MENDAKI

Policy Digest 2012

BUILDING ON A LEGACY
IMAGINING THE FUTURE
MENDAKI

Yayasan MENDAKI
In Quest of Excellence

A publication of the Research and Policy Department

MENDAKI

Policy Digest 2012

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"We do not live to think, but on the contrary, we think in order that we may succeed in surviving."

—Jose Ortega y Gasset
A Spanish philosopher (1883–1955)

FOREWORD

First published in 2001, the MENDAKI Policy Digest serves as a platform for MENDAKI to share its discourse on multi-faceted issues faced by the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore. It is recognised as an important reference source for community practitioners and local social observers. It hopes to analyse how present global trends and national initiatives actually impact the local Malay/Muslim populace.

Building up to this year's edition of the Policy Digest, Singapore's socio-political landscape has seen a somewhat transformative change, especially since the watershed General Election in 2011. Today, debates on Singapore's national policies call for a more inclusive approach to be adopted. It is hoped that the discussions initiated in the 2012 Policy Digest will inspire and encourage policymakers, community leaders, social activists and keen social observers and analysts to actively engage in further discourse, and to deliberate upon and perhaps even expand on the ideas and proposals that have been raised.

This year, 2012, has been an interesting one. The global socio-economic outlook remains volatile, and in Singapore, the immediate economic trajectory is expected to be the attainment of a reduced growth rate. However, citizens' aspirations remain high, including those of the Malay/Muslim community. As MENDAKI celebrates 30 years of community development in 2012, it cherishes the challenge of driving the Malay/Muslim community of Singapore to be more equipped in problem posing the community's place within the national framework via-a-vis our needs and aspirations. MENDAKI will also continue to highlight pertinent issues that must be collectively addressed both at the community and national levels.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all contributors, especially our research officers and local academia, for dedicating their time, effort and commitment to this project. I hope the Policy Digest will continue to serve as a useful reference for reflection upon the community's ongoing effort in making sense of being part of the active process of citizenry, and in MENDAKI's commitment towards developing a community in quest of excellence.

Moliah Hashim
Chief Executive Officer, Yayasan MENDAKI

Contents

04 Contents

07 A Note from the Editor

13 About the Contributors

Section I: Policy Reviews 2012

19 A Review Of Singapore's Education Policy Changes And Their Impact On The Malay/Muslim Community.
Siti Nur Ida

39 The 'Happiness' Quotient: A Summary of Policies Affecting Singaporean Youth.
Humairah Zainal

59 A New Paradigm: Singapore's Shift towards Productivity Driven Economic Growth Employability.
Suffyan Othman

83 Singapore's 'New Normal' Socio-Economic Paradigm: Navigating Needs, Expectations and Aspirations.
Muhammad Nadim Adam

Section II: Engaging Hearts and Minds — The Malay/Muslim Youths

135 Youth and Social Capital: Considerations for Social Policy and Programmes.
Suen Johan

149 Pedagogy of Hope—Singapore Malay Youths and Our Educational Future.
Mardiana Abu Bakar

159 Critical Multiculturalism in Changing Global Landscapes: Youth Citizenship in the Age of Insecurity.
Rahil Ismail

193 (Mis)Understanding Youth and Living Community: What Went Wrong?
Azhar Ibrahim Alwee

"There is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and then publish them, you have entered the public world."

— Edward Said

A Palestinian-American literary theoretician

(1935–2003)

A Note from the Editor

How do the recent policy reviews by the Singapore government impact the Malay/Muslim community? What are the challenges that lie ahead for the years to come? And what possibly is the "new normal"? These are the questions the MENDAKI Policy Digest 2012 grapples with.

Prior to 2012, the year 2011 will be remembered as the year when the landmark General Elections (GE) was held. The 2011 GE manifests the aspirations of many young voters in the local political scene. Some of the key issues raised then include inter alia housing shortage, competition from foreign workers, transportation efficiency and the role of youths.

I would characterise 2012 as a 'year of reviews'. It mainly reflects the government's attempt to rectify the problems the electorate raised in 2011. Unsurprisingly, many old policies were reviewed, re-evaluated, and rectified. Needless to say, the implications of these reviews are also being felt by the Malay/Muslim community.

The main objective of this Policy Digest is to examine how the recent policy review affects Singaporeans, particularly the Malay/Muslim community. Featuring articles from the MENDAKI Research and Policy Development (RPD), academics, and professionals, articles covered shall examine issues impacting citizens in general, either on the individual basis or via their family ecological system, and the Malay/Muslim community per se, through policy initiatives such as housing, employment, education and on youths.

This year's policy digest is divided into two sections. The first section mainly highlights the recent changes and initiatives in Singapore's national policies. It mainly describes the reasons for the reform initiatives and the possible impact they may have on common citizens, and on the Malay/Muslim community. The second section mainly adopts a critical approach, inviting readers to rethink on certain dominant ideas and inquire new questions that may be crucial for the development

of the community. Such rethinking is necessary in order to generate alternative measurements of success in the community that transcends academic achievements.

Although the articles presented in the digest deals with a wide range of policy areas, more focus is given towards youth engagement particularly in the second section. As Yayasan MENDAKI is focused on uplifting the Malay/Muslim community by improving the community's educational attainment of its young. A major segment of MENDAKI's engagements and programmes have been with the community's youths. This culminated in the organising of the 'Imagining Youth Seminar: Towards a Youth Charter' and the 'Engaging Hearts and Minds' Seminar Series in 2011. These seminars served as platforms for various stakeholders to address ideas, issues and concerns towards developing a youth charter for the community. Different perspective on youth issues and approaches were presented by the audience who were mainly youth workers, policy makers and youth activists. Building on the success of these seminars, the 'Youth Symposium 2012: Garnering Generational Dividend' was organised this year. Given its success, a selection of the papers originally presented at both the seminar and symposium are included in the Policy Digest.

The first section mainly features four papers from MENDAKI's Research and Policy staff. **Siti Nur Ida**'s paper discusses the policy changes in the education system this year, the impact towards the Malay/Muslim community, and the future direction and implications. The paper highlights the changes made in the education system at the pre-school, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. She also touches, albeit briefly, on the Islamic education. Having made tremendous achievements in terms of education performance, Siti is optimistic that there are many opportunities presented as a result of the recent review for the Malay/Muslim community to build on.

In the same vein, **Humairah Zainal**'s paper examines how the recent changes in policies affected and influenced Singaporean youth over the past few years, in particular Malay/Muslim youth. Humairah invites readers to re-evaluate what 'happiness' means to young Singaporeans. She argues that happiness needs to be seen beyond economic performance but to include other indicators such as family, friends, culture, arts and sports. The pursuit of happiness and the development of youth can only be attained in connection with other people. Highlighting both several

success stories and worrying trends in relation to our youths, Humairah opines that a 'Conscientised Generation' will be an integral element for the community in its pursuit for excellence.

Discussing another challenge facing the Malay/Muslim community, **Suffyan Othman** takes on the issue of employability. Such discussion is timely as the influx of foreign labour in a globalised world become a major concern for many Singaporeans. In examining the possibilities and challenges that the community will face in the realm of employability, Suffyan believes that the global and local economic climate play an important role. Apart from highlighting the economic indicators, Suffyan also points out the opportunities available for the community in terms of employment prospects and the ways to improve their employability. However, Suffyan also warns of the structural impediments that continue to marginalise the community in varying degrees and how they should be taken into consideration when coming up with efforts to overcome them.

Lastly, **Muhammad Nadim Adam**'s paper serves as a bridge between the first section and the second section. Highlighting the demographic and socio-economic trends facing the Malay/Muslim community, Nadim invites readers to rethink the challenges and re-evaluate established paradigms bestowing the community. More importantly, Nadim's paper underscores that those who fail to cope within Singapore's socio-economic system, especially amongst the Malay/Muslim community, may not necessarily be of their own choice, nor is it a matter of negative mindset problems. The failure may be linked to certain structural challenges faced by the community due to the unintended, unforeseen shortcomings arising out of certain policies, falling victims to certain labelling and social stereotypes, besides the after-impact of the feudalistic and colonial yolk.

The second section mainly deals with the 'youth' as the subject matter. These papers are generally theoretical in nature. Some provide alternatives, if not critical approaches, in thinking about youth engagement.

Suen Johan deploys the concept of social capital and examines the role social capital networks play in the creation of human capital among youths as they prepare to transit into adult social spheres such as work and parenthood. He calls for social policies and programmes to adopt a more inclusive and organic approach

when attempting to build quality social capital for youth at large.

On the theme of Malay youths and education, **Mardiana Abu Bakar** applies Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of Hope in her paper. She believes that the narrative surrounding the performance of the Malay/Muslim community's relatively lower achievement in education, high divorce rates, and the dysfunctional state of our families must be accepted not with despair but with hope.

The paper by **Rahil Ismail**, on the other hand, asserts the need for one to interrogate intertwining political, economic and social subterranean structures of power in considering multicultural citizenry as both national and global preparatory measures. She argues that Malay/Muslim Singaporean youth, and their co-citizens, have particular (due to 'differences') and common (as we are also 'similar') means to proceed in this 'age of insecurity'.

The policy digest concludes with a critical piece by **Azhar Ibrahim**, who questions the absences of certain ideas or expectations in the discourse dealing with youths. He argues that the choice of ideas uttered in the public domain speaks volume of the dominant thought of the present society, and it is this dominant thought that we have to bear in mind whenever we speak of the youth, be it admonishing them towards a certain idealism, or challenging them based on certain convictions. Azhar also believes that structural and systemic factors must be given due consideration in whether the goals set for the youth are realistic and achievable.

For certain, this Policy Digest does not claim to provide ultimate answers to the problems facing our society. The diversity of viewpoints featured here is mainly a reflection of the fact that there are no single solutions to the challenges ahead as the Malay/Muslim community progresses. Furthermore, these articles are mainly written by members of the Malay/Muslim comunity who have engaged the community in many different ways. It is hoped that this presentation of diverse approaches in this manner will open up greater awareness of existing policies and how they may affect the community. The ultimate aim, nonetheless, is to generate further discussion on the various subject matters.

Norshahril Saat
Editor

"If you want to change the world in a constructive direction, you better try to understand it first. And understanding it doesn't mean just listening to a talk or reading a book, although that's helpful sometimes. It means learning. And you learn through participation. You learn from others. You learn from the people you are trying to organize."

—Noam Chomsky

An American political critic (b1928–)

About the Contributors

Dr Azhar Ibrahim, PhD, is a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS). He obtained his MA and PhD from the same department in 2002 and 2008 respectively. His research interests include the sociology of religion, the sociology of literature and critical literacy, and the Malay-Indonesian intellectual development. He pursued his post-doctoral research on social theology in Muslim Southeast Asia at the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, and at Abbasi Islamic Studies Program at Stanford University, USA.

Dr Mardiana Abu Bakar, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL) Academic Group at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Her research and teaching interests include curriculum history and reform, the sociology of curriculum, curriculum theory and design, educational research, problem-based learning, reflective practice and values education. She teaches courses for pre-service teachers, and lectures in NIE's Master's programme.

Dr Rahil Ismail, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. She earned her Honours degree in History at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and later a Postgraduate Certificate in Education from the Institute of Education, University of London. She received both her MA and PhD in International Studies from the School of International, Development and European Studies, University of Leeds. Her current research and publishing interests are in international relations, multicultural studies and heritage studies. Publications include the co-edited book, *Southeast Asian Culture and Heritage in a Globalising World* (Ashgate 2009), the journal articles, '"I get high with a little help from my friends?" Volunteerism as Multicultural Experiential Education' for the *Multicultural Education Review* (2010), and 'Future Proofing the Intelligent

Island?' (with Brian J. Shaw) in the Ist World Sustainability Forum (2011). Her teaching duties at NIE/NTU include American history, multicultural studies and international conflict and cooperation.

Humairah Zainal is an Associate Faculty member of the Department of Malay Language and Literature, Singapore Institute of Management University (UniSIM). She is also a Research Assistant at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore (NUS). Humairah obtained her Master of Arts (MA) degree from the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at NUS and the School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific at Australian National University (ANU) under a Joint Masters Programme. Her research interests include Islam and Malay culture, the socio-cultural history of the Malays, Malay films, as well as health and medical practices. Humairah's current research project was also accepted for presentation at the International Journal of Arts and Sciences (IJAS) International Conference at Harvard University, USA in May 2012.

Mohammad Suffyan Othman graduated with a Bachelor of Social Science in Political Science in 2006 from National University of Singapore (NUS). He is currently working in Yayasan MENDAKI as a Research & Policy Executive since 2011, focusing in the areas of socio-economic development, employability as well as issues pertaining to youth. His research interest lies in human rights issues and rights-based movements regionally.

Muhammad Nadim Adam is presently a Research & Policy Executive in Yayasan MENDAKI. Two times book prize winner from the Department of Malay Studies, recipient of the *Berita Harian*/*Berita Minggu* gold medal award, and emerging as the best student in Malay Studies in his cohort at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2000, he graduated with an Honours degree in Political Science from NUS in 2001. Recently offered the pursuit of a Masters degree (by research) at the Malay Studies Academy (APM) from the University of Malaya (UM) in Kuala Lumpur, his research interests include developmental studies, the subaltern history of the Malay World *(Nusantara)*, intellectual development and modernization, and discourse on post-colonialism. Nadim wrote a series of commentaries for *Berita Harian* (Singapore) between 2001 and 2009, with an article published in Malaysia's current affairs magazine, *Dewan Masyarakat* (June 2008). A translation work of his was featured on the online portal of the

Kyoto University Review of Southeast Asia (March 2003). In 2011, he presented at an academic seminar in Goathe-University of Frankfurt, Germany, on his research paper entitled, "Wither the Spirit of *Gotong Royong?* A Socio-Ecological Observation on the Malay Ethnic and Sub-Ethnic Groups of Contemporary Singapore."

Siti Nur Ida Md Ali is a Bachelor of Arts with Merit (Sociology) graduate and has been a Research & Policy Executive in Yayasan MENDAKI since 2011. She has been passionate about the Malay community since her early years and has been involved in various cultural and language activities. A former Head of Publications in the NUS Malay Language Society (PBMUKS), she has had the opportunity to reach out to the younger generation within the Malay/Muslim community. Siti wrote for *Berita Harian* for nearly five years during her student days, and interned as a scriptwriter at Eaglevision, Mediacorp. Her research interests include education, youth deviance especially in relation to drug offenders, and the challenges faced by young, married Malay/Muslim couples.

Suen Johan is currently a Research Assistant at the Research Division of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS). During his candidature as an undergraduate and Master's student at the Department of Sociology at NUS, he wrote dissertations on the role of religion in offender rehabilitation in Singapore, and gambling among lower-income Malay-Muslims. His research interests include the sociology of deviance, the family, ethnic-based social capital and religious networks in Singapore.

Section 1:

Policy Review 2012

"Schools can be used as a strategic site for addressing social problems and helping students understand what it means to exercise rights and responsibilities as critical citizen actively engaged in forms of social learning that expand human capacities for compassion, empathy, and solidarity."

— Henry A. Giroux,
An American cultural critic (b1943–)

Chapter 1

A Review Of Singapore's Education Policy Changes And Their Impact On The Malay/ Muslim Community

Siti Nur Ida Mohd Ali

> *"While it is not possible to create equal outcomes for everyone regardless of their background, education remains an important social leveller."*
> *— Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat in an interview with TODAY in 2011*[1]

Education has always been an issue that concerns the Malay/Muslim community till today. The call for more graduates has always been discussed with great interest from many sides. With higher education, the chances to have a better future are brighter. There have been many attempts by several organizations to boost the community achievement in education. At the policy level, the education system has changed tremendously, creating new pathways. With vast changes in technology, it will transform our lives. China and India will continue to rise and compete with Singapore in many business areas—manufacturing, services, research and development (R&D)

1 Ng Jing Yng. "Education still the social leveller here". *TODAY* online. 5 October 2011. Available at: http://www.todayonline.com/Print/EDC111005-0000172/Education-still-the-social-leveller-here. (Accessed 10 November 2012).

but their cities will offer many opportunities for Singaporeans to live and work in.[2]

Singapore being a global city has indeed transformed the nature of our economy and demands a substantial pool of highly skilled people and also lower-skilled workers to keep labour costs low. This gap has attracted the attention of the people, and many have voiced their concerns on the widening gap and the fate of the people at the bottom.

With all the discussion and feedback received from the people, the government is stepping up to ensure that every income group is given an opportunity to level up. As education is quoted to remain an important social leveller, it is imperative to capture the recent changes in the education system. This will allow the Malay/Muslim community to see the opportunities and possibilities that the system offers.

Hence, this paper encapsulates policy changes in the education system this year as well as the impact towards the Malay/Muslim community and its future direction and implications.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

> *"Every child deserves the best possible help in pre-school".*
> *—Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs K Shanmugan*
> *on 5th August 2012, at a National Day celebration dinner*
> *in Chong Pang.*

Pre-school education has not been under scrutiny until the release of two studies—one showing that Singapore's pre-school education ranked in the bottom half internationally, the other calling for sweeping and urgent reforms, including making pre-school education free and partially nationalizing the sector to level the playing

2 Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2012 (Speech in English), Prime Minister's Office Singapore. Available at http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2012/August/prime_minister_leehsienloongsnationaldayrally2012speechinenglish.html (Accessed 11 November 2012)

field.[3] Singapore's pre-school education is presently ranked 29 out of 45 worldwide, according to a latest study by the Economist Intelligent Unit, commissioned by the Lien Foundation. Although Singapore did well in providing targeted subsidies for underprivileged families and has high levels of pre-school enrolment, they fared low in the area of quality such as the student-teacher ratio, average pre-school teacher wages, pre-school teacher training and the linkages between pre-school and primary school.[4]

The call for reforms of pre-school education was mainly due to the disparity of quality between pre-school providers in Singapore. There are currently about 500 kindergartens and some 900-plus childcare centres in Singapore run by a wide variety of operators, from companies to religious groups and community-based bodies, such as People's Action Party (PAP) Community Foundation and National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Fees range from $55 to more than $2,000 a month.[5] More expensive childcare programmes are not always better and if parents use price as a signal for quality, it may lead the society to view pre-school education as a niche "luxury good". Acting Minister for Social and Family Development (MSF) and Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, Chan Chun Sing said that while the government cannot prevent parents from seeking out "higher benchmarks", it would do its part to ensure that there are "sufficient mass market options" which are both of high quality and affordable to the average family. Ms Sally May Tan, chief executive of Knowledge Universe South-east Asia, an education company that oversees Pat's Schoolhouse, agreed with Minister Chan, but she added that quality programmes do cost more.[6]

Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Tharman Shanmugaratnam has suggested that the government should put in more effort to ensure that the children from low-income families are not singled out from these chances to be on par with their

3 "Study impact of pre-school education: Experts". *TODAYonline.* 6 August 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120807-0000005/Study-impact-of-pre-school-education--Experts (Accessed 10 August 2012)

4 Ng Jing Yng. "Singapore's pre-school education ranked 29 out of 45 worldwide". *TODAYonline.* 26 June 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120626-0000111/Singapores-pre-school-education-ranked-29-out-of-45-worldwide (Accessed 28 October 2012)

5 Toh, Kezia & Tai, Janice. "Childcare: Pricier is not always better". *The Straits Times.* 6 October 2012.

6 ibid.

friends from the same cohort.[7] Dr T. Chandroo, chief executive officer of Modern Montessori International, acknowledged that early signs of social segregation may be emerging. "The lower strata cannot afford to go to pricier centres, which offer different programmes."[8]

Although some educators say that there are no tangible differences in learning abilities of children from different schools while studying the impact of pre-school education, this disparity should not be taken lightly. The extent of the impact of the varying quality of pre-school education towards a child's later years cannot be backed by data locally as there are currently no local studies on the quality of pre-school education.[9]

However, nationalizing a significant portion of the pre-school industry is not the best solution as it would make the situation worse and lessen the entrepreneurial spirit in the industry.[10] To restrict the range of teaching philosophies could be detrimental to children who may have different learning needs.[11]

Thus, several other measures are being considered and implemented. Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong mentioned during the National Day Rally 2012 that the government has the responsibility to make pre-school affordable and raise the standards of anchor operators. The main objective is, of course, to create a level playing field for the children.

Minister of Education (MP) Heng Swee Keat then worked with his team and announced that the kindergarten framework will be refreshed, taking into account

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7 "Every child deserves best possible help in pre-school: Shanmugam". *TODAYonline.* 5 August 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120805-0000004/Every-child-deserves-best-possible-help-in-pre-school--Shanmugam. (Accessed 10 August 2012)

8 Toh, Kezia & Tai, Janice. "Childcare: Pricier is not always better". *The Straits Times.* 6 October 2012.

9 "Study impact of pre-school education: Experts". TODAYonline. 6 August 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120807-0000005/Study-impact-of-pre-school-education--Experts. (Accessed 10 August 2012)

10 Rae Yaw. "No nationalization of pre-school, please." TODAYonline. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Voices/EDC120719-0000058/No-nationalisation-of-pre-school,-please. (Accessed 10 November 2012)

11 Ng Jing Yng. "Nationalizing pre-school education could kill diversity". *TODAYonline.* (Date missing). Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120821-0000008/Nationalising-pre-school-education-could-kill-diversity. (Accessed 11 November 2012)

the recent child development findings.[12] Singapore's Education as well as the Social and Family Development ministries have set up a committee to oversee the enhancement to the pre-school education. The enhancements will include updating the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework. The Implementation Committee for Enhancing Pre-School Education (ICEPE) will be co-chaired by MP Heng Swee Keat and Acting Minister Chan Chun Sing. Members of the committee include Halimah Yacob, Minister of Social and Family Development, Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Education, and senior officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). MOE and MSF said this in a joint statement; days after Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that the government will play a more active role in early childhood education. The Kindergarten Curriculum Framework first came about in 2003 and acts as a guide for kindergarten teachers. The Education Ministry said that the revised framework will incorporate latest research on early childhood education. It will also include learning goals at the end of Kindergarten 2 in a bid to facilitate better transition from preschool to Primary 1. The revisions will be completed by the end of 2012. The framework will also include a teachers' guide and learning resources. These will be available by the first half of next year.[13] The Malay/Muslim community who forms the underclass will benefit from this. With a significant number of Malay/Muslim under Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KIFAS)[14] and enrolled in PAP Community Foundation (PCF) and NTUC First Campus, this move will ensure that the community will be on par with children who are enrolled in private kindergartens that some say are better in terms of quality.

Besides looking into the kindergarten framework, the quality of PCF will be raised for the mass market while keeping costs affordable. Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework SPARK, a quality assurance framework introduced by MOE in January 2011 to raise the quality of preschools in Singapore, has only accredited one in

12 "Kindergarten framework to be refreshed". *TODAYonline*. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120814-0000047/Kindergarten-framework-to-be-refreshed. (Accessed 15 November 2012)

13 Kotwani, Monica. "New committee set up to enhance pre-school education". Channelnewsasia. 30 August 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1223016/1/.html. (Accessed 15 November 2012)

14 COMCARE Kindergarten Fees Assistance. Community Development Councils Last Updated: 05 March 2012. Available at http://www.cdc.org.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37&Itemid=46. (Accessed 11 November 2012)

10 centres so far.[15] PCF will be restructured in terms of how they operate and manage all its kindergartens and childcare centres by 2015. PCF will ensure that all its 328 PCF kindergartens and childcare centres are able to offer the level of quality education standards. This is the biggest restructuring in its history of 26 years. MP Lawrence Wong, Chairman of the Executive Committee of PCF who is also Senior Minister of State (Education), said that the restructuring is vital in ensuring that PCF can be the 'choice'. Since the restructuring, about 90 kindergartens and childcare centres were regrouped under six clusters. Each cluster consists of 10 to 15 kindergartens and childcare centres, and is headed by an executive principal. With the change, all PCF centres will offer a similar curriculum, but not necessarily the same so as to maintain their unique programmes like arts, music and sports. Each PCF centre under its cluster will be able to share best practices, centralize key tasks and coordinate several administrative and financial management procedures. Besides that, the centres could be cost efficient when buying stationeries and furnishings in bulk. The centre system also allows more opportunities for PCF staff to expand their careers and be promoted from centre principal to the head of a cluster. The process of hiring teachers has also changed and is now done at PCF's main office.[16]

With the increasing quality of PCF, it is no doubt that fees will increase, although the government has assured that the fees will remain affordable. Fees are also expected to rise given the increasing demand for childcare services and limited suitable sites for building new childcare centres. It is inevitable that good locations are pricier and harder to come by, and operators end up needing to turn in progressively higher bids as commented by Ms Sally May Tan, chief executive of Knowledge Universe South-east Asia. The space crunch is expected to worsen, as 200 childcare centres will be added over the next five years. The government is also looking at bringing in two or more anchor operators.[17]

> There are more areas that the review should consider, for instance, including children with special needs, smoothening the transition

15 Hetty Musfirah. "All PCF pre-school centres to get MOE quality stamp". Channelnewsasia. 02 September 2012 Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1223524/1/.html. (Accessed 12 November 2012)

16 Nur Dhuha Esoof. "PCF susun semula pusat tajaka dan tadikan agar jadi 'prasekolah pilihan". *Berita Harian.* 2 October 2012.

17 Tai, Janice. "Childcare crush sees rents, fees shoot up". *The Straits Times*. 21 September 2012.

process into Primary 1, raising the image of pre-school teachers and doing more research before implementing solutions.[18] The bottom line is that pre-school is all about learning through play. Education and child development experts say that over-teaching will harm the kids. Pre-school taught skills that are suitable for that age include language, social skills and basic skills. If pre-school education becomes geared towards preparing for academic readiness, this could result in "long-term negative effects on a child's enjoyment and learning" as commented by Chiltern House Principal Director Fiona Walker who noted that children develop at different speeds.[19]

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary school is the start of formal education and the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) is the goal at the end of the six years of study. Recently, there was a call for the PSLE to be scrapped. Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC MP Hri Kumar who sits on the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Education pointed out that "so long as a child's PSLE scores determines which secondary school he goes to, and so long as places in 'better' schools are limited", competition and stress are inevitable and parents will also "do what they can to help their kids out-score their peers". Nominated MP Paulin Straughan also agrees to the abolishment as a way to reduce stress and encourage young couples to have more children.[20]

But there are others who did not agree with the idea. Some felt that the PSLE's purpose as a placement exam would help students who have differing abilities. Some

18 Ng Jing Yng. "A 'to-do' list for pre-school education". *TODAYonline*. 02 September 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120901-0000011/A-to-do-list-for-pre-school-education. (Accessed 10 November 2012)

19 Ng Jing Yng. "Nationalizing pre-school education could kill diversity". *TODAYonline*. 21 August 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120821-0000008/Nationalising-pre-school-education-could-kill-diversity. (Accessed 17 November 2012)

20 Lee, Amanda. "MP echoes calls for PSLE to be scrapped". Channelnewsasia. 18 September 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1226598/1/.html. (Accessed 18 November 2012)

toyed with the idea to reduce its emphasis, for instance, Choa Chu Kang GRC MP Low Yen Ling felt that the format of PSLE could be tweaked or non-academic aspects could be considered to be assessed as part of the PSLE score.[21]

PM Lee Hsien Loong rejected the calls for PSLE to be scrapped as the examination is still needed to assess that the children have attained the standard which are expected of them and to post them to secondary schools.[22] Besides relooking into PSLE to make it less stressful for students, parents should be persuaded that every school is a good school and this pressure of having to gain entry to 'better' schools will be removed.[23] DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam also warned that any change to the PSLE system is something that has to be studied carefully to ensure that it does not undermine the meritocratic basis of the education system.[24]

MP Lawrence Wong, raised his concern that may appear if the emphasis on PSLE is to be lessened and more focused on character development, music and presentation skills. That is because he did not want parents to then shift the focus and emphasis those skills then. Stress will still exist.[25]

In view of the syllabus adjustment which was done after MOE's regular curriculum review conducted every six years, the Primary 1 Maths syllabus will be tweaked in 2013. Pupils entering primary school in 2013 will be given more breathing space to grasp basic numeracy skills as MOE plans to drop part of the current Primary 1 mathematics syllabus. For instance, Primary 1 students will no longer learn about measuring and comparing objects' physical mass through the use of non-standard units like paper clips and apples, and will not be taught 3D shapes. Instead, they will learn about the orientation of objects such as whether they are facing left or right, or pointing up and down. Primary school teachers welcomed the latest move, saying it bridges current gaps in students' understanding and allows more time for students to grasp the remaining topics. This could lighten the syllabus load and give

21 Ibid.

22 "Review the PSLE? We're not in a hurry to make changes: PM". *The New Paper.* 30 September 2012. Available at http://www.asiaone.com/print/News/Latest%2BNews/Edvantage/Story/A1Story20120928-374322.html. (Accessed 12 November 2012)

23 Yong, Jeremy Au. "PSLE stays but needs relook: PM". *The Straits Times.* 27 September 2012.

24 Chew, Matthias. "Tharman supports rebalancing of PSLE system". *The Straits Times.* 29 October 2012.

25 Shamsul Jangarodin. "Wong: Bukan mudah rombak PSLE". *Berita Harian.* 22 September 2012.

teachers more time to impart basic numeracy skills to the children.[26] The amount of homework has also been reduced in several schools as part of the school's homework management policy, to ensure that the pupils get enough rest.[27]

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ranking has always been the utmost concern of secondary schools. Secondary schools have been ranked since 1992, and then replaced by a banding system in 2004[28] which grouped secondary schools according to the average General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-level score of their students, ranging from one to nine, with one being the best.[29] During the annual MOE Work Plan Seminar 2012, it was announced that the secondary school banding would be removed. Many including parents and principals applauded the move. Parents said that this would avoid labeling students and ease the pressure for them to qualify for 'good' schools as defined by the rankings.[30] Ms Tan Hwee Ping, principal of Kranji Secondary School, added that this removal of the banding reduces pressure and enables us to focus on building key processes to achieve better student outcomes.[31]

In addition, MOE will remove the Masterplan of Awards (MoA) and reduce the number of school awards from 2014. Instead, it will place more emphasis on recognizing best practices by schools in delivering a well-rounded education. MOE will continue to recognize good school practices under a simplified recognition system. The five key aspects are Best Practice in Teaching & Learning, Student All-Round

26 Ng Jing Yng "Pri 1 maths syllabus to be tweaked from next year". ChannelNewsAsia. 11 May 2012. Available at: http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1200575/1/.html. (Accessed 14 November 2012)

27 Toh, Kezia & Sim, Bryan "Schools takings steps to reduce homework". *The Straits Times*. 14 September 2012.

28 Tan Wah Thong. "How will we assess merit?". *The Straits Times***.** 24 September 2012.

29 Ng, Gwendolyn. "Parents, schools cheer scrapping of secondary school banding". *My Paper.* 13 September 2012.

30 ibid.

31 "No more banding of secondary school". *Tabla!*. 14 September 2012.

Development, Staff Development and Well-Being, Character and Citizenship, and Education and Partnership.[32] This was mentioned at the recent MOE Work Plan Seminar 2012.

However, there are some who disagree that the secondary banding system should be removed. One is worried that discarding the banding of schools will give principals and their key people, like subject heads, a 'free ride', much like the way the students who got a 'free ride' with automatic promotions without having to pass examinations once upon a time.

It was announced that six more schools will admit Secondary 1 students for the Integrated Programme (IP) in January 2012, making it a total of 18 schools offering the IP and creating another 800 places for student intake. The six schools are CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' School, Singapore Chinese Girls' School, Catholic High School, Methodist Girls' School, St Joseph's Institution and Temasek Junior College. These academically stronger students will proceed directly to either GCE A-levels or International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma at the end of six years. Out of the six secondary schools, five secondary schools are offering the scheme for the first time, and Temasek Junior College is expanding its four-year programme to six years. The IP was started in 2004 to allow the top 10% of primary school leavers to skip the GCE O-levels and spend more time on broader learning experiences like research attachments and field trips.[33]

TERTIARY EDUCATION/POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

With the increase in competition, it is essential for Singaporeans to attain higher education to remain relevant in the workforce. The decision made by the government to open up more paths in higher education was welcomed with applause in the National Day Rally 2012. Besides providing more university places, the government is also focused on creating more applied-oriented degree and ensuring that students' future prospects would be good. For example, in the Singapore Institute

32 "MOE Removes Secondary School Banding and Revamps School Awards". *MOE Press Release.* 12 September 2012.

33 Ng, Jane. "800 more places for IP track next year". *The Sunday Times.* 7 October 2012.

of Management University (UniSIM), an aerospace degree involves practicum practice-oriented teaching, internship in a company and learning the practical aspect of aerospace. In the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), the school is working with foreign partners in culinary and interactive digital media courses.

UniSIM and SIT will become Singapore's 5th and 6th universities respectively. SIT will award degrees apart from their foreign partners, while UniSIM will add full-time programmes to its part-time courses and build strong industry links but will remain as a private university. Currently, its enrolment is 13,000 students. In 2020, it aims to increase its enrolment to 16,000 students. Thus, 40 percent of its students will enter university, up from the current 27 percent. This will give more help to meet the aspirations of full-time Singaporeans. More part-time places will be available for adults to take up degree courses. Also, government bursaries and loans will be extended to UniSIM part- time students.

But even as the government increases university enrolment in Singapore, it will do so with prudence to ensure graduates have jobs. PM Lee announced in the National Day Rally that albeit they aim by 2020, that 40% of each cohort would enter university, they have to strike a balance and ensure jobs are available. PM Lee added that science and technology would likely transform the way the economies are produced. Singapore is currently preparing itself for these changes by encouraging more students to take up the applied disciplines, such as engineering and the life sciences, and by emphasizing the retraining of workers.[34]

MOE WORK PLAN SEMINAR 2012

As mentioned previously, the school banding was removed to give more room for schools to focus on other niche areas. Besides that, MP Heng highlighted that MOE will be investing money to enable schools to build its own niche. Not only that, work-life balance for teachers will be reviewed, relations between parents and educators will be enhanced and sources of stress will be monitored.

The aim is that every school in Singapore will have a niche of its own by 2017. To

34 Toh, Elgin. "Prudence to guide rise in local varsity enrolment". *The Straits Times.* 8 October 2012.

do so, MOE will train teachers, build facilities, buy equipment and run programmes to build expertise in the teachers' chosen field. Schools can also work with external organizations and tap on other sources of funding. However, MOE will work with schools to ensure a good spread of niche areas. Currently, only 191, or about half of all schools here, have recognized niches under the Programme for School-Based excellence and Niche Programmes that started in 2005.[35]

Besides that, Human Resources (HR) policies will be reviewed to better meet the needs of teachers so as to work towards having a work-life balance. For example, teachers do not have annual leave. Thus, MOE will make provisions for teachers to go on urgent leave when necessary. Schools can also exercise greater flexibility in meeting the needs of their staff. In order to enhance parents-educators relations, Parents in Education (PiE) a new website - http://parents-in-education.moe.gov.sg/ containing articles on parenting tips, educational news, information on the school curriculum and resources for parents to support their children's learning at home, has been launched. Another would be the Partnerships Resource Pack for schools to help engage parents and the community. It includes useful tips, good stories and best practices for partnership with parents, alumni and the community. Parents Support Group, on the other hand will support parents who are new to the school. Last but not least, sources of stress to be monitored include the issue of homework, excessive tuition and not setting unrealistic standards for tests and examinations.

IMPACT ON MALAY/MUSLIM STUDENTS

The Malay/Muslim community has indeed made much progression from the past. More young Malays have proven their ability and effort on their own merits in comparison with the different races here.[36]

With the ongoing review, the Malay/Muslim community needs to seize the opportunity available. The quality of pre-school has been a new concern upon the release of the study commissioned by the Lien Foundation. As most of Malay-

35 Chia, Stacey Pamela. "Every School to have a niche by 2017". *The Straits Times.* 20 September 2012.

36 "Melayu harus bangga capai kejayaan atas usaha sendiri". *Berita Harian.* 17 September 2012.

Muslim families are in the lower-income bracket, it is a relief when the government decided to look into the quality of services from public providers such as PCF and NTUC First Campus. This will hopefully lessen the gap between those who can afford pre-school education and those who cannot.

Apart from that, the number of students moving beyond secondary schools is increasing. More students across the races are pursuing studies beyond secondary schools, according to MOE. Of the cohort that entered Primary 1 in 2001, about 94.1% were admitted to post-secondary institutions, compared to about 87.6% for the 1992 cohort.[37] The increase was the greatest—at 12 percentage points-for Malay students, compared to other races. MPs sitting on the GPC for Education said the rise in post-secondary enrolment was due to MOE giving weaker students more options and greater support especially for teens at risk dropping out of school. Jurong GRC MP Ang Wei Neng added that Northlight School, and more grassroots and voluntary organizations who provided support for those at risk of dropping out also contributed to the increase in the number of students pursuing studies after secondary school.

Also, with the government's constant reassurance that every school is a good school, MOE will stop its practice of announcing the top-scoring students in the release of all national examinations results. The practice of naming the top student for each ethnic group will also be scrapped. Instead, it will encourage the media to highlight the performances of students from a variety of schools, those who have done well not only in the examinations but also in other aspects. Nevertheless, Mdm Rostinah Mohamad Said, principal of Macpherson Primary School, said that her school will still acknowledge their top performers but their results will not be published. The school will also mention about other non-academic achievements such as leadership qualities so as to signal to parents the importance of having a holistic development.[38] As the Malay/Muslim community isknown for its non-academic skills, these achievements could help boost our morale.

37 "Lebih ramai pelajar ke posmenengah hasil ketekunan pelbagai pihak". *Berita Harian.* 31 October 2012

38 Ng, Jing Yng. "No more naming of top students for national examinations". *TODAYonline.* 21 November 2012 Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Hotnews/EDC121121-0000060/No-more-naming-of-top-students-for-national-exams. (Accessed 22 November 2012)

MALAYS' PERFORMANCE IN THE NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
Malay students made the greatest improvements at the GCE O-level examinations.
More Malay students did better in GCE O-level Mathematics with 60% last year as compared to 57% in 2002.
The percentage of Malay GCE A-level students with a least three H2 passes and a pass in General Paper or Knowledge and Inquiry rose by 12 percentage points over the past decade.

