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Migration, International Labour and Multicultural Policies in Singapore

Brenda S.A. Yeoh

From Diasporas to Multicultural Nation

Today, Singapore's resident population comprises 76.8% Chinese, 13.9% Malay, 7.9% Indians and 1.4% 'Others' (using official categories) (*Department of Statistics*, 2000). This balance is primarily the outcome of 19th and early 20th century movements which saw especially the translocation of Chinese and Indians from south China and India respectively to what was then Malaya (including present-day Malaysia and Singapore). In the nineteenth and earlier half of the twentieth century, Singapore was a polyglot migrant world constituted by streams of immigrants from China, India, the Malay archipelago, and other far-flung places and dominated by a small European imperial diaspora. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Singapore had rapidly consolidated its position as the premier entrepot and trading centre in the Far East. The rapidly expanding economy, coupled by a liberal open door policy on immigration, drew ever-increasing numbers of immigrants.[1] With only about 10,000 people on the island in 1824 (five years after Stamford Raffles established Singapore as a British trading post), the total population grew past the 100,000 mark not long after the first extensive census in 1871, and took only another two decades for the population to double and pass the 200,000 mark in 1901. The next doubling was in the 1930s and in the immediate postwar era, the population size reached one million. On the eve of independence in the early 1960s, the people of the newly conceived city-state numbered about one and a half million. As a component of population dynamics, migrational surplus outweighed natural increase which was in fact negative prior to 1921. Not only were mortality rates (the main killers being malaria, tuberculosis and beri-beri) extremely high up to the early twentieth century, the sex ratio among Chinese and Indian immigrants was highly imbalanced (with about three men to every woman in the early twentieth century), thus resulting in low fertility rates. Natural increase did not replace migrational surplus as the dominant contributor to population growth until some time after 1957 (Yeoh, 1996).

As Demaine (1984:29) argues in the context of Southeast Asia, labour migration was strongly encouraged as the European colonial powers sought to introduce immigrants from outside colonised territories in order to fill specific occupational niches unpopular with the indigenous population. In a port city such as Singapore, entrepot trade and the development of the port economy was dependent on a continuous stream of immigrants to supply sufficient cheap labour. Migration gave colonial Singapore a distinctively plural character in the Furnivallian sense of a society with

> ... different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit ... Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they

[1] Immigration control was first enforced in 1919 through the introduction of the Passengers Restriction Ordinance to control the arrival of newcomers. In 1933, the Aliens Ordinance passed introduced a fixed quota for "alien" immigrations.

> meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling ... Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines. Natives, Chinese, Indians and Europeans all have different functions, and within each major group, subsections have particular occupations (Furnivall, 1948: 304-305).

Each immigrant group was accorded a specific place in Singapore's social and economic landscape. The European population, which never expanded beyond about one to two per cent of the population, were the governing and mercantile elite, possessing socio-economic and political power disproportionate to their numbers. Indian immigrants, making up about eight per cent of the population at the turn of the century, arrived in Singapore mainly as traders and labourers although some came as garrison troops, camp followers and transmarine convicts (Turnbull, 1977:37). They were particularly conspicuous in textile and piece-goods wholesaling and retailing, moneylending as well as workers around the port and railway. Most were south Indian Tamils although Sikhs, Punjabis, Gujeratis, Bengalis and Parsis also numbered among them. The small local Malay population was also soon augmented by immigrants from Malacca, Sumatra, Java, the Riau archipelago and other eastern islands and these became boatmen, fishermen, wood cutters, carpenters, policemen, watchmen, office 'boys', drivers and house-servants (Turnbull, 1977:37; Roff, 1964:77). At the turn of the century, they accounted for about 15 per cent of the total population. Among the much smaller minority groups, the Arabs and Jews were of note as wealthy merchants and landowners, while the Armenian and Japanese communities, though small, also found a place in Singapore's cosmopolitan landscape.

