From Colonial Pluralism to Postcolonial Multiculturalism: Race, State Formation and the Question of Cultural Diversity in Malaysia and Singapore

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Abstract

In postcolonial societies, multiculturalism is a historical problem conditioned by colonial racial knowledge and state formation on the one hand, and by the ethnic conflicts of decolonization on the other. The reality and legacy of colonial racisms in colonized societies were not straightforward affairs. Anthropological knowledge was crucial for the construction of colonial state institutions, where racial ethnography determined the way each native ethnic group was ruled. In turn, nationalist consciousness developed along communitarian ethnic lines. The inheritance of the colonial racial state by nationalists created the conditions for postcolonial ethnic conflict. Drawing on the acclaimed Malaysia and Singapore cases of successful postcolonial management of ethnic conflict, I show the transition from colonial pluralism to postcolonial multiculturalism, in which nationalist leaders tapped into communitarian practices, scripted cultural identities and transformed themselves into a transcultural elite to maintain authoritarian rule through state multiracialism. However, globalization today is creating a new pluralism that threatens this multiracialism and presenting opportunities for democratization.

The question of multiculturalism in the postcolonial 'Third World'

The past two decades have seen the blossoming of scholarship on post–colonialism and multiculturalism, which have infused new theoretical insights into the sociology of race and ethnicity. Despite their similar focus on the question of cultural difference, the two fields have scarcely interacted because of their separation in terms of geographical and temporal focus. In Gunew's *Haunted Nations* (2004), we find, at last, a sustained attempt to bring post–colonialism to bear on multiculturalism. Drawing from Stuart Hall's (1996) seminal essay, Gunew (2004, 33) begins with the assertion that postcolonialism has broken down the conceptual distance between metropolitan centre and the colonized peripheries to show that colonial processes were integral

not only to the formation of colonial societies, but also to the functioning of metropolitan societies. Therefore, Gunew (2004, 34) argues, the central question 'for *all* analyses of multiculturalism' (emphasis original) must be the racial discursive question of 'Who counts as European?' Existing studies of multiculturalism tend to have a 'limited geopolitical perspective', Gunew (2004, 40) points out, often keeping its purview within the club of former metropolitan societies and usually the former Anglo–imperial powers, the UK and USA. As a result, questions of colonial racialization, that is, the production of racial knowledge that shaped social institutions and cultural identities, are not explicitly asked in the consideration of multiculturalism. Furthermore, multiculturalism, as it is proposed in the former imperial centers with its liberal presumption of cultural equality, is projected by scholars to have 'a wider, even universal, application' (Gunew 2004, 50).

By expanding the field to Canada and Australia, former dominions of Britain, Gunew shows that the universal application of liberal multiculturalism breaks down in former colonial societies, where the legacies of colonial racialization continue to structure contemporary politics of identity and claims to national citizenship and ownership of modernity. The politics of multiculturalism in these postcolonial societies do not simply pit whites against nonwhites, but entail alliances and oppositions that cut across the white–nonwhite divide and shift the key question to one of national belonging. For example, in Australia, descendents of postwar European immigrants have aligned themselves with Asian groups to contest the descendents of earlier British settlers over claims to Australian identity and all its political implications for citizenship, immigration, and education (see Moran 2005). But beyond the geopolitical limits of European-dominated First World countries, what about the multiculturalisms of Third World nations, the majority of which were not settler colonies but conquered nonwhite societies with state boundaries that correspond to the administrative units of nineteenth-century late colonialism? If the problem of multi-culturalism in the former metropolitan societies is concerned with the relationship between the integration of migrant communities and their right to retain and develop their own ethnic heritage (Kymlicka 1998; May 2002; Rex 1994), and with the question of 'who counts as European?' in the former dominion societies, as Gunew has argued, then what is the nature of the problem in the former colonial societies of Asia and Africa?

In this essay, I distinguish between postimperial societies, which include former metropolitan and dominion societies of the First World, and postcolonial societies consisting of the nonwhite societies of 'Third World' Asia and Africa, and argue that the problem of multiculturalism in the latter category goes deeper than the political effects of colonial racialization in structuring citizenship and national identity issues. The key difference between postimperial and postcolonial societies is the nature of the state. The state in postimperial societies is liberal democratic, with a long history of being conditioned by civil society struggles against state power, or the

cultivation of civil society institutions and representative democracy as in the case of the former dominions. But the state in postcolonial societies is born of the colonial imposition of absolute power and built on colonial racialization as opposed to being merely inflected by it as in postimperial societies. As an instrument of absolute rule, sometimes intentionally operating with a divide-and-rule strategy but mostly operating on the premise of ethnic pluralism along the lines prescribed by colonial racialization, the colonial state intervened into local society and organized the social economy according to its pluralist model. Consequently, the nationalist elites who inherited the legacies of colonialism also inherited a racial state and its pluralist worldview. Resulting separatist ethnonationalisms and ethnic conflict are symptoms of the continued operation of the racial state, and ironically, symptoms that confirmed its pluralist model. In such a situation where the political effects of colonial racialization are acute and traverse the entire length and breadth of state–society relationship, the problem of multiculturalism revolves around the question of whether the ruling group could establish itself as the transcultural elite who can legitimately define the distribution of the economic spoils of national development to ethnic groups.

