role in the identity formation of individual Singaporeans, either as a self-congratulatory justification for those who are successful and self-deprecation for those who are not.

The government has consistently used the individualizing effects of the meritocracy ideology has the defense against arguments that specific race-groups are historically or structurally determined economic disadvantaged by the colonial regime. The individualizing logic of meritocracy does not allow the government to admit to economics of race-groups. This is most apparent in the case of the race-Malay group. The government consistently and relentless, according to Rahim (1998), attributes ideologically the persistent economic 'backwardness' of the Malays as a group to Malay-Muslim 'culture' as poor preparation of



market competition; notwithstanding the fact that Arab traders were among the first generations of entrepreneurs in early 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial Singapore.<sup>13</sup> However, some concessions to structural disadvantages of the race-Malays have been granted after the Malay MPs collectively appealed to the government for funding assistance in establishing ‘self-help’ organizations to raise the academic performance of Malay students, particularly those from economically needy families.

It should be apparent that in the capitalist market economic sphere, the PAP government has consistently refused to take ‘race’ into consideration in its economic policies. It insists on that the English language is ‘non ideological’ but ‘pragmatically’ necessary for Singapore and Singaporeans to be competitive and successful in the global economy, where English is the relatively ‘universal’ language. The economic achievements of Singapore since 1965 apparently support this claim. In contrast, it has argued that Singaporeans should continue to learn their respective Asian languages, from which their ‘Asian’ values are supposedly derived. The Asian values are supposedly necessary to counter the individualizing effects of access to ‘Western’ values and cultures because of Singaporean’s facility with English language. With the results of market competition conceptualized entirely in an ideology of ‘meritocracy’, in terms of each individual’s ‘effort’, ‘race’ may be said to be denied as an explanatory factor in the economic position, positive or negative, of any race-community. However, in view of the persistent economic disadvantaged position of the race-Malay community, race-culture has entered into the management of race by the back door, with the Malay MPs attempt to raise the educational achievements of Malay students and subsequently, the economic positions of Malay individuals and, in aggregate, the Malay community.

### **COSTS AND BENEFITS ASSESSMENT OF MULTIRACIALISM**

Obviously, multiracialism as practice of governance obviously does not translate into equality of all races in all circumstances at all costs; this is an issue that will be taken up in the next section. For now, in summary, it should be noted that the policy has engendered secure sense of race-group identification and identity among the two smaller race-groups. This strong sense of community is reflected in the ability of the two groups to organize their respective self-help organizations, with a little financial help from the government. There have been no overt attempts by the majority Chinese or the government itself to promote assimilation of the former. The occasional suggestions that the various public campaigns that promote ‘Chinese’ language and culture are attempts to ‘Sinicize’ the others are largely ideologically misplaced.

This is because the success of 'Sinicization' would be detrimental to the strategy of governance of the PAP. As it would destroy the two important basis for governance - the emphasis on the 'divisions' within the population and the presence of the race-Indians in amelioration of the dominance-subordination effects between the Chinese and the Malays.

However, the strong identity of the race-groups does not always translate into benefits of individual members of the groups; indeed, the communitarian values of multiracialism can translate into hardships for individual members. Unfortunately, strong group coherence is often dependent on intense maintenance of the group boundaries. This means that individual members are subject to pervasive formal and informal surveillance to enforce their adherence to the group and its cultural practices. This disciplining of individual members is particularly harsh on members who are self-selectively marginal to the group's cultural practices. For example, Malay individuals who do not abide by the dietary injunction of Islam such as no alcoholic drinks or more radically, professes a religion other than Islam. Such individuals are subject to extremely intense negative sanctions from the community and suffer intense psychological stresses from all forms of stigma, including threats of banishment from the family and community. For many Chinese, condemnation from others and self-sense of shame of lack of facility with Mandarin in school and in society at large are daily stresses. Individual freedoms may often be severely compromised by the emphasis on the 'cultural rights' of the race-groups guaranteed by official multiracialism.