The Chinese were by far the most dominant ethnic group in numerical terms, accounting for 63 per cent of the total population by 1881. The Chinese immigrants hailed mainly from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien in southeast China and comprised five major *bang* or dialect groups: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hylams (Hainanese). Spanning a wide range of occupational niches including merchants, shopkeepers, agriculturalists, artisans and manual labourers of all sorts, they brought with them an entire array of organisations such as clan and dialect associations, trade guilds, temples dedicated to a panoply of Chinese deities, and secret societies which provided the institutional structures within which social, cultural, religious, and recreational activities were performed (Yen, 1986:317). Through these institutions, Chinese groups had access to a certain range of services which supported immigrant life such as the provision of medical care, job protection, education, entertainment, and facilities which catered to the observance of the rites of passage. The social infrastructure of migration was relatively well-developed, and provided the bridgeheads for the chain migration of relatives, friends and clan members.

Until the establishment of the Chinese Protectorate[2] in 1877, the British in general did not intervene in the affairs of the Chinese communities. In conformity with the racialised politics elsewhere in the British Empire, the British rulers considered the Chinese a discrete race and there was little attempt to incorporate the Chinese in any meaningful sense into a broader Malayan framework, whether in terms of the legal

[2] This had the aim of effective liaison between the authorities and the poorer immigrant sections of the Chinese population.

framework or the provision of education, health care facilities or housing (Yeoh, 1996). As Freedman (1950:98) observed, 'the internal affairs of the Chinese community largely passed out of the purview of the British administration. Legally and politically, the Chinese contrived to maintain their own world'. In economic terms, the Chinese were also assured of a certain degree of autonomy in conducting their own affairs, thereby constituting an *imperium in imperio.* It is in this context, and under the encouragement of the Chinese government during the rise of modern China, that '"the Chinese overseas" became "overseas Chinese," having come to think of themselves as an entity with rights and duties *vis-à-vis* their homeland' (Rajah, 1997:13). Pride engendered by the new Chinese nationalism especially after 1911 further strengthened the consciousness of their links with their ancestral 'homeland' even as they sojourned in the Nanyang ('south seas'). Even among the politically untutored, China remained the locus of their existential world, if not in life than at least in death, as Low Ngiong Ing (1983:112), an early twentieth-century Hockchiu immigrant, explained in his autobiographical account:

> An immigrant, if he could afford it, would return to China every few years. In his perambulations he would keep his eyes open for a desirable burial-plot, a knoll commanding a good view, and auspicious according to the laws of geomancy. For we did not mind being men of Nanyang, but that dying, we would hate to be ghosts of Nanyang. If we prospered, we would pile up money in China in order to renovate the ancestral graves and the ancestral homes, to redeem the ancestral fields and add to them … so that men might know we were somebody.

Clearly then, for most of the colonial period, immigrant Chinese who sought their livelihoods in the Nanyang continued not only to frame their identities with reference to China as their homeland where return, if not foreseeable in the immediate future was at least desired as the ultimate rite of passage.

Immigration continued to feature strongly in Singapore's population dynamics right up to the Japanese Occupation, along with a continuous flow of return and secondary migration. Such movements persisted up to the early 1960s, after which they dwindled (Kwok, 1998:200). At the same time, as Singapore moved towards the end of British rule in the late 1950s, the lines between immigrant and resident became more clearly drawn. The Singapore Citizenship Ordinance of 1957 was a major watershed which conferred automatic citizenship on everyone born in Singapore.[3] Requiring a residential requirement of only eight years (later increased to ten years), the Ordinance also admitted the majority of those born in China to Singapore citizenship (Kwok, 1998:211).[4]

[3] Those born in Malaya or to citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies could become citizens if they had a minimum of 2 years' residence (later increased to a minimum of 8 years).
[4] Dual citizenship was prohibited in 1960.

Multicultural Policies of the New Nation

With independence in 1965 also came new policies and plans as well as a new state rhetoric about nation-building that pervaded public discourse. Policies and plans were put in place to tackle major socio-economic problems (such as unemployment, housing and education) and hence improve living conditions, but they were also mounted so that the government could secure political legitimacy, build ideological consensus and transform the population into a disciplined industrial workforce (Chua, 1991). The state's strategy in forging a new "nation" rested in the forging of a common consciousness and a sense of identity with the nation-state, beyond meeting the immediate and more long-term material needs of the people. Singapore's leaders had to fundamentally reshape the "primacy of places" in people's consciousness and in turn replace it by "an abstractly conceptualised and much less immediate linkage with a generalised area", in this case, a "nation" defined by political and territorial boundaries (Benjamin, 1988:3). This was particularly crucial since Singapore's population consisted primarily of immigrants hailing from different "homelands".