In the following three sections, I explicate the above argument by focusing largely on the cases of Malaysia and Singapore. These two successor states of British Malaya are acclaimed to be among the most successful countries in the postcolonial management of ethnic pluralism through state-institutionalized multiracialism. But instead of posing pluralism as a natural condition to be managed and resolved by the state, which mimics the two states' discourse on multiracialism, I argue for a critical perspective that places the state at the center of the problem of postcolonial multiculturalism. In the first section, I draw on the literature on pluralism and colonial state formation to discuss the racial constitution of the colonial state and the social construction of pluralism as both state worldview and institutional outcome. I then proceed to discuss the immediate postcolonial period, when the inheritance of the racial state and its pluralist worldview was accompanied by ethnic conflicts and the nation-building project. In the last section, I come finally to the problem of postcolonial multiculturalism and discuss the central question of transcultural elitism pertaining to it.

The colonial racial state and the social construction of pluralism

'Race' is a concept fraught with passion, politics, and blood. In its pseudo-scientific incarnation in the age of imperialism, race took on meanings that assigned biological essences to explain the cultural behavior of whole groups of people. Postwar contemporary scholarship has responded to this race concept critically. Alatas (1977) shows that Western travel writers, historians, and naturalists constructed a myth of the lazy native that distorted local economic realities and justified the establishment of colonial plantation

capitalism in Southeast Asia. From the angle of world systems theory, Wallerstein (1991) situates the construction of race as the ideological counterpart to the international division of labor between the developed capitalist West and the underdeveloped peripheries. Gould (1996) places the blame squarely on the geometrical aesthetics of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's racial theory in the 1795 classic, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, in which Blumenbach postulated that the Caucasian people represented the original human archetype, with the American, Mongolian, Ethiopian, and Malay types representing relative degeneration from the aesthetically superior original. Considered together, these scholars have shown that race is a false concept constructed in the historical context of European exploration, colonial expansion and scientific development.

Despite the fallacies and myths, the race concept reflects social realities that have been historically structured by colonial racialization and continue to be driven by them. Even after over 50 years of decolonization in Malaysia and Singapore, ethnic relations and national politics still revolve around the racial categories used by the British colonial state to enumerate the population in its census and organize the colonial division of labor of white overlords, Malay bureaucrats and peasants, Indian plantation and municipal laborers, and Chinese compradors and commercial laborers (Hirschman 1986, 1987). Race then is not simply an artificial idea to be deconstructed but a sociological fact, a category of analysis that should be examined in specific historical contexts and in its link to social institutions. Given the deep involvement of race in the structuring of colonial societies, how do we approach the social realities of racisms in postcolonial societies?

If racial representations of native peoples as inferior and subhuman 'noble savages' were crucial for the genocidal settler colonialisms of the Americas (Berkhover 1979; Liebersohn 1998; McGregor 1988), then popular and scholarly representations of civilized Eastern peoples as culturally opposing 'orientals' were instrumental in Western imperialist expansion in Asia (Said 1978, 1993). In actual fact, both 'noble savage' and 'oriental' representations were employed in the production of Western knowledge of native peoples in Asia. In addition, peoples with established states that had resisted Western colonialism, but who had been conquered, were often represented or rethought as 'medieval', as resembling the feudal stage of European societal development and therefore situated midway in the evolutionary path culminating in white racial achievement (Cannadine 2001; Goh 2007a; Spurr 1993). In Malaya, the British saw the Chinese as economically useful but perfidious orientals to be kept out of the colonial body politic while the Malays were lazy but picturesque medievals to be advanced in civilization by political and agricultural training and the Tamils from South India to be cared for as docile savages working European-owned plantations.

Anthropological imaginations developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were complicit in crafting these representations and lending a scholarly legitimacy to them (Asad 1973; Fabian 1983; Gough

1968; Pels and Salemink 1999; Trouillot 1991). But the direct link between anthropological representations of colonized peoples and the institutional structuring of colonialism was not empirically shown by this early scholarship. This has led to recent studies that have shifted the lens from the internal disciplinary debate in anthropology to the sociology of knowledge and colonial state-building, where the analysis focuses on the appropriation of anthropological representations of racial difference by officials for the purpose of colonial government (Go 2004; Goh 2007b; L'Estoile et al. 2005; Steinmetz 2007). This development allows us to begin delineating exactly how colonial racialization did not merely remain on the level of political ideology, but was inextricably involved in the construction of the colonial state and in determining the very content and direction of state intervention in the structuring of Third World societies. For our purposes here, the most important thing to note is that anthropological representations provided for the colonial state's pluralist worldview, causing the state 'to see', to use Scott's (1998) phrase, the population in distinct racial categories with essential cultural characteristics, which then formed the basis for colonial political and economic policy.

In British Malaya, the split anthropological imagination of oriental Chinese and medieval Malay was the basis of a split colonial rule in which the governor presided over protectorate government incorporating Malay royalty and aristocratic rajas in the Peninsular Malay States and Crown Colony government in the Chinese-dominated Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca, and Singapore). Because the British could not trust the Chinese, as orientals, to be honest laborers, the immigration of supposedly docile semicivilized Tamils was subsidized for the development of European-owned cash crop plantations and employment as municipal and construction laborers. Despite signs of the political awakening and settling down of both Chinese and Indian immigrants in Malaya, the colonial government maintained their non-resident status in the Malay states and gave 'British subject' status only to the descendents of middle-class, and increasingly Anglicized, immigrants in the Straits Settlements. The result is the institutionalization of pluralism, which Furnivall (1948, 304) influentially defines in his study of British Burma and the Dutch East Indies as a 'medley of peoples' that 'mix but do not combine', meeting 'only in the market–place' and 'living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit'. Therefore, by the social construction of pluralism, I mean two things. The first sense is the anthropological construction of the racially pluralist worldview. The second sense is the institutional construction of plural social structures in the colony.