Overall, Malay and Indians made the greatest strides in the overall performance in the national examinations over the past decade. The Malay Members of Parliament cheered the news and credited the support of self-help groups like MENDAKI in the form of tuition and mentoring for the rising pass rates (refer to table). Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Zaqy Mohamed said that more Malay parents are placing greater emphasis on education as a means of social mobility. But with about 38% of Malay O-level students not attaining at least five passes, Mdm Moliah, CEO of Yayasan MENDAKI said that her group will "continue and intensify efforts" to bring the Malay performance closer to the national average.[39]

The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College Central has just launched more facilities such as a graffiti wall, a skateboard park and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. It also houses five types of planes including the Boeing 737. This college is the third and final mega campus, following ITE College East which opened in 2005 and ITE College West which opened in 2010. It will house 6,400 students at the five satellite campuses—Balestier, Macpherson, Bishan, Tampines and Yishun. Students will be thrilled to know that there will be four new courses beginning next year. Two of them—Fashion Apparel Production, and Design and Filmmaking (Cinematography)—are part of ITE's new Design and Media School, and will be launched in January and April 2013, respectively. The other two courses—Floristry and Shopping Services, and Operations—will

39 Chew, Matthias. "More pursuing studies after secondary school". *The Straits Times.* 30 September 2012.

also be rolled out in January and April 2013, respectively.[40]

Moving on to tertiary education, with the inclusion of UniSIM and SIT, there will be a total up to six universities offering full-time and part-time degree courses with public funds. Currently, more than 3,000 students are expected to enter local universities. Thus, the number of students will increase to 16,000 up from 13,000 currently. This means 40% from each cohort will be able to continue their studies up to university. The proportion will increase to 50% if the group of students doing part-time degree is included. There is a potential to increase the number of Malay graduates as about 15.6% of Malay students (year 2010) have a diploma so there are chances for them to continue their studies to the degree level through universities such as SIT and UniSIM which emphasize on skills needed by the industry/economy.[41] Students can look forward to a new applied degree pathway via these two universities. In terms of affordability, students will be enjoying government-subsidized tuition fees and financial assistance schemes. The Committee on University Education Pathways Beyond 2015 has proposed these changes to the university landscape to provide Singaporeans with more diverse opportunities to develop their full potential and the government has accepted these recommendations.[42]

One way to increase the number of Malay graduates is for non-graduates to continue their studies and achieve at least a bachelor's degree, either part-time or full-time, in line with the culture of lifelong learning. Another way is for GCE A-level holders who fail to enter local universities to retake their examinations. With determination and effort, they can achieve better results. PM Lee also advised against focusing only on university graduates for the Association of Muslim Professionals 'graduates in every family' strategy. Comparing different levels of achievement in communities to a pyramid, PM Lee said the wise approach is to aim to move each level of the

40 Lee, Amanda. "ITE to open third mega campus". *TODAYonline.* 31 October 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC121031-0000012/ITE-to-open-third-mega-campus. (Accessed 22 November 2012)

41 Mohd Noor A. Rahman. "Rebut peluang emas tambah siswazah Melayu". *Berita Harian*. 1 September 2012.

42 N.a. "SIM University to provide full-time university places; Part-time students to enjoy government bursaries and loans." SIM . 27 August 2012. Available at http://www.unisim.edu.sg/Happenings/Latest-Highlights/Pages/H2012_27Aug.aspx. (Accessed 20 November 2012)

pyramid up a little.[43]

Moving forward, PM Lee invites MENDAKI to not only focus on the most successful and the least successful, but rather involve all levels of society to collectively guide and support them to earn higher success, given the resources by the government. With the uncertain global landscape, MENDAKI has to help the Malay community to adjust to the new environment in ways such as providing the community with the skills needed in the areas of new technology and automatic graphic arts.[44]

FUTURE DIRECTION/FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The expansion of educational pathways and changes in the system will have an impact on our Malay/Muslim community. As said above, 92.3% of our Malay/Muslims students managed to advance to secondary.[45] Thus, only about 7.7% did not make it. They may either (i) retake their PSLE, or (ii) pursue alternative education in Northlight School, Assumption Pathway or Crest Secondary School. Crest Secondary School is one of the two specialized schools catered to normal technical stream students and will be launched in 2013. Its principal, Mr Frederick Yeo, said that Crest Secondary School will not only focus on imparting academic knowledge, but will also focus on vocational training to provide an immersive and meaningful experience for its students. The learning pedagogy of the school encourages experiential learning, where students learn numeracy skills by completing practical tasks.[46] The school's four-year programme will allow students to graduate with a GCE N-level in English, Mathematics and Mother Tongue Language, as well as an ITE Skills Certificate (ISC). The ISC courses focus on four areas, namely Facility Services, Mechanical Servicing, Retail Services and Hospitality Services. The

43 Lim, Lydia & Ong, Andrea. "Graduates in every family' call". *The Straits Times.* 1 July 2012. Available at http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/inthenews/primeminister/2012/July/_graduates_in_everyfamilycall.html. (Accessed 23 November 2012)

44 Shamsul Jangarodin. "Mendaki penting dalam pencapaian Melayu". *Berita Harian.* 29 October 2012.

45 "Lebih ramai pelajar ke posmenengah hasil ketekunan pelbagai pihak". 31 October 2012.

46 "Creating Student Transformation through Multiple Learning Pathways". 1 November 2012. Available at: http://www.schoolbag.sg/archives/2012/11/creating_student_transformatio.php. (Accessed 25 November 2012)

admission criterion is still under review and will only be released at a later date.[47] As a big proportion of our students make up the normal technical stream which in 2011 was 23.1%[48] it is heartening to know that the possibility of them not dropping out of school or giving up on their studies will be minimized.

Looking at the climate right now, more and more Malay parents are educated (with about 6.8% who have managed to pursue a degree)[49] thus, they probably have more spending power and can opt for better kindergartens. For those who cannot afford, they would definitely match up in the future, with the increase in the quality of public kindergartens. The removal of secondary school banding will allow our Malay students to concentrate on building their talents. Besides that, with Singapore emphasizing on applied-oriented courses, the completing of ITE College Central will complement the move. Moving on, with the announcement that UniSIM and SIT will be the 5th and 6th universities, this is good news for us as more of our students are attending these universities rather than local ones. With more graduates in the future, more Muslim professionals will be produced and this will definitely benefit our community.

In light of Islamic education, MUIS has just launched Wakaf Ilmu, an Islamic endowment where the objective is to fund MUIS Islamic Education programmes and full-time religious schools in Singapore specifically for the full-time and part-time Madrasahs.[50] Islamic Education was chosen as Madrasahs form an important institution in creating religious leaders for our community. Traditionally, many of the fund-raising initiatives use the form of sadaqah and infaq which will meet the immediate needs of the Madrasahs. As some Madrasahs rely on donations which are at least 50% of their funding, this is neither untenable nor sustainable.[51] While

47 Tong, Jia Han. "1st N(T) school to open next year". *AsiaONE.* 11 April 2012. Available at http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120411-338865.html. (Accessed 24 November 2012)

48 "Press Release: Performance by Ethnic Group in National Examinations 2002-2011". *MOE*. 29 October 2012. Available at: http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/10/performance-by-ethnic-group-in.php. (Accessed 15 November 2012)

49 Mohd Noor A. Rahman. "Rebut peluang emas tambah siswazah Melayu". Berita Harian. 1 September 2012.

50 Saifulbahri Ismail. "Independent committee to be formed to engage Malay-Muslim community". Channelnewsasia. 2 September 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1223297/1/.html. (Accessed 19 November 2012)

51 "Wakaf Ilmu". Majlis Ugama Islam Singapure (MUIS). Last Updater: 14 September 2012 Available at http://www.muis.gov.sg/cms/Services/Wakaf_sub.aspx?id=17051 Accessed 11 November 2012. .

Wakaf in the past was bequeathed in the form of property, the new fund will be the first to allow any individual to donate cash, no matter how small the amount is.[52] This is essential as Wakaf will ensure that Madrasahs will receive a stable flow of income for long term survival. With this, the future of our Madrasahs will be guaranteed.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the Malay community has made tremendous improvements in education performance. With more opportunities available and more pathways chartered, the Malay/Muslim community has to seize the opportunities available. MP Heng Swee Keat will ensure that post-secondary institutes will be able to help their students step into the workforce, realize their potential and achieve success in the future.[53] But, all these recommendations are still a work-in-progress and there are bound to be more changes implemented in the education system. This will ensure that we can catch up and hopefully be on par with the other races in the future.

52 Durai, Jennani. "New "people wakaf" launched". *The Straits Times*. N.D. Available at http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/new-peoples-wakaf-launched-20120905 Accessed 20 November 2012.

53 Azahar Mohd. "Langkah galak integrasi pendidikan menengah dan posmenengah". *Berita Harian*. 14 October 2012.

"Young people today receive many contradictory messages concerning the standards they are expected to meet, and the multiple voices they hear can create a confusing cacophony of demands…Some of a child's teachers demand achievement, service or obedience; others proclaim that youth is a time for playfulness, freedom, avoiding stress, and building self-esteem. Youngsters search in vain to find the coherent and inspiring guidance they need for a successful transition to responsible adulthood."

— William Damon

An American scholar in human development (b1944–)

Chapter 2

THE 'HAPPINESS' QUOTIENT: A SUMMARY OF POLICIES AFFECTING SINGAPOREAN YOUTH

Humairah Zainal

INTRODUCTION

The Malay/Muslim community in Singapore has a high youth base that forms 16% of the national youth population.[1] This significant number of youth that the community is bestowed with presents an opportunity for youthful energy to be harnessed in further propelling the community's progress. Many policies have been formulated and implemented by the government in order to galvanise youth into social action and channel their mental resources into activities that could contribute towards social reconstruction. Using 'happiness' as a common theme that binds many policies affecting youth, this paper provides a background summary of these policies and elucidates how they have affected and influenced Singaporean youth over the past few years, in particular Malay/Muslim youth.[2] By way of conclusion, this paper seeks to chart the trajectory of the present and future generations of Malay/Muslim youth.

1 This review defines 'youth' in Singapore as those aged between 15 and 35 years old (National Youth Council, 2012), and Census of Population, 2010, Advance Census Release.

2 For the purpose of this review, only the major policies that affect Singaporean youth from 2010 to 2012 will be covered as it will be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other policies that are entwined with but are not directly related to youth per se.

YOUTH AND HAPPINESS

Happiness seems to be at the top of many Singaporeans' minds lately. In 2011, the issue of happiness was brought up in Parliament, where Members of Parliament discussed if Singapore had been too focused on gross domestic product (GDP) growth as an indicator of progress, and if there could be an examination of other measures to enhance happiness and well-being for Singaporeans.[3] More recently, it became the theme of Senior Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong's speech at the National Day Rally (NDR) in August 2012.[4]

This increased awareness among the populace could also be attributed to the growing number of happiness-related reports in the news media, with the headliner being the Earth Institute's World Happiness Report commissioned by the United Nations.[5] The report ranked Singapore among the happiest countries in Asia. While this seems all well and good at the country level, it leads one to question about the state of happiness among young Singaporeans, the extent to which current policies can help youth achieve happiness and what more can be done to engender happiness among youth. Within the Singapore context, three initiatives underlie policies that are put in place for helping young Singaporeans attain the pursuit of happiness: (i) creating opportunities; (ii) enhancing quality of life; and (iii) building stronger communities.

(i) Creating opportunities

Having recognised the strong desire of young Singaporeans to attend university, the government is opening up many paths in higher education in order to enable youth meet their aspirations. In his NDR Speech in 2012, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong announced the government's plan to expand university places for Singaporeans in order to increase the current full-time university intake by a total of 3,000 students a year by 2020, that is, from enrolling 13,000 to 16,000 undergraduates annually.[6]

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3 Sophie Hong. "S'poreans' top worries: All about $", *My paper*, 25 October 2011.

4 Speech by Mr Lawrence Wong, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, at the National Day Rally on 26 August 2012, at the University Cultural Centre, (Ministry of Education, 2012).

5 World Happiness Report, 2012, Earth Institute, Columbia University.

6 Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the National Day Rally on 26 August 2012, at the University Cultural Centre, (Prime Minister's Office, Government of Singapore, 2012).

That would mean 40 percent of each cohort entering university, up from 27 percent in 2012. It would also allow more polytechnic and Junior College students to attend university. In line with these goals, the government will make Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore Institute of Management University (UniSIM) Singapore's fifth and sixth universities.

However, some youths have expressed concern that creating more university places would diminish the value of degree and produce a more competitive climate in the job market for graduates.[7] In response to this, the government ensures Singaporeans that it will launch new degree programmes that will have a strong applied focus and close links with industry while maintaining the educational standards. Hence, SIT and UniSIM will focus on applied practice-oriented degrees and offer courses that equip students with skills that are in demand by the industry.

Similar initiatives are also put in place at the ITEs and polytechnics in the recognition that every talent, not just the purely academic must be nurtured and that university qualification is not the only route to success. ITE and polytechnic graduates are well-equipped for work and are highly sought after by employers. The practice-oriented and industry-relevant curriculum offered by ITEs and polytechnics has prepared ITE and diploma graduates well to join the workforce. For example, the Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP)'s Teaching Factory/ Teaching Enterprise offers a unique and industry-relevant training platform for its students to have first-hand experience in carrying out industry-commissioned projects. In particular, under the Teaching Enterprise Project, students from the School of Business Management are attached to real-life businesses for practical training, which equip them with knowledge and skills in sales negotiations, retail operations, merchandise planning and marketing.[8]

The above policies shed light on Singapore's continuous effort in providing youth with a holistic education and equal opportunities to succeed and progress even though the outcomes may be different. This should spur our Malay/Muslim youth on to seize the opportunities that are available to them. Statistics have shown that educational outcomes within the Malay/Muslim community have improved, with

7 Jeraldine Phneah Jia Lin. "Six varsities more harm than good?" *TodayOnline*, 28 August 2012.

8 Speech by Ms Sim Ann, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Law, at the Nanyang Polytechnic Graduation 2012 Ceremony First Session on 21 May 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2012).

more Malays making it to post-secondary education: From 70 percent 10 years ago to 90 percent to-date.[9] The number of Malays who make it to university has also increased from 0.6 percent in 1990 to 6.8 percent in 2012.[10]

Success in education has fed through and raised the socio-economic status of the Malay/Muslim community. Malay/Muslims are now holding higher-skilled and better-paying jobs.[11] The progress that the Malay/Muslim community has achieved thus far should equip the community with the competence and know-how to tackle the remaining challenges resolutely and decisively. Only when the necessary social and cultural resources available for the community are strengthened will the structural challenges that have persistently limited the upward mobility of the Malay/Muslims be overcome.[12]

(ii) Enhancing quality of life

The government is also looking to enhance the quality of life of Singaporeans. In line with this, it is investing in the arts, culture and sports. These are important areas that provide platforms for leisure, expression and self-improvement. Recognising the significance of these areas, with effect from 1 November 2012, the new Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), which will be helmed by Mr Lawrence Wong, will continue to further strengthen Singapore as a centre for the arts, culture and sports. The Ministry assumes some of the roles held by the former Ministry for Community, Youth and Sports (MCYS), and the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA).[13] It will bring into sharper focus the efforts

9 Hisham Hasim. "Lebih banyak peluang tersedia bagi Melayu ke varsity." Berita Harian, 27 October 2012.

10 Ibid.

11 Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). "Progress of Malay Muslim Community in Singapore since 1980." Report. 30 April 2010.

12 Mastura Manap. "The Interplay of Structure and Culture in Intergenerational Underdevelopment: The Case of Working Poor Malays in Singapore." M.Soc. Sci Thesis, 2010, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore.

13 MCYS will be renamed the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). It will focus on building strong families, developing our social services and looking after those in need of social support. There is synergy between these portfolios as the family unit is, and should rightfully remain, the fundamental building block of our society; and MICA will be renamed the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI). It will oversee the development of the infocomm technology, media and design sectors; the national and public libraries; as well as Government's information and public communications policies. Source: Press Statement from the Prime Minister: Restructuring of MCYS and MICA and Establishment of New Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). (Channel News Asia, 2012).

to build a more cohesive and vibrant society, and to deepen a sense of identity and belonging to the nation. Through active engagements with the arts, heritage, sports and youth communities, the Ministry will seek to work with its stakeholders to create an environment where Singaporeans can pursue their aspirations for a better quality of life and together, build a gracious and caring society we are proud to call home.[14] To achieve this, the MCCY will make use of all available platforms in social media, as well as face-to-face interaction so that Singaporeans will feel involved in the plans.[15]

To date, a slew of sports events, as well as an exciting line-up of arts and cultural performances, has been organised for Singaporeans, including our youth. This can be illustrated by the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), which was held in August 2010. The YOG has successfully posed a demonstrative effect of the potential this island-state has to offer to young global talents. The YOG has displayed the value of the network and social capital the young generation has benefited or yet to achieve in this era of globalisation. The presence of international communities in this city-state allows glimpses of cultural heritage to paint the social landscape through observations of their traditions and practices. Similarly, going abroad allows Singaporeans to extend their pool of knowledge, sharpen their creative endeavours and widen their network of contacts. This method of criss-crossing communications means a greater exposure to the dynamics of multi-polar global transactions and knowledge, as well as cultures and traditions of the world.

With Singapore being one of the most globalised places in the world, there are opportunities aplenty for those who can muster the confidence to take them. Our Malay/Muslim youth are no exception in proving that they are able to embrace globalisation by seeking opportunities beyond our shores. A case in point is Ashley Isham, a renowned Singaporean fashion designer who is currently based in London. In 2001, Isham opened a boutique called Acquaint, hoping to "promote fashion talent and support other young designers".[16] He first attracted media attention as the designer of the outfit worn by Zara Phillips at Royal Ascot in 2002, and rose to

14 'Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth' website at http://app.mccy.gov.sg/AboutUs.aspx.

15 "It's 'heartware that matters for new Ministry", *Today Online*, 27 October 2012.

16 'Ashley Isham Autumn/Winter 2012' website at http://www.ashleyisham.com/

international fame after showing his Autumn/Winter 2003 collection during the London Fashion Week. Following this, he opened his flagship boutique, Ashley, in 2005. Isham represents the true Singapore spirit that prides upon hard work and determination in order to succeed.

While globalisation could result in a brain drain within the community, it could just as well mean successes for the community as it innovates and reaps the many benefits of modernisation.[17] It could add to an illustrious Singapore diaspora that we can celebrate. The community will then be well on its way to a winning streak. Perhaps one day, as Minister Yaacob Ibrahim quips, "... the pisang goreng and kerepek pisang could become so widely consumed that they could very well become the new French fries and potato chips."[18] This can only happen if the community is able to rekindle and reinforce its social networks in the spirit of gotong royong (self-help) and to leverage on global opportunities.

In addition to investing in the arts, culture and sports, encouraging marriage and parenthood is also a priority for the government in its attempt to address the population challenge. This is in view of the latest figures from the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD), which reports a growing number of singles in Singapore.[19] More Singaporeans are also marrying later, having children at a later age and correspondingly, fewer children. The report on marriage and parenthood trends shows that the proportion of singles has increased across all age groups between 2000 and 2011. Among those between the ages of 30 and 34, singlehood rates went up from 33 to 44 percent for men and from 22 to 31 percent for women. The median age where men get hitched is now 30 and 28 for women (from age 28.5 to 30.1 for men and age 26.1 to 27.8 for women).

The government does provide a broad range of measures to support young

17 While acknowledging that there are many conflicting and overlapping definitions of 'modernisation', for the purpose of this paper, 'modernisation' is defined as a phenomenon of an evolutionary transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society (Hall, 1992). Among the defining features of the latter society include the decline of traditional social order often associated with 'non-Western', indigenous communities, the rise of a secular culture, the dominance of secular forms of political power and a capitalistic economic system (Hall, 1992). For the purpose of pragmatic discussion, this paper uses the terms 'Western' in relation to Europe, North America and Australia, and 'the East' or 'non-Western' to refer to Asian countries.

18 Kartini Saparudin. "Cultivating a Culture of Confidence in our Community." Institute of Policy Studies. April 2007.

19 Ibid., p.5.

Singaporeans' aspirations of getting married and having children. To help singles find their life partner, the Social Development Network (SDN), a governmental body under the MCYS and formerly known as the Social Development Unit (SDU), reaches out to around 100,000 singles each year to provide them with more social interaction opportunities.[20] Even though statistics at the national level may not mirror trends within the SDN in terms of the proportion of singles getting married, the significant increase in marriage figures for SDU's members over the years reflects SDU's efforts in assisting young people to find life partners.[21]

Many housing schemes have also been put in place to keep housing affordable and available for Singaporeans. To address the problem of rising property prices in the last three years, which have caused some young couples to put off their plans to start a family, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) has significantly increased the supply of Build-to-Order (BTO) flats. Twenty-five thousand BTO flats were built in 2011 while a record 27,000 will be provided in 2012. Furthermore, in allaying the fears of those who are earning just below $8,000, which may cause them to breach the HDB income ceiling, the government has raised the ceiling for income per household from $8,000 to $10,000 for HDB flats and from $10,000 to $12,000 for executive condominiums.

At the same time, to cater to the needs of Singaporeans who cannot afford to purchase flats, the government will increase the supply of rental flats by 7,000. It will also postpone the demolition of some Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) blocks so that they can be used as temporary rental flats until the government can relieve the pressure on rentals. Young couples can also apply for Central Provident Fund (CPF) Housing Grants, such as the Family Grant and the Additional CPF Housing Grant to help them finance the purchase of public housing.[22] It is hoped that all these measures aimed at helping young couples to start a family will contribute to an enhanced quality of life for Singaporeans.

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20 National Population and Talent Division, Prime Minister's Office. "Marriage and Parenthood Trends in Singapore." Occasional Paper. June 2012, p.5.

21 In 2003, SDU reported a significant increase in marriage figures for its members over the years, from 2,789 in 1999 to 4,050 in 2003. Over the first two decades since the SDU was first set up, more than 33,000 members were married (SDU Annual Report, 2003).

22 Ibid., p.5.

There are, however, worrying trends that serve to reduce the quality of life of some young Singaporeans. This includes the increasing number of young drug abusers. The number of under-21 offenders arrested in the last five years (from 2007 to 2011) has tripled. However, recent trends abroad also mean it is necessary to revise Singapore's anti-drug laws. For instance, there are quite a number of clandestine laboratories operating in East and South- East Asia. It is against such a backdrop—and with Singapore being in close proximity to major source countries—that the government is making five key amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA).[23] The amendments can be summarised as follows:

1. New psychoactive substances can be temporarily listed for up to 12 months in the Act, with the possibility of a 12-month extension. Currently, before a substance is listed as a controlled drug and made illegal, study and industry consultation is needed. This takes time and in some cases, the drug may be in circulation, causing harm long before these processes are completed.

2. Hair analysis will be used to complement urine testing in screening for abusers. This new method can detect drugs months after consumption and will address a weakness in Singapore's dependence on urine tests as urine is less likely to contain sufficient drug traces after a few days from the time of abuse.

3. The third amendment involves strengthening the enforcement regime. It will now be illegal to arrange or plan a gathering of two or more people with the knowledge that a controlled drug is, or is to be, consumed or trafficked. The punishment will be jail of between three and 20 years, and caning at the court's discretion. There will be enhanced punishments if young persons, or those suffering from a mental impairment, are at the gathering. Repeat drug traffickers and those who target the young or vulnerable will also face stiffer punishments.

4. A facility to improve the way young abusers are dealt with will be set up. This community rehabilitation centre involves a residential component with counselling programmes that allow youths to continue with education or work.

5. The final amendment involves changes to the mandatory death penalty punishment regime and means that traffickers who satisfy certain tightly-defined

23 Leonard Lim. "Soaring numbers of young drug abusers." *The Straits Times*, 15 November 2012.

conditions may be handed life imprisonment and caning instead.

The above measures will send a strong deterrent message and enhance the operational effectiveness of enforcement agencies. Singapore has long taken a zero-tolerance approach against the drug menace. The amendments proposed will not only protect young people from the scourge of drug but also represent the Government's commitment to treat drug abuse as a national problem. Statistics have shown that Malay abusers continue to form the majority of abusers arrested—48 percent of offenders arrested in 2011 were Malays.[24] However, as Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs Masagos Zulkifli argued in Parliament on 14 November 2012, dealing with the problem requires a "concerted approach" involving the government, community, families and the abusers themselves.[25] Mr Masagos also noted the on-going efforts by Malay/Muslim organisations to help inmates, ex-inmates and their families. It is an increase in these concerted efforts that will fight the drug abuse problem at the national level.

(iii) Building stronger communities

Building stronger communities is also important for happiness. Individual happiness is linked to our interactions with the people around us–our family, friends and neighbours. Familial relationships and friendships that promote communication and a caring, supportive environment all contribute to individual happiness. As aptly articulated by Karma Ura, an outstanding Bhutanese scholar and Director of the Centre for Bhutanese Studies, "There is no such thing as personal happiness; happiness is 100 percent relational".[26]

Indeed, according to The Happiness Report, a study on the happiness quotient of Singaporeans by integrated marketing-communications agency Grey Group Singapore, 74 percent of Singaporeans are happy about being close to their family.[27]

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24 Andrea Ong. "48 per cent of drug offenders held last year were Malays." *The Straits Times.* 18 November 2012.

25 Ibid.

26 FutuArc, The Voice of Green Architecture in Asia. "Bhutan and the Development Philosophy of Gross National Happiness," in T*he Bhutan Project: A Vision of Well-Being Inspired By Children of the Mountains.* Available at http://www.futurarc.com/previous_edition/bhutan.cfm. (Accessed December 2012)

27 The study was conducted in June 2011 on 200 Singaporean respondents of all races aged 18 and above. Source: Ibid.

Likewise, in the Young Singaporeans Conference held on 26 September 2012, where participants were asked to define what happiness means to them,[28] money did not feature as prominently as one would expect. Rather, family and well-being of the self are what form important ingredients for happiness. In fact, in the area of happiness research, academics like economist Richard Easterlin would argue that once a person's basic financial needs are satisfied, more money does not necessarily equate to an increase in one's sense of happiness. Survey results of 1,268 youth aged 15 to 34 by National Youth Survey in 2010 on the state of youth in Singapore also corroborated the finding that the happiest and most fulfilled youth come from backgrounds that they describe as having "high support" from family and friends.[29]

Studies have also shown that once micro-social conditions that foster close personal relationships are met, individuals will tend to strive for a higher level of happiness on the macro-social level.[30] This can be achieved when they work or live for other people, for the community or for God. As argued by Mr Lawrence Wong, "Happiness lies in our hands... when we reach out to others, when we do something worthwhile, when we serve a higher calling and purpose."[31]

In relation to this, many policies have been put in place in order to foster a society that is gracious towards one another and to foreigners, a major theme that was highlighted in NDR 2012. This is in light of the challenge brought about by the recent influx of immigrants, which have triggered off certain anti-social behaviours amongst Singaporeans. This has been a cause for concern for the government as such attitudes are antithetical to nation-building.

Following this, a series of dialogue sessions and focus group discussions were conducted to engage Singaporeans in interrogating the NDR 2012 theme of "Home, Heart and Hope." This can be exemplified by a social narrative dialogue held at

28 The Young Singaporeans Conference is a flagship programme of the Institute of Policy Studies since 1993. The conference invites young Singaporeans between the ages of 25 and 35 across different sectors of Singapore society to discuss their views on issues of national interest. The conference theme in 2012 was on happiness, given the ever-expanding interest in the subject. Source: 'Young Singaporeans' recipe for happiness: Well-being of both self and family is central ingredient' *The Straits Times,* by Kang Soon Hock, 20 October 2012.

29 Laura Teo. "The State of Youth in Singapore" (3rd Edition). 27 January 2011. Source: youth.sg.

30 Hadler, M. & Heller, M. "How Social Relations and Structures Can Produce Happiness and Unhappiness: An International Comparative Analysis." *Social Indicators Research.* January 2006, 75(2): 181.

31 Ibid.

Colonial @ Scotts on 18 October 2012. Entitled "Building a Home with Hope and Heart—the Role of Young Change Agents", the dialogue was spearheaded by various community groups to provide youth from diverse backgrounds with the opportunity to interact and discuss issues pertaining to youth development and engagement in Singapore. In addressing the youth present at the dialogue session, Guest-of-Honour Mr Lawrence Wong emphasised the importance of helping youth to internalise values and to nurture in them the desire to lead a more purposeful life.

Mr Wong also asserted that it is important for Singaporeans to adopt 'morally upright' values, which he defined as 'ethical values' and 'performance-oriented values'. While the former promotes such positive traits as tolerance and integrity, the latter centres on hard work, discipline and resilience. In relation to this, he posited that the government is initiating character and citizenship education in schools that focus on inculcating values like love for the family, community and country in students. Furthermore, programmes that encourage students to initiate projects that would enable them to reflect on their learning journey will also be implemented.

At the national level, some positive impacts of such policies can already be highlighted. Many young Singaporeans are actively involved in civic causes and community projects. A case in point is a movement started by a group of young Singaporeans who felt that more needed to be done about graciousness on public transport. Called "Stand up for Our Singapore", the youth travelled from train to train, distributed badges and flyers, and encouraged commuters to give up their seats to those who needed it more.[32] There are many others like them, who help to care for the aged, the handicapped and the less fortunate. Some youth have even set up their own organisations to advance causes they feel strongly about. Thus, this suggests that the policies that have been put in place are effective and that Singaporean youth in general are able to internalise the social consciousness of their environment such that they are able to galvanise themselves into further social action.

However, while the government has put in place various measures to facilitate the pursuit of youth happiness, too many government initiatives may be counter-productive. As such, the key role for the government is to act in the capacity of a facilitator. This is an important point as oftentimes, governments go all out in

32 Ibid.

this pursuit for their citizens when they should not. Happiness is subjective and, more importantly, different individuals may take different paths towards achieving their happiness. There is no ultimate, one-size-fits-all policy on happiness. Thus, the government's role in this case could take the form of providing an enabling environment to allow each individual the space to embark on their own paths towards happiness, be it in the form of more alternatives to foster work environments that are inclusive, or to allow for greater flexibility at work.

NURTURING A CONSCIENTISED GENERATION OF MALAY/MUSLIM YOUTH

In line with the above policies, the Malay/Muslim community recognises the importance of heightening societal consciousness amongst its young members. This is encapsulated in the community's efforts towards nurturing a 'conscientised generation' or what is known as *Generasi Peduli* in Malay. A conscientised generation can be defined as "one that is able to confront and engage with those ideas and practices that may stunt the path of progress and development of the community".[33] Many social platforms have been put in place by Malay/Muslim organisations in order to increase youths' awareness of the state of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore, as well as the various social issues that plaque the community.

One of the initiatives taken by Malay/Muslim groups in nurturing a conscientised generation is through engaging youth in a series of focus group discussions. The Youth Symposium 2012: Garnering Generational Dividend, organised by self-help group Yayasan MENDAKI, signifies a culmination of efforts from various engagement platforms with young members of the Malay/Muslim community. It brought together a congregation of youth and various community stakeholders in addressing issues surrounding the lived realities of youth today.

The Youth Symposium came about as a result of the Forward Planning Exercise (FPE), which is convened in conjunction with the Community Leaders Forum

33 Alwee, Azhar Ibrahim. "Crafting Social Engagement for Community Building: Towards a Conscientised Generation." *Community Leaders Forum,* 2011.

(CLF) in 2010. The FPE saw over 90 young and emerging professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds coming together to envision the Malay/Muslim community of 2020. These youth came up with four Forward Thrusts to take the community further in the journey of progress in light of rapid changes in the current socio-economic landscape. The four Forward Thrusts that were adopted for collective action are:

i) To establish strong social networks to ensure circulation of social capital among individuals across different generational groups and social strata.

ii) To establish a supportive environment that encourages exploring and learning in order to embrace diversity, celebrate multiple pathways of success.

iii) To cultivate an enterprise- driven ecosystem in order to have creativity and resourcefulness in the future workplace.

iv) To rejuvenate the citizen-leader in every individual in order to own the process of nation-building and reach a shared vision of excellence.

Guided by these four thrusts, three focus areas for action planning were consolidated and recommended for community leaders to adopt. One of them was to harness youth as energy for the community. Alongside the continuous strive for improved educational attainment, this area represents a milestone for society to encourage youth to participate and lead in efforts towards community and nation-building.

There were also parallel engagements during this year-long exercise. These included a street festival where musicians, artists, poets and filmmakers showcased their crafts, and several forums that engaged young people with issues pertaining to youth and the community. One example was the Independent Thinking Explorers (ITE) Seminar organised for ITE students, and another was a day camp entitled *Rumah Empat Bilik* or 'Four-Room House', where views from aspiring professionals were collated.

Following the FPE, several platforms to engage youth were launched in 2011. Among them is the CLF Labs, which is an initiative that allows fresh ideas with new perspectives to emerge and be materialised in order to further contribute to the continued progression of the Malay/Muslim community. The CLF Labs was officially launched on 12 February 2011 via a forum that discussed the report published for

the FPE process. This was a recommendation from the FPE 2010 and works as a funding mechanism for groups of youth with ideas they can experiment with. As of November 2012, more than 10 project proposals have been submitted to the CLF Labs Secretariat ever since its official launch. Many of these projects carry promising ideas that will benefit the community and bear the potential to be up-scaled and made sustainable.

Apart from CLF Labs, many youth forums were organised for various student bodies. The first in a series of youth forums was the Pre-University Forum, where students from junior colleges, centralised institutes and madrasahs came together with the objective of increasing awareness of the FPE amongst the participants, as well as to engage them in the process of building a Community of Excellence. Another engagement was a literary day camp with the same audience entitled Gema Nusantara, which focused on a better exposure of a community's literary treasures in the form of the community's language through various media.

The highlight for 2011 was the Imagining Youth Seminar: Towards a Youth Charter. The seminar was a platform for various stakeholders to address ideas, issues and concerns pertaining to the community. It kick-started discussions aimed towards crafting a Youth Charter for the community, which is another key recommendation of the FPE 2010. The above initiatives thus serve as positive indicators that our Malay/Muslim youth are able to generate and manifest new ideas and values, and that there are social structures in place to empower these youth.

CONCLUSION

Happiness to young Singaporeans generally means looking beyond economic performance to family, friends, culture, arts and sports. The pursuit of happiness and the development of youth can only be attained in connection with other people. The family is an important institution not only to provide support at different stages of the individual's course of life, but also as an important contributor to happiness. Family policies that seek to strengthen familial bonds may pay dividends in the long term as opposed to more economic incentives for individuals, which are often temporal.

With regard to initiatives for our Malay/Muslim youth, while such platforms as the CLF Labs and the Youth Charter are still being utilised and looked into, the community is posed with the question of what more can be done to continue engaging and empowering our youth? While there needs to be a continued engagement with the youth, be it through seminars, workshops, or focus group discussions, the task of nurturing a conscientious generation of youth has to be an on-going and concerted effort amongst various social institutions. Likewise, such social issues as drug abuse should not be simply lumped as problems that are unique to the Malay community and thus require solutions aimed at combating the so-called Malay cultural deficit. Instead, a commitment by the government and social institutions to identify and tackle these issues at the national level should be made.

At the same time, members of the Malay/Muslim community, especially the young who are in their early stages of socialisation need to be continually educated and trained. This training emphasises the importance of understanding civic rights and encourages regular participation. Civic efforts need to be placed within a context broader than that of individual volunteering. The "new citizenship", as argued by Rimmerman,[34] could be an attempt to enhance the quality of democracy by bringing together people from different backgrounds, in a spirit of tolerance, respect, trust, and social and political engagement. This will allow the organic growth of a Singaporean Malay/Muslim community, which can meet the challenges that the present and future bring.

In quest of excellence, a conscientised generation will be an integral element to achieving this goal. The process of nurturance has begun and it will take time for the seeds of conscience to take root and blossom into a Community of Excellence. The elements for this to occur are already in place and the Malay/Muslim community must continue to empower our youth. This is because the young generation is a potential asset in every society. Mannheim captures it succinctly when he argues that "Youth is an important part of these latent reserves that are present in every society. It depends on the social structure whether those reserves, and which of them, if any, are mobilised and integrated into a function".[35]

34 Craig A. Rimmerman. *The New Citizenship: Unconventional Politics, Activism, and Service.* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1969), p.9.

35 Karl Mannheim, Diagnosis of *Our Time: wartime essays of a sociologist.* (London, Routledge & Paul, 1966), p.36.

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"By striving to do the impossible, man has always achieved what is possible."

— Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin
Russian theorist and philosopher (1814–1876)

Chapter 3

A New Paradigm: Singapore's Shift towards Productivity Driven Economic Growth

Suffyan Othman

INTRODUCTION

Employability is one of the four networks underwork the umbrella of the Community Leaders Forum (CLF), with the other networks being Education, Family and Youth. This paper aims to provide a broad overview on the overall outlook on employability for the Malay community. It will examine current trends and highlight possible areas and sectors that could be utilized by the Malay community. Demography is a fundamental aspect of understanding the future of employability and therefore it will be extrapolated to highlight the future challenges that the community will face.

In order to examine the possibilities and challenges that the community will face in the realm of employability, it is prudent to examine the economic climate, both globally and in Singapore. Government initiatives and strategic plans will be looked into to better understand how individuals will be affected and their future prospects in employment. Finally, Singapore's and the community's demographics will be surveyed to provide greater understanding in charting the community's employability. This paper examines the current and future opportunities arising in Singapore in light of the economy's paradigm shift towards productivity based economic growth.

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

The global economic landscape in 2012 has been characterised by a 'new normal' of constant fluctuations and uncertainty, where volatility and not stability underpins market sentiments. The year started on a positive note, with developing and advanced countries both experiencing a recovery in economic activity following the slow growth in the 4th quarter of 2011. However, in mid-2012, the positive albeit modest growth was interrupted by fears from the Eurozone, affecting the global financial market and returning it to a state of flux. The high levels of debt of the wealthier and advanced economies will be the probable cause of the market's continued instability, as it will require years of resolute governmental and economic effort to reduce debt to sustainable levels and to create a less volatile market.[1] The possibility of the United States falling off a fiscal cliff early next year will also deeply resonate in the current economic climate and the confidence in the market.[2]

The openness of Singapore's economy and competition in the global economy means that it will continue to be subjected to market volatility due to its export dependent economy. The forecast for economic growth was moderated from 1.0 to 3.0 percent to 1.5 to 2.5 percent[3] during the mid-year, and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) also adjusted the 2012 inflation forecast from 3.5 to 4.5 percent to 4 to 4.5 percent[4]. While the impact of the developments in the Eurozone to Singapore was substantial, the continued growth in the Asia Pacific region, especially in Southeast Asia will slow down its effects and Singapore will continue to experience moderate growth. Therefore, while there are opportunities present for sustained economic growth, it will still be lower until the global economic situation stabilizes.

At the same time, Singapore's location within a region of widespread economic

1 IMF. *World Economic Outlook,* 2012. Available at http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/pdf/text.pdf. (Accessed Nov 3, 2012)

2 Dominic Rushe, 'Fiscal cliff could push US intro recession, says Fed chief' The Sydney Morning Herald, Nov 22, 2012, http://www.smh.com.au/business/fiscal-cliff-could-push-us-into-recession-says-fed-chief-20121121-29q32.html.

3 Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2012 GDP Growth Forecast Narrowed to 1.5 to 2.5 Per Cent, 2012, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/news/news/gdp2q2012.pdf.

4 'MAS says economy "clearly slowing", revises inflation outlook' Reuters, Jul 25, 2012, http://business.asiaone.com/Business/News/Story/A1Story20120725-361236.html.

growth means that it will experience greater competition—especially in the secondary manufacturing sector. The lower costs of production around the region, due to lower wages and operation costs and other reasons, will attract foreign direct investment to Singapore's neighbours as production in Singapore will entail comparatively higher costs. International companies currently located in Singapore, and even local companies, may move elsewhere within the region because of this, thus adversely affecting Singapore's economy.

Strong growth is a double-edged sword, however. It will also increase incomes in the growing economies and therefore lead to an increase in consumer spending. Singapore is in a good position to export desired products to these countries as well as attract greater regional tourism. Therefore, any adverse effects on Singapore's economic growth brought by regional development will be moderated due simultaneous expansion of its export markets.

SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

For Singapore, dynamic economic growth is a key focus for the government as it directly affects continued creation of opportunities, foreign direct investments, financial investments and employment. Singapore has experienced strong economic growth for a prolonged period and has been able to respond positively during economic crises in the past due to its strong economic and business fundamentals. "Some of the key factors underpinning our economic success are our business-friendly environment, our openness to foreign investments and access by business to a competent workforce."[5] The country's infrastructure, both physical and in terms of state policies, plays a large part in ensuring that Singapore is able to attract businesses and investments. According to Minister Grace Fu, moving forward, Singapore "needs good quality growth for all segments of society to have good jobs

5 Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore. MTI Occasional Paper on Population and Economy, 2012. Available at http://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights/Documents/MTI%20Occasional%20Paper%20on%20Population%20and%20Economy.pdf.

and wages"[6].

