Countering Terrorism: Multiculturalism in Singapore

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Introduction

> Why is it that a small number of Asian youth, and some non-Asians besides, are not attracted to our own society? Surely it is we who hold the balance of power and attraction here? It is a huge indictment of our own societies that we are unable to provide young people with rules, structures, a sense of purpose and meaning, as well as ways of realizing their ambitions, so that they end up looking for this elsewhere—in whatever twisted and abbreviated form that may take. It is not the magnetism of Al Qaeda we need to worry about, but the vacuum at the heart of our own society.[1]

Some observers have argued that the prudent way to defeat militant jihadist terrorism would include counter-*terrorist* measures as well as counter-*terrorism* measures.[2] Counter-terrorist measures are those that create a hostile operating environment for terrorists. These measures not only include technical instruments—such as better surveillance, more intelligence gathering, and countering terrorist financing—but also entail capturing terrorist militants and leaders. As for counterterrorism measures, these include efforts to diminish the allure of the militant jihadi master narrative that is deployed by Islamist extremist groups to explain and understand local and global politics. Examples of these measures include debunking radical jihadi ideology,[3] one mistaken theological point at a time, and starving this ideology of the support it may receive by responding to the grievances in communities where militant jihadis find their natural recruiting base.

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[1] Bill Durodié, "Social Bonds Can Withstand Most Bombs," *Times Higher Education Supplement* (19 December 2003); available at www.durodie.net/articles/THES/20031219social bonds.htm.
[2] See Kumar Ramakrishna, "Delegitimizing Global Jihadi Ideology in Southeast Asia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27:3 (2005): 343–69.
[3] Ideologies are defined here as patterns of thought where "clusters of ideas, beliefs, opinions, values, and attitudes [are] usually held by identifiable groups, that provide directives, even plans, of action for public policy-making in an endeavor to uphold, justify, change or criticize the social and political arrangements of a state or political community." Michael Freeden, "Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy," in *Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 6.

Developing this two-pronged strategy further, the publication *The Fight Against Terror* (2004), in which Singapore's new National Security Strategy was unveiled, contains a chapter devoted to the argument that national security is a national effort based on the cornerstone of social harmony.[4] This argument is significant because it supplements the two tracks highlighted above; social harmony created as a result of a multicultural policy promotes a relatively tranquil environment where militant jihadi ideology will have little appeal. The Singaporean exercise in attempting to use social harmony as a tool against militant jihadi ideology is not unique. For example, consider the Canadian government's belief that

> [m]ulticulturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging…. The Canadian experience has shown that *multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence*.[5]

In addition, in a recent article in *Time*, Peter Skerry argued that the United States, unlike Europe,[6] should not be overly worried about homegrown Islamic terrorism due to its successful multicultural policy.[7] In essence, the question Skerry is trying to answer in the article is, Can a successful multicultural policy, where a harmonious environment is established between different communities, act as a bulwark against militant jihadi ideology? For Skerry, the answer is clearly yes; he believes that Muslim Americans, unlike the Muslims of Europe, are not as interested in the ideology of militant jihadi terrorists as they are in another 'ism': American multiculturalism.

The Singaporean government's key premise—that a cohesive and harmonious society can act as a defense against jihadist ideology—is worth investigating. Indeed, this paper proceeds on the premise that a successful policy of multiculturalism—where an amicable environment exists based on equality and fraternity that respects difference—

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[4] National Security Coordination Centre (NSCC), *The Fight Against Terror: Singapore's National Security Strategy* (Singapore: National Security Coordination Centre, 2004), 59–66.

[5] Canadian Heritage, "What is Multiculturalism?" (20 January 2004); available at www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/what-multi_e.cfm. Emphasis added.

[6] As noted by Fawaz Gerges, a professor of Islamic studies at Sarah Lawrence College, European countries face the threat of the "the jihad generation"—Muslim European converts to militancy in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and elsewhere who are becoming radicalized and are spawning "self-generating" networks and cells. Furthermore, Gerges is of the opinion that "[t]heir numbers are still relatively small, but I fear they could become larger as more young Muslims embrace militancy…. They're not part of Al Qaeda, but in their own eyes, they are foot soldiers who share Osama bin Laden's ideology." Quoted in William J. Kole, "Plot Shows Rise of Extremism in Europe," Associated Press, 13 August 2006; available at http://abcnews.go.com/International/ wireStory?id=2308252&CMP=OTC-RSSFeeds0312.

[7] Peter Skerry, "The American Exception: Why Muslims in the U.S. Aren't as Attracted to Jihad as those in Europe," *Time* (21 August 2006).

is a necessary addition to the arsenal for defeating militant jihadist terrorism.[8] Intuitively, such an environment should reduce the threat posed by terrorism for two main reasons. First, if all members of a polity are united and feel a commonality with each other, an environment will be created that is not conducive to terrorist activity. Second, ensuring that different segments of a polity are not economically, theologically, or politically alienated from the rest of society greatly reduces the recruiting base for jihadist terrorists. Hence, by using the experience of Singapore, this paper argues that modern approaches to multiculturalism may have to be revised to allow multicultural polices to act as successful defenses against jihadist ideology. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part defines the terms *multicultural* and *multiculturalism*, and presents a continuum of different approaches to multiculturalism. In the second part, we locate Singapore's policy on the continuum and discuss its approach. In the third part, we provide an analysis of the policy's underlying problems. Finally, by tracing recent alterations to Singaporean multiculturalism, the final section of the paper suggests possible adaptations that may be required to achieve the cohesive harmonious society necessary to help deter jihadist ideology.