It has been noted by some scholars that the problem of multiculturalism in postcolonial societies is rooted in the condition of colonial pluralism (Rex 1997; Watson 2000). But because the term is packed with implications of 'natural' ethnic antagonisms and social malaise, it is important that we return to the defining work of Furnivall to unpack the term. Writing in

the era of impending decolonization, Furnivall, a former colonial official turned scholar, was concerned with the problem of nation-building that would soon be faced by the independent postcolonial states. As Rex (2004, 134–35) notes, Furnivall's approach was inspired by Durkheim's *Division of Labor in Society*. The erosion of the simple solidarity of precolonial, customary societies by the imposition of the colonial economy and its modern market relations of impersonal cutthroat competition led to 'the collapse of corporate tribal or village life and the atomization of society'. At the same time, this atomization took place within the bounds of racial cleavages, thus each racial unit now formed 'a crowd and not a community'. What made colonial society possible was the involuntary union 'imposed by the colonial power and by the force of economic circumstances' (Furnivall 1948, 307). The alternative was anarchy, where unregulated economic competition and the lack of 'organic social will' meant mob conflicts between the different racial units (Furnivall 1948, 311). In Furnivall's view, pluralism was therefore a function of natural racial cleavages and the imposition of the modern economy. The coercive, interventionist colonial state did not contribute to the construction of pluralism, but was, instead, the crucial institution ensuring the stability and viability of colonial societies.

But as I have argued, citing contemporary scholarship on the matter, the colonial state was not merely a functional unit ensuring order and racial harmony in an atomized colonial plural society, but was complicit in the construction of pluralism. In other words, pluralism was an outcome of colonial state formation. Racial conflicts and the racial division of labor were not natural outcomes of cultural differences and economic modernity. To a large extent, colonial states of the late nineteenth century were instrumental in constructing cultural, economic, and social pluralism, creating the racial conflicts with its right hand and suppressing them coercively with its left, with the pluralism informing policy in the former and used as legitimating justification in the latter. In the process, interethnic and transethnic cultures, institutions, and identities that developed in precolonial times were weakened. A brief glance back in time to Malaya before the onslaught of British colonialism is instructive. Chinese and Indian immigrants were already present in the Malay states before the British arrived in the region and either assimilated or acculturated with the local Malays through intermarriage. New creolized cultures, called *Peranakan* ('descendent' in the Malay language) for those of Chinese descent and *Jawi Peranakan* for Indian descendents, emerged. Indeed, the occasion for British colonial intervention in the Malay states in the 1860s was a spreading war pitting Chinese mining gangs allied with Malay rajas and secret societies against other Chinese mining gangs in similar cross-ethnic alliances. As Mandal (2004) points out, such 'transethnic solidarities' were common in Malayan history, even in the pluralism constructed during the colonial period, but have been erased from both imperial and nationalist historiography, thereby keeping the pluralist worldview of the colonial and postcolonial state intact.

Based on the pluralist worldview, the British colonial state resolutely separated the Chinese and the Malays, institutionally confining the former to the modern economic realm as free labor and compradors of imperial capital and the latter to the political realm and the rural economy, while the Indians were tied down as cheap semifree plantation and infrastructure labor. This pluralism set the stage for the ethnic management and multiracialism policies of the two successor states, Malaysia and Singapore.

It is, however, unfair to criticize Furnivall for being unable to see the relationship between racial knowledge and colonial state formation in the social construction of pluralism. Writing as an ex-colonial official in a turbulent time when race was widely taken as a natural scientific fact and ethnic conflicts and nationalist struggles were consuming post–Second World War colonial societies, we can understand why he saw autocratic government as a solution to ethnic pluralism. It is only with the insights of postcolonialism that we have been able to unpack Furnivall's term to see his blind spots. My point is that pluralism is a useful concept insofar as we recognize the role of colonial racialization and colonial state formation in the construction of it rather than to see it as an outcome of natural cultural differences combining with a modern economy. Contemporary scholarship on postcolonial Third World societies using pluralist theory has yet to move away from the presumption of natural ethnic conflicts and therefore tend to see multiculturalism, however defined, as inapplicable and unworkable in postcolonial societies such as Vietnam and Malaysia (Fenton 2004; Ngo 1998). However, such scholarship has usefully pointed to the need to discuss the conjunction of nation–building and economic development in shaping the continuation of pluralism into the postcolonial era, a subject that I turn to next.

Nationalisms, ethnic conflict and the postcolonial state

The inheritance of the colonial state by nationalist elites in the era of postwar decolonization raises some important implications for the sociology of postcolonial societies. To what extent was colonial racial knowledge inherited by the postcolonial successors? Was the inheritance modified by nationalist ideology or through the codification of racial knowledge in state institutions, or through both and in what degrees? Were there any qualitative changes in the inheritance? These questions point to yet another need: to focus on decolonization as an important transitional period of state formation and nationalist takeovers, in which the agency of the different groups leaving behind and inheriting the colonial legacy was amplified and decisive for the trajectories of postcolonial societies (Duara 2004). The questions of the legacy and inheritance of colonial racialization are already implicit in sociological discussions and debates over nationalism, ethnic conflict, and state formation in postcolonial societies. My argument here postulates that the interventionist racial state and its pluralist worldview

were inherited and continued by the nationalist elites, subjected to some variations according to the class interests of the elites, resulting in ethnic conflicts that, in turn, affirmed the pluralist worldview and legitimized the racial state. The differences are that nationalist ideology transformed race into a more malleable ethnic concept for nation-building and, at the same time, prescribed economic development as the long-term solution to the condition of pluralism while the short-term solution was for the authoritarian state, functioning like the colonial state, to maintain unity and order.