However, upon examining the MAS' forecasted rates of economic growth and inflation, such dynamic growth is unlikely to occur. This is especially in light of Singapore registering its lowest labour productivity rates annually from 2000 to 2011—1.7 percent[7]. Inflationary and cost pressures alongside low productivity will continue to slow down Singapore's economic growth despite its strong economic fundamentals and infrastructure.

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE

With the present economic climate, job creation is a challenge. Dynamic growth is seen as the driver of job creation and Singapore has recently been experiencing slower economic growth. At the same time, while current unemployment rates have been low, the "bottom 20 per cent of working Singaporeans saw their pay stagnate over the last 10 years"[8]. This is exacerbated by the widening income divide as seen from the upward rising trend of Singapore's Gini coefficient among employed households[9] and this is a result of globalisation according to the state[10]. As the wealthy get wealthier and jobs get scarcer, lower-income workers will be left behind, facing possible retrenchments as local workers are more costly in comparison to foreign workers. The social implications of such a trajectory are significant and unfortunately highly likely unless Singapore's socio-economic path undergoes structural changes.

6 Imelda Saad Aziz. "Good quality growth needed to have good jobs: Grace Fu." *Today.* Oct 23, 2012. Available at http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC121023-0000114/Good-quality-growth-needed-to-have-good-jobs--Grace-Fu.

7 Ministry of Manpower. *National Wages Council Guidelines 2012/2013*. 2012. Available at http://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/Pages/PressReleasesDetail.aspx?listid=428.

8 Fann Sim. "Low-wage earners' pay stagnated over last decade: MOM." *Yahoo! Newsroom*. 12 October 2011. Available at http://sg.news.yahoo.com/mom-report-finds-lower-income-s-poreans--pay-stagnated-over-last-decade.html.

9 Manu Bhaskaran, et al, "Inequality and the need for a new social compact." 2012. Available at http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/docs/events/p2012/SP2012_Bkgd%20Pa.pdf.

10 S Ramesh. "Encourage people to rely on own efforts instead of handouts: PM." Channel News Asia. 2 December 2010. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1096850/1/.html.

At present, the number of foreigners working in Singapore is steadily increasing despite measures to restrict their influx. There was a "7.2 percent increase in the number of non-residents—those working, studying or living in Singapore but not granted permanent residency—was 'due to strong manpower demand', the National Population and Talent Division said."[11] This results in continued wage repression and maintenance of the income disparity between higher and lower wage earners. It is expected; also, that growth will slow down in the future, causing wages to drop due to increased competition for jobs. This will intensify the existing pressures on Singapore's social safety nets and stimulate a high social cost. The current economic model based on high capital growth dependent on cheap labour requires a rethink. There must be a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable economic growth model.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES COMMITTEE

In light of all these challenges the Economic Strategies Committee (ESC) was set up in May 2009. The committee comprised representatives from the government, labour movement, private sector and academia, and the report was released in early 2010. The committee's focus was "to maximise our opportunities in a new world environment, by building our capabilities and making the best use of our resources, with the aim of achieving sustained and inclusive growth."[12] One of the ESC's key recommendations was "to grow based on skills, innovation and productivity"[13] as Singapore has reached the limits of its current economic growth model.

For sustained and inclusive growth to occur, thus ensuring continued job creation and rising wages, Singapore's productivity growth and labour productivity have to be the focus. This will be a very difficult challenge to overcome as "(l)abour productivity has been on a down trend since 2004"[14] and productivity growth has

11 AFP News. "Foreign workers up in Singapore despite tightening." 28 September 2012. Available at http://sg.news.yahoo.com/foreign-workers-singapore-despite-tightening-111547694--finance.html.

12 Economic Strategies Committee. *Economic Strategies Committee Report*, 2010. Available at http://www.ecdl.org/media/Singapore%20Economic%20Committe_2010.pdf.

13 Ibid.

14 Professor Neo Boon Siong & Susan Chung, 'Singapore's Declining Productivity Growth, 2008', http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/aci/docs/research_outputs/Singapore%20Declining%20Productivity%20Growth.pdf.

to increase by at least twofold in order for Singapore to continue having dynamic growth. For Singapore to do so, it "must undertake a comprehensive national effort to boost productivity, involving a partnership of enterprises, people, unions and government."[15] The measures to increase productivity include a national council, the comprehensive Continuing Education & Training (CET) system, deep-rooted enterprise innovation, enhanced fiscal incentives for companies to innovate and improve efficiency, and the raising of foreign worker levies.

Other areas of focus include deepening corporate capabilities, especially in the realm of research and development (R&D). Singapore has to increase expenditure on this in order to innovate and raise productivity.[16] Greater R&D sharing will also have to occur, in order to increase innovation for products and productivity. Another way to raise corporate capabilities is to increase the presence of local businesses internationally.[17] There are opportunities for Singaporean businesses to bloom regionally as discussed earlier and financing capabilities in terms of government support and institutions that can mitigate financial and insurance risks need to be developed so that companies can take advantage of these prospects.

The final area of focus is to make Singapore a distinctive global city where people come from all over the world and Singapore becomes "a meeting point in Asia for enterprise, talent, cultures and ideas"[18] and not merely a spot that attracts workers. This will add to Singapore's ability to grow and thrive in the global market and move away from its dependence on increasing cheap (foreign) labour to attain economic growth. Innovative and productive people from all over the world will be attracted to work here, complementing the Singaporean core in the workforce.

15 Economic Strategies Committee, Economic Strategies Committee Report, 2010, p. 9, http://www.ecdl.org/media/Singapore%20Economic%20Committe_2010.pdf

16 Ibid, p. 28.

17 Ibid, p. 11.

18 Ibid, p. 11.

SINGAPORE'S PUBLIC POLICY

Building on the ESC report, the three main areas Singapore should focus on are: Boosting the skills of all workers; increasing Singaporean companies' to take advantage of opportunities in Asia; and making Singapore a distinctive global city in order to transform into an economy driven by productivity growth. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the steps taken by the government from early 2010 to the present (2012), to assess whether these recommendations were utilised and see if Singapore is moving towards productivity driven growth.

Singapore's Budget speech 2012 highlights the importance of restructuring Singapore's economy. The main signal of this is the commitment towards managing the dependence on foreign workers across all sectors. One example of this is the raising of "the eligibility criteria for Employment Pass (EP) and S Pass holders"[19] and more recently, the increase in criteria for Premium Pass holders[20]. While this will adversely affect small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the state will provide help to these SMEs to adjust and "do so in a way that will promote restructuring and upgrading."[21] This will help to ensure that SMEs can continue to thrive and at the same time relinquish over-dependence on foreign labour. This will also ensure that SMEs have to focus on increasing productivity for them to experience growth, as opposed to merely expanding as a result of importing more foreign labour.

There were issues raised by SMEs as a result of this tightening, as seen from comments from the President of Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) where "some SMEs have put their expansion plans on hold; others have closed down."[22] However, the government had given SMEs two years to prepare for this tightening and it "was not going to turn back from its current policy

19 Singapore Budget Speech. 2012. p. 14. Available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/speech_toc/download/FY2012_Budget_Statement.pdf.

20 Woo Sian Boon. "MOM tightens criteria for premium employment passes." *Today*, 7 November 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1235648/1/.html.

21 Singapore Budget Speech. 2012. p. 16. Available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/speech_toc/download/FY2012_Budget_Statement.pdf.

22 Felda Chay. "Foreign Worker Curbs: Ample Warning Given." *The Business Times*. 13 November 2012. p. 1 & 4.

stance, despite persistent pleas from SMEs"[23]. This highlights the government's commitment to focus on increasing productivity for economic growth as opposed to the prior model of intensive capital investment-based growth.

To be sure, there is an emphasis on helping SMEs to focus on increasing productivity and innovation. For example, the Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) for training will be easier to access, ensuring that workers in SMEs can upgrade themselves through in-house training as well as the opportunity to make use of a 90 percent course subsidy for all WDA certified courses[24]. With Singapore facing an ageing population, the budget also has an enhanced Special Employment Credit (SEC) where employers are encouraged via monthly payouts to employ older Singaporeans aged 50 and above. This is to ensure that companies will keep their older employees, or welcome new ones, maintaining a strong Singaporean core in the workforce as opposed to just employing younger foreign workers.

The Budget speech also included the idea that local companies have to take advantage of overseas opportunities overseas to institutionalise and fill in the gaps for long-term offshore investments. This follows the ESC's recommendation to take advantage of offshore growth opportunities. A project finance company will be established to provide financing for companies expanding overseas. Mitigating risks in terms of political risk insurance to help encourage companies to expand overseas is another measure. This will allow Singaporean companies to expand, grow strong and take advantage of the growing regional economies, generating more income that can be reinvested in labour and capital in Singapore.

This commitment towards restructuring was also reflected in the National Day Rally 2012. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted the need to take advantage of improvements in technology, both in terms of increasing productivity and new opportunities that arise from new technologies, as well as "bringing in many new investments to create new and better jobs"[25]. An example of this is the development of JTC eco-Business Park; the focus is to ensure that Singapore can be part of the

23 Ibid.

24 Singapore Budget Speech. 2012. pp. 19-20. Available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/speech_toc/download/FY2012_Budget_Statement.pdf.

25 Lee Hsien Loong. "National Day Rally 2012." 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/annex/ND2012_PMLEE_ENGTEXT.pdf.

clean technology industry and to take advantage of the new business opportunity that resulted from new technology. It "is aimed at positioning Singapore as a global test-bed and the preferred site for early adoption of clean technology products and urban solutions in the tropics."[26] This will generate more opportunities for Singaporeans in terms of new businesses and employment as new jobs will be created.

Another highlight of the speech on employability was to focus on "(s)trengthening the Singapore core in the workforce"[27], moving away from dependence on foreign workers. Steps include a new Singapore-Industry Scholarship where Singaporeans are given the opportunity to go to university and work in local companies as well as greater opportunities for upgrading for low income workers.[28] "The scholarship is aimed at nurturing a strong core of Singapore talent with the requisite skills and capabilities to steer and contribute to strategic sectors."[29] This should allow Singaporeans and local companies to be better prepared and situated to meet the challenges that will arise from changes in the current and future global economy.

Applied higher education, which prepares graduates to work in specific industries, was the final highlight of the National Day Speech with regards to employability. Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore Institute of Management University (UniSIM), "that work closely with industry and emphasise practice-oriented teaching"[30], were recognised as Singapore's fifth and sixth universities, providing greater opportunities for workers to become better qualified and more productive. Part-time students, those who wish to upgrade themselves, will also be given more support as government bursaries and loans are now being made available to them. This will further improve Singapore's workforce and help to make Singapore into a knowledge-based economy.

Going beyond the Singapore Budget speech and National Day Rally 2012, there

26 Joyce Teo. "Making S'pore a Cleantech Leader." *The Straits Times,* 12 July 2012.

27 Lee Hsien Loong. "National Day Rally 2012." 2012. Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/annex/ND2012_PMLEE_ENGTEXT.pdf.

28 Ibid.

29 *Singapore-Industry Scholarship.* Available at http://www.singaporeindustryscholarship.sg.

30 'National Day Rally 2012', 2012, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/annex/ND2012_PMLEE_ENGTEXT.pdf.

are other public policy changes to consider. In the area of CET, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) are developing two CET campuses to upskill workers. "This major initiative underscores Singapore's continuing commitment to CET and its increasing importance in augmenting economic competitiveness as well as enhancing workers' employability."[31] It will allow Singaporean workers, from rank and file employees to executives and management, to remain relevant and employable; it will also enable them to work in new sectors that will arise. It will also give employers the opportunity to "enhance quality and productivity by helping their workers acquire industry-relevant skills and stay ahead of industry developments"[32]. Furthermore, when taken with the PIC as mentioned above, this creates a more holistic approach towards upgrading workers, where businesses (whether MNCs or SMEs) and workers are supported in their upgrading efforts. This cements Singapore's pledge towards making increased productivity its main driver for economic growth.

The Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) scheme was improved in 2010 to better help low income Singaporean workers. It is one of the key social security measures which supplement both workers' incomes and CPF savings. The maximum amount of payments has been increased and the frequency from twice yearly to quarterly. There is also the new Workfare Training Support scheme, which subsidises employers who send their workers for training by up to 95 percent of the course fees, in conjunction with an annual Training Commitment Award of up to $400 for WIS workers who complete their training.[33] In light of the growing income disparity in Singapore, this will alleviate pressures on low wage workers and also provide them with opportunities to upgrade themselves.

The government also recognised the National Wages Council's (NWC) suggestion to increase low wage workers' salaries through a minimum pay raise. "The proposal put forth by NWC… had recommended that workers earning less than S$1,000 be

31 Ministry of Manpower, *Continuing Education & Training*, last update 10 Oct, 2012, http://www.mom.gov.sg/skills-training-and-development/adult-and-continuing-education/cet-masterplan/Pages/default.aspx.

32 Ibid.

33 Ministry of Manpower, *Workfare*, last updated Sep 24, 2012, http://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/employment-rights-conditions/workfare/Pages/workfare-income-supplement.aspx.

given a pay increase of $50."[34] This will help them to cope with rising costs and inflationary pressures in Singapore. However, it is important to note that this is merely a recommendation and that not all companies will take it up; not all low wage workers will benefit.

The ESC's recommendations are currently being implemented and the beginning of a paradigm shift towards a productivity driven economic growth can be seen. This shift will require some time to take root and for its benefits to become apparent. However, it will allow for more sustainable and inclusive growth in the long run. The policies implemented as a result of this shift should be taken advantage of—this will benefit the labour force both now and in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MALAY LABOUR FORCE

To understand how the economic climate in Singapore and the government's drive towards productivity as the basis for economic growth affects the Malay labour force and its employability, it is pertinent to understand them in relation to Singapore's general labour force. This will allow for a greater understanding of the employability of Malay workers, how they will be affected by all these changes, and to examine if they benefit from these changes.

From the paper published by the Manpower Research and Statistics Department of MOM in 2011, the number of "economically active residents increased over the year by 1.6% in June 2011, lower than the growth of 3.1% in 2010 and the average of 2.6% p.a. from 2001 to 2011."[35] For the Malay community, 54 percent of its population are under the age of 35 in 2010, with 49 percent of that age group between the ages of 15 to 29[36]—which can be categorised as economically active or soon to be economically active. Therefore, for the Malay community, the potential pool of workers is growing at a fast pace. This is in direct contrast to the

34 Melissa Aw, 'Gov't accepts NWC proposal for wage increase', *Yahoo! Newsroom*, May 21, 2012, http://sg.news.yahoo.com/low-wage-workers--pay-to-rise-by-s-50-.html.

35 Ministry of Manpower, Singapore Workforce 2011, Nov 2011, p.1, http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singapore_workforce_2011.pdf.

36 Census 2010, *Census of Population 2010*, 2010, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010acr.pdf.

general population where the growth of the labour force is slowing and has to be augmented by foreign workers.

In view of the tightening measures restricting the inflow of foreign workers, as seen from the reduction in the Dependency Ration Ceiling[37], the youth of the Malay community can partially fill these gaps in the workforce and enjoy increased employability if they are carefully nurtured. The tightening of the EP and S-Pass provisions will create greater opportunities to those who are entering the workforce, in spite of slower economic growth. This is because the EP and S-Pass are for foreign workers who wish to work in professional, executive and technical (PMET) positions. More opportunities for employment will be available for the youth of the Malay community if the trend of greater educational attainment continues, as seen from the increasing percentage of the Malay cohort entering post-secondary institutions.[38]

The educational profile of working Singaporeans is another factor that has to be examined in order to understand the challenges and opportunities that the Malay worker will face. This profile for the general population is improving where "[n]early one in four (23%) citizens employed in 2010 were degree holders, up from 14% in 2001."[39] For the positions that these workers were classified, "[c]lose to one in two (49%) citizens employed were in professional, executive & technical (PMET) jobs, up from 42% in 2001."[40] However, for the Malay population, 5.1 percent are university graduates and the number of PMETs is also low in comparison, forming only 29 percent of the working population[41]. In relation to the educational profile, "unemployment rate was lower among the tertiary-educated, with degree holders experiencing the lowest unemployment rate of 2.9%, significantly below the overall average of 3.4% for all citizens in 2010."[42]

37 Singapore Budget Speech, 2012, pp. 14-15, http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/speech_toc/download/FY2012_Budget_Statement.pdf.

38 Ibid.

39 Ministry of Manpower, Singaporeans in the Workforce, Oct 2011, p. 7, http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singaporeans_in_the_workforce.pdf.

40 Ibid.

41 Census 2010, *Census of Population 2010*, 2010, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010acr.pdf.

42 Ministry of Manpower, *Singaporeans in the Workforce*, Oct 2011, p. 15, http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singaporeans_in_the_workforce.pdf.

Therefore, in light of the slow economic growth, it is more likely that Malay workers will be less employable due to their lower educational profile as Singapore continues to focus on knowledge-based employment.

Singapore's policies and plans are focused on improving labour productivity and the Malay workers can take advantage of this. This is because most of the policies for employability are targeted towards upgrading the labour force and greater access to higher education. Furthermore, this endeavour towards skills upgrading is no longer piecemeal but a large-scale effort towards increasing productivity of all Singaporean workers. This holistic approach towards upgrading should attract all Singaporean workers notwithstanding the possible structural impediments that can hopefully be overcome through this approach. The Malay workforce as seen from the educational profile have a larger scope where they can further upgrade themselves and be more employable should they utilise these programmes and policies.

Examining the employment rate for women in general, this has been increasing. For "women in the prime-working ages of 25 to 54 [it] rose to another high, from 71.7% in 2010 to 73% in 2011."[43] However, in general, the numbers are low at only 57 percent[44]. For the Malay community, the numbers are even lower. From the data from the General Household Survey 2005, the last recorded racially and gender based compartmentalised data on economic activity, the Malay community had only 41 percent[45] of its female population economically active, compared to 52 percent of the general female population in Singapore. In view of the slow annual increase (1.8 percent) in economically active women within the general population, there still is a sizeable portion of women who are presently economically inactive; this is a strong resource pool of possibly employable workers. If these economically inactive women could be encouraged to tap on the resources available for upgrading and become gainfully employed, this will help to improve both their household and community incomes.

For Malay workers, regional expansion of local companies will be advantageous.

43 Ibid. p. 5.

44 Department of Statistics Singapore. Time Series on Labour Force Participation Rate (as at June). Last updated on 27 February 2012. Available at http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/economy/hist/labour.html.

45 Department of Statisctics Singapore. General Household Survey 2005. 2005. Available at http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/ghsr1.html.

With policies encouraging expansion and stronger economic growth in the region, they can be seen as more employable if local companies expand to Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. This is because of the largely Malay-speaking population there; language fluency will make it easier to do business. Such opportunities should be taken advantage of by Malay workers here. Malay-run businesses can also look into accessing the available resources and expand regionally as well.

While there are a number of positive trends for the Malay labour force in light of this shift, a negative trend is higher unemployment rates in certain industries. "Accommodation & food services and administrative & support services (both 5.9%) had the highest unemployment rate among the major industries in 2011"[46]. This is because occupations in these industries are not viewed as highly as others. At the same time, a sizeable percentage of the Malay workers, 16.7 percent, are employed in these areas. Therefore, with slower economic growth expected, Malay workers in these industries may face greater challenges in staying employed.

The focus of the Malay community should therefore be on three main groups in order to meet the challenges arising from slower local economic growth and take advantage of opportunities arising from the shift towards productivity driven growth. The first group is the youth. They should be made aware of increased university places and be nurtured so that they can qualify and enter. They should also be made aware of the importance of staying relevant in the workforce and skills upgrading. The next group is the low-wage workers. They can upgrade their skills through the CETs as well as enjoy financial support through the WIS scheme. They should be made aware of these opportunities in order to uplift their employability and incomes. The final group is the economically inactive women. Double income households are becoming the norm in Singapore due to the high cost of living and changing social norms. With such a significant percentage of women in the community not working, the effect of their joining the workforce would definitely ease their families' financial burdens and improve the community's general income level.

46 Ministry of Manpower. *Singapore Workforce 2011.* Nov 2011. p.16. Available at http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singapore_workforce_2011.pdf.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Singapore's demography provides a good guide towards analysing the Malay community's future employment opportunities. The ESC Report, Singapore Budget speech and National Day Rally 2012 also provided a few signposts. Knowledge of these will be beneficial for the present and future Malay labour force.

At present, Singapore in general is facing an ageing population while the Malay community within it is nurturing a young population. An ageing population creates job opportunities in areas of healthcare and elder care. The opening of two new hospitals, one in Jurong and the other in Sengkang will create new jobs in the near future. Other non-clinical job opportunities include administrative, clerical and information technology roles. Elder care will also be another important industry. The creation of new nursing homes to meet increasing demand will create more than 1700 jobs[47].

On the opposite spectrum, early childhood education is an important sector that needs to be improved and the government "will invest substantial resources in pre-school, and play a more active role"[48]. This will provide structured improvements to the teachers and make the job more attractive. Financial assistance will be given to families and therefore more children can attend pre-school, driving increased job creation in this field. This will be a growing industry that Malay workers can look into.

The Malay community also needs to be aware that the government is investing substantially in newer industries like clean technologies and renewable energy, as can be seen in examples like the eco-Business Park. The government also encourages foreign investment in this field, and the Renewable Energy Corporation (REC), an international corporation that owns one the biggest market shares in the solar energy sector, has recently opened their largest integrated solar production facility

47 Tessa Wong. "New nursing homes to create over 1,700 jobs." *The Straits Times*. 8 October 2012. Available at http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/new-nursing-homes-create-over-1700-jobs-20121008.

48 Economic Strategies Committee. *Economic Strategies Committee Report.* 2010. p. 13. Available at http://www.ecdl.org/media/Singapore%20Economic%20Committe_2010.pdf

here[49]. Opportunities for employment and businesses will be more readily available and that more young people should be encouraged to specialize in these industries.

The ESC report also proposed that for Singapore to be a distinctive global city, it should be rejuvenated as a hub for the arts. It recommended the development of "artistic, professional, scholastic and technical capabilities in the arts, including the development of reputable degree and research programmes."[50] This drive is supplemented by the School of the Arts and local arts colleges such as LaSalle and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Here, then, is another sunrise industry that Malay workers can thrive in.

The improving educational attainment rates within the Malay community, with 87.2 percent of the primary one cohort going on to post-secondary school education in 2010[51], will serve the community well as Singapore shifts to a productivity driven economy requiring a highly educated workforce. The jobs that will be created are knowledge based and should these educational attainments continue, the community will be well-positioned to take advantage of these employment opportunities. Those who do not have high levels of education have many other prospects to upgrade themselves, for example the CET programmes, in light of the holistic approach that the government has taken. Future opportunities explored above comprise only a small survey; and there many other industries and sectors in Singapore that will continue to grow, such as the financial sector and other tertiary industries while Singapore continues to be a regional hub for Asian markets. Malay workers should be able to look forward to a more positive economic outlook in Singapore in the near future despite present challenges.

49 Renewal Energy Corporation Singapore. http://www.recgroup.com/recgroup/operations/rec-in-singapore.

50 Economic Strategies Committee. *Economic Strategies Committee Report.* 2010. p. 36. Available at http://www.ecdl.org/media/Singapore%20Economic%20Committe_2010.pdf.

51 Singapore Census 2010. *Census of Population 2010.* 2010. Available at http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010acr.pdf.

CONCLUSION

The economic challenges that Singapore is facing can be overcome if all parties—the government, businesses and labour force—maintain fidelity towards the recommendations proposed by the ESC. Singapore's ability to withstand global economic challenges will improve as it moves towards productivity based economic growth. At the same time, Singapore's economy will evolve towards a slower but more sustainable growth rate and the growth will be more inclusive. However, should business interests take precedence over this commitment towards sustainable and inclusive growth, the divide between capital owners and the labour force will deepen—and so will the income disparity. This "imposes very real costs on society… undermine social cohesion and generate widespread disaffection with the prevailing economic and political systems."[52]

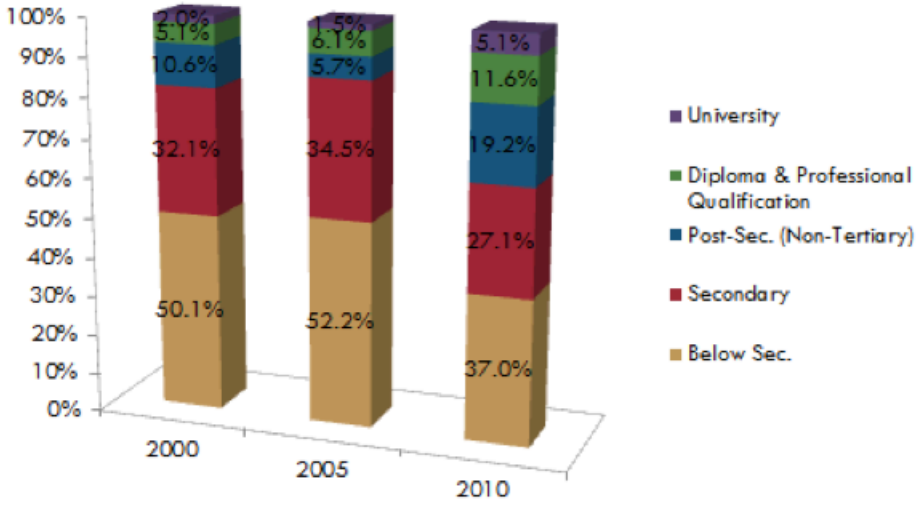
For the Malay community, there are a number of opportunities to take advantage of in terms of employment prospects and improving employability. Both the community and those working to uplift the community (whether national agencies or Malay/Muslim organisations) must be aware of these opportunities and work towards utilising them fully. The structural impediments that continue to marginalise the community in varying degrees[53] should be taken into consideration and efforts must be put in place to overcome them. Should this be successful, the economic and employment prospects for both the Malay community and Singapore as a whole will continue to improve as the shift towards productivity based economic growth becomes more deep-rooted and the global economic situation stabilises.

52 Manu Bhaskaran, et al. "Inequality and the need for a new social compact." 2012. p. 10. Available at http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/docs/events/p2012/SP2012_Bkgd%20Pa.pdf.

53 Lily Zubaidah Rahim. *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

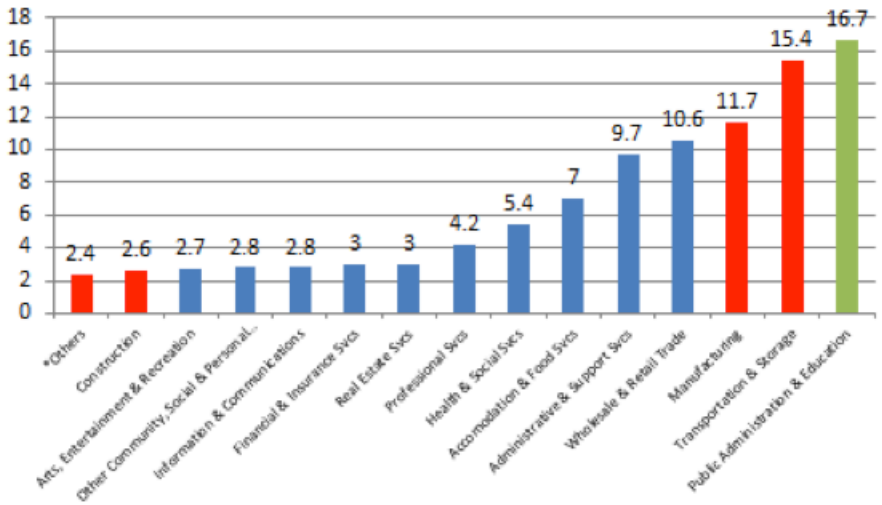
ANNEX

Highest Education Attained by Resident Non-Student Malays (%)
2000, 2005 & 2010

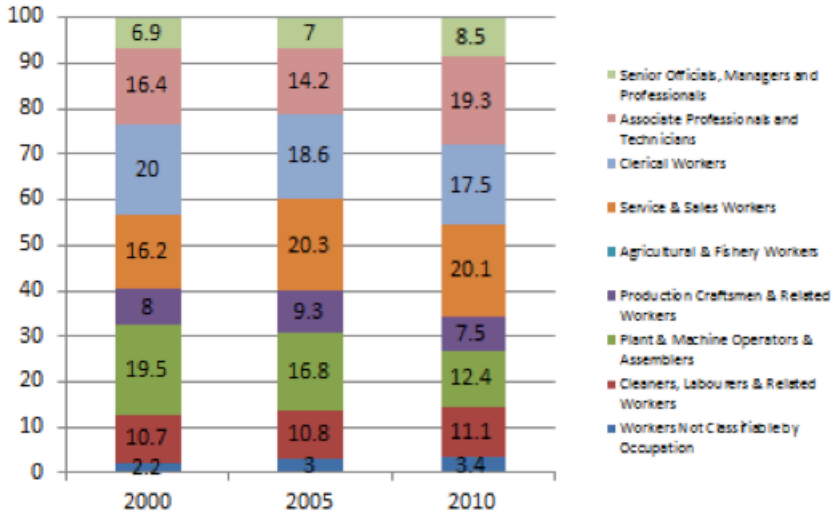


Employability

Resident Working Malays by Industry



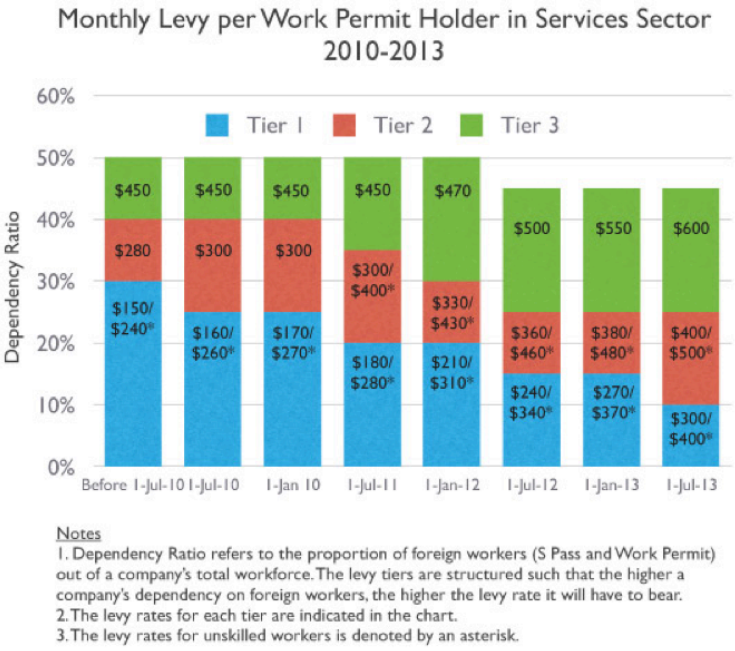
Resident Working Malays by Occupation



Annual Labour Force Participation Rate

YEAR	TOTAL (%)	MALES (%)	FEMALES (%)
2000 (Census)	63.2	76.6	50.2
2001	64.4	77.7	51.6
2002	63.6	77.2	50.6
2003	63.2	76.1	50.9
2004	63.3	75.7	51.3
2005 (GHS)	63.0	74.4	52.0
2006	65.0	76.2	54.3
2007	65.1	76.5	54.3
2008	65.6	76.1	55.6
2009	65.4	76.3	55.2
2010	66.2	76.5	56.5
2011	66.1	75.6	57.0

*All statistics collated from Department of Statistics Singapore, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/index.html.



Notes

1. Dependency Ratio refers to the proportion of foreign workers (S Pass and Work Permit) out of a company's total workforce. The levy tiers are structured such that the higher a company's dependency on foreign workers, the higher the levy rate it will have to bear.
2. The levy rates for each tier are indicated in the chart.
3. The levy rates for unskilled workers is denoted by an asterisk.

* Source: http://population.sg/resources/work-pass-framework/#.ULXIfOQqalI.

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"To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships."

— W.E.B. Dubois

An American sociologist and civil rights activist

(1868–1963)

Chapter 4

Singapore's 'New Normal' Socio-Economic Paradigm: Navigating Needs, Expectations and Aspirations

Muhammad Nadim Adam

> *"Growth is slowing and inflation remains persistently high.. Singapore will be home to the weakest growth and one of the highest inflation rates in Southeast Asia."*
> *—Irvin Seah, DBS Group Research, 1 August 2012*

The 'new normal' in Singapore is the result of profound economic and demographic changes that have occurred both in absolute numbers and in attitudes of Singaporeans at large of late. Moving away from the romantic idea of a young nation in post-independence Singapore which was struggling for survival, Singapore today witnesses apparently increased sentiments of entitlement and individual consumerism amongst its citizens as well[1].

This essay argues that the "new normal" in Singapore is characterized by the following factors:

1 This claim was suggested by Lim, Jeremy and Lee, Daniel. Re-Making Singapore Healthcare. In Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). *Singapore Perspectives 2012.* (Singapore: World Scientific Co. Pte. Ltd, 2012). p.63.

1) Changing demographic patterns which see
   - declining birth rates that are even below replacement rates[2],
   - (resulting in) generally smaller families that may be expected to finance mutigenerational dependants (the sandwiched generation), and
   - a rapidly ageing society.

2) Economic trends outlook which sees
   - an increasingly volatile global economic prospects as well as a
   - sustained inflation existing in parallel with relatively stagnant wages (stagflation)[3].

The first part of this essay shall focus as to why Singapore is facing a decreasing trend in terms of birth rate, and fail to keep up with the universal replacement rate. In examining this phenomenon, the essay shall explore the general socio-economic landscape both in the local and global contexts, putting to test as to keep the practical reasons as to why Singaporeans largely try to keep their families small and compact.

Subsequently, common ideas on progress and development are critically questioned, examining why socio-political policies in Singapore, despite its promise of being inclusive[4], may not necessarily be addressing the actual needs and aspirations of all its citizens, thus, bringing about the sentiments of social exclusion among pockets of the society.

This essay shall then highlight the various social security (social safety net) initiatives, linked to family needs like: housing, caring for the elderly and healthcare—acknowledging the benefits from these policies—and at the same time, highlighting too, the unprecedented gaps that are inherent within these

2 Replacement level fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. In developed countries like Singapore, replacement level fertility can be taken as requiring an average of 2.1 children per woman. In countries with high infant and child mortality rates, however, the average number of births may need to be much higher. See http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7834459. (Accessed 24 November 2012)

3 The inflation rate in Singapore was recorded at 4.7% in September 2012. The present inflation is about three times higher than the 30-year average of 1.8%. See http://www.tradingeconomics.com/singapore/inflation-cpi. 24 November 2012

4 As narrated and highlighted in Singapore Budget 2012 and the idea of "Singaporean First", with the continued hope of seeing a more inclusive general policies for all. Refer to the official speech by Madam Halimah Yaacob, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, on 26 August 2012, at the University Cultural Centre at NUS, as part of the 2012 National Day Rally speech. See also http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/budget_in_brief.html. (Accessed on 25 November 2012).

policy initiatives that need to be addressed.

All in all, this essay wishes to express that those who fail to cope within Singapore's socio-economic system, especially amongst the Malay/Muslim community, may not necessarily be of their own choice, nor is it a matter of mindset problems—but may be linked to structural challenges faced due to unforeseen shortcomings of policies, historical impediments that are left unchecked and victims of present social stereotypes that create negative labelling towards a particular group or community. This is especially so for the bottom rung of the socio-economic strata, whose voices, somehow, as observed by the writer, tend to be 'silenced' and under-represented in the bigger framework of many discussions.

A DIMINISHING SINGAPORE POPULACE: IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

According to a public address by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, Singapore's fertility rate has been falling steadily over the years and was only 1.2 in 2011, almost 1 percent below the ideal replacement rate of 2.1[5]. Based on a local report, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of Singapore from 2008–2010 are as follows[6]:

SINGAPORE	2008	2009	2010
TFR	1.28	1.22	1.16

In terms of individual racial composition, the decline in TFR includes all races, including the Singapore Malays, and the figures are as follows[7]:

5 Since replacement cannot occur if a child does not grow to maturity and have their own offspring, the need for the extra .1 child (a 5 percent buffer) per woman is due to the potential for death and those who choose or are unable to have children. See http://geography.about.com/od/populationgeography/a/fertilityrate.htm (Accessed on 25 November 2012]). See also the article entitled "A Population to Sustain a Home and Global City". *The Straits Times.* 12 October 2012.

6 S. Ramesh, "MM Lee weighs in on Singapore's Record-Low Fertility Rate" Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1105496/1/.html (25 November 2012).

7 S. Ramesh, Op.cit. See also Jeanette Tan, "Why Are Malays Having More Babies?" (16 August 2012) in http://sg.news.yahoo.com/why-are-malays-having-more-babies-.html (Accessed 25 November 2012).

RACE	2008	2010	2012
Malay	1.91	1.65	1.64
Chinese	1.14	1.02	1.08
Indian	1.19	1.13	1.09

Demographic experts believe that Singapore must increase its TFR between now and 2015, or the country's labour force will shrink to the point that it becomes very difficult to support the growing ageing population[8]. In other words, a diminishing populace will bring about an increasing burden on the young as the country's total population size declines. This is because they would have to fork out more taxes to support the elderly. And the expected increase in terms of median age among Singaporeans does not help to ease the concern of a "greying population"[9].

As a matter of fact, it is believed that if Singapore's birth rate remains at the present level and even to the extreme that if the republic does not have immigrants at all, the population of Singapore citizen will still start to decline from 2025, while the workforce of Singapore citizens will start to decline even earlier, that is, from 2020[10]. A shrinking workforce in turn may impede the growth of a nation's workforce, and create a potential of reducing productivity and the nation's total output. In an output-driven economy like Singapore, the implications of a low and declining TFR are definitely worrying.

Thus, it came with little surprise that the recent National Day Rally 2012 speech addressed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, raised several key propositions that are hoped to entice more Singaporeans to marry and have children[11]. Amongst

8 Wong, Reico. "Singapore Must Up Fertility Rate Now, Or Else". *My Paper.* 4 May 2012.

9 Singapore's demographic academician, Dr. Yap Mui Teng indicated that the median age of the (Singapore resident) population will rise from 39 in 2010, to 49 in 2030, and 55 in 2050. Cited from article "IPS Study: Singapore Could Be Extremely Aged by 2050". *Yahoo Newsroom*, 3 May 2012. Available at http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/docs/media/yr2012/RT_population_030512/Yahoo_IPS%20Study%20Singapore%20could%20be%20extremely%20aged%20by%202050_030512.pdf (Accessed 25 November 2012).

10 An excerpt of DPM Teo's speech, "A Population to Sustain a Home and Global City". *The Straits Times,* 12 October 2012.