### **RACIAL HARMONY AS PUBLIC GOOD**

In Singapore, 'race' is obviously maintained at a very highly visible level in the public sphere, in accord with the multiracial declaration of the nation's Constitution, in which the equality of racial groups is guaranteed. As we have shown above, this constitutional declaration does not mean that equality of races is not unfailingly binding and maintained consistently by the government across all spaces of public administration and social and economic policies. Indeed, there are instances in which parity of the three race-groups are maintained, other instances where overt discrimination against particular race-group is exercised and finally, instances in which race is not a factor in the administration of a public policy. Significantly, in each of these instances, however, 'race' is giving very high public visibility because each discrimination and/or ignoring of race as a factor in construction of the respective government positions or policies needs to be explicitly stated. Each of these instances needs to rationalize publicly in ways that do not explicitly violate the 'idea' of equality of races.

The possibility of discursively and ideologically rationalizing even instances of explicit discrimination, as in the government's distrust of Malay-Muslim national loyalties, is conventionally implied by logic of multiracialism. In addition to equality of races, multiracialism also implies racial harmony as a public good; racial harmony is conceptually both the cause for and the result of equality of races. Ideologically, multi-races are made to signify 'deep divisions' within the nation. The divisions create the political discursive space to rationalize, indeed require, the ruling government to closely monitor and police the racial boundaries. This governing function as the 'neutral umpire' that allocates resources and adjudicates disputes among the races can be fully appreciated through the analysis of the idea of 'racial harmony'.

As we have shown above, multiracialism as a regime of governance has extracted significant and different costs from all the three race-groups in Singapore. These anguishes of the various groups in suffering these costs are underwritten by an idea of 'racial harmony' to make the costs bearable. 'Racial harmony' is a public good that few can morally deny. Past instances of race riots are constantly reiterated by the government to warn the population of 'tenuousness' of extant racial harmony and to justify the need for constant policing of racial boundaries. As 'risks' of disruption of racial harmony inheres logically within every discussion of race relations, the entire domain of 'race' has hitherto been considered too 'sensitive' for public discussion and best raised only privately; all public discussions among organizations or with government agencies are best done behind 'closed doors'. Public voicing of grievances within a discourse of race have been quickly suppressed and the individuals publicly chastised, even criminalized as allegedly 'racial chauvinists' who threatened racial harmony.<sup>14</sup> A slew of legislations and institutions are established, in Singapore, to police and ensure racial harmony; these include the Racial Harmony Act and the Presidential Council for Racial and Religious Harmony. There is thus a generalized suppression of public discussion on race relations until today. One of the first acts of Lee Hsien Loong as Prime Minister, in 2004, was the exempting of all indoor activities, except religion and race, from the necessity of obtaining licenses from the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit in the Police Department.

In the absence of public discussions, with very few exceptions, members of the three race-groups lack knowledge, let alone understanding of the cultural practices of the other groups. The resultant 'racial harmony' is minimalist, maintained by passive tolerance of visible and recognizable differences without substantial cultural exchanges and even less cultural boundary crossings. This minimalist racial harmony is reinforced by the above

mentioned an ideology of 'meritocracy', facilitated by the promotion of English as a 'neutral' language for all the Asian-race-Singaporeans.

The fact is that there has been no racial violence in Singapore since 1969. The question remains: how this impressive record of absence is to be interpreted. Could it be that it is the result of the suppression of discussion of race? Could it be that the 'danger' of riots had been exaggerated by mythologizing the past events; if so, suppression was not necessary in the first place? Could it be the result of the progressive enlightenment of a population with increasing higher levels of education; if so, suppression would no longer be necessary? There seems no way for ascertaining which answer is the most likely because 'deterrence' operates in a closed logic: It is assumed that deterrence has kept misdeeds low, if not entirely erased. So deterrence must continue. Since deterrence is never lifted, the validity of the assumption is never tested. Neither is the assumption that if lifted misdeeds will burst forth. So deterrence continues. As this deterrence logic continues to govern discourse on race in Singapore, 'racial harmony' has continued to act as a repressive device for pre-empting public debates and negotiations of issues and difficulties that face all multiracial countries - such as existing racial discriminations in the job market, historical legacy of structural inequalities and 'real' sentiments towards each other among the component races.