Not coincidentally, postwar social sciences witnessed the shift from the race concept to ethnicity. It was not just revulsion with the genocides of the Second World War, but also the decolonization of Africa and Asia that convinced scholars to drop the race concept for a more neutral term that described a more flexible and positive cultural mode of group belonging. But the conceptual distinction between race and ethnicity was not a strong one. The people sociologists study tended to use the two terms interchangeably and sociologists struggled to keep the terms conceptually apart. When the terms are kept apart, the race concept often comes out as containing domination and false biological meanings, while ethnicity is seen as indicating natural or organic socio-cultural life – ethnicity is what people do naturally in their group interaction with each other and nationalism is a self-conscious political derivative of ethnic identification (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Eriksen 1993; Smith 1986). This distinction between race and ethnicity, driven by the need to explain group conflict in postcolonial societies, obfuscates the historical link between colonial racialization and postcolonial ethnic conflict, and between colonial state-building and postcolonial nationalisms.

Similarly, I do not view postcolonial nationalism as derived from ethnic identities, but from the engagements of the intellectual, political and economic elites of formerly colonized peoples with the racial representations and racial state of colonialism. Anderson's (1983) original contribution to the study of nationalism discusses the nation as a cultural artifact born of the breakup in the multiethnic empires of Central and Eastern Europe and an imagination of horizontal political comradeship produced by print language. The remaining question was the origins and constitution of non-European nationalisms. Anderson's answer was that the nation, once it had emerged as a cultural artifact in Europe, was modular and the educated colonized elite easily appropriated it to mobilize new imagined communities. However, in the 1991 revised edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson modifies his view, as a result of Thongchai's (1994) work on Thai nationalism, and argues that it was the bounded and serial representations of the colonial state, particularly the practices of census-taking, geographical mapping and museum-monumentalizing, with all its racializations, that structure the imagination of nations in postcolonial societies. By implication, the pluralist worldview of colonial state must then be transmitted in this form of imagination.

The imagination of the Malayan nation, for example, was one originally limited to the peninsular Malay states, excluding the Chinese-dominated Straits Settlements, because of the split colonial state and the mapping of its territories. Indeed, the museums of the colonial state reflected this split, with the museum in Singapore focused on biodiversity exhibits and the museum in Perak, the most senior of the Malay states in terms of British colonial rule, focused on ethnological and archaeological exhibits memorializing Malay culture. The primary category of enumeration in the colonial census was racial, split along Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, and European lines, which in the Malay states expressed the British concern that the Malays would not become a demographic minority in what the British thought of as their land. In part, Anderson's argument explains why, when the Malayan nation was declared independent in 1957, Singapore, the biggest and most populous of the Chinese-dominated Straits Settlements, was kept out and given a separate autonomous government. But it cannot explain the tumultuous events that followed in a decade.

To accommodate Singapore and the British colonies in Borneo, Sarawak, and Sabah, where the pluralism was structured along Malay, Chinese, and indigenous Dayak lines, in a new federation with Malaya in 1963, a new nation called Malaysia had to be invented. But the new nation could not contain the competing nationalisms that persisted through the decolonization period. Here, it is not that the imagination of Malaya could not contain a Chinese-dominated Singapore, but that the complex engagements of the nationalist elites with the colonial racial state and its pluralism clashed. For the postcolonial theorist, Bhabha (1990), the nation is a rhetorical manifestation of these complex engagements narrating it into existence, and while maintaining the symbolic bounds of the colonial state, also threatens to undermine it. The fundamental tensions in these complex engagements revolved around pluralism and ethnic conflicts resulted not from natural antagonisms between culturally different peoples but began in political disagreements in these engagements. In decolonizing Malaya, the chief disagreement was whether the political primacy of the Malays maintained by the colonial state should continue, making Malaya a 'Malay Malaya' where the non-Malays would recognize Malay primacy in exchange for equal citizenship rights, or that formal racial equality should define the nation, making Malaya a 'Malayan Malaya' where a new hybrid national culture would be cultivated. This originally pitted the conservative multiracial alliance led by the United Malay National Organization against the radical anticolonial left. After the left was decimated by British repressions, the disagreement was expressed by political competition between the ruling elites in Kuala Lumpur and the People's Action Party elites in Singapore. The charged political environment led to Chinese-Malay racial riots in 1964 and then eventually to the separation of Singapore and Malaysia in 1965.