11 In 2009, Singaporeans got married at a median age of 27.4 years old, up from 25.9 years old in 1999. They had their first child at 29.6 years old, compared with 28.6 years old in 1999. Over the same period, the family size shrank. The average number of children born to women between 30 and 39 fell from 1.78 in 1999 to 1.57 in 2009. See Chang, Rachel. "Build Ahead of Demand to Raise Birth Rate". The *Straits Times.* 13 September 2012.

the key initiatives promised by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in the attempt to promote more Singaporeans to start their own families are as follows:

◊ Housing
  - Couples who have children may get priority when applying for HDB flat

◊ Child Birth
  - Looking at paid paternity leave
  - Looking at a Medisave account for children at birth

◊ Pre-school
  - Government to play a more active role and bigger investments in pre-schools
  - A new statutory board to oversee pre-school education

However, increasing Singapore's TFR may be more challenging than a matter of calibrating public policies through the provision of generous perks from the State. As a matter of fact, as highlighted by local sociologist, Dr. Mathew Mathews from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), even with the introduction of the Baby Bonus scheme and enhanced maternity packages, schemes which cost billions of dollars, policymakers are still waiting for the storks to arrive[12].

The Baby Bonus Scheme

The Baby Bonus Scheme supports parents' decision to have more children by helping to lighten the financial costs of raising children. It was introduced on 1 April 2001 and enhanced on 1 August 2004 and 17 August 2008. The latest enhancements include the expansion of the categories of Approved Institutions (AIs) with effect from 1 July 2012 and the extension of the Child Development Account (CDA) until 31 December in the year the child turns 12, with effect from 1 January 2013.

*Source: https://www.babybonus.gov.sg/bbss/html/index.html (26 November 2012).

Dr. Gavin Jones, a demographer based in Singapore, opined that Singapore's study and work culture are built on the foundations of:

12 Mathews, Mathew. "Economic Growth Versus Higher Fertility". *The Straits Times.* 19 June 2012.

1) Long hours of work[13]
2) Involvement of women in the workforce on much the same terms as men[14]
3) Strong pressure on children to perform outstandingly in school, and the extra tuition plus coaching that are considered as indispensible for reaching the goal of excellence[15]

These above factors, according to Dr. Gavin Jones, contain the seeds of an inability of the Singapore population to replace itself[16]. The rest of this essay sheds light on why more Singaporeans decide to delay marriage and/or parenthood, or decide to have smaller families—a manifestation of their logical attempt to cope with the day-to-day challenges of the high cost of living in Singapore[17], within an increasingly economically volatile world—bearing in mind that in the last 15 years there have been five economic down-cycles—the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, September 11, SARS in 2003, the Lehman crisis in 2007–2008 and now the euro zone crisis[18].

WHAT IS IT ABOUT DEVELOPMENT?

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has become virtually every society's default measure of progress. In terms of GDP, Singapore topped the global charts for highest

13 Based on a 2010 report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), Singapore occupied the top of 13 economies in the group's Global Wages Report for 2008–2009, for clocking the longest man-hours at the work place, surpassing even the notoriously hardworking Japanese and Taiwanese. See Li, Dickson. "Longest Working Hours". *The Straits Times.* 11 January 2010.

14 Besides the entitlement for maternity leave, women in Singapore's local workforce, by and large, are expected to cover similar duties as their male counterparts.

15 Despite the various educational reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE), the major examinations that most Singaporean children have to go through such as PSLE, GCE O-Level and GCE A-Level, are still very much considered as examination-oriented.

16 Mathews, Mathew. Op.cit.

17 In 2012, Singapore is listed as the world's 9th most expensive city. Singapore was listed as the 6th most expensive in 2011, but remarkably was ranked 97th in 2001. See Chow, Jason and Mahtani, Shibani. "Singapore Amongst Most Expensive Cities".14 February 2012. Available athttp://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2012/02/14/singapore-among-worlds-most-expensive-cities/ (Accessed on 26 November 2012).

18 The year 2012 has seen Europe, namely in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy in recession, while recovery in the US had been sluggish. China's growth meanwhile, at best, is considered as sub-par. See full report by Seah, Irvin. "Singapore: Stagflation" by DBS Group Research. 1 August 2012.

GDP per capita[19] in 2010 at close to SG$70,000.[20] In the *Wealth Report 2012* published by Knight Frank and Citi Private Bank, Singapore is expected to continue to be the global leader up till 2050.[21]

With regards to a more critical view in assessing the GDP as the primary indicator of progress, as far back as more than forty years ago, in 1968, the famous American politician, Robert Kennedy, delivered a (now famous) speech on the limitations of measuring economic growth:

> "It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."[22]

Perhaps it has been long ignored that GDP not only excludes factors such as the costs of health problems, accidents, family breakdown, crime and pollution, but also excludes unpaid activities like child-rearing, running a household, helping friends and neighbours, volunteering and local political participation.

Despite the above-mentioned concerns, what tends to be overtly highlighted in contributing to Singapore's performance are tangible factors like having a skilled and educated labour force, openness to trade, capital mobility and foreign direct investment. And from the geo-strategic and economics point of view, the eastward shift in the world's economic activity, namely in East Asian countries like China, Japan and South Korea, including the economies of South Asia, namely India—Singapore is therefore geographically perfectly positioned to take advantage of "Rising Asia".[23]

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19 "GDP per capita" refers to the total output of a country divided by the population.

20 Choo, Deborah. "Singapore is Now the Richest in the World". 14 August 2012. Available at http://sg.news.yahoo.com/s%E2%80%99pore-is-now-richest-in-the-world.html (Accessed on 26 November 2012).

21 Choo, Deborah. Op.cit.

22 Marks, Nic. "GDP Growth is No Measure of Societal Progress". 27 May 2011. Available at http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/2011526135338692723.html.

23 Loc.cit.

No doubt that the list of tangible factors mentioned above were crucial contributions of Singapore's present global economic standing. But Singapore's economy is expected to navigate itself in a more volatile circumstance, whereby the local economy had been projected to grow merely between 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent in 2012.[24] In fact, by the third quarter of 2012, Singapore claimed to have barely avoided technical recession[25].

Upon the time of writing, Singapore's economy shrunk by 1.5 percent in the third quarter of 2012, and appears to be slowing down.[26] In fact, Singapore's consumer price index (CPI)[27] rose by 5.1 percent in the first half of 2012[28]. Therefore the lethal combination of almost stagnant wages[29], slow domestic economic growth and the ever lurking potentiality of moderately high inflation, prompted a local economist, Irvin Seah, to describe the situation as one of "stagflation".[30]

Therefore, how can Singapore possibly strategize to continue with a continued sustainable growth? The idea of growth and progress here do not necessarily need to be in its tangible terms, but encapsulates more holistic human factors that would fulfil both the basic material needs of its citizens and also the less tangible aspects of life such as one's well-being, a more forthcoming worldview towards family life (that includes the number of children a couple plans to have based on presenting circumstances) or quality of life in general. In simpler terms, the idea of quality life needs to cover life's most basic needs, as what is quoted below,

"Development is about transforming societies, improving the lives

24 Teo Xuanwei. "MAS Forecasts Another Year of Subdued Growth". *TODAY*. 31 October 2012. p.1.

25 Two consecutive quarters of economic contraction is termed as "technical recession".

26 Chan, Robin. "Managing a More Volatile Economy". *The Straits Times*. 16 October 2012.

27 The CPI measures price changes in a fixed basket of consumption goods and services commonly purchased by the households over time. Available at http://www.singstat.gov.sg/educorner/cpi.html.

28 Chan, Robin. op.cit.

29 A flood of cheap immigrant labour and stiff competition for manufacturing jobs from Asian neighbours like China and Vietnam has kept wages, especially among the low-income earners stagnant for many and widened the gulf between a very wealthy minority. As reported by Kennedy, Alex. "Stagnant Wages, Immigration Fuel Singapore Squeeze". *Associated Press.* 17 February 2011. Available at http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9LEGSSG0.htm. (Accessed 27 November 2012). As a matter of fact, Singapore's overall real wage growth for 2011 was just 0.9%, as high inflation eroded most of the pay increase.

30 Low, Aaron. "Boosting Growth Momentum a Priority". *The Straits Times.* 14 August 2012. p.22.

> of the poor, enabling everyone to have a chance at success and access to health care and education." (Joseph E. Stiglitz, 2002)[31]

The rest of this essay shall cover the selected fundamental need and aspiration of Singaporeans, especially of those who are somewhat unable to cope with:

1) Income Disparity
2) Housing Issues
3) Social Security (Safety Net) System

LEVEL OF INCOME—SINGAPORE'S WORKING POOR LIVING IN THE WORLD'S RICHEST COUNTRY (GDP PER CAPITA)

In a report released by Knight Frank and Citi Private Wealth, it estimates that Singapore's GDP per capita, at US$56,532 in 2010, measured by purchasing power parity—is the highest in the world, topping Norway (US$51,226), the US (US$45,511) and Hong Kong (US$45,301). The report also predicts that Singapore will hold its place as the world's most affluent country in 2050 (by GDP per capita), followed closely by Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea who will displace Norway and Switzerland as the world's richest places[32].

Meanwhile, in the background paper of the *Singapore Perspectives 2012*, its authors indicated that income inequality in Singapore has risen significantly in the last decade[33]. To make matters worse, the increase in income inequality has been accompanied by wage stagnation. Data obtained from the Economics Society of Singapore in 2009 showcased that between 2001 and 2008, the bottom three deciles

31 Joseph E. Stiglitz was Chief Economist at the World Bank until January 2000. He is currently a University Professor of the Columbia Business School and Chair of the Management Board and Director of Graduate Summer Programs, Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester. He won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2011. For the quotation, please refer to Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and Its Discontents.* (New York: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002). p.252.

32 Mahtani, Shibani. "The World's Richest Country". *The Wall Street Journal.* 15 August 2012. Available at http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2012/08/15/singapore-home-to-the-worlds-richest-people/ (Accessed 26 November 2012).

33 Bhaskaran, Manu, Ho Seng Chee, Low, Donald, Tan Kim Song, Vadaketh, Sudhir and Yeoh Lam Keong. "Inequality and the Need for a New Social Compact". Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). Ibid. p.125.

of resident working persons experienced real income declines, while next two deciles experienced hardly any growth at all[34]. In addition, statistics from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) indicated that among citizens in full-time employment, the median monthly income from work increased by 11% or 1.2% per annum in real terms, between 2001 and 2010, workers in the 20th percentile experienced no increase in real incomes over the same period[35].

Wage stagnation for the bulk of Singapore's workforce has been accompanied by the rise of the super-rich, with the incomes of the top 1–2% especially rising very sharply[36]. The table below captures the average monthly income of households in Singapore during the years of 2010–2011.

INCOME GROUP	2010 ($)	2011 ($)	REAL INCOME GROWTH
Bottom 10%	1,497	1,581	0.9
11th–20th	2,940	3,135	1.9
21st–30th	4,158	4,421	1.2
31st–40th	5,418	5,794	1.8
41st–50th	6,603	7,032	1.4
51st–60th	7,840	8,436	2.4
61st–70th	9,310	10,101	3.3
71st–80th	11,105	12.306	5.5
81st–90th	13,943	15,509	5.3
Top 100%	24,442	27.867	7.9
Total Average	8,726	9,618	4.7

*Source: Department of Statistics (Singapore), as cited in *The Straits Times*, 15 February 2012.

In terms of percentage, the Director of United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD),

34 Ibid. p.126.

35 Bhaksaran, Manu et.al, Op.cit.

36 A report by Bloomberg addressed that for every 100 households in Singapore, there are 17 millionaires. Available at http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2012/08/15/singapore-home-to-the-worlds-richest-people/ (Accessed 26 November 2012).

Dr. Paul Cheung, highlighted that in 2000, Singapore's households in the tenth (top) decile had a disproportionate share of total household income at 27.4 percent. Their share increased further to almost 30% in 2010. However, except for the 9th and 10th deciles, all other groups had experienced a decline in income share. And over this period, the upper income groups had increased their claim on the total income[37]. As a result of the disproportionate changes in the income shares by deciles, the ratio of the total income of the top decile to that of the bottom decile had increased from 12 times to 17 times, as of 2010[38].

In a study conducted by Dr. Paul Cheung[39], he analysed the extent of upward mobility of residents (Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents [PRs]) in the 30–39 years age group, and the extent of upward mobility was assessed by means of their educational attainment. For Dr. Paul Cheung, this age group is critical as they are the ones who are trying to establish their career and move ahead. In general, the proportion of resident population in the 30–39 years age group who are tertiary-educated rose significantly from 19 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2010[40].

But what is most disturbing of Dr. Paul Cheung's study was the glaring figure of Malays who had the least tertiary-educated adults, and only registered 11 percent with tertiary education in the above-mentioned age group for the year 2010[41]. And despite being at the bottom, the figure was actually an improvement compared to the statistics in 2000, where the similar age group only had a mere 3% with tertiary education then[42].

Perhaps one could argue that unlike the Chinese and the Indians, the Malays have never seen the situation of an influx of the Malay community from around the region migrating to Singapore in the republic's post-independent era, all the more

37 Cheung, Paul. "Income Growth and Redistribution in Singapore: Issues and Challenges". Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). Ibid. p.13.

38 Ibid. p.15.

39 The study was comprehensively discussed by Paul Cheong. Ibid., pp.17–21.

40 The dramatic inter-cohort increase is a result of rising educational attainment among the local population because of the educational policy as well as the influx of higher educated PRs. See ibid. p.18.

41 Cheung, Paul, Op.cit

42 Loc.cit

Proportion of Resident Population with Tertiary Education (aged 30–39 years old in 2010)

YEAR	2000	2010
Malay	3%	11%
Chinese	20%	43%
Indian	26%	56%

*Source: Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS), *Census of Population 2000, Statistical Release 2: Education, Language and Religion.*

so of having foreign Malay professionals into the workforce. But that does not hide the fact that without university education, local Malays of this category, may face a much uphill task in their attempt to rise up the economic mobility ladder, and the illustration of an earlier trend pattern shows that the income growth has slackened off for the lower income deciles[43].

In fact, Malays with secondary or education below for the age group 30–39 years old in 2010, formed the overwhelming majority of 47 percent, compared to the Chinese at 24 percent , Indians at 18 percent, and Others at 12 percent[44]. See table below.

Proportion of Resident Population with Secondary or Below Education (Age Group 30–39 in 2010)

RACE	SECONDARY OR BELOW EDUCATION ATTAINMENT
Malays	47%
Chinese	24%
Indian	18%
Others	12%

*Source: DOS, *Census of Population 2010, Statistical Release 1, Demographic Characteristics, Education, language and Religion.*

43 Ibid. p.19.

44 Ibid. p.19.

Overall, in the field of employment, Singapore's resident population that constitute managers and professionals in 2010 had jumped from 30 percent to 37 percent[45]. But once again, the Malays formed the smallest minority in terms of having managers and professionals within the age range of 30–39 years old. See table below.

Proportion of Resident Working Population Who are Professionals and Managers (Age Group 30–39 in 2010)

YEAR	2000	2010
Malay	8%	15%
Chinese	33%	38%
Indian	33%	46%
Others	47%	48%

*Source: DOS, *Census of Population 2000* and unpublished 2010 data from DOS (as cited from *Singapore Perspectives 2012*, p.20).

This situation of low presentation of Malay/Muslims in Singapore occupying the higher occupational profile jobs is worrying because a research conducted by an American academician, Professor Donald J. Trieman, and his Dutch colleague, Professor Harry B.G. Ganzeboom, from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), strongly indicated a correlation between a father's occupational status (indicating high income professions) with a child's academic attainment[46].

Meaning to indicate that children with more educated parents whom are high-earners tend to do better and go further in education as a result of better exposure and attainment of school-relevant skills, other necessary study aid materials such as books, as well as and entry into academically high-performing schools that are better equipped to provide its students with a more wholesome education[47].

45 Ibid. pp.19–20.

46 Findings of the research was shared in Singapore by Professor Donald J. Trieman in a public seminar at the National Library (Bugis), on 5 December 2012, organized by the Asia Research Institute (ARI) of the national University of Singapore (NUS).

47 The idea of more affluent students benefiting from the general education system was strongly advocated by Professor Donald J. Trieman in the public lecture that he presented in Singapore (National Library, Bugis on 5 December 2012). In fact, his discussant during that session, Dr. Irene Ng, from the Social Work Department, of the National University of Singapore (NUS), also highlighted her observation that the ability towards accumulation of capital resources enable more well-to-do parents to purchase more resources to invest in their children's education. Thus, indicating how class differences may actually impact educational outcome of students in general.

However, in the attempt of highlighting Malays underperforming in the fields of education and white-collared or professional occupational profile, there needs to be a consciousness that an over-emphasis on racial representation in statistical data, through the "C-M-I-O" (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others) approach may just perpetuate racial boundaries in Singapore even more[48], to the extent that social issues that are specifically class-related, can be conveniently miscued as racial deficiency of a particular ethnic community, and hence perpetuating the idea of "blaming the victim"[49], or sarcastically termed as the community's pitfall into the "mindset problem". Nonetheless, for the Deputy Editor for *The Straits Times* (Singapore), Zuraidah Ibrahim, she aptly pointed out that,

> "Race-blind statistics may be welcomed by some who have already arrived, and members of the majority who prefer to pretend that our country has achieved racial equality. But they do not help those most urgently need help, most of whom do not have the opportunity to make their voices heard in public debate and need data to speak for them. Information is power, and making relevant information public allows us to discuss it and act on it. We should be asking for more information, not less."[50]

In explaining the Malays underperforming malaise such as in the areas of education and other socio-economic attainment, perhaps it has become too convenient in promoting the cultural deficit thesis[51], and to a lesser extent, the biological

48 Norman Vasu. "Governance Through Difference in Singapore: Corporatism's Composition, Characteristics, and Complications". *Asian Journey*. Vol.52. No.4. pp.738-739.

49 The idea of "blaming the victim" is a classic term in the field of "Black Studies", which involves social myths that relates race to the tendency towards poverty, under-attainment in work and education, and poor attitude towards health. See Ryan, William. *Blaming the Victim*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

50 Ibrahim, Zuraidah. "Hiding Ethnic Data Won't Solve Problems". *The Sunday Times*. 25 November 2012.

51 The "cultural deficit thesis" essentially posits that socially disadvantaged ethnic communities have remained economically and educationally marginalised primarily because of their negative values and generally moribund attitudes. See Akmar, Shamsul. "A Question of Loyalty: The Malays in Singapore". New Straits Times. 19 December 2000. And in the context of the Singapore Malay/Muslim community, amongst the "cultural deficit" factors commonly reported in the mass media, which tend to be proclaimed by local politicians and community leaders are as follows: poor parental supervision, lack of family planning leading to children not receiving the appropriate attention, poor attitude towards education and so on. See Rahim, Lily Zubaidah. *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). especially on Chapter 9, "Understanding the Malay Educational Marginality", whereby, Lily Zubaidah critically explored the historical roots to the Malays' underperformance in the educational realm.

determinist thesis[52]. Thus, less surfaced factors like the deficiencies of colonial educational policies and the socio-economic standing of the Malay community during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period, seem to be overtly underrated, as compared to the more publicized and sensationalized theories on cultural and biological deficits.

Ultimately, in the general sense, Dr. Paul Cheung[53], believes that the tertiary educated will probably continue to enjoy a reasonable level of affluence, as income growth for occupations requiring higher education has been positive over the years[54]. But for those educated at the secondary level and below, like many of the Singapore Malays, as reflected earlier, what then would be their market worthiness if they actually have specific areas of expertise? Or would this group fit into what the former chief economist at the Government of Investment Corporation (GIC), Yeoh Lam Keong, deemed as the "working poor"?[55] Yeoh Lam Keong uses the term "working poor" to refer to the bottom 10% of working household breadwinners, who hold full time jobs, but yet find themselves entrenched in the poverty cycle. It refers to poverty in work, as opposed to poverty due to unemployment[56].

According to an American correspondent writer, David K. Shipler, the working poor are caught in an exhaustive struggle. Their wages do not lift them far enough from poverty, and their lives in turn hold them back. Thus, the working poor are continuously attempting to climb out of poverty, or for some, desperately steering away from the possibility of homelessness, or in fact, are already homeless. Some succumb to substance abuse, others fall deep into depression and frequently struck by bouts of anxiety, some of their children to a certain extent are malnourished

52 According to Lily Zubaidah Rahim, biological determinist explanation have long been utilized by eugenicists to explain educational marginality of ethnic minority communities, postulating that the innate intellectual deficiencies of certain classes, ethnic communities, and individuals are major factors which contribute to their socio-economic and educational malaise. These eugenicists were concerned with different birth rates of the races and the threat of generic pollution. See Lily Zubaidah Rahim, ibid, p.184 and p.208.

53 Dr. Paul Cheung is the Director for the United Nations (UN) Statistics Division.

54 Ibid, p.19

55 The situation of the "working poor" in Singapore was described in great details by Yeoh Lam Keong in the article by Tan, Jeanette. "Behind Singapore Inc. (Part 1): The Growing Class of Working Poor". Yahoo News. 22 August 2012. Available at http://sg.news.yahoo.com/behind-singapore-inc---part-i---the-growing-class-of--working-poor-.html (Accessed 28 November 2012)

56 http://sg.news.yahoo.com/behind-singapore-inc---part-i---the-growing-class-of--working-poor-.html (Accessed on 28 November 2012)

or even sexually abused, and some live in such poor living conditions that their children's studies are affected[57].

But then again, this essay does not talk about the working poor in the American slums, or the ghettos in Western Europe, or the "Ant Tribe" in China who are made up of groups of low-income college graduates who settle for poverty level of existence in the cities due to the cities' high costs of living. The working poor that Yeoh Lam Keong spoke of, and the lifestyle that David K. Shipler highlighted, are also similar lived experiences of the working poor in Singapore—living in the shadow of prosperity of cosmopolitan Singapore—the working poor in Singapore are in fact, walking amongst us and if work security and affluence are dependent on academic qualifications, then one can expect many working poor amongst the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore.

HOUSING MATTERS—MATTERS OF THE HEART: HOUSING FOR THE LOWER-INCOME AND THE HOMELESS

A popular local online blog claimed that the prices of Housing Development Board (HDB) flats have nearly doubled in the last five years while the wages of Singaporeans have remained more or less stagnant during the same period of time after factoring in inflation[58]. A recent official report from the national media also indicated that prices of resale HDB flats are estimated to have risen 2% in the third quarter of 2012, even as the government ramped up the supply of new units to rein in prices[59].

However, Minister for National Development (MND), Mr. Khaw Boon Wan, assured that HDB's "Built-To-Order" (BTO) flats are meant to be affordable, well within one's working lifetime. Therefore, there is no need for working couples to

57 An illustrative narrative on the sub-culture of the working poor can be assessed through the writing of Shipler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

58 ("Khaw Boon Wan: We Priced BTO Flats To Be Affordable to All Singaporeans"). Available at http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/08/14/khaw-boon-wan-we-priced-bto-flats-to-be-affordable-to-all-singaporeans/ (Accessed 28 November 2012). The article was posted online on 14 August 2012.

59 Chin, Daryl. "HDB Resale Prices Up 2% to New Record". *The Straits Times.* 2 October 2012.

take 50-year mortgages to buy HDB flats[60]. This statement was somewhat a prelude of the Government's move to curb on long mortgages to prevent buyers from overextending. As of October 2012, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) will restrict all home loans (including public housing by HDB) to a maximum of 35 years[61].

Based on the Malay/Muslim community's educational and occupation profile, as depicted earlier in this essay, it is a fact that a significant percentage of Malay/Muslim families in Singapore would be very much affected by the public housing policies for the lower income group. Permanent housing for the lower income, according to HDB may not be easy, but it is possible[62].

Below are some already implemented initiatives by HDB to address housing for the lower income groups:

1) Home Protection Scheme (HPS)

In 1981, the HPS, administered by the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board, was implemented to ensure that dependants of HDB flat owners would not lose their homes because of a default in loan repayments, in the event of death or permanent incapacity of the sole breadwinner.

2) Additional CPF Housing Grant (AHG)

The AHG was first introduced in 2006, and increased in 2007 and 2009, to help flat buyers with lower incomes to own their first homes. As its name suggests, the AHG comes in addition to the existing market subsidy for new flats and CPF Housing Grant for resale flats. HDB also builds more affordable two-room and three-room flats for lower income families[63].

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60 As spoken during the Singapore Parliamentary session on 13 August 2012.

61 The rationale of the 35-year housing loan limit was based on long tenure loans, said MAS, that causes buyers to overestimate their financial wherewithal or financial means. While rising property market, as of present times, also gives buyers and lenders the "false confidence" that the property can always be sold off for a profit if the loan becomes difficult to service. See Chang, Rachel. "35-Year Limit Set On Home Loans". *The Straits Times*. 6 October 2012.

62 *Reflections on Housing a Nation: A Collection of Commentaries by Mah Bow Tan*, (a book penned by the former Minister for National Development in conjunction with HDB's 50th anniversary in 2010), p.63. The commentaries were first published in the *TODAY* from September to December 2010.

63 *Reflections on Housing a Nation: A Collection of Commentaries by Mah Bow Tan* , Op.cit.

3) Special CPF Housing Grant (SHG)

The SHG, which is given over and above the regular housing subsidy and the AHG, was introduced in March 2011 to help low-income families purchase their first flat. Families earning between SG$1,501 and SG$2,250 can qualify for a SHG of up to SG$15,000 if they buy a 2-room or 3-room standard flat in the non-mature estates from HDB. Those earning SG$1,500 or less can qualify for a SHG of SG$20,000 if they buy a 2-room standard flat in the non-mature estates from HDB[64].

4) Offer 2-/3-Room Flats under the BTO System

HDB resumed building 3-room flats and offered for sale such flats under the BTO system in 2004. There was strong demand for 3-room flats due to changing demographics, as families preferred to buy or downgrade to smaller flats. HDB also launched the first batch of new 2-room flats for sale under BTO system at Fernvale Vista in Sengkang in 2006[65].

5) Subletting of Flat Policy

HDB has been gradually relaxing its policy on the subletting of whole flats since 2003. The policy was revised in March 2005 when the Minimum Occupation Period (MOP) for the subletting of flats was reduced to 10 years for owners with an outstanding HDB loan, and five years for all other owners. In March 2007, the policy was further revised to allow owners of subsidised and non-subsidised flats to sublet their flat after occupying it for five and three years respectively. This was to help flat owners who needed to earn supplementary income, to be able to do so from subletting. Currently, owners who purchased their flat before 30 August 2010 from the open market without any housing grants are allowed to sublet their flat after occupying it for three years. All other flat owners are allowed to do so after occupying their flat for five years[66].

6) Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS)

64 The Special Housing Grant is now being expanded to include families buying 3-room flats. HDB had decided to relax the criteria because it recognized that some low-income households may prefer a larger space for their children. Therefore the agency said the change would "fulfil their desire to provide a better living environment for their families, so long as it is within their means." See Chin,Daryl. "Low-Income Families Can Go for Bigger Flats". The Straits Time.s 1 August 2012.

65 It's the official HDB website Available at http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10320p.nsf/w/AboutUsPublicHousing#ownership. (Accessed 28 November 2012).

66 http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10320p.nsf/w/AboutUsPublicHousing#ownership (Accessed on 28 November 2012).

HDB introduced the Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) in 2009 to make it easier for eligible lower-income elderly households in smaller flats to unlock their housing equity to meet their retirement needs. The Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) is an additional monetisation to help low-income elderly households in 3-room and smaller flats to unlock part of their housing equity while continue living in their homes, and receive a lifelong income stream to supplement their retirement income. Low-income elderly households who need financial assistance are unlikely to be able to take advantage of schemes to monetise their HDB flats, such as: buy a smaller flat, buy a studio apartment, or sublet a room[67]

At the more extreme end, there are cases where Singaporean families and individuals cannot afford public housing in Singapore. Based on the figures by the former Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), the number of homeless families assisted by the former ministry had nearly doubled in the last three years. See table below.

YEAR	2009	2010	2011
No. of Homeless Cases Reported to MCYS	72 cases	128 cases	141 cases

*Source: Neo Chai Chin. "Without Home to Live In, More Families Getting Help: Number of Homeless Families Assisted by MCYS Nearly Doubles in Last Three Years". *TODAY*, 23 August 2012.

There are currently three transitional shelters in Singapore:

1) New Hope Community Services shelter
2) Lakeside FiT shelter
3) Wahah shelter

For needy families who are in need of temporary shelter, the MND had introduced the Interim Rental Housing (IRH) scheme in 2009 as a pilot, to provide temporary shelter for families in financial hardship and awaiting for more permanent housing. These families could be waiting for rental flats or downgrading to a smaller flat still under construction[68].

67 Based on the announced Enhanced Lease Buyback Scheme in Singapore Budget 2012, HDB is currently reviewing the scheme, and details would be announced in due time.

68 Lim, Desmond. "Not Easy When Families Share Flats". *The Sunday Times.* 29 July 2012. See also http://mndsingapore.wordpress.com/2011/12/30/getting-irh-to-work-better/ (Accessed 28 November 2012]).

In terms of rental flats, as part of HDB's continued efforts to assist the low income families in Singapore, HDB has planned to expand its rental flats units to 57,000 by 2015[69]. By late 2011, there were 45,000 families living in HDB rental flats, with 1,500 of these families living under IRH scheme[70].

Interim Rental Housing (IRH)[71]

- About 3,000 families have lived in interim rental housing since the scheme started in 2009.
- As of December 2012, 1,500 families were under the scheme, where usually two families share a flat (3-room flats), where the rent is subsidized and each family pays about SG$300 a month, while utility bills are split between families.
- The scheme is run by private operators, and not HDB, and to cover costs, the operators are allowed to lease out a portion of the flats at each IRH site at market rental rates to other Singaporeans and foreigners working and studying in Singapore.
- However, HDB will exercise greater oversight of the IRH scheme, to ensure that the private operators managing the scheme serve needy Singaporeans first.
- IRH rental flats are available at HDB neighbourhoods like: Havelock Road, Yung Kuang Road (Taman Jurong), Toa Payoh, Bedok, Woodlands and Dover Road.

In late 2011, HDB announced that it would take a more active role of pairing families to minimize conflicts, and the tenancy extended from six months to a year, and is renewable for up to two years.

But then again, does it suffice only to provide the basic residential needs for the low-income residents of Singapore? A more critical view on the IRH scheme can be related to the feedback of residents benefiting from the IRH scheme itself. For instance, residents from the IRH scheme often complained of regular conflicts

69 See http://mndsingapore.wordpress.com/2011/12/30/getting-irh-to-work-better/ (Accessed 28 November 2012).

70 As an extension of the IRH scheme, HDB had identified the block of flats of the former Malaysian Railway (KTM) quarters located at Spooner Road (Tanjung Pagar), as new rental site for families who wish to seek temporary shelter. In an official statement, 110 units of the 3-room flats from Spooner Road shall be converted into IRH rental units, while another 208 units of the 2 and 3-room flats shall be rented under the Public Rental Scheme (PRS). See article by Jangarodin, Shamsul. "Bekas Kuarters KTMB Dijadikan Flat Sewa". *Berita Harian.* 8 October 2012.

71 Jangarodin , Shamsul. op.cit.

between families living in the same flat unit. Arguments arose, and tempers flared over issues that tend to be taken for granted as petty like: arguments over cooking, in the things kept in the refrigerator, whether the place is kept clean or dirty, and even how family members dress indoors[72]. In fact, the most common disputes involve splitting utility bills, and sharing household chores and common spaces like kitchen and toilets.

As a matter of fact, in a media interview, a former resident of the IRH scheme, whom wished to be identified as Madam Yati, shared her feelings while living in the rental flat under the IRH scheme in Bedok South by reiterating that,

> "It is frustrating living in a rented premise that is termed by its dwellers as "the Communist block" (blok komunis) due to the different arrays of problems created by the flat dwellers themselves. Some residents even threw television sets out from their high-rise apartments as a result of their domestic squabbles. Everyday residents there by and large, long for a move to a more permanent home arrangement. This is because many among these residents could not actually bear to live under the given living arrangements anymore. But then again, as there are no other choices, patience is the only option."[73]

Of late, HDB is in the midst of reviewing the ethnic quotas for public rental flats in its attempt to meet up with the demand from various ethnic groups. According to MND,

> "Currently, 60% of [HDB] rental blocks have reached the limit allowed for Malay residents, which is 25% per block."[74]

The latest figure shared by the Minister of National Development, Khaw Boon Wan, as indicated in in the above quote, has concretely indicated that a significant percentage of the Malay/Muslim families in Singapore have an issue of purchasing their own residence, resulting in them resorting to renting a home instead.

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72 Lim, Desmond. op.cit.

73 Cited and translated from Salleh, Saini. "Hidup Tidak Lagi Terumbang-Ambing". *Berita Harian*. 7 September 2012.

74 Chang, Rachel. "HDB Reviewing Ethnic Quotas for Rental Flats". *The Straits Times.*, 14 November 2012.

The concern here is especially towards Malay/Muslim families that are large in size, but unable to purchase their own homes. Admittedly, rented HDB units consist of smaller flats, comprising of 1 to 3-room flats. Thus, especially those living under the IRH scheme, where each household usually consist of two families at least, how then will children in these families be ensured of a conducive enough environment at home, especially after school hours, to have a proper space for their studies, leisurely activities and the overall process of healthy socialization? The question is, do rental public flats for the low-income in Singapore have sufficient amenities and a decent ecological environment to cater to the sociological needs of its residents? And if not, what are the long-term repercussions?

Studies from Cornell University in the US, uncovered that natural and built environments affect people's mental and physical well-being throughout their lives[75]. Academics involved in this particular study found that decisions about factors such as density of communities, presence and size of parks, landuse, height and size of residential structures, food store location, and how roads laid out affect people's physical health and psychological well-being. For example, studies show that noise from the road works affect reading skills in children, elevates blood pressure and increases stress hormones[76].

In a separate study, in a report prepared by Mona Marshy, she was quoted as follows:

> "Baum and Koman's study of the psychological effects of social and spatial density found that people living in high social density environments were more likely to become socially withdrawn, while responses to spatial density would include aggressive behaviour (Baum and Koman 1976). Other findings in the literature include the 'selective and modest' effects of overcrowding on human sexual behaviour (Edwards and Booth 1977)."[77]

75 In this study, academics from Cornell University, Dr. Nancy Wells, and her two other colleagues, Gary W. Evans and Yizhao Yang, undertook a comprehensive review of research on how planning decisions impact public life. See http://www.human.cornell.edu/outreach/upload/CHE_DEA_NaturalEnvironments.pdf. (Accessed 28 November 2012)

76 http://www.human.cornell.edu/outreach/upload/CHE_DEA_NaturalEnvironments.pdf (Assessed on 28 November 2012)

77 Based on a report by Marshy, Mona. *Social and Psychological Effects of Overcrowding in Palestinian Refugee Camps in the West Bank and Gaza—Literature Review and Preliminary Assessment of the Problem.* (Montreal, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 1999). Available at http://prrn.mcgill.ca/research/papers/marshy.htm. (Accessed 28 November 2012).

Therefore, in relation to the above-mentioned US research, how then does the Government ensure that residents of small public housing units, especially those with large families, are provided with residences that do not put their family members at risk, in the aspects of physical, psychological and emotional concerns? Mona Marshy, in her study, indicated that overcrowding or spatial density may contribute to far-reaching social problems at two basic levels[78]:

◊ Social Effects
- places strain on social relations both at home and with the community
- "push-factor" for girls to wed early (before 18 years old), which may lead to serious health and social ramifications for them and their children
- over-crowding affects women's access to social and economic resources due to increased burden at home

◊ Psychological Effects
- lack of privacy may link to depression and other negative psychological outcomes
- overcrowding contributes to psychological frustrations, which in turn, may have bearings on behaviour responses

In the context of school-going children, students especially from the low-income background, need to be given sufficient alternative venues or spaces for them to study beyond school hours, spend their leisure time fruitfully, and be exposed to various upstream and transformative programs for their own personal development. Are there enough quality student-care centres being provided at the grassroots and community level which can be an alternative space for these students? How then can the Malay/Muslim organizations (MMOs) be of assistance? Or should it be left as a national agenda? More thoughts need to be focused on this issue.

Based on a recent statistical finding that traced 14% of the young drug addicts convicted in Singapore in 2011, the group comprised school drop-outs, while 4 out of 10 of these drug offenders did not have a job upon conviction[79]. Therefore, Mr. Zainal Sapari, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC, and also

78 http://prrn.mcgill.ca/research/papers/marshy.htm

79 (Nazri Hadi Saparin.) "Isu Dadah Cerminkan Masalah Lebih Mendalam". *Berita Minggu*. 25 November 2012.

the committee member for the task force on drugs, spearheaded by Mr. Masagos Zulkifli Masagos Mohamad, the Minister of State for Ministry of Home Affairs, believed that drug addiction in general, and among the Malay/Muslim community per se, which are again on the rise for the latter[80], may be traced deeper into factors like dysfunctional families, socio-economic impediments and educational shortcomings[81].

For the Malay/Muslim community of Singapore especially, these series of questions are very pertinent, and must be dealt with accordingly, on top of the national initiatives that had already been implemented and going to be in the pipelines. More strategies need to be thought of, and subsequently crafted, so that students from low-income families, would not be badly deprived of opportunities to optimize their potential, just because they lack physical space in their home front, since rented homes tend to be small in size, and worse still, if under the IRH scheme, the living arrangement might just be lesser than ideal for the young to work, study and play.

Again, in the context of the Malay/Muslim community of Singapore, perhaps there may be claims that there are those from the Malay/Muslim community who had supposedly gone through the transformation from rags to riches—in other words, defying all odds—and consider themselves as the epitome of "the self-made man"[82]. But the counter-argument shall be—on a quantitative level, just how many cases out there where individuals from deprived background are actually able to come out there are from the vicious cycle of poverty, without appropriate social assistance both from the State, society at large and the community per se? Consider the following statistical figures[83]:

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80 In the period of January–June 2012, the total number of Malays arrested for drug offences rose from 839 cases in the same period of 2011 to 896. Similarly for the new cases, in the period of January–June 2011, 301 Malays were arrested, and in the same period of 2012, the number rose to 311 cases. For both instances, the Malays make up majority of the arrests. See http://cnb.gov.sg/Libraries/CNB_MediaLibrary_Files/CNB_Drug_Situation_Report_Jan-Jun_2012_final.sflb.ashx. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

81 http://cnb.gov.sg/Libraries/CNB_MediaLibrary_Files/CNB_Drug_Situation_Report_Jan-Jun_2012_final.sflb.ashx.

82 *Self-Made Men* is a famous lecture (1895). In this speech, which was first delivered in 1859, by Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, He described his way from a poor, unknown son of a candle-maker to a very successful business man, went against all odds, broke out of his inherited social position, climbed up the social ladder and created a new identity for himself.

83 Figures narrated came from the Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Education), Mr. Hawazi Daipi, during his address in Parliamentary session. See Lee, Amanda, "From Low-Income Families Making Progress Through Education", *TODAY,* 15 November 2012.

Performance of Students from Low Socio-Economic Status in PSLE

- 6 in 10 students in the top primary schools live in private housing.
- 50% of students from families of low SES—the bottom one third—occupy the bottom one third at the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).
- Only 1 in 6 students from families of low SES score in the top one third at the PSLE.

Thus, the bottom line is that, the Singapore Government has credibly provided public housing for the majority of Singaporeans in general. But for the low-income and homeless families and individuals, provision of temporary shelter alone will not suffice. There is still room for improvement as to how these families can be further assisted in terms of providing better quality public spaces and facilities that could raise the socialization process towards a better networking capacity (social capital) and the raising the self-esteem of the dwellers, so that, individuals within these families, will one day be equipped to realize their fullest potential, and not be impeded by their socio-economic status.

SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM FOR THE LOW-INCOME, ELDERLY AND CITIZENS IN GENERAL—LOOPHOLES IN BETWEEN?