## **GROUP RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY**

The promotion of multiracialism has several effects on the political development of Singapore towards greater democratization. First, the encouragement of race-group identities, especially in 'self-help' endeavours, has resulted in re-organization of race-community organizations. These organizations have provided leadership opportunities for community minded individuals, thus appropriating some of the political energies from these individuals away the main arena of electoral political contest. Second, promotion of 'traditional' values of the different race-groups not only helps to re-emphasize the boundaries of the groups but also provides the ideological space to 'denounce' the critical, tradition-questioning impulse of democracy or democratic culture as 'individualistic'. There are persistent public expressions of worries of the 'disappearance' of the race- cultures by the respective race-groups, not through the assimilation of each other or even of the smaller groups by the overwhelming race-Chinese majority, but by the individualism of 'Westernization'; a fear encouraged by the state itself. Democratic culture is this demonized through the trope of 'Western liberal individualism'.

Finally, beneath the abstract ideological displacement of democratic culture, the logic of politics of multiracialism is substantively expressed in the idea and practice of 'proportional' representation. With the spatial distribution that disperses the smaller race-Malay and race-Indian electorate and the resultant inevitable Chinese majority in all electoral constituencies, the complete elimination of representations for the two smaller race-groups is a readily imaginable outcome of general elections. To avoid this, the PAP government has modified the electoral process to ensure that non-race-Chinese constitute at least 25% of the parliamentarians in each government. This is achieved through the Greater Representative Constituencies (GRC). Several electoral constituencies are bind together as a GRC. Each contesting political party has to field a slate of candidates for the several constituencies. The slate that garnered the highest aggregated votes wins all the seats in the GRC. To ensure minority representation, at least 25% of the slate of candidates must be non-Chinese. In this manner, representation from the smaller race-groups is ensured, a laudable achievement that delivers on the promise of multiracial politics. However, ironically, the same process also ensures that the majority of the parliamentarians are race-Chinese.

The question remains: Can a parliament of a permanent race-majority be democratic? Of course, it could be argued that the outcome of a race-Chinese majority in parliament is inevitable because of its overwhelming demographic majority, if every voter were to vote along race-lines. However, by the same logic, it also becomes apparent that the 'fortunes' of the smaller race-groups are dependent on the will of the race-Chinese majority. The smaller race-groups are thus placed in a dilemma: to accept political multiracialism so as to ensure representation or to encourage de-linking and re-definition of the political sphere as one determined by issues and best candidates for the job, regardless of race; that is to 'de-racialize' electoral politics. This question, in theory, can be resolve independently of the ability of multiracialism as cultural policy which enables the different race-groups to preserve their race-identities, communities and cultures; in practice, however, the necessary disentanglement of the cultural and the political aspects of multiracialism would be, of course, extremely difficult.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Hitherto, the ideological success of official 'multiracialism' is reflected in the ease, even self-congratulation, with which Singaporeans readily describe the nation as a multiracial nation, by citing all the religious, cultural and linguistic guarantees and practices of the state. The insistence of the racial divisions potentially encourages the three race-groups to attempt

reconnecting with their respective ‘homelands’. Indeed, remittances to kin in China and India have continued since the early days of the migration, presently augmented by new migrant workers from these two countries. Singaporean investors have also capitalized on their respective race-ties in their investments and other business transactions, as the economies of India and the PRC open to the world. Of the three possible reconnections, for reasons of geographical proximity, the Malay one is the most immediate and perhaps, most troublesome. Malaysian Malays, apparently unable to sever all their real and imagined kin ties, often take upon themselves to ‘look after’ the interests of, and intervene in issues concerning Malays in Singapore. In such instances, the Malay PAP MPs and leaders of NGOs are usually the main defenders of Singapore’s practices as ‘this is our domestic affair’. Obviously, the potential for ‘reconnection’ must and will be policed, if a nationalist boundedness is to emerge. Nevertheless, a sense of ‘we Singaporeans’, of nationalism has certainly taken hold among the multiracial population.