However, political disagreements alone could not turn the different narrations of the nation into ethnic conflict. It was only when the differing

views of 'Malay Malaysia' and 'Malaysian Malaysia' were fought out in the political ambit of the nascent postcolonial state with its pluralist under-standing of social reality that the issue became a racially charged one. Although Chatterjee (1996) has roundly criticized Anderson's view for the implied lack of originality and uniqueness of non-Western, anticolonial nationalisms, his work also postulates the colonial state as defining the imagination of the postcolonial nation but in a far more negative sense than Anderson. For Chatterjee (1993), the uniqueness of non-Western nationalisms, especially Indian nationalisms, lies in the cultivation of many imagined national possibilities by anticolonialists in the inner sphere of native culture, a sphere they resolutely defended from the racist intrusions of the colonial state. On the other hand, the anticolonialists submitted to the superior organization of colonial state in the material sphere. The problem for postcolonial societies lies with the modular nationalism that came with the modern state – a nationalism that can only allow for a singular consciousness.

Reading Chatterjee with my argument on the social construction of pluralism, however, the colonial state was not simply a replica of the modern state, but one bound up with a pluralist worldview. The nascent postcolonial state was thus faced with an internal cultural tension. It had to embark on a nation-building project admitting only one national consciousness, while it had to reduce and manage the many national consciousnesses as parochial ethnicities according to its pluralist worldview. Ethnic conflicts arose when the postcolonial state failed to resolve the internal tension stemming from the disjuncture between the multiple national conscious-nesses and the singular public nationalism of the nation-state (Maiello 1996). This was what happened in Malaysia in the 1963–1965 years between merger and separation. The 'Malay Malaysia' nation-building project was challenged by the 'Malaysian Malaysia' consciousness championed by the Singapore elites, and when this entered into the electoral politics of the formally democratic postcolonial state, the first became racialized as Malay and the second became racialized as Chinese despite the fact that both sides were supported by multiracial elites. Months after a former radical leftist from Singapore won an electoral seat in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur in 1964, racial tensions escalated and riots between Chinese and Malay gangs broke out in Singapore. A year later, Singapore left the federation, separation being the only resolution for the internal cultural tension of the disjuncture between the two competing national consciousnesses and the Malay-primacy nation-building project of Malaysia. The internal tension continued in Malaysia, with opposition parties filling in the gap left by Singapore elites, but this was resolved in favor of the dominant Malay-primacy nation-building project after bloody Chinese-Malay riots in May 1969 following the good electoral performance of a center-left opposition party championing a variant of the 'Malaysian Malaysia' consciousness.

At this point, I want to briefly zoom out from Malaysia and Singapore to consider postcolonial societies in Southeast Asia, which form what I

suggest is a spectrum of different plural formations, with British Malaya and British Burma respectively forming the extremes of pervasive pluralism in a single market-bound society versus geographical ethnic segregation, and in between the two cases, the Dutch East Indies. As Brown (1994) points out, in Burma and Indonesia, British, and Dutch colonial rule respectively disrupted stable authority structures and created the conditions for ethnic conflict and ethnonationalist separatist movements in the periphery. But in Malaysia, British rule geared to strong colonial economic development produced a stable racial class state anchored in the alliance between the economically differentiated Chinese, Indian, and Malay groups. Interestingly, of the Southeast Asian cases surveyed by Brown, only in the Malaysian case did Brown mention the role of pluralist–racial knowledge promoted by the colonial state as significant. In Burma, the mixed racial direct rule and ethnic indirect rule in the hinterland of the British colonial state led to an ethnocratic postcolonial Burmese state faced with ethnic separatist rebellions in the hinterland. In Indonesia, plural ethnic conflict plagued the urban centers, usually between Chinese and Javanese or Muslims and Christians, while separatist conflicts raged in the periphery, notably in Aceh. Part of the reason why Indonesia has not dissolved into ethnic chaos is that the ethnic conflicts have been moderated by the patrimonial character of the postcolonial state, in which the ruling elites have been able to distribute economic wealth through the chains of patron–client relationships that ran the gamut of Indonesian society. Whether through 'corrupt' patron–client relationships or legal institutional channels, the distribution of economic resources was crucial for the nationalist elites to transcend their own parochial ethnic status as marked in the racial pluralism of the inherited colonial state, so that they could legitimately manage the ethnic diversity of their postcolonial societies and at the same time claim to lead in the general interest of society while advancing their own class interests. This, in essence, is what differentiates postcolonial multiculturalism from the Western multiculturalisms of postimperial societies.

From colonial pluralism to postcolonial multiculturalism

Given the historical legacies of colonial racialization and divisive social pluralism, it is a wonder at all that society is even possible in the first place in postcolonial countries. The continuation, and oftentimes deepening, of authoritarian colonial state institutions certainly helped in keeping tensed interracial relations in check. In both Malaysia and Singapore, the colonial-era instrument of indefinite and extrajudicial administrative detention has been used, for example, during the 1964 and 1969 riots, and kept till today primarily for this purpose, although it has been widely used against political opponents. But authoritarian state control is not enough to explain the rather tranquil and institutionalized relations between heavily pluralized ethnic groups in these countries and other postcolonial societies. Indeed,

Malaysia and Singapore have often been presented as exemplary cases studies of the successful management of ethnic conflict in postcolonial societies (Brown and Ganguly 1997).

Racial hegemony, as defined by Omi and Winant (1994) in terms of the cultivation of consent of the dominated racial groups, is also inadequate to explain this apparent success, since the pluralist situation, with the diminution of ethnic communities into mere crowds threatening to degenerate into mobs, implies that ethnic community organizations were too weak to represent the people who were nominally members to give consent to the rule of the dominant group. In any case, unlike postimperial societies, postcolonial societies were largely formally democratic rather than substantively or organically so. In such a situation, hegemony has to be built from the ground up by the postcolonial state. The process is what differentiates postcolonial multiculturalism from Western liberal multiculturalism. I argue here, using liberal multiculturalism as a constant foil, that postcolonial multiculturalism is defined by a simultaneous three-part process of manufacturing consent to the ethnic arrangement of the nation-building project in postcolonial state formation.