In the final part of this article, the main areas of focus shall be on Singapore's social security or social safety nets. Over the last few years, there are at least three main innovations in Singapore's social security system (social safety nets). And the three are as follows:

1. Workfare Income Supplement Scheme (WIS)
2. Central Provident Fund Life

3. Enhanced MediShield

WIS addresses the problem of wage stagnation among low-income earners with the Government topping up the wages of low-wage workers, and the details are in the box below.

Performance of Students from Low Socio-Economic Status in PSLE

- The Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) Scheme was announced during the 2007 Budget Speech as a permanent scheme following the one-off Workfare Bonus Scheme. The objectives of WIS are to supplement the wages and retirement savings of older low-wage workers as well as to encourage them to stay employed.
- In 2010, the WIS Scheme was enhanced by increasing the maximum WIS payment from SG$2,400 to SG$2,800, and increasing the qualifying average monthly income ceiling from SG$1,500 to SG$1,700 to encourage older low-wage workers to seek and to remain in employment. The Workfare Training Support (WTS) Scheme was also introduced to encourage low-wage workers to upgrade their skills through training, so that they can improve their employability and earn more.
- In 2012, changes were made to the WIS payment frequency. Low-wage employees now receive their WIS payments quarterly, instead of twice yearly, to help them meet their daily expenses.

*Source: http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/Members/Gen-Info/WIS/WIS_Scheme. (Accessed 29 November 2012]).

For CPF Life, the basic details are as follows:

Central Provident Fund (CPF)

CPF Life is a scheme launched in September 2009 to provide members with lifelong income. Through this scheme, members will receive a monthly income for as long as the live. The amount depending on the cash savings they have in their Retirement Account (RA).

Upon a member's enrolment into CPF Life, a portion of the cash savings in his RA will be set aside for an annuity. Combined with the remaining cash savings, the member will get a lifelong monthly income from his Draw Down Age (DDA).

If one reaches 55 years old before 1 January 1999, the DDA is 60. The table shows a more complete breakdown.

Year of Birth	Applicable DDA
1944–49	62
1950–51	63
1952–53	64
1954 and after	65

*Source: http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/NR/rdonlyres/F540570D-A107-488F-A295-67E128643210/0/CPFLIFE_FAQ.pd. (Accessed on 29 November 2012)

In terms of Enhanced MediShield, the origins of the scheme was to represent the basic tier of coverage in Singapore's national health insurance scheme, with claims pegged at the subsidised B2 and C class rates—leaving the private insurers to cater to those who prefer higher benefits or enjoy higher classes of ward. The

Government requires the latter "Shield" plans to incorporate the basic Medishield plan, with supplemental rider plans that provide additional coverage[84].

Enhanced MediShield (2012)

MOH announced its proposals to enhance MediShield payouts in April 2008. As mentioned earlier, the goal is to increase coverage to 80% of larger hospital bills for subsidized (B2/C class) patients. In order to have the larger payouts, premiums will go up by less than SG$5 a month for those younger than 60 years. Those who are 60 years old, as well as those between 60–80 years old, will need to pay between SG$5 to SG$10 more each month to enjoy greater coverage. But for older people (those 80 years old and above), who are likely to require more hospital care, the premium is set to increase by a bigger margin, but the difference will still be less than SG$40 a month.

By 2012, further enhancements of the MediShield are as follows:

a) Increase the policy year limit from SG$50,000 to SG$70,000;

b) Increase lifetime limits from SGS$200,000 to SG$300,000 to better cover patients with exceptionally large bills;

c) Extend MediShield coverage to include short-stay wards in the Emergency Departments;

d) Extend MediShield coverage to members up to 90 years of age; and,

e) Extend MediShield to cover inpatient psychiatric treatment.

* Source: http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/pressRoom/pressRoomItemRelease/2012/MOH-to-enhance-MediShield-coverage.html. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

84 Lim, M. K. "MediShield Insurance Gets Enhanced" in *Health Policy Monitor,* (11) 2008, See also http://www.hpm.org/en/Surveys/University_of_Singapore_-_Singapore/11/MediShield_insurance_gets_enhanced.html. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

Examining further details in the area of discussion of Singapore's social security system, the specific schemes that shall be discussed here shall be based on what had been discussed in Singapore Budget 2012. In general, the groups involved in the discussion consist of:

a) The elderly

b) The low-wage earners

c) General healthcare of citizens

The Elderly

The elderly group is of primary importance because it is forecasted that a "silver tsunami"[85] will lie in Singapore's future, where almost a third of the residents in Singapore will be over 65 years old in 2050[86]. More alarmingly, by 2050, the dependency ratio will increase to almost five folds as of the year 2010. By then, every 100 workers will support 58 pensioners, as compared to just 12 pensioners in 2010[87].

As for the lower income group, among the poorest in Singapore, the groups come from[88]:

- The bottom 10% of the working households.
- Those who earn wages barely enough to meet basic needs to the extent that they are unable to accumulate sufficient savings for retirement, hence forming the bottom 30% of the working households.

85 Data from the Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS) shows that life expectancy has increased among Singaporeans over the years. The life expectancy at birth was 63 in 1960 but has increased to 80 years today. See: http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/NR/rdonlyres/F540570D-A107-488F-A295-67E128643210/0/CPFLIFE_FAQ.pdf. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

86 According to a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) commissioned by Manulife Asset Management, entitled "Saving up: The changing shape of retirement funding in a greying ASEAN", the ageing phenomenon is the worst in Singapore. See http://sg.news.yahoo.com/a-third-of-s%E2%80%99pore-will-be-%E2%80%98grey%E2%80%99-in-2050--report.html. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

87 http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/NR/rdonlyres/F540570D-A107-488F-A295-67E128643210/0/CPFLIFE_FAQ.pdf. (Accessed on 29 November 2012).

88 Categorization of the poorest segment in Singapore was illustrated in Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.), *Singapore Perspectives 2012*, ibid, "Appendix 1", p.161.

The Silver Housing Bonus Scheme

A new SG$20,000 Silver Housing Bonus for older Singaporeans to unlock their savings by moving to smaller units. (Announced in *Singapore Budget 2012*)

* Source: http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/download/FY2012_Budget_in_Brief.pdf. (Accessed on 29 November 2012).

The key features for the Silver Housing Bonus scheme is that, sales proceeds from the sale of the older flat unit by the elderly shall be used to top up their CPF Retirement Account up to the prevailing CPF Minimum Sum[89]. The bonus will match the proceeds committed to their CPF dollar to dollar, up to S$20,000. In turn, the top-up, along with all other monies in the RA will be used to purchase CPF LIFE[90] annuity, which will provide a lifelong monthly payout. The remaining proceeds beyond the prevailing Minimum Sum can be taken out in cash. Further details of this scheme shall be announced in a few months time.

However, in the mean time, the concern here is that, the Silver Housing Bonus scheme may just escalate the income disparity between those who already own their own HDB flats and those who have yet to own their flats. This is especially so for those who sell off their larger unit flats, and thus earn larger sales proceeds. And even for those who might already own their HDB flats, the sales proceeds from the sale of their flats may not be sufficient for them to be entitled for the bonus scheme, as most, if not all of their sales proceeds, might just be absorbed to fulfil their CPF's minimum sum.

Therefore, the prospects of selling one's own home, sacrificing the luxury of familiarity within their old residential premise, and not obtaining a large enough cash money from the sales proceeds, may be considered as major stumbling blocks to the success of the proposed Silver Housing Bonus scheme.

89 The Minimum Sum ensures that one has some regular income from age 65 to live on in the event of one's retirement. The Minimum Sum was set at SG$80,000 in 2003 and will be raised gradually until it reaches SG$120,000 in 2015. These amounts will be adjusted yearly for inflation.

90 One born in or after 1958, will be placed on CPF LIFE if one has at least SG$40,000 in one's RA when one reaches 55 or at least SG$60,000 when one is reaching one's Draw Down Age (DDA). If one is not placed on CPF LIFE, or was born before 1958, one can choose to join CPF LIFE anytime after reaching 55 and before one reaches age 80.

With further regard to the residential arrangement for the elderly, below are some of HDB's recent initiatives[91]:

1) **Multi-Generation Priority Scheme**
   From March 2012, the Multi-Generation Priority Scheme allows parents and their married children to submit a joint application to purchase paired flats in the same BTO project. Applicants have the option to select from a pool of pre-identified flats spread across various housing estates such as Bedok, Kallang/Whampoa, and Punggol.

2) **The Married Child Priority Scheme**
   The Married Child Priority Scheme has been enhanced from March 2012 with HDB further increasing ballot chances for parents and married children who apply to live together.

3) **Launch of Studio Apartments**
   Studio Apartments were launched in 1998 to provide another housing option for those aged 55 years and above. Customised for independent and elderly living, these apartments come with elderly-friendly and other safety features.

4) **Ageing-In-Place Priority Scheme (APPS)**
   The Ageing-in-Place Priority Scheme (APPS) was introduced to help the elderly age-in-place. The APPS supports senior citizens who wish to right-size (down-grade)to a studio apartment while remaining in their current town, so they can age-in-place in a familiar environment.

Other initiatives meant for elderly-care concerns announced in *Singapore Budget 2012* are as follows:

◊ **Scaling Up of Care Capacity**

- Long-term care services ranging from nursing home care to home- and community-based care to be expanded significantly by 2020

91 The source is the HDB official website)t http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10321p.nsf/w/BuyingNewFlatPriority?OpenDocument. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

◊ **Enhance Affordability of Healthcare**

- Introducing a new Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) Programme which will provide a subsidy for installing elderly-friendly features at home. The subsidy will cover up to 95% of the cost of modifications (around SG$2,000).

Low-Wage Earners

As of the lower income group, groups among the poorest in Singapore come from the bottom 10% of the working households, and also those who earn wages barely enough to meet their basic needs to the extent that they are unable to accumulate sufficient savings for retirement, hence forming the bottom 30% of the working households[92]. Amongst the planned initiatives announced in *Singapore Budget 2012* in the attempt of uplifting low-income families are as follows:

◊ Enhance Pre-School Subsidies

- To introduce a new per capita household income criterion to the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme (KIFAS)[93] and the Centre-based Free Assistance for Childcare (CFAC)[94]

◊ Raise Household Income Ceiling of the Ministry of Education (MOE) Financial Assistance Scheme

- All families with a gross household income of S$2,500 or less, or a per capita income cap of S$625 will qualify for subsidies.

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92 Direct from MOF website. Available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/download/FY2012_Budget_in_Brief.pdf. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

93 Based on the official website of the PAP Community Foundation (PCF), the total household gross income is S $3,500 or less per month. If the household gross income is higher than S$3,500 per month, the per capita income should not exceed $875 (with effect from 1 April 2012). See http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Summary/pressroom/Annex%20A-CFAC.pdf. (Accessed 29 November 2012).

94 The CFAC provides a monthly fee subsidy for lower-income Singaporean families who place their children in childcare centres. This is over and above the S$300 universal Government childcare subsidy given to working mothers. CFAC subsidies help pay for the children's fees in the childcare centres to enable mothers to work full-time. Actual CFAC subsidies given will vary depending on the family's income level and the actual childcare fees charged. The child's family monthly income is S$3,500 and below; and the child's parents are working. See http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Summary/pressroom/Annex%20A-CFAC.pdf. (Accessed 30 November 2012).

◊ Enhance and extend Student Care Fee Assistance Scheme to help a greater number of lower income families with a monthly household income of up to S$3,500.[95]

GROSS MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GHI) FOR THOSE WITH 2 DEPENDANTS RESIDING IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD	MONTHLY SUBSIDIES
Less or Equal to $1,500	$255
$1,501–$2,000	$250
$2,001–$2,200	$235
$2,201–$2,400	$210
$2,401–$2,600	$185
$2,601–$2,800	$160
$2,801–$3,000	$130
$3,001–$3,200	$105
$3,201–$3,400	$80
$3,401–$3,500	$55

◊ Government to top-up Edusave Endowment Fund[96] by $200 million

◊ Government to top-up Comcare Endowment Fund[97] by $200 million

All these schemes for the lower-income Singaporeans are definitely not exhaustive,

95 For families with three or more dependents, the monthly subsidy range from a minimum of SG$55 for Per Capita Income (PCI) of S$851–875 to a maximum monthly subsidy of $255 for PCI below $375. See http://app.msf.gov.sg/ComCare/FindTheAssistanceYouNeed/StudentCareFeesAssistance.aspx. (Accessed 30 November 2012).

96 The Edusave Endowment Fund is built up from Government contributions. The fund is invested by the Government and the interest earned is used to finance the contributions, grants and awards given to schools and students. See http://www.moe.gov.sg/initiatives/edusave/ (Accessed 30 November 2012).

97 The ComCare Fund was established in 2005 and it provides sustainable funding for assistance programmes for low-income Singaporeans. The ComCare Fund stands at $1.5 billion today. See http://www.c3a.org.sg/directory/comcare-community-care-endowment-fund. (Accessed 30 November 2012).

but initiatives targeted at the low-income group, may not necessarily be trickled down to the knowledge of the intended target group as efficiently as intended. As a matter of fact, for policy-makers, the challenge is to create a decent enough outreach in terms of having the lesser privileged group within the society, including the lower-income group, to fully understand their entitlement as citizens, in terms of obtaining the necessary assistance as already provided by the Government.

One needs to seriously consider that details of the assistance schemes are readily available on digital media or at the front line desks of relevant social agencies. But then again, one needs to consider the digital divide that might be faced by individuals of the lower-income group, who may not have access and knowledge to the Internet, and services information reliability from the front line counters tend to be subjective and varied from one centre to the other. These are the realities faced by our low-income groups.

In fact, in one of the write-ups from the Lien Centre for Social Innovation (Social Insight Research Series), the authors of this write-up highlighted that,

> "Existing protection schemes need better coordination. There is a gap between people's needs and current protection schemes, made apparent by take-up rates that are lower than the extent of visible vulnerabilities. While some bridging are done at grassroots level, it needs adequate resources and greater access to available information."[98]

Thus, in the enthusiasm of policy-makers to reduce the socio-economic divide in Singapore, one needs to be wary that initiatives meant for the target group need to be understood by the target group themselves, based on their own level of understanding. The challenge is therefore to be grounded enough to translate sophisticated public policies into palatable feed of humble information that can be comprehended by the target groups that these schemes are meant for, in this case, the lower income group amongst the citizens of Singapore.

General Healthcare

98 Mathi, Braema and Mohamed, Sharifah. *Unmet Social Needs in Singapore: Singapore's Social Structures and Policies and Their Impact on Six Vulnerable Communities.* (Singapore: Lien Centre for Social Innovation, 2011). p.11.

Singapore's public healthcare system is widely considered to be a well-designed and financially attainable one. The 3Ms system of financing (Medisave, MediShield and Medifund) ensures that the large majority of Singaporeans have affordable access to good healthcare while still providing patient choice[99]. In the most general sense, security of access to good basic healthcare is not just central to societal well-being but it is also often considered a right, which is sometimes even enshrined constitutionally (eg. Canada)[100].

At the individual level, it is believed that health level affects one's capacity to work in terms of time and energy levels—whereby, increased productivity in turn leads to higher income levels[101]. Conversely, an individual's income will affect his ability to provide good healthcare for him and his family. Thus, a widening inequality of incomes can, therefore, compromise access to good healthcare unless government policies actively and deliberately address the inequalities[102].

A summarized outlook of healthcare in Singapore highlighted the following:

> "Increasing longevity and a larger proportion of older persons in our population will almost inevitably, require a higher national expenditure on healthcare. The state will come under increasing pressure to expand its financing of healthcare. Second, medical advances will push healthcare costs up as medical conditions become treatable and as more effective drugs and treatments become available. Again there will be rising public expectation for the state to provide these new drugs and treatments on a subsidized basis. Third, the combination of demographics and medical advances will increase the interactive complexity and interdependence between the different parts of the healthcare system (for instance between primary, acute, intermediate and long-term care). At the same time, citizens will expect seamless, integrated care..."[103]

99 Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). *Singapore Perspectives 2012.* ibid. Appendix 2. p. 168.

100 Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). *Singapore Perspectives 2012,* Ibid. p.167.

101 Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.), Op.cit.

102 Loc.cit

103 Ibid. p.168.

Through the observation of local medical executives, Jeremy Lim and Daniel Lee, they believe that healthcare in Singapore is built on the political philosophy of *"individual responsibility"* coupled with the *"many helping hands"* approach, with community self-help groups and non-governmental organizations chipping in[104]. However, on a more critical note, the idea of "self-reliance" as Singapore's national philosophy resulted in a shift in terms of healthcare financing, from the government to citizens, via increase in co-payments borne by the citizens[105]. As a result, in 1965, at independence, government spending account for 50 percent of healthcare financing. But by 2000, one quarter from every dollar spent on health came from the government[106].

This essay argues that co-payments may be prudently necessary in healthcare, but sharing the sentiments with Jeremy Lim and Daniel Lee, policy-makers must nevertheless appreciate the fact that co-payment is fundamentally regressive in that a harsher burden is imposed on lower-wage earners, as healthcare expenses will constitute a proportionately larger share of disposable income[107]. A useful example refers to a new drug for advanced liver cancer, "Sorafenib", which is priced at S$10,000 a month; and even if 50 percent co-payment is arranged (which is a norm for Standard Drug List 2 medicines)[108], the cost will still be prohibitive to a low-wage earner[109].

Specifically to the context of Malay/Muslim in Singapore, perhaps it is high time to increasingly conduct open discussions on the community's general health issues. This includes both physical and mental health. For example, it has been reported of the prevalence of dementia among Malays aged 60 years and above is higher than the

104 Jeremy Lim is a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in Fortis Healthcare International (Singapore), while Daniel Lee is the Assistant Director of Operations at Changi General Hospital. Lim, Jeremy and Lee, Daniel. "Re-Making Singapore Healthcare"., ibid. p.62 and p.73.

105 Ibid. p.73.

106 Lim, M. K. "Shifting the Burden of Health Care Finance: A Case Study of Public-Private Partnership in Singapore". Health Policy. 69 (2004), pp.83–92. See also http://www.hpm.org/Downloads/healthcare_financing.pdf.

107 Lim, Jeremy and Lee, Daniel. ibid. p.72.

108 There are two subsidy rates. Medicines on standard drug list one cost $1.40 for a week's supply, while those on list two are charged half the price with a 50 per cent subsidy. See http://www.healthxchange.com.sg/News/Pages/Subsidised-drug-list-reviewed-every-year.aspx. (Accessed on 30 November 2012).

109 Op.cit.

population prevalence of 5.2percent. And it is the highest among the major ethnic communities[110].

A survey conducted by HPB revealed that the awareness level of the signs of dementia is relatively lower among the Malay residents in comparison to others [111]. Grassroots adviser for Geylang Serai and Member of Parliament for Marine Parade GRC , Professor Fatimah Lateef, added that conducting HPB's mental well-being programme in Malay and within a mosque will encourage more elderly Malays to enrol in the programme, since it is conducted in a language and setting the seniors are comfortable with[112].

In fact, more Malay Muslim organizations (MMOs) ideally, should play a more pivotal role in facilitating more relevant public education for the elderly within the community. And at a national level, new strategies need to be thought of, as to how the Malay/Muslim community would become more active participating in public education conducted at grassroots level, especially in areas that affect them directly like health seminars and free clinical sessions that are often conducted in community centres around the Singapore heartlands.

In the case of obesity, it was reported that almost seven in 10 Malays here are considered at risk of health problems such as diabetes or heart disease because of their weight[113]. Over one in two Malays is too heavy, with a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or more[114]. One in five has a BMI[115] of 30 and above, and is obese. The overall concern for those who succumb to the situation of being obese, is that, it increases the possibility of developing chronic disease such as diabetes, heart trouble and high blood pressure. The repercussion of high blood pressure may lead to further

110 It is estimated that about 28,000 seniors aged 60 and above live with dementia in Singapore currently, and this number is expected to increase to 50,000 by 2020. See http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1186720/1/.html. (Accessed 30 November 2012).

111 http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1186720/1/.html. (Assessed on 30 November 2012).

112 Loc.cit

113 Chang Ai-Lien. "Malay and Obesity: BIG TROUBLE". *The Straits Times.* 13 March 2010.

114 Chang Ai-Lien. "Malay and Obesity: BIG TROUBLE". *The Straits Times*. 13 March 2010, Op.cit.

115 BMI is an international classification of weight status in adults, based on a person's weight and height.

complications like stroke and kidney disease[116].

However, it is rather disturbing that the situation of obesity among the Malay community is naively, or even perhaps brashly being described as a situation of mindset problem. In the national media, it was reported that,

> "Fatty foods and a couch potato lifestyle have long been the Malay way" [117].

Within the Malay community itself, in 2009, a young and enthusiastic post-graduate, seemed to be genuinely concerned over the issue of obesity among the Malays. However, it is rather too premature for him to conclude in his article, "The Fat Tsunami", that,

> "Harmful foods like thick gravies, fried delicacies, meaty dishes and sweet beverages have been ingrained in the minds of our children as an acceptable source of nourishment. When they grow up, these detestable eating habits continue as a form of lifestyle."[118]

Linking obesity and lavish food consumption is problematic because in a study conducted by a medical practitioner in the US, she attributed that the major contributing factors to the disproportional impact of obesity on low income populations in America include the barriers faced by people living in poverty in accessing healthy foods, a lack of nutrition education, a dearth of safe environments for physical activity and recreation, and food marketing targeted to this population[119].

According to Dr. Susan Blumenthal in her personal blog, population level data have shown that diet quality follows a socioeconomic gradient. People with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to consume whole grains, lean meats, fish, low-fat dairy products, and fresh vegetables and fruit. In contrast, lower SES is

116 As testified by Dr. Sum Chee Fang, director of Alexandra Hospital's diabetes centre. See Chang Ai-Lien, op.cit.

117 Loc.it.

118 Rahmat, Muhd Ridzwan. "The Fat Tsunami". *Karyawan* (Singapore: Association of Muslim Professionals/ AMP-RIMA). Vol.10. Issue 01 (July–December 2009). p.19.

119 Blumenthal, Susan. "Poverty and Obesity: Breaking the Link". 4 November 2012. See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-blumenthal/poverty-obesity_b_1417417.html (Accessed 30 November 2012]).

associated with the consumption of more refined grains and added fats[120].

Simply stated, families with limited economic resources may turn to food with poor nutritional quality because it is cheaper and more accessible[121]. Lack of physical activity is another commonly-cited problem fuelling the obesity epidemic[122]. Many low-income communities lack access to fresh and nutritious food[123]. Instead of a supermarket, these neighbourhoods may have an abundance of fast-food retailers and corner stores that are stocked with products high in fat and low in nutrients. Additionally, low-income families are often targeted by food marketers with advertisements encouraging the consumption of nutrient-poor foods. In this environment, children in low-income families are especially hard hit, as evidence demonstrates that consistent exposure to such advertising increases the likelihood of adopting unhealthy dietary practices[124].

Therefore, in the context of the Malay/Muslim community of Singapore, this essay argues that their over-representation in terms of obesity, compared to other major races in Singapore, does not simply indicate a matter of choice, or a mindset problem, but may also be linked to the structural challenges faced by the community, especially those at the lower socio-economic strata. Arguing that obesity is a choice of a lifestyle may not be necessarily accurate in a reality setting where consumers may not be given with a wide enough affordable choice of healthier food, especially so when healthy food like "organic foodstuff" are mainly sold in Singapore as higher end goods.

Even if there are ample choices of affordable healthy food that are actually available, at the policy level, one needs to rethink on the efficacy of the healthy lifestyle campaign conducted in Singapore so far. Therefore, what can be further done to convince the populace in general towards a more healthy lifestyle? Thus, public education towards the idea of a more healthy lifestyle needs to be further strategize.

120 Darmon, N. and Drewnowski, A. "Does Social Class Predict Diet Quality?". Am J Clin Nutr. (May 2008): 1107–17.

121 Drewnowski, Adam, Darmon, Nicole and Briend, André. "Replacing Fats and Sweets With Vegetables and Fruits—A Question of Cost". *American Journal of Public Health*. (September 2004): 1555–1559.

122 Siple, Julie. "Researchers Untangling Link between Hunger and Obesity". MPR News. 27 January. 2012.

123 Darmon, N. and Drewnowski, A. op.cit.

124 Grier, S. A. and S. K. Kumanyika. "The Context for Choice: Health Implications of Targeted Food and Beverage Marketing to African Americans". American Journal of Public Health 98.9 (2008): 1616–629.

CONCLUSION

Income inequality in Singapore has risen significantly in the last decade. As a matter of fact, the yawning income gap between the lower percentile, the middle class and the upper percentile is not unique only in Singapore, but regarded as a global phenomenon[125].

But what is more worrying is the situation of possibly an increasing trend in income inequality that has been accompanied by wage stagnation. Wages stagnation for the bulk of Singapore's workforce has been accompanied by the rise of the super-rich, with incomes of the top 1–2% especially rising very sharply[126].

Thus, the growing concern here is that, if social mobility in Singapore fails to rise significantly, or is no longer adequate to give young Singaporeans, especially from the lower income backgrounds, sufficient chance to move up in life, the situation may just polarize Singaporeans deeper in their individual socio-economic enclaves.

The Malay/Muslim community in Singapore is no exception. Like other communities in mainstream society, the Malays do aspire for better quality life in Singapore. The present enhancements and planned initiatives to better improvise Singapore's social security system, be it in the area of workfare, housing, health, education and so forth, definitely assist and facilitate the attempt of the Malay/Muslim community to ascend the social mobility ladder.

However, one needs also to consider that the Malay/Muslim community of Singapore did not have the privilege of a similar social capital[127], as compared to their Chinese and Indian counterparts upon Singapore's independence in 1965. From a majority race upon Singapore's merger with Malaysia in the period between of 1963–65, the Malay/Muslim community suddenly became a minority community in independent

125 Kentaro Toyama, "Income Inequality Around the World is a Failure of Capitalism", 13 May 2011). Available at http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/05/income-inequality-around-the-world-is-a-failure-of-capitalism/238837/ (Accessed 30 November 2012).

126 Bhaskaran, Manu et.al. Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.). *Singapore Perspectives 2012*.ibid. p.126.

127 James Coleman defined "social capital" as anything that facilitates individual or collective action, generated by networks or relationships, reciprocity, trust and social norms. See Coleman, James. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital". *American Journal of Sociology.* Supplement 94: S95–S120 (1988).

Singapore (post-1965). The British colonial "divide-and-rule" policy that never actually optimized the Malay community's potential in academic education or as a business class[128], and the Malay feudal past that clearly dichotomized the privileged noble class as comparison to the masses, made worse by the problem of an underdeveloped elite[129], the Malays of Singapore did not have a historical head-start upon the implementation of meritocracy[130] in independent Singapore.

Thus, to evade the possibility of further social exclusion of the Malays or any other apparently marginalized communities within Singapore's present cosmopolitan setting—in the spirit of "An Inclusive Society, A Stronger Singapore"[131]—besides carrying forward right through the National Day Rally speech in 2012, via the aspirations of the "Heart, Hope and Home"[132] —the language of social connectedness needs to be more prevalent in terms of increasing more effort to make more sense out of the lived experiences arising from multiple deprivations or inequities experienced

128 According to academic couple, Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, the British dual conception of their task regarding the Malays was the conciliation of the Malay nobility and minimum interference with the Malay commoners. Thus, even when the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) was opened in 1905, the original intent was to create a special residential school to train Malay boys from the royal and noble families for government service. In fact, the British were not anxious to encourage a university education for the local population for fear of creating a "literary class with no employable skills". And the "employable skills" referred by the British government were more of vocational courses that would provide "useful" skills in society, namely low-ranking civil service posts like writers, clerks and interpreters, or simply agricultural activities like farming and fishing. See Andaya, Barbara Watson and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia.* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982). pp.228–232.

129 An underdeveloped ruling group is one in whom is absent the qualities necessary for development. The qualities necessary for development which the Malay elites lack are ethical integrity and standards, intellectual capacity and stamina for productive and creative endeavours. The history of the Malay elites' underdevelopment dates back to the Malay feudal period. *Sejarah Melayu, Misa Melayu, Tuhfat al-Nafis* and the writings of Abdullah Munshi show the dominance of a ruling group which lacked ethical integrity and concern for ethical standards. As a consequence the Malay society was in a general state of general backwardness and stagnation. See Maaruf, Shaharuddin. *Concept of a Hero in Malay Society.* (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 1984). p.97.

130 One generally associates meritocracy with the idea of competition, but the idea can be understood in at least two different ways. On the first, the purpose of competition is to give everyone the chance to earn the right to a job or access to other wants. On the second, the purpose is not to create winners and losers, by giving people the chance to earn rewards, but to reveal who the best person is. For more details on the idea of "meritocracy", see Cavanagh, Matt. *Against Equality of Opportunity.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). pp.3–4.

131 Available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2012/download/FY2012_Budget_in_Brief.pdf. (Accessed 30 November 2012).

132 National Day 2012 (Special Report). Available at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/nd2012/ (Accessed 30 November 2012).

by people and localities, that cuts through race, culture and religiosity. In other words, the language of acceptance across racial divide and economic boundaries need to recognize equity, justice, citizenship expression and opportunities[133]. More importantly, Singapore needs to prevent itself from a chronic class divide within its diverse and plural population.

Ultimately, the challenge before us today is one of rising inequality. Inequality in our society is being exacerbated by the rise of the creative economy where its populace come up with new ideas and better ways in doing things or solving problems, which is hoped to raise productivity and living standards. For Singapore to fully immerse itself in the production of the creative class[134], inevitably it raises the issue of how the government deals with a more critical mass, that no longer accept straightforward reasoning, but demand explanations that are based on more concrete reasoning.

The approach towards understanding the Malay/Muslim community, or any other communities needs a re-thinking, whereby the idea of "race" should not be problematized through the demarcation of the "C-M-I-O" discourse, as the writer sees this approach as an archaic one. Instead, a more open debate is needed in scrutinizing the present structural arrangements, and the need for a strong moral courage to identify structural factors or relevant policy gaps that may impede the progress of a particular community, or citizens in general. Issues faced by the local Malay/Muslim community, the writer believes, is one that relates to economic class differentiation and therefore a structural one, rather than a racial one, which is cultural and genetic in nature.

Last but not least, the Singapore government, policy-makers, academics, community leaders and bureaucrats alike, need to realize that for far too long, we have been succumbing towards market demands. But in reality, though the power of markets is enormous, market demands have no inherent moral character. At their best, the markets have played a central role in creating and shaping the world's economy since

133 Taket, Ann, Crisp, Beth R., Nevill, Annemarie, Lamoro, Greer, Graham, Malissa and Barter-Godfrey, Sarah (eds.). Theorizing Social Exclusion. (London: Routledge, 2009). pp.3-4.

134 The "creative class" refers to professionals like scientists, engineers, artists, musicians, designers and knowledge-based professionals who hinge their trade based on the principle of the "3 Ts"—talent, technology and tolerance towards new ideas and needs. For more details, see Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, & Everyday Life.* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). pp.xiii-xx.

the Industrial Revolution since over 200 years ago, but the markets too had created a situation of the monopoly of wealth and incurred environmental costs, failing to achive a sustainable form of physical development within contemporary times.

For all these reasons, Noble prize-winner, Joseph E. Stiglitz highlighted that markets must be tamed and tempered to make sure they work to benefit of most citizens.[135] Therefore, Singaporeans cannot afford to be subdued as though they are at the mercy of global market, but to confidently decipher the nature of the present world market, but and remain in control, so that it is mankind that gain the upper-hand in determining the market, and not vice-versa. Over and above, today's new-normal will one day just become a mere norm. Instead of being helplessly intimidated by the market forces, more importantly, is how do we actually transform the new normal to our advantage?

In speaking of development, the notion of development is not about helping a few people get rich or creating a handful of industries that only benefit the country's elite. As pointed out again by Joseph E. Stiglitz,

> "[I]t is not about bringing in Prada and Benetton, Ralph Lauren or Lois Vuitton, for the urban rich…Development is about transforming societies, improving the lives of the poor, enabling everyone to have a chance at success…"[136]

But in order to bring upon this realization, a higher level of synergy possibly needs to be worked upon so that political actors, policy-makers, the bureaucracy, academicians and the public at large need to have a consistent, meaningful dialogue so that to remind each other of the common project of fulfilling the collective good for Singaporeans and its populace in general, in terms of the quality of life to be attained within the context of a developed country like Singapore.

Perhaps, the words of the late Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas, as simple and idealistic as it may seems to sound, may just be the tonic for those seeking answers in our day-to-day challenges of contemporary times. According to Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas,

> "Any lack in our knowledge can be rectified as long as there are

135 Joseph E. Stiglitz, Op. Cit. pp.251-252.

136 Ibid, p.252.

> other thinkers who are willing to bring forth their opinions. If there is any public opinion which is wrong, it canstill be corrected without incurring any loss to society. Although the presence of an effective body of thinkers is not the sole condition for progress, nevertheless, their absence is an impediment to progress."[137]

Here, the "thinkers" advocated by the late Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas do not refer to the "armchair intellectuals", but real functioning intellectuals who are willing to put their thoughts into action. Whereby the synergy between policy intent, community needs and citizens' aspirations can only be met if there are common meeting points - through accurate problem posing - ability to identify relevant long-term strategies towards the challenges at hand - the humility to learn from shortcomings - and the moral courage to execute concrete change.

137 Alatas, Syed Hussein. *Modernization and Social Change: Studies in Modernization, Religion, Social Change and Development in Southeast Asia.* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Pte Ltd, 1972). pp.168–169.

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Section II:

Engaging Hearts and Minds—The Malay/Muslim Youths

"(I)t is a very common clever device that anyone has attained the summit of greatness, he kicks away the ladder by which he has climbed up, in order to deprive others of the means of climbing up after him."

— Friedrich List

A leading German economist in the 19th century (1789-1846)

Chapter 5

Youth and Social Capital: Considerations for Social Policy and Programmes

Suen Johan

> *"The ability to choose and maintain one's own social relations is not an ability everyone has by nature. It is… a learned ability which depends on special social and family backgrounds. The reflexive conduct of life, the planning of one's own biography and social relations, gives rise to a new inequality, the inequality of dealing with insecurity and reflexivity."*
>
> *—Beck, 1992: p. 98*

INTRODUCTION

This paper serves to critically evaluate the role of social capital in youth development policies and programmes. The motivation to write this piece and the ideas put forth arose from an observation of the erroneous trend for social capital to be viewed as always positive for youth development, especially for youths belonging to the category of 'at-risk' and 'vulnerable'. In essence, I will argue that there is an urgent need to reduce the formation of 'bonding' forms of social capital while simultaneously nurturing more 'bridging' forms of social capital among youths. This is due to the tendency for the former to reinforce and reproduce social inequalities, and the latter to encourage and open channels for the exchange of informational, economic, and emotional resources between youths from a variety of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The first section of this paper will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of social capital, which will be followed

by the highlighting of several gaps in current efforts towards building social capital. I will then conclude with a call for a more inclusive and organically-empowering approach to youth development.

SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR THE YOUTH: A FACILITATOR OR IMPEDIMENT TO SOCIAL MOBILITY?

Defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition,"[1]social capital is an often overlooked component of determining an individual or group's social positions; the more obvious and popular being educational attainment, financial assets/resources, and even aptitude. Social capital however, not only potentially provides access to cultural, emotional and economic resources, but also the opportunities for individuals to translate and utilize them towards ultimately enhancing their social positions. For instance, a fresh graduate looking to enter the workforce may fulfil the stipulated minimum level of qualification for numerous positions, but being privy to information on career openings would be greatly facilitated if the employment seeker had an extensive and socially varied network of contacts to tap into. Granovetter's work on "the strength of weak ties" illustrates such a process where "bridging" social capital serves as an extremely potent resource for identifying and gaining access to market opportunities that lie outside of one's immediate social milieu[2].

However, being aware of specific vacancies in the employment market is only half the battle won, securing a position would still require an applicant to face the hurdle of an interview process, during which he/she must employ the relevant 'soft-skills' to convince a potential employer in terms of his/her suitability to the organization's core objectives, work culture and group dynamics. Although there is currently an abundance of courses and workshops dedicated to coaching CV-writing and interview skills, it is argued that these classes only teach individuals to refine

1 Bourdieu, Pierre. "The forms of capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. John G. Richardson (ed.). (New York: Greenwood, 1986). pp. 214–258.

2 Granovetter, Mark. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *The American Journal of Sociology.* 1973, 78(6): 1360–1398.

and organise knowledge and skills that they already have. Coleman elaborates that social capital exists in the relations among persons and is highly instrumental in the augmentation and improvement of human capital, which constitutes the "skills and knowledge acquired by an individual" to "facilitate productive activity."[3]

Nevertheless, Coleman also mentions that such resources tend to be private and generational in their means of transmission. In other words, the social networks privy to such potentially valuable social capital interactions are generally exclusive in nature and whose membership may be restricted along familial, class or even ethnic lines. To this effect, various scholars of social capital (Bourdieu and Coleman included) argue that the utilisation of social capital plays a central role in reproducing social inequalities as the socially and economically disadvantaged would face difficulty in gaining access to the opportunity networks and tacit resources required to transcend their social positions.

Thus, not only does social capital require an extensive amount of time to develop, it is also highly intangible. In light of this, it is unsurprising that the concept of social capital is rarely operationalised among the current landscape of social programmes. Therefore, how feasible would it be for social policy and intervention to facilitate upward social mobility through addressing the social capital deficit of certain groups in society? Simply put, the answer resides in a more organically empowering approach to youth development. However, in order to avoid reinventing the wheel, the following section will provide a critical assessment of current predominant approaches to youth development in Singapore, before building on them and concluding with a more thorough explication of the implications of social capital development among youths for social policy and programmes.

3 Coleman, S. James. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 1988,94(S): S95–S120.

GAPS IN CURRENT APPROACHES TOWARDS BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Overemphasis on 'Bonding' Social Capital

By applying Durkheim's perspectives on the division of labour in society[4], it is apparent that the complex organization of modern societies consists of functionally differentiated but interdependent social groups. A general example may be gleaned from law enforcement and social service agencies, which have differing but complementary objectives. However, through adapting Weber's notion of rationality and value spheres[5], we understand that the fragmentation of society into relatively discrete social domains has also resulted in the tendency for such domains to be more exclusively autonomous. This means that the push towards domain-specific specialisation has made it more difficult for inter-domain switching to occur without the possession of specific transferable skills.

However, a major impediment to the transmission of such skills is the propensity for social networks to cluster among those of similar socio-economic stratification. Lindescribes this process as "homophily"[6],one of the root factors perpetuating inequality in social capital. This is because social capital may be generated *across* and *within* social groups. The latter, which is termed as 'bonding' social capital, is the most common form of social capital that individuals can drawn upon. This is largely due to the 'segregationary' structures of modern society, beginning from the education system through to the life stage professionalisation; resulting in a distinct lack of 'everyday' opportunities for social networks to form between individuals of varying social characteristics. Arguably, once a child goes through the educational streaming process at the age of nine or 10 in Singapore, it is highly likely that his/her peer groups would also be 'streamlined' accordingly. How then could social capital be formed across social groups? We may see such 'bridging' social capital most actively generated in the less 'formal' realms of social interaction; such as in recreational clubs and arts groups as well as religious and voluntary organisations.

4 Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labour in Society*.(Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan, 1984).

5 Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology.* (New York: Routledge, 1919/2009).