A corollary of place-bonding in the construction of nationhood is the welding of individuals within the legitimised borders of the independent "nation" into "one people". The state's vision was to integrate the "nation" to create a "multiracial, non-communist, non-aligned, and democratic socialist state" (Chan, 1991:158). Also, given the geopolitical sensitivities of a numerically Chinese- dominated nation in "a region of an overwhelmingly Malay make-up," a multiracialism which "protects the 'Malays' and 'Indians' by formally denying the 'Chinese' dominant status" was an "astute" solution to counter the "combustibility of inter-racial animosity" (Pang, 2003:13). In 1966, a Constitution Commission was appointed to enshrine the multiracial ideal in the Constitution in order to safeguard the rights of racial, linguistic and religious minorities (Chan, 1991:159). Multiracialism (along with multilingualism, multireligiosity and multiculturalism) has since then been promulgated as a social formula to forge a single identity out of the heterogeneous population driven by racial, religious, language and cultural lines (Benjamin, 1976; Siddique, 1989:365). This state-vaunted formulation designates four "official" races – Chinese, Malays, Indians and 'Others' – viewed as separate but equal, and encourages acceptance of the co-existence of different religious practices, customs and traditions of the various communities without discrimination. The PAP government had consistently regarded racial chauvinism as one of the two main threats to nation-building (the other being communism) and strove to ensure a balance between the interests of the different racial groups through its policies relating to education, housing, language[5] (Chiew, 1985; Shee, 1985), the formation of self-help groups and urban conservation districts (Kong and Yeoh, 1994). While each race is urged to maintain and draw sustenance from a carefully contained sense of ethnic and cultural identity, they are also encouraged to develop a larger identity based on secular, non-cultural national values. Communalist sentiments based on race, dialect, surname or regional affinity must be broken down and replaced with social relationships which derived their meaning from the overarching "nation-state framework" (Benjamin, 1988:36). By appeasing and containing ethnic demands, the multiracial ideology "contributes to the nation building process" (Hill and Lian, 1995:5) and is predicated on

[5] One's "ancestral culture" is assumed to be embedded in the "language" of each "race", which is assured continued existence through compulsory school instruction of one's "mother tongue" (ironically determined by patriarchal descent" (Pang, 2003:17).

the virtue of meritocracy where no one race is favoured over another. It has been argued, however, that rather than protecting minority interests, Singapore-style multiracialism functions as "a means of disempowerment", erasing "the grounds upon which a racial group may make claims on behalf of its own interests without ostensibly violating the idea of group reality" (Chua, 1998).

Singapore's project of multiracialism is rooted in the belief that different ethnic groups have a right to remain distinct rather than assimilate into a mainstream norm. As Pang (2003:15; quoting Brown, 1993) puts it, it is based on "a binary between the component 'elements' and the master-national self", where the nation is "portrayed as a multi-cellular organism which derives its character, identity and values from those of its component cells, specifically denoted in ethnic terms. The Singapore national identity and values are thus seen as developing out of the component Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian cultures". This "CMIO quad-chotomy" (Pang, 2003:17) of essentialised categories has been portrayed as a resilient ideology undergirding nation-building and fostering racial harmony over the decades. It has been articulated using different analogies over the years, the most recent version appearing in Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's (2000:16) vision of "building a multi-racial nation through integration":

> My preferred imagery for building a multi-racial Singapore… is not mosaic pieces, but four overlapping circles. Each circle represents one community. The area where the circles overlap is the common area where we live, play and work together and where we feel truly Singaporean with minimal consciousness of our ethnicity. This pragmatic arrangement of seeking integration through overlapping circles has underwritten the racial and religious harmony that Singaporeans enjoy today.