The first part of the process is the conversion of the state's pluralist worldview into an ethnic pedagogy of public 'recognition' that provides for both the education of national citizenship and the relegation of ethnic identities to the parochial. Philosopher Charles Taylor's classic examination of the multiculturalism as the politics of recognition in liberal democratic societies locates the 'new ideal of authenticity' of modern identities as contrasted with earlier societies in which one's identity 'was largely fixed by one's social position' (1994, 31). No longer as socially determinate as before, modern identities are now largely formed out of mutual recognition in both private and public realms. Contemporary liberal multiculturalism, Taylor argues, moves beyond issues of tolerance and cultural survival into the realm of public recognition of equal worth. The proper action to take to fulfill the demand of recognition is to transform our standards of worth by studying the cultures demanding recognition in a nonethnocentric manner, thereby creating a 'fusion of horizons' that would guide public judgment of the value and the substantively good (Taylor 1994, 67). Appiah's cautious response questions the fundamental scripting of modern identities that Taylor assumes as a privately given fact and collective good. As Appiah puts it, 'We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose' (1994, 155), so that one is left with the choice of negative or positive scripts for public recognition attached to particular identities, for example, for Appiah, as a gay black man in America. This blurs Taylor's contrast between mutually produced modern identities and socially fixed premodern identities and brings the question of social reproduction of identities into stark relief. The social may have retreated from the determination of identity, but it still forms the ground, the terrain for what may be deemed publicly possible *as* identities and *in* identities.

The terrain of social reproduction is both more delimited and less constrained in postcolonial societies. Colonial racialization inherited in the pluralist worldview of the state has pinned down a series of ascribed primary and parochial ethnic identities that, in the postcolonial period, turned into injunctions to perform these identities in everyday life as part of the state-prescribed public script of the nation. In Singapore, for example, one's cultural actions are constantly recognized in the bounded categories of Chinese, Malay and Indian, so as to make up the public multicultural performance scripted by the state (Chua 2003; PuruShotam 2000). When one's cultural action is unrecognizable, it becomes the basis of a social problem, named variously as Westernization, deracination, or communalism, to be treated with doses of state discipline. These ethnic scripts permeate all public institutions, especially schools and government-controlled grassroots organizations, and even the press. Under the shadow of authoritarian state powers, autonomous civil society groups, which are dwarfed by the para-state organizations, transgress these public ethnic scripts at their own peril.

This is not to say that postcolonial societies are less modern because identities are more socially determinate, less democratic. With regards to many other identities, compared to Western societies, postcolonial societies simply do not have public scripts and the manifestation of such unscripted and less scripted identities is simply neglected, leaving the individual with greater freedom to write and perform his or her own life narrative privately in such respects. This is because colonial racialization has created a pluralist horizon that cannot recognize other cultural identities as valid, even before worth can be imputed by collective judgment. For example, a Malay gay man in public view in Singapore, say, as a poet, is constantly judged in terms of his Malayness, judged in terms of his performance as a diligent model minority, while his homosexuality is simply unrecognizable and has to be confined to the private realm. Thus, public homosexuality is often misrecognized in the idiom of ethnic pluralism as a symptom of deracinated Western debauchery.

The ethnic horizon of postcolonial multiculturalism has important implications for the multicultural action Taylor proposes. In the first place, it is questionable whether the fusion of horizons can ever remove or reduce ethnocentricity when the initial horizon is already conditioned by colonial racialization and ethnic pluralism, through which each constituent ethnic identity recognizes itself only in a mirroring effect with other ethnic identities recognized by the state. Furthermore, as implied by the last assertion, the horizon does not reside in the independent public sphere but in the public domain of the state. Given this ethnocentric, bureaucratic, and authoritarian anchoring of postcolonial multiculturalism, I question the usefulness of bringing less scripted identities into the field of public recognition, as it seems only to lead postcolonial societies down the slope of cultural totalitarianism, where cultural identities can only be recognized within the ambit of the state and practiced in the institutionalized spaces of the

state. The presumption of independent prepublic cultural identity by liberal multiculturalism does not therefore work in postcolonial societies where state recognition ascribes one's primary identity and leaves out the others as private and irrelevant to the making of public demands, rendering these irrelevant identities morally problematic and even politically seditious if they do make public demands.

The second part of the process is the institutional transformation of the plural social condition into communitarian political organization. For the postcolonial state, pluralism is the presumed natural social condition that justifies its nationalism and, ultimately, permits the nonliberal 'multiculturalism of fear', allowing the state to assert 'the fact of cultural pluralism' to intervene into society to forestall 'the danger of ethnic violence' (Levy 2000, 38–39). Singapore represents an interesting case study because of the degree of state penetration into society, but it is also an important case study in that the technocratic state's economic and political success has attracted many admiring counterparts in Asia and Africa, who seek to emulate its approach to managing and harnessing the energies of society. Chua (1995) has described the Singapore political system as a communitarian democracy that is successful not only because of its ideological leadership in representing the universal and moral interests of society, but also because of its provision of material welfare through a state-market corporatism that has become a model for economically liberalizing socialist countries like Vietnam and China.