6 Lin, Nan. "Inequality in Social Capital."*Contemporary Sociology*. 2000, 29(6): 785–795.

One major drawback of such informal arenas however, is ironically, their exclusivity. Apart from religious and voluntary organisations, the others tend to be relatively 'niche' groups. Even religious organisations would appear exclusionary, especially for religious minorities.

Community-based social programmes therefore play an integral role in providing inclusive platforms for social interaction and network formation. Unfortunately, there is still a high tendency for community activities to explicitly or implicitly segregate groups, even youths, according to their ethnicity, educational background, social positions, or a combination of these characteristics. This is evident in the various 'networking events', dialogue sessions and forums that attempt to engage individuals from similar educational and class backgrounds. While the intentions and efforts behind such initiatives are indubitably laudable, their target groups tend to be post-secondary school youths and unfortunately, the potential for a young person's social capital networks to drastically evolve gets increasingly constricted with time as "constellations of social relations" are "spatially, culturally, *temporally* and economically embedded"[7]. Thus the general outcome of such programmes and events would be an accumulation and strengthening of bonding social capital. As building social capital is also deemed to be a form of intervention for the disadvantaged; particularly youths-at-risk, it would be pertinent at this juncture to question the impact of bonding social capital on such a target group.

THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF EXCESSIVELY 'DOWNSTREAM' SOCIAL CAPITAL INITIATIVES

As mentioned above, the peer groups and social circles of individuals in the later stages of their youth are generally relatively fixed. Coupled with the tendency to associate with individuals from similar socio-economic statuses, it is important to be cognizant of the implications stemming from the *negative* consequences of social capital.

7 Raffo, Carlo &Michelle Reeves. "Youth Transitions and Social Exclusion: Developments in Social Capital Theory." *Journal of Youth Studies*. 2000, 3(2): 146–166.Emphasis mine.

While Portes[8] admits that social capital networks constitute an important source of opportunities, knowledge and financial resources, he has also identified several forces of constraint that are experienced by members of a social network, namely; the exclusion of outsiders; the imposition of excess claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedom; and downward levelling norms. Taken together, these negative aspects of social capital serve to stifle the social mobility prospects of members of disadvantaged social groups. For instance, in Stack's study of the social dynamics of impoverished black communities in the United States[9], she found out that a major factor preventing poor families from accumulating any form of capital (economic or cultural) is downward levelling norms, which place pressure on individuals within social support networks to share any surpluses accruing to them in a re-distributive manner. Furthermore, individuals who display ambitions or attempts to transcend their social positions are also perceived as trying to transcend their social circles and inadvertently become the target of either chastisement or isolation. A similar phenomenon was observed by Fadzli when he observed how the peer-socialisation occurring within groups of working class Malay youths served to imbibe more 'moderated' and lowered educational aspirations amongst their members[10]. In sum, once formed, such social networks and the impacts of their socialisation on individuals are hard to reverse or even resist.

These points are pertinent in light of recent Singapore Budget initiatives aimed at enhancing the support system for youths-at-risk. The implicit thrust of these initiatives is to build social capital networks of at-risk youths by "coordinating efforts across agencies, strengthening *upstream* intervention and getting communities involved"[11] (emphasis mine). Efforts include participation in "learning journeys, career talks,

8 Portes, Alejandro. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology.*1998, 24: 1-24.

9 Stack, Carol. *All Our Kin*. (Basic Books: New York, 1975).

10 FadzliBaharom Adzahar. "'Taking the Gravel Road': Educational Aspirations of Working Class Malay Youths." Academic Exercise, Dept. of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. 2008.

11 ChannelNewsAsia. "Budget 2011: MCYS Initiatives to help at-risk youths."*ChannelNewsAsia,*8 March 2011. Available at http://global.factiva.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/sb/default.aspx?NAPC=S. (Accessed on 9 March 2011).

internships" and support in areas such as job placement and career guidance"[12]. Again, despite the positive objectives and intentions of such efforts, they are in reality, excessively downstream in their operationalisation. A case in point would be the fact that the target group for these programmes are youths who have either been institutionalised, dropped out of school or have officially been issued warning letters by the police. Attempts to place these youths in support networks are overdue at the very least. This is because such youths would have already been embedded in their own networks of social support, which are difficult to replace after the stage of adolescence. Ultimately, it is posited that the very approach of segregating youths and designating them the label of being 'atrisk', even if the intention is to provide them with specialised or customised care, serves to further undermine their chances of developing much needed bridging social capital. This is due to the higher likelihood that bonding social capital is fostered within such disadvantaged or marginalised groups[13].

Another implicit method of addressing the social capital deficit of youths is mentoring. While the value of mentors ideally apply to youths from all social backgrounds, studies have reported how excessive social distance in a mentor-mentee relationship may actually do more harm than good to the self-esteem of the mentee. This is especially the case with middle-class mentors and lower-income mentees[14]. In such instances, a mentor is usually assigned to a mentee after the latter has been identified to be in need of guidance. The mentor is thus 'transplanted' into the social reality of the mentee and is required to build rapport, trust and empathy within a short span of time. The middle-class mentor then either tends to be overly demanding, or face problems providing solutions that are contextualised to the social circumstances of lower-income realities experienced by the mentee.

Under such demanding circumstances, it is not surprising that in order to increase the effectiveness and success rates of mentoring; there are calls for mentorship to prioritise those who are deemed 'more responsive' to guidance. Although such

12 Singapore Government News. "Central Youth Guidance Office to Pilot New $1.2 Million Youth GO! Programme." *Factiva*, 8 March 2011. Available at http://global.factiva.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/sb/default.aspx?NAPC=S. (Accessed on 9 March 2011).

13 Woolcock, M. "Friends in high places?An Overview of Social Capital." *Development Research Insights*. 2000, 34(September).(Sussex: Institute of Development Studies).

14 Grossman, B. Jean and Jean E. Rhodes. "The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships." *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 2002, 30(2): 199–219.

practices are understandable given the fact that most social work agencies operate under scarce resources, where does this leave those youths who are socioeconomically 'out of reach' to the majority of volunteer mentors and 'life coaches' with lower-middle and middle class social positions?

The implementation of peer mentoring has been a feasible response to the problems arising from excessive social distance. However, apart from matching mentors and mentees according to their age groups, educational or socioeconomic backgrounds, would it be possible to go a step further and identify as well as empower mentors from *within* the youths' own social capital networks?

HUMAN CAPITAL FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: THE CALL FOR INCLUSIVE AND ORGANICALLY EMPOWERING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Thus far, this essay has highlighted both the valuable and the negative aspects of social capital in relation to the development of youth. Certain oversights and gaps have also been identified in current predominant approaches to building social capital as well as addressing its deficits amongst disadvantaged youths. Taking these limitations into consideration, this final section will propose a holistic and macro-social conception of youth development, which is 'upstream' in its focus, 'organically empowering' in its philosophical approach, and inclusive in its strategies of implementation.

Firstly, in order to mitigate the segregationary tendencies of the education system and facilitate the development of bridging social capital, social programmes should aim to encourage active participation from youths across educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. As Ng *et. al.* reported in their study of youth social participation in Singapore, those respondents from "challenging family environments" were the least likely to *actively* contribute and undertake leadership roles in social groups as compared to those from families with "supportive and educated parents."[15] Such groups included sports-related groups, arts and cultural groups, uniform groups,

15 Ng, Irene, Kong Weng Ho & Ho Kong Chong.(National Youth Council)."Family Environment, Class and Youth Social Participation."*A Journal of Youth Research Studies in Singapore*. 2009, Issue 3.

community groups, welfare and self-help groups, religious groups, interest and hobby groups, and discussion groups. This concurred with Tomanovi's findings that the variety of out-of-school activities among families with parents holding professional occupations was more extensive than their working-class counterparts[16]. The challenge in creating such platforms is thus not only to identify common grounds for inclusive engagement, but also to ensure that leadership positions are taken up by youths across social classes in order to promote inclusive participation as well as contribution.

Secondly, once initiated, youth social groups should as far as possible, be youth-led with minimal interference from adults, save to guarantee that participation remains inclusive, and that ideas are rigorously tested. Thus the challenge here is for the adults to ensure that their criticisms and counterpoints are constructive in nature, and which serve to extract and refine the essence of the youths' ideas, rather than to co-opt, commandeer, and appropriate them. This is, however, a very fine line and must therefore be thread carefully by adults in their roles as responsible consultants who should be constantly reflexive about how their contributions affect the directions that the youth groups take. This is to encourage youth groups to evolve organically and in the process, foster communication and dialogue between youths of various social positions. The occurrence of such social interactions, within a relatively egalitarian context of mutual respect, would be extremely conducive to the transmission of information, knowledge and skills as well as the process of socialising the trust and socio-cultural norms necessary for the creation of human capital that is in well-rounded in quality and more evenly distributed in quantity.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the development of social capital should be understood as an embedded[17]and long-term process. Ideally therefore, it should begin no later than the period of adolescence where a youth's set of social relations and support are still largely in its nascence as well as influx. Facilitating the growth of social capital networks from such an 'upstream' period of youths' lives would allow for role models and mentors to be identified organicallyfrom within the social circle of mentees themselves, thereby minimising social distance while maximising the

16 Tomanovi, S. "Family habitus as the cultural context for childhood." *Childhood*. 2004, 11(3): 339–360.

17 Granovetter, Mark."Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 1985,91 (3): 481–510.

effects of homophily to easily establish rapport, trust and empathy.

In conclusion, the essence of this essay discusses the complexities of the concept and resource known as social capital; especially the respective impacts of its bridging and bonding aspects. It also examines the role that social capital networks play in the creation of human capital among youths as they prepare to transit into adult social spheres such as work and parenthood. Ultimately, it calls for social policies and programmes to adopt a more inclusive and organic approach when attempting to build quality social capital for the youth at large.

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"It is the serenity of birds that greet the city's morning with a gesture of hope, against the fierce roar of the streets."

— Goenawan Mohamad
an Indonesian poet and social critic (b1941–)

Chapter 6

Pedagogy of Hope —Singapore Malay Youths and Our Educational Future[1]

Dr. Mardiana Abu Bakar

This paper deconstructs the concepts of pedagogy, hope, Malay youths and educational future with a view towards providing new and meaningful frameworks for Malay youths to think of their past and future learning experiences and identities; and how these may have a bearing on the educational future of the community into which they are born and in which they continue to be borne; and towards which they must bear responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The first three words of this paper—*Pedagogy of Hope* is taken from the title of a book by educational thinker Paolo Freire (1921–1997). Freire was a Brazilian educationalist who has left a significant contribution on progressive education. The full title of the book, which was written in 1995, is *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Pedagogy of Hope* was written 25 years after Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which remains one of the most quoted books of this century. He started out to write an update of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* but it became a new book, at the core of which is a call for critical hope and for critical education to become, in essence, the practice of self-directed determination. In direct contrast to the passionate and angry dialectics of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Pedagogy of Hope* is

1 This paper was presented at the Youth Symposium 2012, organised by Yayasan MENDAKI on 14 April 2012 at the United World College (East Campus), Singapore.

a humanistic synthesis of his life's work, in which stories of his struggles in pushing for the education of Brazil's lower working classes became examples, both of the place for inspiring hope and for assuming one's place as a practitioner of hope. Critical education, said Freire in this book, is a basic element of social change, and also a basic way to help us think about society as inseparable from how we come to understand the world, power, and the moral life we aspire to lead. This core idea in *Pedagogy of Hope* anchors the informing points of this paper. They point to how, as a Malay youth who bears some of the responsibility for our community's educational future, you need to carry within you your own pedagogy of hope.

DEFINING PEDAGOGY

The word pedagogy is borrowed from Old French and has its origins in the Greek term paidaggi, from paidaggos, which refers to the *leading the child.* The word has since come to refer to the holistic science of education, and may be implemented in practice as a personal, and holistic approach of socialising and bringing up children and young people. In education, pedagogy as holistic education is associated with the works of theorists such as Vygotsky and Bruner, who see learning as the adoptive understanding of procedures, organisation, and structure, where the learner develops an internal cognitive structure that strengthens the synapses in his brain. The learner requires assistance to develop prior knowledge and integrate new knowledge using various intelligences including verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences. The learner must learn how to learn while developing existing schema in his head and adopting or re-constructing knowledge from both the people and the environment around him. From the work of Vygotsky[2] comes the notion of a learner's zone proximal development (ZPD), defined as the distance between the actual development of a child as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

One of Bruner's contributions to pedagogy is his conception of intuitive and analytical thinking. Intuition as "the intellectual technique of arriving and plausible

2 Vygotsky, L. Thought and language. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962).

but tentative formulations without going through the analytical steps by which such formulations would be found to be valid or invalid conclusions"[3] is a much neglected but essential feature of productive thinking. He also makes the case for education as a knowledge-getting process thus:

> To instruct someone... is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge. We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself, to consider matters as an historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process not a product.[4]

Freire, in turn, conceives of pedagogy as "a practice of bafflement, interruption, understanding, and intervention"[5] against the backdrop of ongoing historical, social, and economic struggles. For Freire, literacy must be seen as a way of reading not just the word but also the world and changing the world had to be reconceived within a broader understanding of citizenship, democracy, and justice that was local as well as global and transnational. Freire was opposed to the conception of teaching using what he referred to as a banking metaphor of depositing something in someone's mind. He believed that education should not involve one person acting on another, but rather people working with each other. In education, Freire implies a dialogic exchange between teachers and students, where both learn, both question, both reflect and both participate in meaning-making. He advocates for education to be in a dialogical (or conversational) form. Freire was also insistent that dialogue involves respect.

Freire was concerned with praxis—action that is informed and linked to certain values. Dialogue wasn't just about deepening understanding—but was part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect. The process is important and can be seen as enhancing community and building social capital and to leading us to act in ways that make for justice and self-

3 Bruner, J. The Process of Education. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 13.

4 Bruner, J. The Culture of Education. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 72.

5 Bhabha, H. The Enchantment of Art. In C. Becker and A. Wiens (Eds.) The Artist in Society. (Chicago: New Art Examiner, 1994), p. 24.

development. Freire's attention to naming the world has been of great significance to those educators who have traditionally worked with those who do not have a voice, and who see themselves as oppressed. The idea of building a "pedagogy of the oppressed" or a "pedagogy of hope" and how this may be carried forward has formed a significant impetus to the work of progressive education, but it is also a powerful means for the self-development of a person.

An important element of Freire's concern was with conscientisation—developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality[6]. Freire believed that education offered students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life and critical agency. Pedagogy in this sense connected learning to social change; it was meant to challenge students to critically engage with the world so they could act on it. As the sociologist Stanley Aronowitz noted, Freire's pedagogy helped learners "become aware of the forces that have hitherto ruled their lives and especially shaped their consciousness"[7]. Freire contended that the basic importance of education lays in the "act of cognition not only of the content, but of the why of economic, social, political, ideological, and historical facts... under which we find ourselves placed."[8].

At this point, let us look at Freire's concept of hope, and work from here towards understanding his conception of the pedagogy of hope.

HOPE IS NOT A CORNER IN DISNEYLAND

Hope is not a soft option for Freire. Hope demands an anchoring in transformative practices, and one of its tasks was to "unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be"[9]. He described hope as an ontological, meaning transformational, need that should be anchored in practice in order to become historical concreteness. Without hope, we are hopeless and cannot begin the struggle to change. Hope for

6 Taylor, P. The Texts of Paulo Freire. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), p. 52.

7 Aronowitz, S. Introduction to P. Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 5.

8 Ibid., p. 101.

9 Freire, P. Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (New York: Continuum Press, 1994), p. 9.

Freire was a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination that enabled us and others to think otherwise in order to act otherwise, and not to be subsumed by other people's conceptions. It is about the "understanding of history as opportunity and not determinism"[10]. Freire consistently reminded us that political struggles are won and lost in those spaces that linked narratives of everyday experience with the social weight and material force of institutional power. Hope is also an expression of faith in the ordinary person's capacity to make a difference. But Freire's definition of hope-building is not so much about heroes standing alone and starting a revolution as it is about building a formative culture around which each of us can play a critical part, starting with ourselves, with smaller circles of like-minded people but also having respectful and meaning-making dialogues with others who think and would act otherwise. Heroes come and go but a formative culture built on hope and self-agency will outlast all of us.

Educational sites both within schools and the broader culture represent some of the most important venues through which to affirm positive values, support a critical citizenry and resist those who would deny the empowering functions of developing a whole person.

YOU, THE MALAY YOUTHS, AND YOUR EDUCATIONAL "FUTURE"

There is a consistent narrative surrounding the performance of the Malay community's education and with it the attendant issue of our ability at moving up the social ladder, and with these the value of our place in the larger Singapore society. We are in the news as much for our relatively lower achievement in education as we are for our high divorce rates and the dysfunctional state of our families. It is a narrative we need to accept not with despair but with hope. You must carry within each of you your own pedagogy of hope. So what does this pedagogy of hope look like for you? In this section, I will attempt to set out my own conceptions of this pedagogy of hope based on Freire's work, and also based on my experiences as someone educated and socialised in this system and who believe she can overcome odds because she has

10 Ibid., p. 91.

access to education, not just in the classroom, but from all sources of knowledge, to continue with her own knowledge-making and to carry through whatever work she chose to carry though critical hope, so that some transformations of reality may be made.

One is not educated because one has 'A' Level qualifications or a PhD degree. Our 'A' Level results, diplomas and degrees are credentials. They speak of outcomes we have accomplished. Producing outcomes are important, especially for a member of our community, and it is a work that must continue in earnest. I believe, however, the way forward for all of us, in tandem with this work, is to think of ourselves as critical knowledge constructors, as pedagogues of hope. In fact, I believe that if we are to embrace the identity of pedagogues of hope, we will move forward to take on the necessary credentials of higher learning with critical hope. Credentials on their own are, however, by no means true testaments to who we are in our capacity for working with knowledge, for reading the world, for dialoguing meaningfully with texts and people, and for building formative culture to transform.

Here are the precepts for becoming pedagogues of hope

◊ Think of yourself as critical agents of learning and teaching

- Overcome your own negative experiences as a learner in your past encounters. Do not carry the baggage of being a less-than-successful learner in the past continue to have a grip on you. Think of yourself as being an able constructor of knowledge, regardless what the knowledge is. Some knowledge will take more work but to see yourself as a possible knower in any field of discipline is a powerful mindset you must embrace. Remember what Bruner said, "Knowing is a process not a product."[11] Get into the process.

- Related to this is the precept of always having high expectations for yourself.

- Teach whoever you can whatever whenever and you can—even if it is teaching the understanding of what a decimal point is, or how a bicycle pump works, or why a rainbow is not a real object. One of the

11 Bruner, J. *Toward a Theory of Instruction.* (Cambridge, Mass: Belkapp Press, 1966). p. 72.

Prophet's (PBUH) injunctions is to teach even if it is one *ayat* of the *Qur'an*[12].

◊ Be a critical, humble but determined "political" reader of situations around you, and forge formative cultures.

- The word politics means "of, for, or relating to citizens", "civil", "civic", "belonging to the state". We are all political beings whether we acknowledge it or not, because we are all citizens and members of a society. We are all part of the way in which the country and scoeity has chosen to place us and view us. Learn to read the situation around you with humility but with hope and determination. And just as importantly, dialogue with others around you on these issues. Dialogue with respect, says Freire, which means speak to understand, argue in order to make your points comprehended but with a view to also understand the other side of the argument, to transform your reality and others perception, and always attempt in these dialogues to build a "formative culture" of knowing[13].

◊ Refuse others' narratives and labels and analyse issues from points of successes not failures.

- A pedagogue of hope is aware of the larger narratives and labels that may impinge upon his self-worth and self-identity but is at the same time able to look at what Freire refers to as "devoted criticality" and with "rage and love"[14]. Devoted criticality means you will keep going back to the same issues to deconstruct it in various positive ways from points of successes and not from points of failures. Rage is a reference to passion and without passion, few things are possible.

- Freire also suggests that how learners experience the world and speak to that experience is always a function of unconscious and conscious commitments, of politics, of access to multiple languages and literacies.

12 Al-Bukhari.

13 Freire, Pedagogy of Hope, (New York: Continuum Press, 1994).

14 Freire, Pedagogy of Hope, p. 8.

> Literacies here is written in the plural because it refers to the ability to not just understand words but also to understand various modes of communication and expression, such as a film, a piece of art, a politician's speech and a set of statistics. Thus experience always has to take a detour through self-reflection, critique and possibility. As a result, not only do history and experience become contested sites for you to struggle with your understanding of who you are and who you can become. I quoted from Stanley Aronowitz earlier on how he noted that Freire's pedagogy helped learners "become aware of the forces that have hitherto ruled their lives and especially shaped their consciousness."[15]

The educational future of any community is built on the formative culture built by its members within and without. I do hope that you will attempt to carry within you a culture of the pedagogy of hope so that you may ensure your own educational future and that of the community.

15 Aronowitz, S. Introduction to P. Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). p. 5.

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"People who stay separate have few channels of communications. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups, and readily misunderstood the grounds for it."

— Gordan W. Allport
An American psychologist (1897–1967)

Chapter 7

Critical Multiculturalism in Changing Global Landscapes: Youth Citizenship in the Age of Insecurity[1]

Dr Rahil Ismail

ABSTRACT

Multicultural education which suggests an appreciation of the kaleidoscope of human diversity and difference through mutual understanding, empathy and respect, and which gives dignity to all, underlines unequivocal universal values. In this seemingly relentless globalising world, harnessing the youthful potential of a generation through the prism of multicultural education and with it, multicultural competence seems more urgent than before.

In multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious Singapore, the Malay-Muslim community forms a significant part of the 'Unity in Diversity' canvas and with it bears unique historical, social, political and structural legacies that precede 1965. These legacies and impact have been analysed continuously but as with other communities, there are also current challenges that speak to the community as a significant minority, and also as part of the national identity that serves to address the dual identity markers of being Malay-Muslim *and* Singaporean.

While not mutually exclusive identities, there are indeed challenges within and beyond

1 This paper was presented at the 'IMAGINING' YOUTH Seminar: Towards a Youth Charter, organized by the Research and Policy Department, Yayasan MENDAKI, at the POD, National Library (NLB), Singapore, on 17th September 2011.

our national boundaries that our younger Malay-Muslim Singaporeans need to navigate confidently and critically of this intensely interconnected and disconnected world: the acknowledgment of power dynamics in a relationship between 'difference' of dominant and subordinate groups, the undemocratic impact of the globalisation process, the noxious normalisation of Islamophobia, the environmental impact of consumerism and the increasing popularity of 'voluntourism' are just some of the urgent issues to consider in a multicultural context for what is perceived to be an 'Age of Insecurity' (Elliot and Atkinson 1998, Judt 2010). Preparation for active citizenry must necessarily be framed within a national context but to exclude a consideration of major global issues is one that we ignore at our peril.

'A YOUTHFUL LEADER IS A FEARLESS LEADER?'[2]

When one speaks of 'youth', itself a complex societal and terminological construction, the connotations are the promises of renewal, change and hope and not without the dash of youthful daredevilry, unencumbered by the caution of experience. Every generation makes claims and lamentations for the potential of its younger generation and in multiracial Singapore, the Malay-Muslim community contends with a younger generation that is identified with the dual proud markers of being Malay-Muslim and Singaporean.[3] The challenge has been, as with other communities, maintaining a sustainable balance in being true to the faith and as a Singapore citizen. These are not mutually exclusive components of identity but a reflection of the official management of race and the official legacies in "disciplining ethnic differences"[4]

2 Barrie, Abdul Ghani Ahamed (Ed.), *A-Z Steps to Leadership from the Qur'an and Words of the Prophet Muhammad.* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2006), p. 47.

3 Features of the Singapore Muslim identity listed by the government body, "Muslim Religious Council of Singapore" (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) in its 2009 Annual Report are: (1) Holds strongly to Islamic principles while adapting itself to changing context; (2) Morally and spiritually strong to be on top of challenges of modern society; (3) Progressive, practises Islam beyond form/rituals and rides the modernisation wave; (4) Appreciates Islamic civilisation and history and has a good understanding of contemporary issues; (5) Appreciates other civilisations and is self-confident to interact and learn from other communities; (6) Believes that good Muslims are also good citizens; (7) Well-adjusted as contributing members of a multi-religious society and secular state; (8) Be a blessing to all and promotes universal principles and values; (9) Inclusive and practises pluralism, without contradicting Islam; (10) Be a model and inspiration to all.

4 PuruShotam, N. S. *Negotiating Language, Constructing Race: Disciplining Difference in Singapore.* (Berlin & NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998).

enacted since 1965 of a newly minted independent, multiracial Singapore.

Multiracial diversity has and will always be with us, and our citizens have been raised on the formal and informal engagement with the 'other' through institutionalised and informal forms of instructions. In this, multicultural education in Singapore has evolved to confront and manage domestic and international challenges and hopefully, through our educators guide our next generation not just to understand the 'other' through the '3 Fs' of "food, fashion and festival"[5], but also answer the basic call to elevate our collective humanity to its full affirming potential. The knowledge of diversity in its multitudinous expressions and outcomes can only transfer the essential knowledge on the complexity and sanctity of human lives and experiences to the next generation in the pursuit of social justice.[6] This is more crucial given the general recognition that we "have entered an age of insecurity-economic insecurity, physical insecurity, political insecurity" where "[I]nsecurity breeds fear…fear of change, fear of decline, fear of strangers and an unfamiliar world"[7].

Awareness of the mechanics, implications and consequences of the current transformational changes on the global and domestic landscapes should be considered in any contemplation of preparatory measures of the younger generation as Malay-Muslims and Singaporeans. To be informed of both unfortunate outcomes and viable opportunities can mean a more commanding control of our lives and our future: an active citizenry and nation-building exercises that do not operate in a vacuum of complex realities and experiences. Our multicultural education programmes can still be a conduit but the notion that 'multicultural education' is a trendy form of

5 Ismail, R. *Muslims in Singapore as a Case Study for Understanding Inclusion/Exclusion Phenomenon*. Paper presented at Fulbright Symposium: Muslim Citizens in the West: Promoting Social Inclusion. (Perth, August 2007a).

6 The term 'multicultural education' can elicit nuanced differences of meanings ranging from simply being ostensibly multiracial to a concept with deep discourses on the myriad extension of hard and soft 'power' (Nye and Keohane 2001; Nye 2008: 29-32). James A. Banks' proposed three components of multicultural education for example including "an idea, or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process" (Banks 2005: 3). Within these components, multicultural education seeks a commitment to curriculum content reform and multiple educative processes for incorporation of inclusive practices. Including multiple identity markers such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class and physical abilities, the mission is to foster inclusiveness for all with meaningful understanding and respect for these 'differences'. As noted by K. Anthony Appiah, significant "collective social identities: religion, gender, ethnicity, 'race', sexuality… matter to their bearers and to others in very different ways" (Appiah 1994: 150). Though there are contextual adaptations or differential emphasis to these basic aims, the general consensus is that multicultural education is a positive path of action befitting an enlightened education system through overall promoting equity.

7 Judt, Tony. Ill *Fares the Land* (London: Penguin, 2010). pp. 8–9.

education that can somehow be 'learned' and 'exhibited' without fully committing oneself to understand and institutionalise the essence of multiculturalism as a form of national and personal growth for social justice and collective good is one of the biggest challenges today. This paper contends that a critical qualifier needs to be added: an interrogative "critical" approach to multicultural awareness that goes beyond the comfortable narratives of 'racial harmony'. As this author stated before[8], there is a need to

> …probe, discuss, dissect and reflect on the challenges and realities of being not just an 'other' ('race' or otherwise) in a diverse Singapore society but within a globalising world. …build hopefully on their knowledge of the 4 Ms learned previously with a more nuanced understanding that could assist them to be truly multicultural in a multiracial, multilingual, multiethnic and multireligious society within a specific national statal narratives of the past, present and future.

THE PAST IS STILL WITH US

For a highly diverse country, Singapore's achievements in the 5th decade of its independence is indeed impressive but it is still a work-in-progress especially if construed within the framework of a multicultural experience in a multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual and multireligious environment. A countervailing assessment to the dominant narrative is a racial harmony landscape that is "minimalist, maintained by passive tolerance of visible and recognisable differences without substantial cultural exchanges and even less cultural boundary crossings"[9]. New strains on the racial grid are clear with its tenability questioned not just because of the greater globalised hybridity but inherent weaknesses in the neat compartmentalization of identity

8 Ismail, R. "I get 'high' with a little help from my friends", *Multicultural Education Review*. 2010, 2(2): 31–56.

9 Chua, Beng Huat. "The cost of membership in ascribed community", in Will Kymlicka & Baogang He (eds.), *Multiculturalism in Asia.* (Oxford University Press, 2005). p. 188.

and in the "imaginary units"[10] ascribed to us by our racial categories of 'CIMO' (Chinese, Indian, Malay, Other).

As a highly racialised society where race flourishes as a major identifier, the high visibility of race and race consciousness is palpable. At times normalised, this ranged from the silence over and presence of "everyday racism"[11] such as the unwritten racial preference in renting houses in the open market[12], the racist chants during inter-school sporting activities, the derogatory postings on the Internet (The Straits Times 17 April 2005), the depiction of minority caricatures[13], the "racist laughter" on television[14], the dismissal of objectors to insensitive media portrayal as humourless minorities, the uninhibited racist attributions to foreign workers[15] and the unabashed premium placed on the fair skin over those born of darker hue, and thus what passes for 'beauty' and the 'normal'. Bigoted, venomous expressions are sometimes seen as social faux pas or principled political incorrectness rather than conceptually flawed or racist conclusions. There are possible uncomfortable narrative outcomes when it is 'normal' to think in race categories and viewing others through the race prism with its resilient stereotypes[16]. As Mr. Zainuddin Nordin, Member of Parliament for Bishan-Toa Payoh Group Representative Council stated recently (2011):

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10 Chua, Beng Huat & Kian-Woon Kwok. "Social pluralism in Singapore", in Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.* (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 87. See also Anderson 1983.

11 Clammer, John. *Race and state in independent Singapore 1965-1990: Multiculturalism and the Cultural Politics of Pluralism.* (Ashgate: Adershot, 1998). Also see Velayutham, Selvaraj. "Everyday racism in Singapore," in Selvaraj Velayutham & Amanda Wise (eds.), *Everyday Multiculturalism Conference Proceedings*. (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2007).

12 Kisnah, Rikesh. "Race counts against new citizen when renting house", *The Straits Times*, 23 August 2006.

13 Tan, Eugene. '"We, the Citizens of Singapore…': Multiethnicity, its evolution and its aberrations," in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Beyond rituals and riots: ethnic pluralism and social cohesion in Singapore*. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, Marshall Cavendish International, 2004). See also Tan, Kenneth Paul. "Racial stereotypes in Singapore films," in Daniel P. S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden, & Gek Cheng Khoo, (eds.), *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*. (London & NY: Routledge, 2009).

14 Gabrielpillai, Matilda (2009). 'The Singapore Indian woman: a symptom in the quest for 'Chinese Identity', in Daniel P. S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden, & Gek Cheng Khoo (eds.), *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore.* (London & NY: Routledge, 2009), p. 147.

15 Ismail, R. "It's a Small World After All? Rethinking Multiculturalism in a Multicultural World," in *Globalization, Multicultural Society and Education: Education in Asia Conference Proceedings* (Seoul: Korean Philosophy of Education Society, 2008).

16 Ismail, 2010.

> I suspect there is a growing blind spot in the midst of the peace we enjoy. True harmony requires a deeper understanding of the diversity of Singaporeans, and a deeper appreciation of how this diversity can be harnessed to our advantage.
>
> We need to set aside our aversion to discussing different approaches to race and religion. We need more robust dialogue to achieve a balanced consensus about the possible dislocations that race and religion have in a multiracial society like Singapore.
>
> What I advocate is a more thoughtful examination of our race relations. It would be dangerously naïve for us to assume that we have attained utopia as far as race relations are concerned.

Not unexpectedly, multicultural education proponents will speak naturally of the complexities and intricacies of the philosophy of affirming and respecting one's identity[17] in a diverse society. However as expressed through a structure of a formal education policy, there is an institutionalisation of priorities, objectives and outcomes that are not always unaffected by particular perspectives of politics, socio-economic status, race, class and personal/societal prejudgements of the 'other' within the system itself[18]. These intersections of identity, whether personal, institutional or national have significant mediated impact on the relationship towards curriculum content within and beyond multicultural education. The essentialisation and stereotyping of an individual or community and other associated socially derived markers are potent factors in both privileging and 'stigmatising' an identity[19]. In this, to assume that one has a multicultural education simply by classifying it as such with claims to a progressive education needs urgent re-examination. There are as Banks noted "conflicting conceptions about the nature of knowledge and their divergent political

17 Banks, James A. 'The Canon Debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education'. *Educational Researcher*. Jun-Jul 1993, 22(5): 4–14. See also Banks, James A. & Cherry A. McGee (eds.). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives.* (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2005). See also Gutman, Amy (ed.) *Examining the Politics of Recognition.* (Princeton, 1994).

18 Allport, Gordon. **The Nature of Prejudice**. (New York: Perseus Books, 1979). See also Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986). See also Sleeter, E. Christine & Carl A. Grant. M*aking Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class, and Gender*. (New Yersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2007).

19 Goffman 1986, p. 3.

and social interests"[20].

These are accumulative and socialisation processes with unintended outcomes, but outcomes they are, whether affirming an identity, promoting assimilation under the guise of integration, perpetuating a stereotype or embedding a power structure. A recent commentary noted the increasingly differentiated education paths within the education system and with that low intergenerational social mobility[21]: a continuation of the "differentiated economic destinations" contention expressed by this author earlier with its developments along racelines[22].[23]

Education systems are, in a way, processing plants for the social replication of a society and with that the replication or improving its social power dynamics. If a multicultural education speaks energetically of 'inclusion', 'affirmation', 'dignity' and 'understanding' but with a complete absence of probing the mechanics of the 'real world', it is preparing a world for a specific whom which might not necessarily conform to the fundamental objectives of multicultural education of equity pedagogy, curriculum reform, multicultural competence and hopefully, social justice[24]. "The cultivation of the overriding sense of meaningful respect and inclusion of the 'other' must be a factor in how the dominant group or individual 'dialogics' with 'difference' and the 'other': an essential acknowledgement of power dynamics in a relationship between 'difference'."[25] Masking this with an emphasis on forms of difference rather than substance can mean at its worst a multicultural education as a self-serving sloganeering exercise that institutionalises particularised, mbalanced power

20 Banks 1993, p. 4.

21 Irene H. Y. Ng, 'Growing worry of social immobility,' *The Straits Times,* 16 February 2011.

22 Ismail 2007a; Barr 2006

23 The official response from the Ministry of Education (MOE) appeared on 23 February 2011: "Differentiated teaching has enabled more students to go further as schools can cater to different learning needs and abilities. The results affirm this approach. More than 90 per cent of each cohort now progress to publicly funded post-secondary institutes' one of the highest in the world. Almost half of the students who live in one to three room HDB flats are admitted to universities and polytechnics' and this ratio has remained stable over the past decade". See Cheong 2011.

24 Bennett, Christine I. *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice.* (Pearson, 2011), pp. 5–10; Alliance of Civilizations. "Education and the Alliance of Civilization, Report on Education". (Doha, Qatar: Second High Level Group Meeting, 26-28 February 2006). Available at http://www.unaoc.org/repository/6872HLG_ReportonEducation.pdf (Accessed March 2011).

25 Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition," in David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994). pp. 78–81.

relationship towards a targeted 'other'[26]. Carl A. Grant and Agostino Portera[27] echo these insights:

> …[I]ntercultural and Multicultural Education also lives within social discourses and functions in situations that involve power relations. Internally generated power….can at times be created and utilized. Power with, among or against individuals, groups and structures are also embedded. Additionally, sovereign power, such as that which people have over one another, can support or significantly limit people's choices and possibilities. Oppression and hegemony exist in contexts where these extreme institutional conditions reside.

Essentially, in analysing the challenges for multicultural education in any part of the world, this paper reiterates that the overarching consideration of multicultural education as a preparation for the future must consider one relentless question: *for whom?* This of course relates to associated interrogations of what we are preparing for, who is doing the preparation and that crucial question of who we are as members of a Malay-Muslim community within Singapore.

GLOBALISATION: "TRENDY FORM OF COLONIALISM"?[28]

The world might be "flat"[29] but it is not a level playing field.[30] The challenges to multicultural education are the breathtaking range of seemingly inextricable, insurmountable complexities that highlight not just dialectical tensions within the country or between countries, but also the global divide between a 'dominant

26 Ismail 2008; also Ismail, R. "International Comparative Study of Multicultural Education The Singapore Story: The Response from Education," in International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes.

27 Grant, Carl A. & Agostino Portera (eds.). Intercultural and Multicultural Education: Enhancing Global Interconnectedness. (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 6.

28 McAdam, Murray, "Martin Khor in Toronto Catches Up with a Key Member of a Group of Southern Intellectual Activists Who are Mounting a Challenge to the Tidal Wave of Globalist Modernization." (New Internationalist, April 1998).

29 Friedman, Thomas. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree.* (New York: Farrar, 1999).

30 Shaw, Brian J. "Globalization" (unpublished lecture: cited with permission, 1999).

north' and the 'majority south' where the definitions, objectives and outcomes of multicultural education can produce tensions between national aspirations versus claims to universalism with varying hegemonic ability to stigmatise another country's national, cultural or religious difference as 'problematic' and somehow not 'civilised' enough[31]. This comes from a self-declared or covert suggestion on the overall 'superiority' of the dominant group to 'normalise', 'teach', 'civilise', 'liberate' the targeted 'other' through various forms of direct and indirect hegemonic assimilative powers. Newly independent countries of the postwar era are familiar with the overt and covert infantalistic aspects of this imbalanced relationship and its political, socio-economic and cultural condescending stigmatisation markers.

This has been exacerbated by particular outcomes emerging from the political-economic framework simplistically expressed as the 'globalisation process' where it is not totally a case of "lifting all boats"[32] or a 'win-win' situation as some would like to trumpet, but has intensified inequalities[33], magnified "unequal power relationship between a global core and periphery which created a number of 'worlds within one world'"[34] and thus continuance of national, ethnic and geographical stereotypes. Some would not hesitate to conclude that this is a new form of colonisation being masked under the positively-couched term of 'globalisation' with vastly differing realities for different parts of the world and even within a stable, confident nation like Singapore. Indubitably, this has urgent relevance for multicultural education in Singapore and for her citizens who have assumed to be advocating a global citizenship while remaining rooted to a Singapore identity.

These apparently 'new' forms of change and 'difference' are ostensibly new contenders to the past inequitable economic structures on global, regional and national scale. While this has some resonance if the impact of the information-wired world of the Internet is added to the consideration, the broad outlines of the current world

31 Rosenstone, Robert A. "Racist War for Civilization", *Reviews in American History.* 1987, 15(3): 468–473. See also Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). See also Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

32 Bigelow, Bill & Bob Peterson (eds.). *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World.* (Wisconsin: Rethinking Schools, 2002).

33 Stiglitz, Joseph. *Globalization and its Discontents.* (London: Penguin, 2002). See also Ellwood, Wayne. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization.* (UK: New Internationalist, 2006). See also Pilger, John. *The New Rulers of the World.* (London: Verso, 2002).