As for current realities, a recent survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies showed that there was generally strong support for the concept of a multiracial society in Singapore (Malays and Indians were more supportive (88% and 83% respectively) than the Chinese majority (78%) (Ooi, Tan and Soh, 2003). The same survey also found that inter-ethnic relations (measured by participation in festive occasions of other races and the extent to which there were positive views on inter-racial marriages) have strengthened. It is important to note, however, that these findings – like those of earlier surveys – need to be interpreted with caution for they do not necessarily capture the true quality of the *experience* of multiculturalism, which is far more complex and multidimensional. Another recent survey among primary schoolchildren, for example, showed that children tended to choose their friends from within the same ethnic group and that racial mixing was stultified in schools (*Today*, 12 August 2003). Lai's (1995) ethnographic work on ethnic relations in a public housing estate demonstrates the cracks and crevices which characterise the negotiation of multiracial living. Clammer (1998) and George (2000) both argue that Singapore's brand of multiculturalism is an "artificial" one and suffers from the heavy-handed strictures on what constitutes "multiracialism" dictated by the state:

> The real fragility of the remarkable society that has been created in this tiny island state… is not its ethnic and cultural complexity *per se*. It is rather in the artificiality of the attempts to prune into a precarious

> order … In both size and its artificiality Singapore does indeed remind one of the bonsai: nature miniaturised and bent. The problem is that the bonsai, when its cramps are removed and it is put in a bigger pot, grows with the natural exuberance of the rest of nature (Clammer, 1998).
>
> The goal of peaceful multi-racial living has to be downloaded from the main frames of government, into the hard drives of Singapore's increasingly autonomous citizens (George, 2000:169).

Migration and Foreign Labour Policies

Three decades after becoming an independent nation, Singapore is once again a convergence point for (re-)new(ed) migration streams. The term "diaspora" (where constant harking back to a material or imaginary ancestral homeland is a key signature) captured the essence of large numbers of sojourners in Singapore engaged in "experimental migration" (Wang, 2003:3) in the pre-independence days. By the first post-independence census of 1970, however, the total share of the non-resident population in Singapore had dwindled to 2.9% (or 9.6% of non-citizens) of a population of over two million as the raison d'etre of nation-building necessitated choosing one's place of belonging, residence and allegiance through embracing citizenship as Singaporeans. Within three decades, however, transborder mobility and flux are once again the key hallmarks of a rapidly mobilising world. "Transnational migration" with its emphasis on crossing national borders through multiple, sometimes circular, journeys and on diverse social and economic networks linking "host" and "home" in more ambivalent and flexible ways is now an increasingly common experience for a wide range of people. By 2000, increased transnational migration streams have expanded the non-resident population to 18.8% (or 26.0% of non-citizens) of a population of over four million (Table 1). The increasing share of the non-resident/non-citizen population at the millennial turn is a consequence of the city-state's policies to attract and rely on "foreign manpower", as made clear in the vision and aims of the Ministry of Manpower (MOM)):

> Singapore has always leveraged on foreign manpower at all levels to enhance our economic growth. The employment of foreign manpower is deliberate strategy to enable us to grow beyond what our indigenous resources can produce. As we transit to a knowledge economy, we need to ensure that our manpower augmentation policies remain relevant and effective (Manpower 21, Ministry of Manpower, http://www.gov.sg/mom/m21/strat3.htm).

Two main flows of foreigners attracted to Singapore include one, low-skilled contract labour, and two, skilled professional and managerial workers in high-end positions.

In terms of the unskilled foreign worker population, the number in 1997 stood at about 470,000 and in terms of nationalities comprised roughly 80,000 Filipinos; 70,000 Thais; 20,000 Sri Lankans; and 300,000 Malaysians, Indians, PRC Chinese and Indonesians (*The Sunday Times*, 31 August 1997). These are concentrated in the construction industry (about 200,000), domestic maid services (about 140,000) and

the remainder in service, manufacturing and marine industries (*The Straits Times*, 20 May 1999). The high demand for these categories of workers reflects not only the low wages (well below the national norm) accepted by these workers, but also the reluctance of Singaporeans – even during times of economic recession – to fill jobs that require manual labour or shift work in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, marine industries, personal services, as well as domestic service (*The Straits Times*, 30 June 1998; 5 & 7 July 2001; 7 February 2003). The demand for these workers is likely to continue, or even increase, as the socio-economic and educational levels of Singaporeans rise over time, and "fussy Singaporeans… would not take jobs in less 'glamorous' areas" (in the words of Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, cited in *The Straits Times*, 7 February 2003).