This vernacular sense of nationalism is disclosed ironically by the position of the ‘guest workers’ in Singapore, who have been arriving since middle 1970s.<sup>15</sup> The unemployed in the neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the People’s Republic of China, constitutes a reserved labour force which continues to fuel Singapore’s labour demand. The national origins and ethnicities of the large segment of these guest workers are the same as the racial-Singaporeans: South Asians, generalized locally as ‘Indians’, Malays and Indonesians, generalized as ‘Malays’ and ethnic-Chinese. As such, these guest workers can be absorbed racially and culturally, in principle, with relative ease, into local racial communities without intensifying existing racial differences. Yet they will remain temporary and marginal because they are being and will be kept, by the state, on temporary working permits without any opportunity to obtaining permanent residency or citizenship. They are also being kept out by Singaporean racial counter parts that treat them as ‘outsiders’, as ‘others’, as ‘essentially’ different because of their ‘cultural inferiority’ by virtue of the economic underdevelopment of their homeland. Here, Singaporean citizenship and status is privileged over possible racial connections, affinities and identities. Economic development and its consumer cultural entailments have placed ‘Singaporeans’ as ‘superior’ to those potential racial kin from ‘underdeveloped’ Indonesia, South Asia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). A sense of nationalist belonging, of being ‘Singaporean’ has apparently taken hold with economic success as a marker, if on rather unsavoury grounds of diminishing the dignities of others who are potential of one’s own race.

However, the neat packaging of multiracialism as an ideology to define and justify social and political structures and governance has inherent weaknesses which are becoming noticeable and requiring solutions. The spectre of 'race riots', along with much of Singapore's past struggles to survive as a viable nation, has begun to recede in social memory. The proportion of Singaporeans who are local born with no interest in the imaginary race-homelands see themselves in 'nationalist' rather than in racial terms; surveys after surveys have found that young identify themselves as Singaporeans first, not race. Under such changed circumstance, every instance of overt discrimination or privileging of particular group(s) finds less and less resonance in the public sphere, as the presumed racial cultures become far less important and relevant to the daily life of Singaporeans.

In line with rising education and expectations, Malay/Muslims have found the voices and channels to object publicly to instances and areas of actual and perceived inequalities and voicing their dissatisfactions with existing social configurations. With the internationalization of Islam since the 1970s, the relevance of religion in daily life has intensified among the Malays (Kadir 2004). This religiosity became a focus of public debate in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York City. Singapore, being in a region where Muslims are the majority population, was unavoidably caught up in the global and regional discourses and vigilance against terrorism from those who use or abuse the name of Islam to pursue their own ends. This placed the Malays in a difficult, if not defensive position.

In December 2001, a cell of fifteen members of Jemaah Islamiyah, a network of Muslim radicals working throughout Southeast Asia and allegedly an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, the organization allegedly responsible for the bombing, was uncovered.<sup>16</sup> Thirteen were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act for allegedly planning to terrorize Americans in Singapore. Then, the president of an organization of young Muslims, the *Fateha*, claimed in its internet website that Osama bin Laden, the alleged master mind of the bombing, is a better Muslim than the Malay PAP MPs. He was immediately publicly isolated by a frenzy of chastisements from government ministers, MPs, Malay community leaders and other citizens in the mass media and resigned from his organization within a few days. Third came the act of civil disobedience by four Muslim parents who sent their daughters on the first day of the school term with head-dresses, challenging the school uniform rule set by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry suspended the students after one week of failed negotiation; the students subsequently left the school with unknown fate, which was itself against the compulsory education law. The issue of the head-dress has been simmering for

over a decade and had been repetitively raised with the government by Muslim leaders, but hitherto always away from the public eye. This instance had exposed it to public debate and the issue may be displaced for the moment but by no means solved or erased.

This series of consecutive events exposed the restlessness under the mythologized calm of the prevailing minimal tolerance multiracialism. In response, there is now a call for developing race-cultural boundary crossing activities among the population. As is wont in Singapore, government's suggestion that grassroots organizations, schools and other institutions organize 'inter-racial confidence circles' to break down boundaries and barriers has been taken up seriously; for example, fortuitous but felicitous timing saw non-Muslims invited to the performance, at different mosques, of the sacrificial ritual which marks the end of the period of Haj.