34 Frank and Gills 1993 cited in Shaw 1999.

order are merely continual perpetuation of social, political and economic structures that militate against greater recognition for a respectful multicultural world. This contention is predicated on the thesis that multiculturalism is also ultimately about 'power' in interacting with 'difference': in tangible and intangible forms, in covert and overt expressions and in dominant and subordinate relationships. While there had been significant economic progress since the immediate postwar years for some developing countries, the interdependence and imbalanced relationship between the 'dominant north' and the 'majority south' still persists in varied forms of structural dependencies and inequitable relationships[35]. The tensions were and still are "between who you are and who you are for others": "essential part of being alive"[36] in the past as it is now today. The "politics of identity"[37] has morphed to new forms in this Brave New World of frenetic globalisation and should naturally give us pause to think on how multiculturalism is being challenged within the broad framework of exercising 'power' to define a 'difference' with distressing impact. And again, how does this affect this community's attempts to chart and navigate the future where the tensions might overlap, particularise or stigmatise cherished, unique aspects of our identity within and beyond the national borders?

'Globalisation', as a default answer which the subtitle above suggests[38], is itself a loose term with varying definitions and paradigm discourses: "golden straightjacket"[39], "a trendy form of colonialism"[40], "worlds within worlds"[41] and "failed the world's poor"[42]. Amidst the expanding debate ranging from the implications for national

35 Viotti, Paul R. & Mark V. Kauppi. *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond* (New York: MacMillan, 1993, 2nd Edition). Available at http://www.wsws.org/articles/2011/aug2011/pers-a31.shtml (Accessed August -September 2011). pp. 35–37, 449–450.

36 Leaning, Jennifer. "Brutality, Bloodshed, and Resolution: A Violent Inheritance," in Kate Holbrook, Ann S. Kim, Brian Palmer & Anna Portnoy (eds.), *Global Values 101*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 206.

37 Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition," in David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

38 Shaw, Brian J. *Globalization*. (unpublished lecture, cited with permission: 1999).

39 Friedman, 1999.

40 McAdam, Murray. "Martin Khor in Toronto Catches Up with a Key Member of a Group of Southern Intellectual Activists Who are Mounting a Challenge to the Tidal Wave of Globalist Modernization," *New Internationalist.* April 1998.

41 Giddens, 1999.

42 Bolton, Giles. *Poor Story: An Insider Uncovers How Good Intentions Have Failed The World's Poor* (London: Random House, 2007).

sovereignty, for cultural survival[43] to environmental destruction, there is recognition that there are indeed "many globalizations"[44] with 'winners and losers'. While there have been affirming outcomes for a more connected world through the transfer of knowledge and technology, there is an urgent need to balance these varied stories[45] with an unequivocal but respectful acknowledgement of devastating realities for vulnerable communities. There must be a committed continuous call to question the solipsistic narrative of a relentless, positive phenomenon of globalisation: a critical analysis beyond the cheerleading sloganeering of a "flat" world[46] or that globalisation is merely a "global circulation of goods, services and capital, [but] also of information, ideas and people[47].

The world today, as it was in the past, not uniformly 'one' and the 'we' in a global world has compartmentalised membership with differing privileges and realities. In the preparation of our children for the future, the question rears again: for whom? Multicultural education today and more so in Singapore with its inextricable links to the global economy needs to question critically and thoughtfully the intense impact of this interconnected and disconnected globalising process. This means going beyond, for example, equating a diverse demography to an instant multicultural sensibility or to promote an education programme that 'recognises' the 'other' predominantly in forms of "food, fashion, festival"[48], flags and folklore rather than the substance of a living reality of the 'other' with its 'everyday racism' dominated by race, faith, language, class and politics. As concluded by Susan Gillespie[49]:

> Reconceptualizing international education in the era of globalization means recognizing that we can and should learn

43 Alternatively, Kymlicka also contends that globalisation talks of "creating more room for minorities to maintain distinct identity and group life" (1996), p. 9.

44 Torres, Carlos Alberto. *Education and Neoliberal Globalization.* (NY: Routledge, 2009), p. 89.

45 Gaff, Jerry G. "Beyond Politics". Change. Jan/Feb 1992, 24(1): 30–35.

46 Friedman, 1999.

47 The World Bank. *Poverty in the Age of Globalization.* 2000. Available at http://www1.worldbank.org/economicpolicy/globalization/documents/povertyglobalization.pdf (Accessed August -September 2011). p. 1.

48 Ismail, 2007a.

49 Gillisepie, Susan. 'Towards Genuine Reciprocity', *Liberal Education***.** Winter 2003. Available at http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-wi03/le-wi03feature.cfm. (Accessed March 2011). p. 4.

> *with* and *from*, not only *about* people from other cultures… There needs to be a dialectical relationship between learning about diverse cultures and learning to interact in diverse peoples.

The plea for a more interrogative critical multiculturalism that goes beyond the 'iceberg' theory of knowledge of the 'other' is not new. The urgency for its consideration is that between the 'different' worlds, one must prepare every child for the future as it is a universal right and not for the selected whom marked by 'unearned privilege'[50] or denied due to the "stigmatised"[51] nature of their ascribed identity. Or we are simply preparing a future that replicates political, economic and social power structures with multicultural education, consciously or inadvertently, facilitating this path of stratified, differentiated future where nothing is fundamentally 'changed' as nothing has been fundamentally 'questioned'[52].

THE GLOBALISATION OF RACISM?

The interrogative subheading from Donaldo Macedo and Panayota Gounari[53] is a powerful reminder on the ugly side of globalisation: a fundamental consideration. There are real concerns that globalisation has facilitated the "globalisation of racism" but couched as inevitable for the good of "global community": solipsistic understanding that 'global community' here means privileged members within both developed and developing world. The realists (or the cynics depending on one's political prism) did not wholly concur with the optimism that a "flat world" purports to bring.

While "change" can indeed be difficult, the interrogative process can be pursued to ensure amore equitable depiction of global affairs. This is to prevent the emasculation

50 'Unearned privilege' or 'inside privilege' can be described as a special advantage, entitlement or benefit, covert or otherwise, to an individual simply based on membership of a group and therefore not based on a particular ability or talent, i.e. not 'earned'. Essentially, it's a privilege that excludes non-members but seen by its beneficiaries as 'normal', 'natural' and 'fair entitlement'.

51 Goffman, 1986.

52 Ismail, R. "'…tomorrow belongs to …whom?' Challenges in Multicultural Education in Developing Countries," in *Multicultural Education: The Application of Multicultural Education in Developing Countries.* (Bandung, Indonesia: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), 2011).

53 Macedo, Donaldo & Panayota Gounari (eds.). *The Globalization of Racism.* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

of multicultural education as mere "safe multiculturalism" of "food, fashion and festival" and also crucially to trigger and cultivate a more critical eye to how "difference" is presented with attending implications for embedded power structures in international relations.[54] In the undemocraticimpact of the global economy, the developing countries with their legacies of colonial inequalities are affected by the neo-liberal economic policies[55] of a hegemonic minority. The allegations of prioritising profits over people, usually the most vulnerable have raised issues of not just economic opportunities, national inequities but also cultural respect and dignity of communities in the 'majority south'. The critics of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank have noted the human impact of "structural adjustment policies", the "race to the bottom" despair of workers in the developing world and the impact of "free trade" on domestic agriculture and employment[56].

These are harsh realities that have produced general global trends in economic inequities and severe hardships during the economic meltdowns of 1997 and 2008. But if a subordinate economic position is explained simply as the 'other' of the developing world with all the assumptions associated with the term, the absence of critical questions on the inequities, the contradictions and the debilitating outcomes of imbalanced political and economic power, the less privileged children within the 'majority south' and Singapore too will 'embrace' their ascribed normalised stigmatised identity as 'truth'. To continue with this is to continue a 'default' racist paradigm of education where 'false truths' are 'taught' and unquestioned. As noted by David L. Blaney[57]:

> If we allow globalization to become a "ready-made phrase" that carries along with a sense of givenness and inevitability of a whole set of global social practices, we inadvertently cultivate "fatalism and submission".

54 Ismail, R. "I get 'high' with a little help from my friends," Multicultural Education Review. 2010, 2(2): 31–56.

55 Viotti & Kauppi 1993: 449-450; Stiglitz 2002

56 Bigelow and Peterson 2002; Stiglitz 2002. See also Stiglitz, Joseph. *Making Globalization Work*. (WW Norton, 2006). See also Ellwood 2006.

57 Blaney, David L. "Global education, disempowerment and curricula for world Politics", *Journal of Studies in International Educatio*n. 2002, (6): 271.

This is echoed by Macedo and Gounari[58] and worth being quoted extensively here:

> The neo-liberal economic challenge, which supposedly invites everybody to drink from a fountain of equal opportunities, ignores the lines of class, race, gender, education, age, disability and so forth. It also pigeonholes people as skilled or unskilled workers, educated and uneducated, successful or unsuccessful, while leaving unchallenged the inequality inherent in the system designed to build skills. It obscures the fact that choices may not be the same for people who do not have the same resources to realize these choices, in a society that largely promotes injustice and unequal opportunities and resources. In the current global disorder people are "free to be excluded" without anybody feeling the moral and ethical responsibility to intervene to change the reality.

Crucially, any "ameliorative pedagogical strategies"[59] or complementary, intervening programmes such as the "helping hands" model (Nadler 2002) to confront these 'false truths', no matter how well-intended, walk a fine line between affirming and demeaning an identity, between respecting and condescending the 'other' and between helping to 'doing' harm[60] to a subordinate group. As an expression of the social contact theory[61], learning of the 'other' is a two-way process[62]:

> The effort to improve understanding through education about specific cultures, religions and heritages is only a small part of that effort, though a very important one. Before educational efforts can change the way people view others and their culture, it is necessary to challenge the way they view themselves and their own cultural context.

58 Macedo and Gounari, 2006, pp. 13–14.

59 Blaney, 2007, p. 272.

60 Langseth, Mark. "Maximising Impact, Minimizing Harm: Why Service Learning Must Fully Integrate Multicultural Education," in Carolyn R O'Grady (ed.), *Integrating Service Learning and Multicultural Education*. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000). See also Ismail 2010.

61 Sidanius, J. & F. Pratto. *Social Dominance: an Intergroup of Social Hierarchy and Oppression.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

62 Alliance of Civilizations, 2006, p. 7.

THE LAST SOCIALLY 'ACCEPTABLE' FORM OF RACISM?

It is insightful that a response by a conservative political journal framed the response to the massacre of over 90 young people in Norway in July 2011 as "violent counter-jihad"[63]: in one fell swoop suggesting vague legitimacy to a horrific action as a response to 'provocation' by Muslims and Islam, and the Norwegian perpetrator as a 'victim' than a mass murderer. Apart from the continuing misuse and distortion of the concept 'jihad' itself, this is the extent of the normalisation and racist default answer to the complex web of political, social, economic and historical events and circumstances. Multiculturalism in the so-called 'War on Terror' is to view multiculturalism through the solipsistic and self-serving 'lens of security'[64].

Concurrently, the wave of "racist, protective measures" against Muslims, Romas and immigrants in Europe against the 'other' "masks the same old barbarism"[65]. Slavoj Žižek explains it succinctly in which an 'other' difference is neutered enough to make the dominant group 'comfortable' with their own racism: "today's tolerant liberal multiculturalism as an experience of the Other deprived of its Otherness the decaffeinated Other"[66]:

> Is this same attitude not at work in the way our governments are dealing with the "immigrant threat"? After righteously rejecting direct populist racism as "unreasonable" and unacceptable for our democratic standards, they endorse "reasonably" racist protective measures or, as today's Brasillachs, some of them even Social Democrats, tell us: "We grant ourselves permission to applaud African and east European sportsmen, Asian doctors, Indian software programmers. We don't want to kill anyone, we don't want to organise any pogrom. But we also think that the best way to hinder the always unpredictable violent anti-immigrant defensive measures is to organise a reasonable anti-immigrant protection.

63 Strømmen, Øyvind. "Violent Counter-Jihadism," *Foreign Affairs*, (July 2011).

64 Muslim Council of Britain, Press Release: Shared Identity Should Not Be Seen Through the Lens of Security—MCB Respond to Prime Minister's Munich Speech, 5 February 2011.

65 Žižek, Slavoj. "Liberal multiculturalism masks and old barbarism with a human face," The Guardian, 3 October 2010. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/03/immigration-policy-roma-rightwing-europe (Accessed August -September 2011).

66 Ibid.

This is the insidious development in this current global framework that should concern multicultural educators and all Singaporeans: the normalisation of an apparently "last socially acceptable form of racism" against Islam and its adherents[67]. As launched by the United States' Council on American-Islamic Relations in a recent campaign, it's a case of "Same Hate, New Target"[68]. The intensification of the religious bigotry against Islam since the events of 9 September 2001 with its full force of venomous, racist and hateful paradigm and an unquestioned collective guilt has now assumed a noxious normality and benignity in the deceptive term of 'Islamophobia'. This generic term of 'phobia' makes for a 'comfortable', and masks unvarnished racism giving it an intellectual and official sheen of apparent respectability within an overtly racist dialogue. It has emboldened not just notable hatemongers but 'world' leaders who are reassured enough of the 'acceptability' of Islamophobia to declare the failure of 'multiculturalism' and the associated 'problem' of Islam within their country and its Muslim citizens[69].

The normalisation of the unmitigated offensive racist term of 'Islamic terrorism' is 'acceptable' within intellectual, political, national and international circles, that is, within the 'polite society' of the dominant powers. This is being institutionalised by the limitless possibilities of the global echo chamber to denigrate, demean, condescend and dehumanise at will. Consequently, offensive is the attending normalisation and stigmatisation of a Muslim as either 'moderate', 'radical', 'extremist', 'good' or 'bad': again hegemonic identity markers that discourage critical interrogation of 'power' and 'difference' but an institutionalisation of a 'false truth' and racist essentialisation of a Muslim based on terms, standards set and controlled by dominant political, economic and military group. In the "politics of recognition"[70], it is not just that one is 'recognized' but how is this recognition expressed is crucial and in this, how

67 Kirkup, Kirk. "Tory chief Baroness Warsi attacks 'bigotry' against Muslims." *The Telegraph,* 19 January 2011. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8270294/Tory-chief-Baroness-Warsi-attacks-bigotry-against-Muslims.html (Accessed March 2011).

68 Council of American-Islamic Relations. "Same Hate, New Target: Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States 2009-2010", June 2011. Available at www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/islamophobiareport2009-2010.pdf. (Accessed August -September 2011).

69 Anonymous. "Merkel says German multicultural society has failed", BBC Online, 17 October 2010. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451. (Accessed August -September 2011). See also Anonymous. "State Multiculturalism has failed, says David Cameron", BBC Online, 5 February 2011. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994. (Accessed August -September 2011). See also Ismail, 2011.

70 Taylor, 1994.

does one relate and inevitably 'explain' this 'acceptable form' of global racism in a classroom to both pupils of the Muslim faith or otherwise?[71]

It is worth repeating the late Edward Said's contention even before 2001[72].

> …there has been an intense focus on Muslims and Islam in the American and Western media, most of it characterized by a more highly exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility…
>
> Much in the current representations of Islam is designed to show the religion's inferiority with reference to the West, which Islam is supposed to be hell-bent on opposing, competing with, resenting, and being enraged at. Moreover, important journals of opinion such as the New Yorker, the New York Review of Books, and Atlantic Monthly never carry essays (or literary works) in translation by Muslim or Arab authors but instead rely instead on experts…to interpret political and cultural actualities shaped not by the facts but by unexamined presuppositions such as the above. Very rarely do critiques of these practices stray into the mainstream to challenge their hegemony.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Multicultural issues are not only about the ostensibly 'weighty' matters of politics and history but in the seemingly benign, interactive actions that should apparently not attract any controversial narratives. The current popularity and expansion of overseas volunteerism (or

'voluntourism' or 'disaster tourism' or 'ego tourism') abroad among our citizens has raised concerns of a projection of power as a means of cultivating, conscious and unconscious, a sense of national, cultural superiority over the subordinate

71 Ismail, R. "Ignoring the Elephant in the Room: Racism in the War on Terror," in Gopalkrishnan, N. and H Babacan (eds.), *Racisms in the New World Order: Realities of Culture, Colour and Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007b).

72 Said, Edward. *Covering Islam*. (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp. xi, xxv.

national 'other'. This is not to deny the personal growth and satisfaction from such empowering exercises achieved by our young ambassadors as these are framed as warm, feel-good multicultural interaction with an 'other' and should be encouraged. The crucial reminder to this exercise is that the dangers are real in undermining the "respectful[ly] encounter [of] the other"[73] as this has the potential to be less than a respectful dialogic model[74]:

> …overseas volunteerism by economically privileged groups interacting in a structural unequal power relations with an economically disadvantaged 'other', variously marked by ethnic, regional, religious and/or material differences, can be framed as a demeaning 'touristification' of the exotic 'other' with the concomitant perpetuation of pre-existing stereotypes.
>
> At its worst form, it can be seen as an ego trip or a booster shot to define the server's unconscious sense not only of dominance but self-serving 'superiority': personal, cultural, religious, financial and national.

Similarly another crucial consideration for the future (and present), and for the more privileged Singaporeans, young and mature, is the awareness of the impact of rampant consumer culture on the environment. Our modern consumer culture must be integrated into understanding the mechanics of the interconnected patterns of the global economy to environmental destruction. Awareness can prompt action[75] as individual choices have consequences and with that accountability[76]. Nonetheless, but educating our youth of negative consumer impact on vulnerable communities and on the environment through discreet shopping habits, no matter how genuinely expressed, again merely ignores and disrespects the vital interconnected nature of all

73 Delpit, Lisa & Joanne Kilgour Dowdy (eds.). *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom* (New York: New Press, 2008), p. 216.

74 Ismail, 2010.

75 Pike, Graham. "Global Education and National Identity: In Pursuit of Meaning," *Theory into Practice.* Spring 2000, 39(2), Global Education: Viewed from around the World: 66.

76 Drum, J., & G. Howard. *Multicultural and Global Education: Seeking Common Ground* (Summary). Paper presented at the a conference cosponsored by Las Palomas de Taos, REACH Centre for Multicultural and Global Education, and the Stanley Foundation. (Taos, New Mexico: January 1989).

lives. Using a reusable shopping bag or buying fair trade products is commendable but ultimately, we cannot shop our way out of an environmental disaster at the shopping mall. The concept of 'ethical shopping' promotes the false, comforting sense of 'doing something' in the midst of 'doing nothing'. There must be concerted evelopment to prepare our youth to develop "attitudes of solidarity that go beyond mere charity"[77].

Thus, by subtle or direct means, our younger generation are in some cases being "carefully taught"[78] that tomorrow seemingly belongs to selected beneficiaries: the privileged whom with their inherent, unquestioned 'right' to access those opportunities and benefits. Through lackadaisical attitudes to injustices, through semantic wordplay, racist claims of inherent 'defects' of a faith, dubious assertions of cultural 'deficit' of a community, through the shameless promotion of a preferred skin colour and all perpetuated by the 24-'news' cycle global echo chamber of a homogenised information networks[79], multicultural education proponents are challenged to assist our youth to adopt a more critically empowering approach to understanding their current and future paths within their Islamic and Singapore identities: to be a global citizen moored to Malay-Muslim Singapore values and identity.

Preparing societal future through the prism of affirmative multicultural education would appear to be the fundamental component of any education system. An education philosophy should ideally assume an uncompromising inclusion of multicultural ethos in the formulation and application of education practices as struggles of an individual or a community, dominant

or marginalised, in navigating and contesting the "politics of identity"[80]. The Malay-Muslim community in Singapore has proved to be resilient, adaptive and engaged to the internal and external challenges of their identities. The recent May 2011 General Elections suggested an apparently 'surprising' result that the community, while placing trust in community and grassroots leadership, viewed and used the Internet

77 Bigelow and Peterson, 2002, p. 2.

78 Rodgers, Richard & Oscar Hammerstein II. *South Pacific.* (1949).

79 Solomon, Norman & Jeff Cohen. *Wizards of Media Oz: Behind the Curtain of Mainstream News.* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1997).

80 Taylor, 1994.

as a significant channel of communication and source for information, but not an absolute reliance on traditional sources of television and the print media[81].

FOR AN ACTIVE AND *'TAHAN LASAK'* COMMUNITY

It would be breathtaking arrogance to consider the above as core standards on which the youth of our community should consider in marshalling their energy and focus for the future but these are undoubtedly often marginalised 'uncomfortable narratives' that could be given some consideration when formulating shared goals and visions within the context of national and global citizenship. The framework could include equal recognition of differing realities for the cultivation of genuine, respectful ameliorative global programmes and supplemented by a national critical multicultural education programme. The crux of this proposal is echoed by Grant and Portera[82]:

> …sensitively responsive to the ever-increasing diversity that influences our immediate context…not just conversations and contemplation, but bold, creative, localized acts that contribute to well-being and flourishing life for everyone and the world we share.

Certainly we need to go beyond the classroom to think about ourselves, our community, our nation and our human race critically and not just as an academic formula for educational strategies or limited worldview of a global citizenry. It should and could be a strategy for 'making a difference' in a consistent, committed and patient way with the acknowledgment that there will be no instant gratification of success. An excellent start however would be to question exactly what is meant by these rampant sound bites and buzzwords when one claims to a programme that involves 'learning', or makes a 'difference' or to 'empower' especially if a multicultural education programme appears to be "narrow and ethnocentric… academically parochial and intellectually isolated"[83].

81 Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Institute of Policy Studies, IPS Post-Election Forum, 8 July 2011 (National University of Singapore, Singapore).

82 Grant & Portera, 2011, p. 10.

83 Lynch, James. *Multicultural Education in a Global Society* (NY: Falmer Press. 1989), p. 1.

These above exhortations speaks to universal concerns with global applications with the ultimate caveat that in promoting universalist ideas, there must be consideration for 'differences' and an acknowledgement that a 'problematic' or 'celebratory' difference is mediated by 'power'. There is no one model for a particular nation or community but it does not obviate the consideration of multicultural education as a means to prepare for a collective future: confronting the intense challenges of both an interconnected and disconnected world. The Malay-Muslim community of Singapore with its proud 'double-identity' marker needs to prepare through a critical formal and informal multicultural education that considers how its destiny is inextricably connected, in positive and disconcerting ways with the national and global community.

The explicit and implicit exhortations to challenging institutionalised power structures within are fraught with sensitive issues frameworked by Singapore's 'OB markers': affected as ever with latent historical legacies and memories. There are indeed massive constraints especially those questioning "the capitalist order and the very ideology that created the need for representatives of oppressed groups"[84]; or those challenging advocates of social reproductions through national education programmes; or those criticising particular, unique national race management policies.[85] These challenges are vital and not necessarily provocative or disrespectful but could be perceived as increasing maturity and robust democracy: an enduring, 'tahan lasak' community with instinctive survivalist skills and experiences.

Crucially, the main challenge for the younger generation schooled in the Singapore way of respect and tolerance for the '4 Ms' of multicultural, multiracialism, multilingualism, multireligious components of our nation as both a national and global good with overlapping and distinct features of respecting the particular identities of its citizens, diverse or homogenous, is a continual critical engagement with the mechanics of this New World Order.

This paper acknowledges the structural challenges and the seeming unfeasibility of

84 Macedo & Gounari, 2006, p. 17,

85 These structural education issues are recognised in the 2006 Alliance for Civilization report (3-4) as: "The most obvious issue is gender inequity in access to higher levels of education, but bias toward technical education may also forestall broader career choices that create imbalances in social development. Other inequities and workforce biases may have been built into national development planning decades ago, that affect admission to higher education to the present day". See also Lynch 2005 (25-26) in planning a global approach framework.

the exhortations but asserts the fundamental consideration: one must interrogate intertwining political, economic and social subterranean structures of power in considering multicultural citizenry as both national and global preparatory measures. Malay-Muslim Singaporean youth and their co-citizens have particular (due to 'differences') and common (as we are also 'similar') means to proceed in this "age of insecurity". It is a 'journey without maps' but one that we can hopefully map together within the 'Unity in Diversity' paradigm. To assert an 'answer' finally to the question posed before as to whom should the future belong: indubitably to our and the 'other' youth but there must be genuine, concerted and sustained efforts to ensure that tomorrow can belong to all. To ignore this is to be placed in the path of global peril and to jeopardise the sovereign national identity of our nation.

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"There is no such thing as a blank human being, man is shaped by conditions, situations and obligations…it is man who determines values; without man, conditions, situations and obligations do not exist."

— Pramoedya Ananta Toer
Indonesia's prolific nationalist literati (1925-2006)

Chapter 8

[Mis]Understanding Youth and Living Community What Went Wrong?[1]

Azhar Ibrahim Alwee

> *"It is only by remaking man himself that the reconstruction of society is possible."*
>
> *—Karl Mannheim*

Introduction

We begin this discussion with an enumeration of what we often hear on the subject of making our youth conscious of their roles in society. Youths are urged to take an active part in nation-building and community development; they must be responsible and cultivate the values of excellence so as to be the leader of tommorrow; the future of the country and the people depends on the youth; they ought to have a sense of belonging to the community, and rootedness to their culture; and they need to be global citizens (whatever that means) and contribute to making their city-state a truly global one. Such calls are exhilarating, easily acclaimed as progressive and forward looking, and generally agreed upon as something that we need.

1 This paper was presented at the 'IMAGINING' YOUTH Seminar: Towards a Youth Charter, organized by the Research and Policy Department, Yayasan MENDAKI, at the POD, National Library (NLB), Singapore, on 17th September 2011.

In no way are we refuting such exuberant optimism. Indeed such expectation in itself is a recognition of youth as transformative agents for the future. Our concern and focus here is not the motivations that can be discerned from what has been uttered, but on what has not been uttered. This means the absences of certain ideas or expectations. The choice of ideas uttered speaks volumes on the dominant thought of present society, and it is this dominant thought that we have to bear in mind whenever we speak of the youth, whether we are admonishing them towards a certaim idealism, or challenging them based on certain convictions.

Consider another relevent question: Do our expectations match the prevailing structures of our society today? Simply put, are our expectations realistic? Obviously, we cannot expect something excellent and productive if our system itself is not conduicive for such traits to grow, or even curtails these traits. Are such calls valid and realistic considering the structures in place which youths are confronted with? Have we asked the right questions? Have we posed the right expectations? In sum, what has gone wrong?

As we are very much aware, youths, who are in a developing and maturing state, naturally are looking for exemplary models whom they can emulate or be inspired by. The signals society gives to the young, and how this happens, has serious ramifications. If we only speak of being global without having interest in what is local, it communicates something to the young; if we speak as though scholarly merit is the only path to attain community and organisational leadership, it can only undermine the raising of bottom-up consciousness. Our interest in youth and talking *with* them is commendable, but it cannot be more celebatory than cerebal. To borrow the words of a liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, there is a need today for a *preferential option for youth*, inasmuch as there is a call for the preferential for the poor[2] as championed in the liberation theology circles.

Before we move into the discussion proper, it is important to emphasise what this paper aims to achieve. Our raising questions does not pretend to give full answers, but by way of a *problem-posing approach*, we hope to encourage *conscientisation* or consciousness-raising, which was conceptualised by Paulo Freire. The problem-posing approach requires us to see the limitations and problems that we encounter, with the aim to understand their nature, analysing them, and diagnosing them, with

2 Boff, Leonardo Boff. *Faith on the Edge*. p, 27.

alternatives suggested.[3] In all, the process of this diagnosis is reconstructive rather than simply an intellectual excercise.

One example of how we can pose a problem concerns the ability to make a distinction between those ideas that can empower us, as opposed to those that can only provide us with a contentment which is more illusive than anything else. Let's take for instance the need to make distinctions between humanist and humanitarian affiliations. Both claim to be outcomes of the consciousness of the ethical demand to help the unfortunate in our society. We can evaluate which carries a conscience which is substantive; one is satisfied with palliative assistance to the poor and the underprivileged, as opposed to the other that calls for deep rooted change.

RECOGNISING HUMANISING ETHICS FOR YOUTH

In a milieu where helping the underprivileged is framed largely in the form of assistance rendered, rather than a long term structural adjustment, we are conditioned to be active as *humanitarians.* Surely this is a virtuous initiave, but we rarely extol or espouse the importance of being *humanist*. We must know how to make the distinction between the two. This is well argued by Freire, though he is speaking from a specific Christian context: "A humanitarian is a person who contributes a considerable sum of money in order to write off the amount and lower his income taxes… A humanist fights to change the world and hands out no checks. If he gives, it is with a different intention.[4] To be humanistic, as Fromm puts it, demands "a system of thought and feeling centred upon man, his growth, integrity, dignity,

3 A problem-posing stance in Freirean sense demands "creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation," Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* p. 71.

4 Freire continues: "There is a basic difference. I do not wish to sound like a preacher, but I would like to give an example of how Christ rejected a humanitarian. When that handsome, well-dressed, very clean young man—one of the "ten-best-dressed"—approached Christ, and asked "Master, what must I do to follow you?" Christ responded, "Divest yourself of everything and come." The young man said, "The Lord is very demanding," and went away. Nowhere in the gospel do we read that Christ went after him to propose that they make a compromise. He made no concession. He did not follow him and the young man could have even offered a check for the parish, but Christ did not want to go after him. The difference I am trying to make clear is expressed in Chris's rejection toward humanitarians." See, *Paulo Freire and the Street Educator: Care Alternatives for Street Children.* (Bogota: UNICEF, 1987), p. 33.

freedom; upon man as an end in himself, and not as a means toward anything; upon his capacity to be active not only as an individual but as a participant in history, and upon the fact that every man carries within himself all of humanity."[5] It is this type of ideal that we should put forth in transformative programmes for our youth.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

In this paper we shall be focussing on the ideas of two leading thinkers. First is Abraham Joshua Heschel, a leading contemporary Polish-American Jewish philosopher, and Erich Fromm, a renowned German-American social psychologist and humanist. The first part of the paper highlights some of Heschel's critiques and challenges, based on his illuminating essay, "Children and Youth." The second part deals with Fromm's discussion on the productive character orientation vis a vis other regressive types. In the third part we shall highlight some of the key ideas from Paulo Freire, a renowed Brazilian liberation pedagogue whose insights on critical cultural literacy and empowerment can be appropriated in our planning towards youth and community building.

Before we begin our discussion proper, let us pose another question in relation to Heschel's assertion that "the cardinal sin of our educational philsophy is that we have asked too little."[6] Our discussion does not pretend to answer this but brings us to a next qustion, which demands that all of us to ask honestly: Have our adults seriously thought about us? Again, we do not have the answers here, but this is surely a relevant point to keep at the backs of our minds, especially concerning our youths who are called to engage and dialogue with adults who generally do care for them.

5 Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 262.

6 Heschel, Abraham J. "Children and Youth," in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence.* (New York: Noonday Press, 1960), p. 45.

[MIS]UNDERSTANDING OUR YOUTH AND OURSELVES

The first problem that we want to raise is this: Our misunderstanding of youths leads to a process whereby these youths, possibly and eventually, misunderstand themselves. We argue in this paper that this misunderstanding of youth stems from our ambivalence towards the world that we live in; simply demanding that they deliver the ideas, while both they and ourselves are sociologically blind to present conditions and structures, is naivete, if not simple ideological manipulation. But before we idealise what we want from our youth, we must recognise what has gone wrong in the present era that we live in. Heschel's reflection is apt here:

> "The problem of our youth is not youth. The problem is the spirit of our age: denial of transcendence, the vapidity of values, emptiness in the heart, the decreased sensitivity to the imponderable quality of the spirit, the collapse of communication between the real of tradition and the inner world of the individual.."[7]

One common admonition that we come across is the call for youth to be imbibed with a *sense of belonging* to their community and nation. That sounds noble and relevant. But not so, says Heschel, who is in the opinion that: "The problem will not be solved by implanting in the youth a sense of belonging. Belonging to a society that fails in offering opportunities to satisfy authentic human needs will not soothe the sense of frustation and rebellion. What youth needs is a sense of significant being, a sense of reverence for the society to which we all belong."[8]

PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH ADULTS

When we speak to our *youth,* we must also speak to our *adults*, just as when we speak up about the plight of the poor, we have to also speak up about the excesses of the rich. The adult-youth nexus must be constantly engaged. Often, when we have youth

7 Ibid., p. 39.

8 Ibid., p. 39.

forums, we try to gather youths from various sectors. Adults are a stark absence, with the exception of the speakers who are usually professional adults speaking in their capacities as leaders, academics, activists and officials. If adults are not present and engaged in the discussions and dialogues, such forums will always remain ceremonial, only an item on the organiser's annual event list (which is probably registered into their Key Performance Index).

Put simply, we cannot simply launch a series of exhortations with the notion that the youth will be convinced. We need to bring to adults' attention the predicament faced by youths today. We believe that this kind of forum should be where youths get to dialogue with adults—politicians, bureacrcats, professionals, activists and activist leaders. But there must be genuine dialogue, *productive* dialogue, not simply receptive partners of dialogue. (We are using the terms "productive" and "receptive" as explained by Erich Fromm; this will be discussed shortly.)

In other words, a forum like this must be a site where both adults and the young affirm their positions. It cannot be a monologue where adults exhort the youth to take up a new direction, no matter how progressive that direction is.

We have come across some excellent analyses of generation gaps and generational differences, but one apparent phenomena which is seldom given attention is the spatial gap. Adults and youth live in the same society, yet we experience spatial gaps, not because we lack the means of communication, but because we lack the drive and ability to communicate relevantly to each other. To Heschel, segregation of youth and adult is unwarranted.There is no fellowship between the two. "He [the adult] has little to say to the young, and there is little opportunity for the young to share the wisdom of experience, or the experience of maturity."[9]

In the absence of genuine dialogue and the ability to listen to the needs and anxieties of our young, we are quick to commission studies and reports that are usually more academically analytical than profoundly emphatic to the conditions of our young. We are more eager to pronouce what best our young should undertake, than to denounce or criticise the conditions which prevent them from unfold their best potentials.

Out current education system, praised for its high standards by merit of its

9 Ibid., p.48.

examination-driven evaluations, has neglected the other dimensions of education. We have trained our young to answer questions excellently, but we failed to teach them to pose questions relevantly and eloquently. "We evaluate the student," writes Heschel, "by his ability to answer questions rather than to understand problems."[10] In such an environment, the will and courage to pose questions remains undeveloped, and a problem-posing pedagogical style (as opposed to a problem-solving mode) is seen as abberant and disruptive. With no ability and desire to ask questions, only unthinking conformity and apathy can prevail. Here again, Heschel's view is relevant:

> "We, the adults, have delegated our moral responsibility to the schools, the social agencies, or community funds. We have time for hobbies, for watching baseball; we have no time to help the needy, to sustain the sick, to offer companionship to the lonely, no time to offer guidance to our children. ... School education is a supplement. The problem is not only the scarcity of teachers; the problem is the absence of parents. ... What we need are not only more school buildings and more playgrounds, but also the restoration of the home, the ressurrection of the parent as a person worthy of being revered, as an example of devotion and responsibility...[11]

It is common in such exhortations that youths are called to change their *attitude.* But what about the adults themselves? To Heschel this is the task that we need to undertake; to him, "a radical of attitudes is the call of the hour"[12]—a call which includes both adult and youths, and in many cases the examplary act of the former, transpire the latter. Put simply, adults must take the responsibility of the conditions which our youths are confronted with. Adults must not simply exhort and see how damaging a situation it is, before they easily pronounce the call for youths to "change their mindset" as commonly uttered. Let say, in the realm of education, as Heschel noted, "We prepare the pupil for employment, for holding a job, we do not teach him how to be a person, how to resist conformity, how to grow inwardly, how to say No to his own self. We teach him how to adjust to the

10 Ibid., p.46.

11 Ibid., p.48

12 Ibid., p.51

public; we do not teach him how to cultivate privacy."[13]

Adults in this milieu of efficiency and competitive productivity call for youth to be disciplined and dutiful, exhorting good morality, yet have little inkling of how to cultivate a human person's ethical conscience. Heschel puts this point directly:

> "The basic issue is how young people can be brought up with a proper sense of responsibility... Yet, how can we expect the young to be noble if we ourselves continue to tolerate the ignoble... There is no sense of responsibility without reverence for the sublime in human existence, without a sense of dignity, without loyalty to a heritage, without an awareness of the transcendence of living."[14]

We (adults) have created an environment bereft of empathy. We settle for sympathy and think our palliative assistance programe is already a charity on our part towards those who are unfortunate. All these actions give wrong signals to our youths.

> "We have denied our young people the knowledge of the dark side of life. They see a picture of ease, play, and fun. That life includes hardships, illness, grief, even agony; that many hearts are sick with bitterness, resentfulness, envy—are facts of which young people have hardly an awareness. They do not feel morally challeged, they do not feel called upon."[15]

This is the environment that we live in. Today, more than ever, we are confronted by a situation where non-market values such as commitment to solidarity, community, and care are becoming hard to hold on to, while market values only interested cost efficiency and output productivity.[16] We may have an education system of the first order in terms of infrastructure, content and style, but are sadly not prepared to

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13 Ibid., p.45

14 Ibid., p.44.

15 Ibid., p..43 .

16 A similar point has been decribed by Cornel West in relation to his Black community: "Young people want to make the easy buck now. In many ways they are mirrorring what they see in society at large, what they see on Wall Street. It makes it very difficult for them to take, not only commitment and caring and sacrificing, but ultimately human life itself seriously. Profits become much more important than human life. What we see is a very cold-hearted mean-spirited throughout these communities..."A World of Ideas, Interview by Bill Moyers, in Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalim, p. 104.

admit that we do not have nurturing systems for children and youth—especially outside the school system which is already facing tremendous pressure to churn out productive worker-citizens for the economy, in view of the endless consumptive image projected as the successful and neccesary lifestyle to be achieved.

YOUTH AND VALUATIONAL CRISIS

Indeed our youths are living in the context of a turbulent valuational crisis, especially when they are in relative comfort; some are more pampered than others. "Society, the age, or his mother is blamed for his failure, weakened by self-indulgence, he breaks down easily under hardship."[17] We must fully comprehend this before we lament about youth apathy in every sense of the word. Heschel's moving depiction of the dominant life orientation of the present is telling, in a tenor of a religious philosopher:

> "Home, inwardness, friendship, conversation are becoming obsolete. Instead of insisting: my home is my castle, we confess: my car is my home. We have no friends; we have business associates. Conversation is dissappearing; watching television substitutes for the expression of ideas... We have achieved plenty, but lost quality; we have easy access to pleasure, we forget the meaning of joy....Not only do we distort our sight of the world by paying attention only to its aspects of power; we are reducing the status of man from that a *person* to that of a *thing*. We have locked ourselves out of the world by regarding it only as material for the gratification of our desires. There is a strange cunning in the fact that when man looks only at that which is useful, he eventually becomes useless to himself. In reducing the world to an instrument, man himself becomes an instrument. Man is the tool, and the machine is the consumer. The instrumentalization of the world leads to the *disintegration of man*.[18]

17 Ibid., p.43.

18 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

What Heschel has problematised above is obviously directed at both the young and adults in society. But in highlighting the adults' limitations, we do not mean to just simply put *all* blame of them, absolving the young from any responsibilities. We highlight these problems because adults and youths must come together and see the kind of world that we have created, one that we inhabit today. If we demand that our adults take responsibility, the same must be demanded from our young. Hechel's challenge is apt again:

> "For *the high standard of living* the young people enjoy we must demand in return *high standard of doing, a high standard of thinking*. Charity, being personally involved in relieving the sufferings of man, is as important to education as the acquisition of technical skills. We must implant in the pupil a sensitivity to the challenging questions: What shall I do with power? What shall I do with prosperity, with success, or even with competence?[19]

Speaking of *high standard of thinking,* and the *high standard of doing* bring us to the second part of the paper, which attempts to highlight the significance of understanding what (a) real thinking entails and (b) what sort of productive activity we should take up.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGE I: A HIGH STANDARD OF THINKING AND A SENSE OF EMPATHY

We first note the definition of real thinking. An Argentinian philosopher, Enrique Dussel, known for his philosophy of liberation, noted the crisis of thinking in society. His reflection, quoted below, has direct relevance on how we have conditioned thinking in our education system. He writes:

> "Our study is bookish and unrealistic because we are not accustomed to penetrating deeply into what we live and what we

19 Ibid., p.51.

> are surrounded by; but rather, from childhood on we study about the Nile and the Mississippi rivers without knowing a thing about the brook that runs nearby. How, then, can we get an idea of what a river is? In order to know the history of our people, we must first learn what it means to have a father, an aunt, a grandparent in time and to become acquainted with what goes on in our district and in the city, and then go on to universal history. Instead, we begin with the cave dweller. So, the child from the start sees history as a myth, geography as a fairy tale, and the nation as an ethereal, volatile, unreal entity. It is the general belief that study is the study only of what others have thought and written. All that the student has to do is accumulate content."[20]

Although Dussel wrote in the context of Latin America, the problem he raised is not unfamiliar to us—education devoid of context, bereft of affiliation to its immediate surrounding, as its educational paradigm remains captive of what is claimed to be the universal standard, which is invariably the Euro-American model. This is exactly what we face today but rarely problematise.