Perceived to be potentially disruptive to Singapore society if left unregulated, state policy is opposed to long-term immigration and directed at ensuring that this category of migrants remains a transient workforce, subject to repatriation during periods of economic downturn. State policy has remained firmly committed to ensuring that unskilled and low-skilled foreign workers are managed as a temporary and controlled phenomenon through a series of measures, key among which are the work permit system, the dependency ceiling (which regulates the proportion of foreign to local workers), and the foreign worker levy. Together, these measures act to "dampen cyclical domestic labour shortages without imposing on Singapore unbearable, long-term social and political costs" (Pang, 1992, cited in Wong, 2000: 63).

As a control measure, short-term work permits (or 'R' passes, usually of one- or two- year duration) – required for all foreign workers earning S$2,500 or less per month (in accordance with the Employment of Foreign Workers Act (Ministry of Manpower (MOM) website, www.gov.sg/mom/fta/wp/wp3b.htm) – work to ensure the status of these unskilled and low-skilled workers as a short-term labour pool that is easily repatriated, especially in times of economic recession. For example, after Singapore entered a period of economic recession in 1997, 7,000 foreign workers had their work permits cancelled in the first five months of 1998 as compared to about 6,000 cancellations for the whole of 1997 (Rahman, 1999: 7). Work permit holders enjoy few privileges and face restrictions such as the non-eligibility for the dependant's pass allowing them to bring their spouses and children with them (Table 2). In addition, they may not marry Singaporeans, and are subject to regular medical examination which includes a general physical check-up, a chest X-ray (to detect active tuberculosis infection), and a test for HIV/ AIDS (*The Business Times*, 19 February 2000).[6] Female work permit holders (that is, foreign domestic workers) who are found to be pregnant on medical screening are subject to repatriated without exception. The termination of employment also results in the immediate termination of the work permit, and the worker must leave Singapore within seven days (Wong, 1997: 151). The number of work permit holders that employers are allowed to employ is also subject to a

[6] According to the MOM, "During a foreign worker's employment in Singapore, the employer is generally responsible for … arranging for the worker to be certified medically fit and free from contagious diseases and drug addiction by a Singapore-registered doctor when requested by the Controller of Work Permits". (http://www.mom.gov.sg/MOM/WPD/Procedures/2410_WP_General_Guide_1Oct03.pdf). Doctors who miss detecting pregnancy on medical examination are subject to court penalties (27 October 2003).

dependency ceiling, a quota which is tied to the number of local workers the company employs (MOM website, www.gov.sg/mom/fta/wp/wp3b.htm).[7]

The other key measure, the monthly foreign worker levy, works to control the demand for contract migrant workers, as well as to ensure that their wages "reflect labor market conditions and not simply the marginal cost of hiring foreign workers" (Low, 1995: 753). As with the dependency ceiling, levy rates – currently ranging from S$30 for workers considered "skilled" to S$240-470 for unskilled workers (with rates varying by economic sector) – are periodically adjusted with shifts in the economic cycle to protect jobs for local workers (*The Straits Times*, 12 July 2001). Adding to the cost of employing foreign workers, employers of work permits holders are also required to post a S$5,000 security bond for each (non-Malaysian) worker. In addition, all employers of foreign domestic workers must take out a personal accident insurance cover of at least S$10,000 for each worker since foreign domestic workers are not entitled to claim workmen's compensation (MOM website, www4.fov.sg/mom/wpeaw/wcfile/wc2.htm).