For Chua (2005), the Singapore state's communitarian democracy is, in part, embedded in and structured upon the vernacular communitarian practices of the ethnically diverse population. Singaporeans, a largely immigrant population who settled in the country from different parts of Asia, do not think of themselves as individuals first but live as members of various communities, from families to religious to ethnic and subethnic communities. Colonial state formation and the social construction of pluralism had eroded these community relationships and atomized society, but it did not diminish the communitarian beliefs held by the people. On the macro-level, the state represents itself as arbitrating the formal racial equality of the ascribed three racial groups, Chinese, Malay, and Indian, and enacts this arbitration in key institutions such as electoral representation, public housing, and social welfare. On the micro-level, the state taps into existing vernacular communities and revives them through the provision of material support and sanctions, these then forming the grassroots ethnic props for the state's racial political structure. In other words, the social condition of pluralism inherited as a colonial legacy is transformed into a communitarian order by the postcolonial state. If the authoritarian colonial state had to intervene into society to preserve the unity of the plural society it was complicit in constructing, then the postcolonial state, riding on the pluralist interpretation of ethnic conflict as caused by natural racial antagonisms, intervened to transform the plural condition into a

communitarian order, in which it sits at the apex as final arbiter and dispenser of material resources. As a result, the cost of membership in the ascribed racial–national community, including punitive exit costs for those who seek to become free individuals less encumbered by communitarian structures and practices, is closely managed by the state.

Chua's model is an important advance in the study of postcolonial multiculturalism as differentiated from Western multiculturalism. If Western multiculturalism is concerned with the state's relationship to the market of individual cultural actors and the price of cultural choices, then postcolonial multiculturalism is concerned with the cost of membership in a state-managed market of cultural choices bounded by one's ascribed racial identity. This is a monopoly situation, where the state is always on a lookout for cultural elements in society that have not become part of its bounded cultural market, where ideological profit accrues only in the hands of the state that guards its monopoly with great jealousy. It is this looking out for cultural elements that forms the capacity for recognition in postcolonial multiculturalism. Compared to Western multiculturalism, recognition here takes on a whole different meaning, as it involves the ethnographic apparatus of the state in producing cultural knowledge of the population using its pluralist worldview, so that groups in the population can become recognizable. This points back to my earlier discussion of the state formation processes involving colonial racialization and ethnic pluralism that began in the colonial era.

The third part of the process is the self-transformation of the nationalist elite, the group that won the competition of multiple national consciousnesses, into the transcultural elite with the power to define cultural identities as parochial and distribute resources through patronage. Caws (1994) proposed an important distinction between transcultural and multicultural elements of one identity, in which the former refers to our engagement with the physical world in the terms of scientific rationality and the latter to our interaction with others who have divergent symbolic practices. Optimistically, he believes that the two can be combined in a fruitful manner in which the multicultural can be harnessed for its 'power of enrichment' while the transcultural can be used for 'its power of uniting' (Caws 1994, 385). But in the postcolonial context, this harks back to Furnivall's pluralist theory, in which cultural diversity poses the problem of division that is solved only by the state acting as transcultural agent. Although Caws confined the transcultural to science, it is not difficult to see the link between scientific rationality and the modern state, particularly the technocratic developmental state, which the Malaysia and Singapore states exemplify. Thus, Caws may find in Malaysia and Singapore a dystopia of that combination, where the transcultural is monopolized by the nationalist elites so that the rest can be ruled according to their ascribed ethnic identities. The multicultural in this situation does not enrich but is institutionalized in the public arena according to specific scripts that locate individuals in parochial communities,

while the nationalist elites unite the divided national community through the official multiracial institutions of the technocratic state.

In Malaysia and Singapore, it is no coincidence that the respective Malay-dominated and Chinese-dominated ruling elites, despite their opposing national consciousnesses developed in the decolonization era, share many important characteristics that identify them as transcultural. Both elites expound and apply scientific rationality as the progressive force that unites and develops the nation toward First World status. Both elites claim an identity that transcends supposedly parochial interests and identities, and constitute themselves in political parties that have formal multiracial representation more or less along the lines of demographic proportions: two thirds Malay and one quarter Chinese in Malaysia and vice versa in Singapore, with the remainder made up by the Indian and Eurasian categories in both countries. Both elites have been challenged by political opponents that they have marked as parochial ethnic chauvinists: the Islamists as unprogressive Malays in Malaysia and the left-leaning intelligentsia as Chinese-speaking chauvinists in Singapore. Both elites developed national ideologies in the 1980s, the 'Shared Values' in Singapore and 'Vision 2020' in Malaysia, with corresponding institutions that placed themselves in leadership position to facilitate the multicultural enrichment of the parochialized ethnic identities. Both elites defended themselves against the wave of democratization and human rights scrutiny that followed the end of the Cold War by asserting 'Asian values' as a conservative modernity opposed to neoliberal Western modernity. With the ruling elites positioned as transcultural guardians of the communitarian order they have constructed through the scripting of parochial cultural identities, postcolonial multiculturalism poses a definite challenge for democratization in these fast-developing societies.