Government officials have begun to express reservations on race-exclusivity. Past Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, wanted to avoid sending 'the wrong message that the Government now favoured a race-based approach to politics' and reiterated 'that our national objective remains the integration of the different ethnic communities' (Strait Times, 26 February 2001). Columnists at the pro-government national newspaper followed up with pieces on the time for 'Singaporean Singapore' (Straits Times, 28 February 2001), a position long held by Singaporeans who are against official insistence on the racializing everyone. This about face may give rise to new 'nationalist' discourse, for which the earlier mentioned emerging Singaporeans identity will be a significant cultural and political foundation. As for the government, the 'nationalist' discourse is as usual premised on the need for the people to pull together in the continuing struggle for the 'survival' of the island-nation in the intense heat of competition of global capitalism.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This working paper gathers together many strands of thoughts that were developed in various previous essays on different aspects of multiracialism and multiculturalism in Singapore. Among the published works are Chua (1998, 1998a, 2003, 2003a). Extensive bibliographic references on the topic can be found in these essays.

<sup>2</sup> For details on the political intrigues wrought by the British in the history of the Johor Sultanate, see Lee (1991: 3-19).

<sup>3</sup> A positive take on the changes in size of the settled population is to attribute the rises and falls to migration of seafaring people (*merantau*) within the archipelago (Rahim 1998:71).

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had 'challenged the special constitutional position and privileges of Malays in Malaysia by alleging that Malays were no ore indigenous than the Chinese, Indians and other immigrant communities' (Rahim 1998:16), and that they 'should be on the same footing as the other immigrant communities' (Rahim 1998:17).

<sup>5</sup> For a brief discussion of the history of the conflation of Malay and Muslim identities to the exclusion of non-Muslim 'Malays', see Rahim (1998:17-19).

<sup>6</sup> For details of the responses of the three race-groups to the quota system and its financial consequences see Sin (2002).

<sup>7</sup> For a brief discussion of the administration of Malay-Muslims and the idea of alternative leadership to MENDAKI, see Kadir (2004).

<sup>8</sup> The same may be said of the Singapore and Malaysian Muslims from Muslims in Indonesia, southern Thailand and southern Philippines.

<sup>9</sup> It is conventional wisdom also that Singapore is quite indefensible, however the arms build-up is aimed at making it costly by imposing severe damages on enemies who might ultimately triumph. On Singapore's defense force, see Huxley (2000).

<sup>10</sup> Both quotes are from the Straits Times (11 March 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Nanyang University was closed down and its student and staff merged with the then University of Singapore to form the National University of Singapore in 1981. The current Nanyang Technological University, which occupies the site of the old Nanyang, has no academic affiliation at all with the latter.

<sup>12</sup> In the Sri Lankan situation, Tamils were privileged during the British colonial days over the Sinhalese. Arguably, and over simplifying the issue, had the independent government adopted the same strategy of retaining English language as the official language, the privileges of Tamils would have been eliminated in the same way as in Singapore.

<sup>13</sup> Lily Rahim (1998) has provided the most sustained argument that the PAP uses a 'cultural lack' thesis in explaining the economic disadvantaged position of the Malays as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1997 general election, one of the candidates from Worker's Party was publicly labelled as a 'Chinese chauvinists' by the ruling party, on account of his expressed sentiments regarding the social and economic disadvantages suffered by those who are monolingual Mandarin speakers in the face of ascendancy of English as the lingua franca. He is now a fugitive from the law for his failure to pay indemnity, which results from a series of libel suites brought against him by several members of the ruling party, including cabinet ministers.

<sup>15</sup> 'Guest workers' are to be distinguished from 'foreign talents', the latter refers to highly educated, highly trained professionals who will add value to the labor force and are much welcomed by the government.

<sup>16</sup> Several plans of terrorist acts were allegedly also uncovered; see the Straits Times series on terror in Southeast Asia, during the month of January, 2002.

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