The other burgeoning sector of foreign labour – professional and managerial workers – is usually referred to as "foreign talent" in both government and public discourse. Traditionally, the expatriate community of skilled professionals comprise westerners from countries such as the United States (5,600), Britain (6,600), France (1,600) and Australia (3,300), apart from Japan (10,200) and South Korea (1,400) (*The Business Times*, 15 June 1998). In 2000, skilled workers and professionals accounted for about 80,000 of the total number of foreigners, the numbers being bolstered by policies to target non-traditional sources such as China and India. Given the aspirations of the natural resource-scarce, labour-short city-state to become a major player in a globalised world, Singapore's main economic strategy is premised on the development of a highly skilled human resource base as the "key success factor" in confronting a global future. Besides investing heavily in information technology and human capital to meet global competition, the state has emphasised the strategy of developing Singapore into a "brains service node", "an oasis of talent" and ultimately, the "Talent Capital" of the New Economy, "where local and foreign talent combine their strengths, ideas and creativity to drive the economy and rise above global competition" (Lee, B.Y., 2000:70). In this formulation for a global future, major initiatives have been launched to "welcome the infusion of knowledge which foreign talent will bring" (the words of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, 1997). In other words, skilled foreign labour, managed through generally liberal immigration policies, capitalises on savings in human capital investments, and allow for "technology transfers" (Hui, 1998:208). As such, Singapore, it is argued, must make strategic forays amidst "the global war for talent" and augment its talent pool in order to "maintain the momentum to keep abreast in the global competition for wealth creation" (Lee, B.Y., 2000:71). To secure its place in "a global network of cities of excellence", Singapore must reconfigure itself as a "cosmopolitan center, able to attract, retain and absorb talent from all over the world" (Lee, K.Y., 2000:14). Various programmes aimed at attracting "foreign talent" such as company grants

[7] The dependency ceiling varies by sector, e.g. in the service industry, 30% of the workforce is permitted to be foreign, while in the construction industry, four foreign workers are allowed for every full-time local worker.
http://www.mom.gov.sg/MOM/WPD/Procedures/2414_WP_Guide_Construction_Sector(1_Oct_03).pdf.
According to the Ministry of Manpower, the government varies the quota on work permit rules by sector depending on where locals are less or more willing to work because it "has to balance the needs of both employers and citizens in implementing the foreign-worker policy" (*The Straits Times*, 30 January 2002).

schemes to ease costs of employing skilled labour, recruitment missions by government agencies and permanent residency schemes have been implemented to boost the professional workforce. In a similar vein, recent policies aimed at re-imaging Singapore as a culturally vibrant "Renaissance City" or a "Global City for the Arts" are at least partially driven by attempting to animate the city in order to attract and retain foreign talent.

Employment passes for skilled foreign labour comprise P Passes and Q Passes (see Table 2). P Passes are intended for the highly skilled and generally issued to foreigners who hold university degrees and seek professional, administrative, executive or managerial jobs (with salaries above S$3,500) or who are entrepreneurs or investors. Q Passes are issued to those a lower salary range (S$2,500 to S$3,500) and who have evidence of "acceptable" degrees, professional qualifications or specialist skills (*The Straits Times*, 9 November 2001). Holders of P and Q Passes may work in any sector of the economy, are not subject to levies, and may bring family members with them. In October 2003, a new category – the Entrepass which uses good business plans as opposed to educational qualification and salary as criteria – was introduced to attract "global value-creating entrepreneurs and innovators to come to Singapore to start their business ventures" (MITA, 2003).

Skilled foreigners may apply to become Permanent Residents (PRs) or citizens. PRs are accorded most of the rights and duties of citizens, including eligibility for government-sponsored housing and mandatory National Service (military service) for young male adults. They, however, may not vote in General Elections. For foreigners to obtain Singapore citizenship, they must be at least 21 years of age and have been Singapore Permanent Residents (PRs) for at least 2 to 6 years immediately prior to the date of application. According to the Singapore Immigration and Registration (SIR), citizenship applicants must also be "of good character", have the intention of residing permanently in Singapore and be able to support themselves and their dependents financially.

Broader Implications

> We must … welcome the infusion of knowledge which foreign talent will bring. Singapore must become a cosmopolitan, global city, an open society where people from many lands can feel at home. We need strong links with every major economy, not just our close neighbours. Therefore we must incorporate into our society talent from all over the world, not just Chinese, Malays, or Indians, but talented people whatever their race or country of origin – East Asians, South East Asians, South Asians, Arabs from the Gulf and Middle East, North Americans, Europeans, Australians, even Latin Americans and South Africans…. Our economy and society will benefit from their vibrancy and drive. Some will integrate into our society and settle here. For them we hope this spirit will eventually evolve into one of loyalty and rootedness to Singapore. But even those who do not stay permanently will make a contribution while they are here (Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, National Day Rally Speech 1997, quoted in *The Straits Times*, 30 August 1997).