Conclusion

Returning to Gunew's postulation that the central question in postimperial multiculturalism is, 'who counts as European?', the corresponding question in postcolonial multiculturalism is, 'who counts as transcultural?', and 'who is thus marked as parochial?' is the converse question. While colonial racialization continues to influence both postimperial and postcolonial multiculturalisms, in the latter colonial racialization constituted the state, where pluralist inclusion rather than political and social exclusion was the norm. Pluralist inclusion brought ethnic conflict and demands into the very center of the state. In other words, liberal democracy may be possible only with racial exclusion in postimperial societies, but in nonliberal postcolonial societies racial pluralist inclusion was a fact and a dilemma to be dealt with from the beginning of nation-building. The problem of multiculturalism in postimperial societies is therefore how is inclusion of cultural diversity possible without endangering or diminishing liberal

democracy. In postcolonial societies, the problem is how to forge a national unity given the pluralist division and multiple national consciousnesses.

As I have argued in this essay, the resolution of the problem in Malaysia and Singapore indicates that postcolonial multiculturalism is defined by the transformation of racial pluralist worldview of the state into the essentialist scripting of parochial ethnic identities, of the social condition of pluralism into a state-managed communitarian political order embedded in revived vernacular communities, and of the nationalist elites into transcultural arbiters of multicultural identities. Being developmental states that have successfully kept ethnic conflicts in check while other postcolonial societies continued to be plagued by them, Malaysia and Singapore represent postcolonial multiculturalism in its comprehensive manifestation as the statist solution to cultural diversity. As I have suggested in my brief comparison of Southeast Asian states above, postcolonial multiculturalism may exist with ethnic conflicts in various proportions, and this proportion is determined by the pluralist division and multiple national consciousnesses born of the transition from colonial to nationalist state formation. This proposition, of course, has to be considered more closely by comparative sociological studies of postcolonial societies. Very broadly, Mamdani's (1996) study of Anglophone and Francophone African colonial state legacies and ethnic conflict seems to bear out this proposition beyond Southeast Asia.

Ironically, pluralism is making a return to postcolonial societies through the processes of globalization. As Markus (2002) puts it, 'cultural pluralism' subverts the taken-for-granted world of everyday vernacular communities and the imagined community of the nation. The use of the term 'pluralism' by Markus to refer to the increasing cultural diversity induced by globalization is fortuitous. Globalization is indeed introducing in postcolonial societies the pluralism idealized by colonial officials and problematized as a natural fact by nationalist elites. The intraregional and transnational migration of peoples has caused the postcolonial states to negotiate new territorial practices of variegated sovereignty and flexible citizenship (Ong 2006). In a liberal context, in postimperial societies, pluralism may offer further democratic opportunities, as Markus hopes. But in postcolonial societies, the new pluralism is reinforcing the old conjunctions of race and class in the new globalized economy. Thus, in Singapore, while the largely Chinese professional class competes with hastily naturalized immigrant Chinese and Indian professionals to hobnob with white expatriates possessing privileged residency status, these groups are serviced by working-class Chinese, Indian, and Malay Singaporeans in different economic sectors, and everyone live in spaces built and maintained by Indian, Indonesian, and Filipino immigrant workers with minimal legal protection. This new pluralism is challenging the scripted ethnic identities, the communitarian political order and the ruling elites' transcultural status with new diversities, crowds, and cosmopolitan ideas and practices, posing immense social problems for the accomplished postcolonial multiculturalism of the developmental states.

With the fraying of postcolonial multiculturalism, autonomous civil society groups have sprung up to address the new pluralism and its deleterious effects. For example, in Singapore, feminist, human rights, church social activists, and art collectives have combined their efforts, sometimes in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations in the source countries, to protect and advocate for the welfare of migrant laborers who bear the brunt of class exploitation in racial guises. Therein lays the possibility and opportunity of democratization in postcolonial societies, as these groups seek to tackle the cross-border and cross-ethnic issues and develop new cross-cultural connections to other civil society groups and communities domestically and in other countries. These connections, riding on the international networks of the globalizing economy, create new 'contact zones' in which diverse peoples write their mutual 'auto-ethnographies' to challenge the racial knowledge and ethnic pluralism of the postcolonial state, similar to a process termed 'transculturation' by Pratt (1992) for the earlier period of globalizing colonialism. They challenge not imperial knowledge but the nationalist elites' monopoly of transcultural identity and practices in postcolonial multiculturalism, as they develop a different type of transcultural knowledge and practice that overcomes scripted parochial identities and springs from the grassroots to make the question, 'Who counts as transcultural?' increasingly superfluous. These journeys may very well be the undercurrent of the realistic and context-sensitive promotion of liberal multiculturalism in non-Western countries that Kymlicka (2007) advocates, but as such, these new transcultural practices promise democratization beyond the imperious odysseys of liberal multiculturalism and nationalist fortifications of postcolonial multiculturalism.

Short Biography

Daniel P. S. Goh's research interests include state formation, cultural studies, religion, and environmentalism. His doctoral dissertation approached the comparative–historical study of state formation in British Malaya and American Philippines from the angle of cultural studies and postcolonial theory. He has published papers on the sociological relationship between colonial ethnography and government in *Comparative Studies of Society and History* and *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. He has extended the insights of cultural studies into postcolonial state formation and environmentalism in Singapore in forthcoming articles in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* and *Biodiversity and Human Livelihoods in Protected Areas: Case Studies from the Malay Archipelago* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). Current research involves the extension of cultural studies into the theoretical and empirical research on Chinese religiosity in Malaysia and Singapore. He has held fellowships from Michigan's International Institute, Michigan's Rackham Graduate School and the National University of Singapore's Overseas Graduate Scholarship. Goh is presently Assistant Professor of

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Note

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