This is also exactly what we have missed—the failure to cultivate a sense of the community, the empathy of the local situation, and a sense of duty for the immediate surrounding. As such, when our youth are asked what poverty is, many of their immediate answers revolve around those in the poor Third World countries that have little food, clothes and social amenities like schools and health care. That is surely relevant, but what about the poor in their own neighbourhood? Hence, we must teach our youths first to think about their neighbourhood before they get eager to take up global things; it is sad for them to be seeing the world map with rigour while remaining ignorant of the precincts, alleys and corners of their neighbourhood.[21]

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20 Refer, Dussel, Enrique D. *Ethics and the theology of liberation.,* p. 122.

21 This emphasis on being sensitive to one's own local environment and vicinity is well developed Folk Community School as initiated by Myles Horton and circles in the USA. Read, Samuel Everett (ed.) *The Community Folk School.*

THE HAVING MODE PREDOMINATES

Another dimension of 'attaining' a high standard of thinking calls for discernment in our approach to knowledge or learning, which can be experienced in either the *having* mode or the being mode—a point that has been briliantly conceptualised by Fromm. Let us understand Fromm's elaboration of the having mode that can be found amongst our student population:

> "Students in the having mode of existence will listen to a lecture, hearing the words and understanding their logical structure and their meaning and, as best they can, will write down every word... so that, later on, they can memorize their notes and thus pass an examination. But the content does not become part of their own individual system of thought, enriching and widening it. Instead, they transform the words they hear into fixed clusters of thought, or whole theories, which they store up... Students in the having mode have but one aim: to hold onto what they "learned," either by entrusting firmly to their memories or carefully guarding their notes. They do not have to produce or create something new. In fact, the *having*-type individuals feel rather disturbed by new thoughts or ideas about a subject, because the new puts into question the fixed sum of information they have..."[22]

The having mode therefore cannot lead to substantive and experiential learning, and its approach to knowledge is very much like the hoarding orientation that is part of the non-productive character orientation that Fromm has brilliantly discussed.[23] The productive character orientation, or productiveness is a state or condition where it refers to

> "…man's ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him. If we say he must use his powers we imply that he must be free and not dependent on someone who controls his

22 Fromm, Erich. *To Have or To Be?* (New York : Bantam Books, 1981). pp. 17–18.

23 The having mode in education thus reminds us of what Freire has described as the banking approach in education. Read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* (New York: Continuum, 1970). pp. 58–60.

> powers. We imply, furthermore, that is guided by reason, since he can make use of his powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for. Productiveness means that he experiences himself as the embodiment of his powers and as the 'actor'; that he feels himself one with his powers and at the same time that they are not masked and alienated from him."[24]

This contrasts with the non-productive orientations which comprised of: (a) the receptive orientation; (b) the exploitative orientation; and (c) the hoarding orientation. A non-productive character type is also an ethically imperfect type, since it cripples or thwarts man's power (or prevents or inhibits the unfolding of man's power). Elsewhere, Fromm reiterates that man's character becomes distorted when "[h]is powers of love are impoverished, and he is driven to want power over others. His inner security is lessened, and he is driven to seek compensation by passionate cravings for fame and prestige. He loses his sense of dignity and integrity and is forced to turn himself into a commodity, deriving his self-respect from the saleability, from his success."[25] In the being mode, we see a different kind of relatedness to the world. Fromm continues by saying that students in this mode:

> "…do not go to the course of lectures, even to the first one in a cours, as tabulae rasae. They have thought beforehand about the problems the lectures will be dealing with and have in mind certain questions and problems of their own. They have been occupied with the topic and it interests them. Instead of being passive receptacles of words and ideas, they listen to stimulates their own thinking processes. New questions, new ideas, new perspectives arise in their minds. Their listening is an alive process. They listen with interest, hear what the lecturer says, and spontaneously come to life in response to what they hear. They do not simply acquire knowledge that they can take home and memorize. Each student has been affected and changed; each is different after the lecture than he or she was before it."[26]

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24 Fromm, *Man for Himself,* p. 84; In addition, the faith of a productive character in Fromm's formulation, is marked by "certainty of conviction based on one's experience of thought and feeling, not assent to propositions on credit of the proposer." *Psychoanalysis and Religion,* p. 37.

25 Fromm, *The Forgotten Language,* p. 40.

26 Fromm, *Man for Himself,* p. 18.

Although the examples given above point to the realm of our youths' education, we see how the *having* mode of existence has conditioned their minds and outlook in life. The challenge of the having mode affected in society obviously has serious ramification in our educational system. Examination-oriented excellence, tied to its meritocratic benefits, bears another serious dimension which we rarely want to admit: Meritocracy claims that everyone starts on equal terms, but historical and economic realities do not support such an assertion.

Indeed Heschel's view is akin to Fromm in some ways when he disagreed of the fact that learning today is "pursued in order to attain power." "It is wrong to define education as preparation for life. Learning is life, a supreme experience of living, a climax of existence."[27] His deep and clear reflection as a religious thinker is worth quoting again:

> "Learning is holy, an indespensable form of purification as well as ennoblement. By learning I do not mean memorization, erudition: I mean the very act of study, of being involved in wisdom. Genuine reverence for the sanctatity of study is bound to invoke in the pupils the awareness that study is not an ordeal but an act of edification; that the school is a *sanctuary*, not a factory; that study is *a form of worship.* True learning is a way of relating onself to something which is both *eternal* and *universal.* The experience of learning counteracts *tribalism* and *self-centredness.* The work of our hands is private property; fruits of the intellect belong to all men. The ultimate meaning of knowledge is not power, but the realization of a unity that surpasses all interests and all ages. Wisdom is like the sky, belonging to no man, and true learning is the astronomy of the spirit. Learning, education, must not be equated with a curriculum we complete upon graduation... The meaning of existence is found in the experience of education."[28]

27 Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, p. 42.

28 Ibid., pp. 42–43

CONFRONTING CHALLENGE II:
A HIGH STANDARD OF DOING: PRODUCTIVE OR RECEPTIVE MODE OF ACTIONS

Heschel demands a high standard of doing things, which relates to the overall capacity of us to be "productive", but not in the usual parlance of producing more in efficient way—one that Fromm conceptualised in his discussion of character orientations in society. When Fromm calls for the youth to have a "frame of reference" where they can be guided by tenable values,[29] his discussion on character orientations in human society bears immediate relevance. Our clarity in understanding what entails a high standard of doing things brings us to Fromm's discussion on productive character orientation, and by so doing, it exposes us to other regressive orientations.

IN NEED OF PRODUCTIVE CHARACTER/ORIENTATION

A productive character means a "person who can produce. He is capable of producing on his own what he needs", of course not in isolation, but in a situation where he is "able to be relatively independent of others in producing what he needs as he functions within society."[30] This productive character is not just active in physical capability but also "in feeling, in thinking, in relationship with people." Fromm adds: "He approaches the world as the possessor in an active manner, and all the expressions of his being are authentic; that is, they are genuinely his, and are not put into him by an outside influence, such as a newspaper and movie."[31] Such a person has an attitude and a set of values that generally indicate that if he works and produces, he shall reap the result of his own toil. Elsewhere, Fromm's succinct description on the productive orientation is useful:

> "Productiveness is man's ability to use his power and to realize the potentialities inherent in him. Saying *he* uses *his* power implies

29 Hausdorff, Don. *Erich Fromm.* (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1972), p.159

30 Evans, Richard I. *Dialogue with Erich Fromm.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1996), p. 13.

31 Ibid., p. 15

> that he must be free and not dependent on someone who controls his powers. It implies, furthermore, that he is guided by reason, since he can make use of his powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for. Productiveness means that he experiences himself as embodiment of his powers and as the 'actor,' that he feels himself as the subject of his powers, that he is not alienated from his powers, i.e., that they are not masked from him and transferred to an idolised object, person, or institution."[32]

In a way this productive character resembles also the biophilous character which is characterized by: (a) the "syndrome of growth"; (b) love of life; (c) independence; (d) enlivens; (e) re-creates; (f) spontaneous.[33] To Fromm, "productiveness is an attitude which every human being is capable of, unless he is mentally and emotionally crippled." This is to be distinguished from other types of character orientations, such as the "exploitative", "receptive", and "hoarding" types. Fromm explains:

> "The exploitative character is a person whose whole sense of life is based on one conviction: that he cannot produce. He thinks that all he can get is what he takes from somebody else; but because this somebody else will not give it to him voluntarily, he must take it by force. His concept of living becomes robbing and stealing, and this is essentially cannibalistic… In the receptive orientation, I expect others to feed me if I'm nice to them. In the hoarding orientation, I don't expect anything from anyone else because I'm sitting here in my castle, guarding my treasures."[34]

The moral-ethical dimension and option must be centred on the human existential

32 Fromm, Erich. Funk, Rainer (ed.) *The Essential Fromm: Life Between Having and Being*. (New York: Continuum, 2000).pp. 63-4.

33 Read Fromm, *Man for Himself*.

34 Evans, *Dialogue with Erich Fromm,* p. 4

aim, because it determines human behaviour and action.[35] For humanist social psychologists like Fromm, there is a need for human community to be wary of authoritarianism. While overt authoritarianism is relatively easily detected and confronted, covert authoritarianism is more subtle; according to Fromm, it manipulates people through signs, eventually leading to an automaton conformity mechanism.[36]

In such a situation, a critical mind is imperative. If we can define this in simple terms, it refers to a mind that is the opposite of naive. We often hear calls for the need for critical thinking among our youth. But what exactly does this entail? Critical thinking is thought mostly confined to the realm of academic excellence, but seems largely silent or ambivalent in the socio-cultural and political-economic realms. Hence we have cohorts of students who are textually critical but realistically blind, for their excellence in the world of text, without empathy for the context, eventually makes them superfluous. This is the context in which it is useful for us to remember Freire's view on the need to recognise the need for education that functions as a liberator, as opposed to education that serves domination.

> "Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man [sic] is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from the people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man [sic] nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it." [37]

35 Fromm sees the compatibility between the call of humanistic religious without those of aims of psychology. *Dialogue with Erich Fromm* p. 101—namely in addressing the problems of human narcissism. "The aim of life is to overcome one's narcissism, that is to say, to overcome that hindrance to one's development which is the greed for self and for property, that which sustains within one the illusion of one's indestructibility, that which prevents one's being open to the world. As the mystic say, we must be empty in order to be full with the world. That is a command which follows from the nature of man, because it happens that the narcissistic person in very unhappy. He is separated, and he is frightened. If he is extremely narcissistic, he is insane." Ibid., p. 102

36 Ibid., p. 21.

37 Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 81.

THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING AND COMMITMENT

A commitment to community is integral to an individual's challenge in living, apart from his personal needs. In the age where "I" comes first, there is a need to mitigate such excesses, encouraging a mindset that articulates, "What is required of me?" rather than the commonly uttered, "What can society give or provide me with?" Heschel opines:

> "Over and above personal problems, there is an objective challenge to overcome inequity, injustice, helplessness, suffering, carelessness, oppression. Over and above the din of desires, there is a calling, a demanding, a waiting, an expectation. There is a question that follows me whenever I turn. What is expected of me? What is demanded of me?...Over and above all things is a sublime expectation, a waiting for. With every child born a new expectation enters the world."[38]

The typical evasion with regards to understanding poverty, for instance, is astounding; that is why our activists feel happy when they have distributed packets of food to poor families, or have helped in painting and cleaning their dilapidated homes and halfway houses. There is not even a basic awareness or conscience desire to look into their problems *deeply*; such activists easily succumb to the so-called scientific research made on their "target" group(s), and instead of empathising with them—itself already a taboo in a supposed need for neutrality and objectivity—simply categorises them as "low income earners", "neglected elderly", "dysfunctional families", or "youth at risk".

How come there is no moral outrage when we see the poor becoming homeless and elderly folks working long hours with no benefits? There is a kind of anaesthetizing mindset looming here, in which it is legitimate and virtuous to organise ourselves in palliative platoons to deliver handouts for the poor, yet taboo or "out of the norm" to be concerned about the social miseries experienced by the poor, the aged, and neglected youth. In fact, in some cases, to be "objective" or "neutral" is the approach that *has* be taken so that we can presumably address the issues with "balanced perspectives" without being "emotive" or "partisan." Such thinking regime, of the

38 Cited in Moore, Donald J. *The Human and the Holy.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), p. 34.

so-called "neutrality", are in fact the most damaging social and educational idea that we have introduced to our young.

But even after highlighting and addressing these facts, we are often expected to accept that, "Oh, this is a reality, there is nothing much that we can do!" This kind of fatalism is exactly what is helping regressive dominanting ideas triumph.[39] So what do we need to tell our youth or amongst ourselves? Cornel West provides this answer succintly: "They have to hope. They have to hold on to some notion that the future can be different if they sacrifice, if they fight, if they struggle." But hope alone, without concrete actions and ideas, is insufficient, if not an illusion.

CONNECTEDNESS VIA CULTURAL AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

In the context of a modern state, West calls for action on the pressing need to foster a sense of critical thinking that is both emancipative and transformative. This is how he defines cultural citizenship: "By cultural citizenship I mean not just the skills and techniques requisite to be an effective speaker and doer in our society, but also the kinds of intellectual traditions that ought to inform what it means to be an active citizen... and specifically democratic sentiments at the center of this understanding of cultural citizenship. How do we foster critical sensibilities that are attuned to the relative lack of accountability mechanisms for elites?"[40]

West's ethical communitarian concern resonates well with Paulo Freire's stress on the rights of full citizenship that all, including youths, must demand via a liberating education. He opines:

39 Liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez put this very clearly: "But the "poor" do not exist as an act of destiny; their existence is not politically neutral or ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of a system in which we live and for which we are responsible. The poor are marginalised in our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, the exploited, the workers cheated of the fruits of their work, stripped of their being as men. The poverty of the poor is not therefore an appeal for generous action to relieve it, but a demand for the construction of a different social order." "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation," in Claude Geffre & Gustavo Guttierez,(eds.). *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), p. 59.

40 West. *Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism* pp. 128–129.

> "Yes, citizenship—above all in a society like ours, of such authoritarian and racially, sexually, and class-based discriminatory traditions—is really an invention, a political production. In this sense, one who suffers any of these discriminations, or all of them at once, does not enjoy full excercise of citizenship as a peaceful and recognized right. On the contrary, it is a right to be reached and whose conquest makes democracy grow substantially. Citizenship implies freedom—to work, to eat, to dress, to wear shoes, to sleep in a house, to support oneself and one's family, to love, to be angry, to cry, to protest, to support, to move, to participate in this or that religion, to swim regardless in what ocean of one's country. Citizenship is not obtained by chance: It is a construction that, never finished, demands we fight for it. It demands commiment, political clarity, coherence, decision. For this reason a democratic education cannot be realised apart from an education of and for citizenship."[41]

But how far do we really understand this democratic citizenship? A point made by another educational theorist is useful: "To be a citizen," according to him, "is not just to hold a legal status in relation to a particular nation state; rather it is to possess the capacities, and have access to the opportunities, to participate with others in the determination of one's society. This means being able to take into account the inter-related character of culture, politics and economics… we will need to have young people think critically and to be able to participate in society so as to transform inequities that impede full participation in democratic life."[42]

Discoursing about democracy is not about politicising the mind of our young. It is affirming our commitment even as we utter the National Pledge every day, something which warrants our close attention and full understanding. A sound education system should prepare our young and infuse our adults with a democratic spirit and a strong sense of commitment and values. To understand this, a look at a reflection on the meaning of democracy by George S Counts, a leading American educational

41 Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers,* p. 90.

42 Read Lund, Darren E. & Paul R. Carr (eds.). *Doing Democracy: Striving for Political Literacy and Social Justice*. p.16.

and social theorist from the early 20th Century, can be instructive. Counts, like many progressives of his time, spoke of the importance of the democratic vision as part of educational aims for the young. He wrote in an American context, which is still helpful to us who are learning to appreciate the democratic vision as enshrined in our Pledge: "To build a democratic society, based on justice and equality."

> "If America is not to be false to the promise of her youth, she must do more than simply perpetuate the democratic ideal of human relationships: she must make an intelligent and determined effort to fulfill it... the conscious and deliberate achievement of democracy under novel circumstances is the task of our generation. Democracy of course should not be intended with political forms and functions—with federal constitution, the popular election of offivcials, or the practice of universal suffrage. To think of such terms is to confuse the entire issue, as it has been confused in the minds of the masses for generations. The most genuine expressions of democracy... has little to do with our political institutions; it is a sentiment with respect to the moral equality of men: it is an aspiration towards a society in which this sentiment will find complete fulfillment. A society fashioned in harmony with the... democratic tradition would combat all forces tending to produce social distinction and classes; repress every form of privilege and economic paratism; manifest a tender regard for the weak, the ignorant, and the unfortunate; place the heavier and more onerous social burdens on the backs of the strong; glory in every triumph of man in his timeless urge to express himself and to make the world more habitable; exalt human labor of hand and brain as the creator of all wealth and culture; provide adequate material and spiritual rewards for every social useful work; strive genuine equality of opportunity among all races, sects, and occupations; regard as paramout abiding interests of the great masses of the people; direct the powers of government to the elevation and the refinement of the life of the common man; transform or destroy all conventions, institutions, and special groups inimical to the

underlying principles of democracy..."[43]

Democracy is not simply located and identified with the political realm but also within our culture and education—our daily lives. Equally important is the fact that is not simply an end, but as a means or process to reaching a desired end.

THE NEED FOR A HUMANISED EDUCATION

Regarding the way in which neutrality has been idealised (idolised?) in our educational thought, George S Counts urged that education must resist all forms of domination. To be neutral has no place in education. Instead education should aim "to foster in boys and girls a profound sense of human worth, a genuine devotion to the welfare of the masses, a deep aversion to the tyranny of privilege, warm feeling of kinship with all the races of mankind, and a quick readiness to engage in bold social experimentation."[44] This is possible only if such notion of being neutral can be challenged and educational idealism takes on the challenge in the struggle for social betterment. In Freirean critical literacy circles, this notion of nuetrality is heavily criticised: "There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom'."[45]

Striving for excellence to achieve is surely commendable. But something is pathologically wrong if wanting to be the first is lauded as the criteria for success, resulting in the neglect of those who are trailing and struggling behind. We do not mean that excellence must be curtailed, but an equally humane concern of those behind or could not catch up bring us to ponder the meaning of success itself. A success is meaningful when it is substantively meaningful to the community as a whole. If one simply thinks, "I will do my best to attain excellence," and leaves

43 Dennis, Lawrence J. & William Edward Eaton (eds.). *George S Counts: Educator for a New Age*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer & Simons, c1980), pp. 99-100.

44 Cited in Gutek, Gerald L. Educational Theory of George S. Counts (Studies in educational theory of the John Dewey Society, no. 8). p. 105.

45 R Shaull, "Foreword," in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 34.

the rest of his community members behind (though some claim that he will come back again to help out), then the situation only perpetuates itself, where a sense of competitiveness turn into a predatory drive while mutual cooperation is deemed as archaic, naïve and impossible.

It is in this sense that Freire calls for a humanising education, one where "men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others."[46] Freire also speaks of pedagogy of solidarity. We need to stimulate and construct solidarity with a sense of connectedness or a sense of belonging to the community and nation, for without this, rampant individualism breeds greater egoism in our social character, fostering selfishness and an unwanted competitive frenzy just to outdo others with no good reason or purpose. In the humanistic parlance of Fromm, this is an ideal that must form part of the human relatedness to one another: "Only when man succeeds in developing his reason and love further than he has done so far, only when he can build a world based on human solidarity and justice, only when he can feel rooted in the experience of universal brotherliness, will he have found a new human form of rootedness, will he have transformed his world into a truly human home."[47]

FROM CULTURE OF SILENCE TO CULTURE CIRCLE

A culture of silence permeates where there is a pervading fear of expressing one's ideas, especially those that contradict dominant ones; timidity and lack of confidence in expressing those; lack of resources to garner any form of alternatives and the inability to think beyond the conventions; and captivation by the myths of the status quo; to the point that one becomes fatalistic about present conditions and thinks that

46 Cited in *Antonia Darder, Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*, pp. 34–35.

47 Fromm, *The Sane Society,* p.61; The need for *relatedness,* as Fromm deliberates, is worth to ponder upon. "The necessity to unite with other living beings to be related to them, is an imperative need on the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends. This need is behind all phenomena which constitute the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word." *The Sane Society*, p. 36.

there is nothing much that can be done.[48] "In the culture of silence," noted Freire, "the masses are "mute," that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being. "[They are often] alienated from the power responsible for their silence."[49] As it is, persons in a culture of silence do not know that their "actions as such are transforming creative and re-creative… they do not know that their action upon the world is also transforming."[50]

We can clearly see this culture of silence at work. On most occasions our students are more ready to be receptive as audience rather than as participants. A culture of asking and inquiring is very much lacking. Why, when we have cohorts of good debaters from our school system who have received international accolades, do we do not see an active debating culture among our youth? Is all that mere eloquence or drilled articulations? Or have we just been training a small elitist group solely to win competitions in the international arena? Yes, the culture of silence within our educational system is something that we rarely problematise because we are inflated with pride from having attained the educational excellence much desired by other nations.

This brings us the culture of silence that has been generated in our language studies as well, a point brilliantly brought up by Freire. We think this resonates with our present predicament since the language corpus and imagination informs our worldview and our understanding of our present situation. "Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centred on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness."[51] The call for reading the word and reading the world, which has been reduced to a dichotomised pedagogy where the words taught are divorced from the realities, must be our concern now. Freire noted this challenge in the American educational system. His elaboration on this point is worth quoting at length:

"...the school, is increasing the separation of the words we read

48 In our case a long historical experience under feudalism, colonialism, and nationalistic fervor in the post-independent period—before finally confronted by the neo-liberal economic system that affect globally.

49 Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom,* p. 21.

50 Ibid.

51 Freire, Paulo. *Education as the Practice of Freedom.* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976). p.37.

> and the world we live in. In such a dichotomy, the world of reading is only the world of the schooling process, a closed world, cut off from the world where we have experiences but do not read about those experiences. This schooling world where we read words that relate less and less to our concrete experiences outside has become more and more specialised in the bad sense of the word. In reading words, school becomes a special place that teaches us to read only school-words, not reality-words. The *other* world, the world of facts, the world life, the world in which events are very alive, the world of struggles, the world of discrimination and economic crisis (all these things are there!) do not make contact with students in school through the words that school asks students to read. You can think of this dichotomy as one kind of 'culture of silence' imposed on students. School reading is silent about the world of experience and the world of experience is silenced, wihout its own critical texts... The school command words only wants students to describe things but not understand them, Then, the more you separate description from understanding, the more you control the consciousness of the stuents. They are kept only at the surface level of reality and do not go beneath it, into a deep critical understanding of what makes their reality what it is."[52]

A culture of silence has a serious disempowering effect among our youth. But addressing the culture of silence of course is not limited just to the ability to articulate ideas confidently. The culture of silence does not just refer to an inability or a refusal to express, but an ideological condition where people are inhibited from thinking beyond the accepted conventions which shackle their liberation and dignity. "In the culture of silence," added Freire, "to exist is only to live. The body carries out orders from above. Thinking is difficult, speaking the word, forbidden."[53]

Most importantly, the culture of silence inhibits cultural freedom and creativity. Cultural freedom is not something that we can be endowed with from above, be it

52 Shor, Ira & Paulo Freire. *A Pedagogy for Liberation.,* pp. 135–136; See also Shor's account on the culture of silence engendered by the school system in pp. 122–123.

53 Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, p.32.

by God or human power holders. We create our own culture, obviously minding our limitations and potentials. "Cultural freedom," noted Freire, "is not a gift but the conquered right of the popular classes to express themselves, an act which enables them to "pronounce the world" and to live a continuous re-creation of it."[54]

CULTIVATING CULTURE CIRCLE

The culture circle encompasses liberating pedagogy where possible alternatives are imagined. To have a consciousness of the effects of the dominant ideology and practices, infuse a sense of dignity via empowerment, and cultivate a collective, democratic and cooperative spirit, the need for a nurturing culture circle amongst our youth is therefore imperative. This cultural circle is not a special organisation or body, but a site where dialogue, criticality, empowerment and a sense of hope are infused. It is a site where the dominant myths that deform us are problematised and alternative paradigms are suggested and evaluated.

Ideally our school environments should be preparing our young for dialogue with their educators in school and with members of their surrounding communities, and also with their immediate families. A summary on the scope of culture circle is useful here:

> "A cultural circle is not an abstract reality that we can rationally define. It is rather the result of a whole critical learning process, intimately linked to the social reality in which the group with which one wants to work lives. Speaking of cultural circles means at the same time speaking of dialogue, animator, education, and politics... The cultural circle... in which we discuss problems that in one way or another concern the inhabitants of a certain region. It is a different school, in which there are neither teachers nor pupils—a place where there are no lessons taught, as in traditional schools. The culture circle is not a knowledge distribution centre, in which the students are supposed to learn by heart what the

54 Freire, Paulo. "Culture of Silence," in *Human rights and the liberation of man in the Americas.* Louis M. Colonnese (ed.) Contributors: Victor Alba and others. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970). p. 176.

> teacher "serves" them. It is a place (near a tree, in a small room of a house or a factory) where group of persons meet in order to discuss their everyday life, and the problems connected to it, such as: their work, local or national events, their family life. This practical life is represented in codifications, and analysed in order to gain deeper and more critical insight, enabling the people to translate the critical view gained into action... a cultural circle is a place where men and women have a right and an obligation to express freely what they think and how they live their daily reality, and where one cannot imagine the kind of repressive silence designed ti keep the popular masses ignorant."[55]

If we extend the culture circle beyond the school environment and situate it in community/social educational initiatives, the culture circle still has a vital role to play, or even becomes so important especially when the school system has given no place or recognition for such culture circle which makes the nurturing of critical pedagogy possible. The latter can be worked out in different contexts, though its essential framework is basically the same. In Freirean critical pedagogy, the essential constituents of a culture circle are: (a) the raising of generative themes; (b) a problem-posing approach in dealing with the themes compiled; (c) engagement in dialogue; (d) analysing and suggesting solutions to the problems raised, and (e) carrying out the actions at personal and/or societal level.[56] In sum, culture circles "must permit the development of the intellectual capacities of the people."[57] Without going into the details of this Freirean method, we shall only focus on the aspect of dialogue that we think youth and adults can undertake to ensure serious communication and engagement between them.

In the culture circles, dialogues open communication, inasmuch as it can pose a challenge to the presently dominant parties. Freire's view on the meaning and purpose of dialogue is relevant here:

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55 Escobar, Hilda & Miguel Escobar. *Dialogue in the Pedagogical Praxis of Paulo Freire.* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1981)., pp. 8–9.

56 Read: Souto-Manning, Mariana. *Freire, teaching, and learning: culture circles across contexts (Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education)*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

57 Hilda and Miguel Escobar, *Dialogue in the Pedagogical Praxis of Paulo Freire***,** p.34.

> "…dialogue must be undertsood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings. It is part of our historical progress in becoming human beings. That is, dialogue is a kind of neccesary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more comunicative beings. Dialogue is a moment where human reflects on their reality as they make and remake it... To the extent that we are communicative beings who communicate to each other as we become more able to transform our reality, we are able *to know that we know*, which is something *more* that just knowing... On the other hand, *we* know that we know, and we human beings know also that *we don't know.* Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality." [58]

Through dialogue we can "take agentive roles and transform their own realities."[59] Dialogue in culture circles enhances participants' critical understanding, helps them be wary of the challenges around them, and commits them to suggesting a way out after sound and substantive analysis and diagnosis. "Through dialogue, we build and change the world. Through dialogue, culture circle particpants can challenge beliefs and realities commonly perceived as static... participants can challnge socioculturally and historically constructed oppressions... Through a variety of topics which are coonected to their very lives, participants engage in posing problems, dialoguing, and deriving some possible solutions and responses in individual and societal realms."[60]

The participation and engagement of youths with adults in culture circles is one where dialogue is made possible and both can learn, unlearn and relearn from each other, and where adults who have more resources and experiences can share and guide without imposing on the youths. Only with such dialogues can we ensure the processes of maturing and growing more sensible amongst our youth; listening to their anxieties and frustations, and challenging their potentials into self-realisation at individuals and societal levels. This self-realisation can only be possbile if we provide

58 Ira Shor and Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, pp. 98–99.

59 Souto-Manning, Mariana. *Freire, teaching, and learning: culture circles across contexts (Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education), p.*39.

60 Ibid., pp. 31–32.

a milieu of empowerment, creativity and criticality.

We have devised many top-down aopproaches, yet we are timid in trying out bottom up, empowering initiatives due to our very bureaucratic and technocratic approach in dealing with things. As a result, we continuously encounter various youth conventions with repetitive proclaimed visions and goals *for* youth, but see little empowerment in the sense that things work organically from the grassroots where youths take the main initiative. If this approach continues, youth empowerment will remain illusive inasmuch as we fail to garner the potentials of our younger generation to be part of this transformative process of community- and nation-building. Moreover, it is constantly repeated that we need to make our young to think better (as encapsulated in Thinking School Learning Nation). But the point here, as Freire has rightly points out, is: "Our task is not to teach students to think—they can already think; but to exchange our ways of thinking with each other and look together for better ways of approaching the decodification of an object."[61] This brings us exactly to our point that dialogic initiatives between our youth and adults are imperative.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The current paradigm of youth and community development is essentially one that advocates an individualised response—that if we have good attitude and values and change our mindset, then all can be alright. This individualised approach conditions us to accept the existing status quo and work within in the system; questioning the fundamentals is invariably seen as disruptive and unproductive. To put in another way, the dominant approach in community development is conservative, despite the liberative and empowering lingo that it regularly incorporates in its repertoire of development pronouncements.

Generally there are few models of community development initiatives where a certain ideological colouring reflects the present condition. Here we shall highlight two main community development programmes that responde differently. The first is the traditional or conservative way of dealing with community issues, where generally:

61 Cited in Lesley Bartlett, p. 37.

> "…action was designed to effect changes in the controllers of resources rather than in those who receive them. The way to achieve significant change at the local level was to increase access to, and democratic control over, the resources that were already available. The operational goal was to radically change the organisation of resources within the local authority, not to act as an outside pressure group. Inevitably this method of practice leads to the involvement of local people into various manifestations of community planning and partnerships."[62]

This is in contrast to the progressives who take up a more radical stance in approaching community issues, where they

> "…rejected previous definitions of community work and attempted to evolve new forms more fitting with economic realities. The projects saw the interconnection between the problems encountered in the local project areas and the uneven nature of capitalist development. Rather than just accepting this is as a given, or responding eclectically, these projects tried to develop along with input from effective local practices at the national level."[63]

Therefore, even as we are zealous in our call for youths' transformation, we must also be humble and critical in looking at the current youth and community development initiatives. In other words, there is a need to look into the limitations of the bureaucratic or adminstrative approach in which community/youth development have been carried out. This approach primarily looks into things, as observers noted,

"…according to statistical analysis plotted on maps to create supposed communities. From this analysis projects are developed, outputs specified and local workers dispatched to recruits and organise local people to the designated end. There is no doubt that some work is achieved through this approach. The problem, though, is that the opportunity costs are at the expense of local people exploring and defining

62 Beck, Dave & Rod Purcell. *Popular education practice for youth and community development work.* (Exeter: Learning Matters, 2010), p. 6.

63 Ibid.., p. 6.

their own needs effectively and the creating and sustaining of truly autonomous community organisations."[64]

In this manner, contrary to an empowering approach, the needs of the community/ youth are formulated in a rather paternalistic way, with the idea that the experts, planners and administrators can think better for the community and youth. The failure to consult the community itself, to listen to their problems and take their suggestions seriously is a classic example of a paternalistic bureacratic mind, which after ignoring the perceptions of the local people, will in the end demand that the local community be responsible in solving their own problems.

Herein lies the need for a popular community and social education, where critical consciousness couples with empowerment and concrete plan-action. Critical consciousness in popular education will enable youth and community development

> "…to work with local people to develop tactics that critically explore people's experience of the world, collectivises issues, builds trust, reciprocity and social capital... Popular education provides a rigourous process for enabling individuals to come together, to reflect on themselves, their place in the world, current needs and issues to identify pssoibilities for change. Usually this process is seen as a cycle of Reflection-Vision- Planning-Action. The reflection phase is concerned with people reflecting on their lives, with the outcome a vision of how they want their life to be . From this vision planning can take place to enable action, Any action taken is then rfelcted upon and the process begins again....What is important is that popular education is seen as a method for critical reflection and social change...To be successful popular education needs to be rooted in the everyday experience of local people and to explore the overarching hegemonic process emanating from the state and powerful institutions."[65]

This is a call for an alternative approach, since dominant practice and ideology takes the status quo and existing power relationships as "normal". Simply put, if we are

64 Ibid., p. 8.

65 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

organised only to be domesticated, to serve the interest of certain groups, then that very hegemony must be questioned.[66]

CONCLUSION: WE NEED VOCATION AND INVOCATION[67]

We must ask ourselves as adults, be it as leaders or activists, whether we have failed our young people. Many young ones have been conditioned to think that they have failed their parents and their teachers. We adults must do the same, so that there is constant vigilance in seriously thinking *of*, as well as *with*, our youth. We need to nurture and groom the impulse for liberation among our young people. The age of paternalistic domestication of youth still persists (and must be ended); a time of empowering them for the next stage of social transformation and resistance against inhibitive practices and ideologies is therefore crucial.

Adults cannot simply hand over transformative thought to the young, just as a revolutionary populist cannot simply hand over freedom to the masses. This reflects Freire's analysis that an educator can never empower his student, except by providing situations where the student can empower himself or herself in the process of learning. The young must play a part in the process of fighting for and experiencing the process of desired transformation. A genuine empowerment averts paternalism, as the latter can never lead to real growth and maturity towards liberation, often ending up in domination. Through empowerment we can put a check on hopelessness, where the motivational drive is dampened and thus easily succumbs to surrendering our fate to

66 The dominant approach of community development obvioulsy: "(a) ignores wider effects of globalisation, structural inequality, etc.; (b) ignores the debates around feminism, identity, culture, sexuality, etc.; (c) is weak on exploring the values underpinning practice; (d) fails to adopts a right-driven perspective; (e) promotes models of participation where local people are largely powerless; (f) draws people into establishment planning structures at the expense of developing autonomous and powerful local organisations; (g) lights on any underpinning theory; (h) accepts the political status quo..." Ibid., p. 7.

67 This is excellently expressed by Cornel West where vocation and invocation means "that calling and re-calling. So you can't really have a vocation unless you have the invocation that allows you to re-member and put together what has been dismembered and shattered. And so, your calling is linked to a re-calling, a re-membering, a historical recollection that connects you then to the best of a past." Gilyard, Keith. *Composition and Cornel West: Notes toward a Deep Democracy*, p. 119.

a dehumanised condition. [68]

The former is not something that can be attained by grace, but via discursive dialogues. The stamina for dialogic struggle must be present, and this requires a sense of historical mission as well as the calling to fulfill one's responsibity to the larger society. Our youths' spirit for collective endeavour must be re-invigorated, and understanding the meaning of struggle becomes imperative. A point made by West is apt:

"Do not look on struggle as some harmful, negative thing. Struggle has great glory and great dignity and great power and great beauty. As a matter of fact, the more you discover through struggle, the purer you become. I think that if we could embrace struggle as a mandatory ingredient to ridding ourselves of this oppression, we'd find the most important too through which we are going to be able to do it. So between doing something and doing it in struggle, I think you will have come on what could be a complete picture for the moment, besides knowledge. Because doing something and doing it in struggle, has to have at its root knowledge and information, so that you're following some course that's designed."[69]

Additionally, the vocation of youth is not something that we (adult) should simply declare or stipulate for them. If there is no vocation on the part of adults to be partners of dialogue with the young, the latter have very little source of guidance and role models. And soon they will be more conditioned by the mass media, especially in this milieu of hyper gadgetry, than they are connected with their community, family, neighbourhood and even their parents. The failure of adults to fill this role means a more complicated challenge ahead of us. The role of adults as exemplary models needs serious revisiting from time to time.

"Young people need to have a stubborn memory of a tradition

68 As West puts it very well: "And when you have motivational structures breaking down, you usually don't have an encouraging environment. Or persons are convinced that the work that they are doing supposed to be doing will not lead to something better. And right now the larger the crisis in the environment—which is partly economic and political and personal, as I said before—makes it difficult for persons to be motivated enough to think that this kind of energy exerted would generate the kind of results that they want." West, Cornel. *Restoring Hope: conversations on the future of Black America.* Edited by Kelvin Shawn Sealey. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), pp. 204–205.

69 West, Cornel. *Restoring Hope: conversations on the future of Black America*. Edited by Kelvin Shawn Sealey. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 33.

> of struggle. And I don't mean just education. That's older people being in their lives who exemplify the struggle that they will remember. It's got to be concrete and palpable and touchable. So then the question becomes: How do we reconstruct our families and communities and churches and mosques and synagogues in such a way that we are more in the lives of young people as exemplars of the struggle that we know brought us as far as we are? Now, how do you do that? Well, one thing you do is try to seize the imagination of enough young people and ensure that they have enough visibility so that other young people can see what they're doing is hip and cool. Because once it becomes hip to be a Freedom Fighter among young people, it's a new world. It's a new world."[70]

Such a spirit of being committed to one's society while simultaneously unravelling one's potential can never be possible in a situation where an education of domestication and oppression triumphs while an education of liberation and emancipation is un-thought or unheard of, or simply dismissed as utopian, impractical and un-pragmatic. The more we avoid addressing this challenge, the more we remain stuck in our regressive and inhibitive thought paradigms, to the point that we are even too timid to ask, "What went wrong?" To keep asking this question, and courageously attempt to answer it, should mitigate our misunderstanding of our youths, our community and ourselves.

70 West, Cornel. *Restoring Hope: conversations on the future of Black America.* Edited by Kelvin Shawn Sealey. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 61

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De plicht van een mens is mens te zijn.
"Human duty is to be human."

— Multatuli
A famous Dutch writer (1820–1887)

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