As Singapore joins in the global competition for talent and becomes more and more caught up in multiple circulatory streams of transnational elites from a wide range of countries, it is inevitable that ethnic relations among groups and individuals in Singapore will become more complex. Foreigners who hail from a number of different continents and countries are not only providers of labour, skill and talent, but also bearers of specific geographies and histories. Not only are they of different nationalities, they carry multiple identities along dimensions of ethnicity, culture, customs and the like. In short, nationality is oftentimes inflected by ethnicity, and both must be taken into account in consideration in examining relationships across divides. As such, the insertion of foreign/ethnic others into Singapore, even if temporary but more so if permanent, will undoubtedly change the complexion of society.

Where unskilled foreign workers are concerned, Singapore has resisted their insertion into society by ensuring that their status remains as transients treated on a "use-and-discard" policy (Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez, 1999). As such, while their physical presence is already clearly indicated in the sanctity of the homes (one in seven households employ a foreign domestic worker) and in public spaces (as visible in the appearance of "weekend foreign worker enclaves in conservation districts, parks, open spaces and leisure sites), their structural position within multicultural society is carefully excluded. As outlined earlier, a range of policy measures have been put in place to ensure surveillance of migrant bodies and that they gain no permanent foothold in the geobody of the nation. In wider society, a number of incidents from the banning of foreign maids from dining in social clubs such as the Cricket Club, swimming in condominium pools and even restricting them to only using condominium lifts marked "for maids and dogs" are symptomatic of the deep-seated discomfort with, and perhaps fear of, the "migrant other" (Yeoh, 2003). Singapore's multiculturalism thus have no place for the far more numerous but unskilled migrant worker performing 3D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) work in the country.

At the other end of the spectrum, state policy welcomes foreign talent with higher-end skills to integrate into Singapore society. Among foreign talent, Asian rather than white foreigners have tended to be more positive about putting down roots in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang, 2003). As such, despite its aspirations to become a cosmopolis of different nationalities, it should be noted that the city may not become less "Asian". This, however, should not lull us into a false sense of security that social integration will be unproblematic, for social issues may well also arise from differences within the category of "race". As "race" becomes inflected by differences in "nationality" and "history", the politics of sameness and difference within each "race" become more complex, there is a need to take a closer look at Singapore's on-going project of developing a national identity based on the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model of multiculturalism. It may well be that the category "Chinese" or "Indian" will become even less homogeneous, while the already unsatisfactory term "Others" becomes even more problematic. It will be important to recognise and allow for complex forms of identifications and ascriptions and not continue to impose disciplinary ethnic categories on society (Yeoh and Huang, 2003).

The task of encouraging Singaporeans to think in less racialised categories is a crucial one for as George (2000:169) observes, given the dominance of the prevailing separate-but-equal CMIO model, "a growing proportion of the population comprises people who have grown up in racially homogeneous societies and cannot be presumed

to understand Singapore's multi-racial core". In terms of civil society, there are few institutions or structures beyond the workplace that facilitate greater interaction, cooperation and collaboration between foreigners and locals. Existing clubs, such as Club Cosmopolitans and Hua Yuan, do not completely fill this need as their membership comprises largely non-Singaporeans (for the former) and newly-converted Singapore citizens and PRs (for the latter). There is hence a need for new social organizations to be developed to actively encourage Singaporeans and foreigners to interact. These could take the form of a widening array of voluntary organizations, with a judicious level of government support, with a good mix of, and jointly run by, foreigners and locals (Yeoh and Huang, 2003).

Stirring in foreigners of different nationalities and races further complicates Singapore's social terrain: each of the circles that Prime Minister Goh referred to – individual ethnic communities – is in itself not homogeneous. Each ethnic community will become increasingly heterogeneous as individuals originating from different nations, although sharing the same ethnicity, come together and are expected to conform to the CMIO model. This further implies that the dynamics within the common area where the circles overlap – where the different ethnic groups interact – is even more fraught with potential fault lines than before, but at the same time, also richer with opportunities for celebrating and capitalising on myriad differences among people of different talents who live and work in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang, 2003). Even as more attempts need to be made to socialise "new immigrants" into Singapore's multicultural society through building bridges which strengthen both cross-national and cross-racial exposure, it would be important to bear in mind that fluidity is and will increasingly be the quintessential experience of the twenty-first century. As such, the ultimate form of integration – conversion to become a citizen of the host country – is likely to occur only for a small minority of foreigners who come to Singapore to work or study. Integration will hence need to be conceived not in terms of dichotomous categories but in terms of a continuum of different degrees of rootedness. Clearly, permanent settlement in a host country marked by a change of citizenship is becoming less common in the age of mobility. More pervasive now are different forms of attachment to and identification with the host country which allow room for subscribing to different identifications with different countries as this provides for the flexibility to successfully navigate in a globalising world.

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Table 1: Changing proportion of citizens to foreign non-residents in Singapore, 1947 to present (Compiled from Del Tufo, 1949; Arumainathan, 1970; Singapore Department of Statistics, various issues)

Census Year	1947[1]		1957			1970		1980		1990		2000	
	No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	**940,824**	**100**	**1,445,929**	**100**	**Total**	**2,074,507**	**100**	**2,413,945**	**100**	**3,016,379**	**100**	**4,017,733**	**100**
Total born in Singapore and Malaysia	571,331	**60.7**	1,055,184	**73.0**	**Total resident population**	2,013,563	**97.0**	2,282,125	**94.5**	2,705,115	**89.7**	3,263,209	**81.2**
	-	-	-	-	• Citizens	1,874,778	**90.4**	2,194,280	**90.9**	2,595,243	**86.0**	2,973,091	**73.9**
Others (excluding non-locally domiciled services personnel	369,493	**39.3**	14,725	**27.0**	• Permanent Residents	138,785	**6.7**	87,845	**3.6**	109,872	**3.6**	290,118	**7.2**
					Total non-resident population[2]	60,944	**2.9**	131,820	**5.5**	311,264	**10.3**	754,524	**18.8**

Notes

[1]Singapore attained independence in 1965, the year when the term 'citizenship' first began to be invoked, drawing a clear boundary between Singaporeans and foreigners. Prior to independence, the census classified the resident population according to place of birth. The numbers of people born in Singapore and Malaysia will be used as a proxy for citizens here. 'Others' therefore denotes the numbers born outside of Singapore and Malaysia. 'Non-locally domiciled services personnel' refer to the officers and foreigners working for the British administrative service, as well as other temporary workers, and their families.

[2]The '**Total non-resident population**' refers to individuals who hold passes for short-term stay in Singapore; these include the Employment Pass, Work Permit, Dependant's Pass, Long-term Social Visit Pass. This category excludes tourists and 'transients'.

Table 2: Different eligibility schemes for Employment Pass holders (after the Ministry of Manpower, 2002)

Type of Pass	Pass	Eligibility	Eligible for Dependant's Pass?‡	Eligible for Long Term Social Visit Pass?ǧ
P§	P1	For foreigners whose basic monthly salary is more than S$7,000	YES	YES
	P2	For foreigners whose basic monthly salary is more than S$3,500 and up to S$7,000.	YES	YES
Q	Q1	For foreigners whose basic monthly salary is more than S$2,500 and who possess acceptable degrees, professional qualifications or specialist skills.	YES	NO
	Q2	A Q2 Pass is issued on **exceptional grounds** to foreigners who do not satisfy any of the above criteria. Such applications will be considered on the merits of each case.	NO	NO
R†	R1	For foreigners with National Technical Certificate (NTC)-3 practical certificates or suitable qualifications.	NO	NO
	R2	For unskilled foreign workers	NO	NO

Notes

§**P Passes** are for foreigners who hold acceptable degrees, professional qualifications or specialist skills and are seeking professional, administrative, executive or managerial jobs or who are entrepreneurs or investors.

†**R Pass** holders are subject to security bond and medical examination required for current two-year work permit holders.

‡**Dependant's Passes** are issued to the children (under 21 years of age) and spouses of Employment Pass holders, entitling them to come to live in Singapore with the Employment Pass holder.

ǧThe **Long Term Social Visit Pass** accords long-term visit entitlements to parents, parents-in-law, step children, spouse (common law), handicapped children, and unmarried daughters above the age of 21