Defining and Locating Multiculturalisms

When viewed from a long-term perspective, most societies, whether they acknowledge it or not, are multicultural. The term *multicultural,* used here as an adjective, describes the social demographic of polities where different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while preserving their "original" identity.[9] Furthermore, the multicultural nature of a specific polity is not unchanging—perceived difference may shift over time. For example, in discussions on a multicultural Britain, the focus is often on the "new" immigrants who arrived in the U.K. after 1945, although discussion of an earlier multicultural Britain comprising the political union of the Scottish, English, and Welsh is often oddly absent. The point is that the debate concerning difference at a particular moment in time for a polity may shift, thus resulting in the same polity possessing a different multicultural demographic.

The notion of multiculturalism used here is substantive, and refers to the different policies adopted by various polities to manage their multicultural constitutions, however the term may be understood in each individual context.[10] In this sense of multiculturalism, "language, history or religion—any combination of which are sometimes referred to as 'ethnicity'—are frequent markers of distinct culture" which require some form of management within a polity.[11] For example, Britain, New Zealand, and Singapore are each multicultural societies that have different approaches to their con-

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[8] Admittedly, although the effectiveness of multiculturalism in reducing popular support for jihadist ideology within a polity is difficult to measure, this paper embraces the Clausewitzian dictum that what is not easily quantifiable may not necessarily be unimportant.

[9] Barnor Hesse, "Introduction," *Unsettled Multiculturalisms* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 2.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Susan Moiler Okin, "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions," *Ethics* 108:4 (1998): 662.

dition. Discussions on the assortment of different multiculturalisms are made even more complex when one considers the fact that different political philosophies do not champion a particular orientation towards multiculturalism; liberals, communitarians, and conservatives, for example, differ among themselves on the political stance that their philosophies support. As a result, there are many different types of multicultural society, and there is no single doctrine of multiculturalism.

In general, it is possible to arrive at three wide-ranging positions on multiculturalism: assimilation, integration (hard and mild), and separation. The various policies through which difference has been managed may be located within the continuum of assimilation on one extreme, and separation on the other. Located somewhere between assimilation and separation, this paper is more interested in mild and hard multiculturalism—two policies that advocate a politics of multiculturalism through integration. The diagram below (Figure 1) illustrates the continuum on which these theories on multiculturalism may be placed. In the diagram, these theories have been located on the continuum based on their regard for difference and the importance they place on individual and group identity.
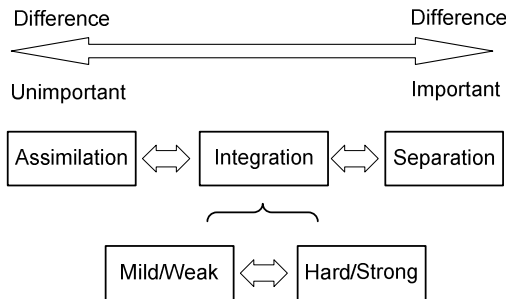

Figure 1: The Multiculturalism Continuum

At one extreme of the continuum lies assimilation. Assimilation into the dominant culture of a particular polity as a form of multiculturalism has roots in both liberal and socialist traditions. Liberals and Marxists of the nineteenth century regarded the smaller nationalities as backward and stagnant. These populations could experience modernity only if they abandoned their identity and assimilated into the identities of the larger, more successful nations.

Consider John Stuart Mill's position on minority cultures for an example of the traditional liberal view on the need for assimilation:

> Experience proves it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and backward portion of the human race the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current ideas and feelings of a highly civilised and cultivated people—to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship

… than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander as members of the British nation.[12]

Marxists were no more receptive to the idea of rights for minority cultures. They considered the proletariat to possess no nationality. For Marxists, cultural and national divisions were considered a "speed bump" on the road to world citizenship. As noted by Engels,

> There is no country in Europe which does not have in some corner or other one or several fragments of peoples, the remnants of a former population that was suppressed and held in bondage by another nation which later became the main vehicle for historical development. These relics of nations, mercilessly trampled down by the passage of history … always become the standard bearers of counterrevolution and remain so until their complete expiration or loss of national character, just as their whole existence in general is itself a protest against a great historical revolution, Such in Scotland are the Gaels… such in France are the Bretons… such in Spain are the Basques.[13]

With their expectation for individuals and groups to abandon their identities by taking on that of the dominant group, proponents of this form of multiculturalism viewed difference and identity as unimportant.

The antithesis of assimilation is separation. Lying at the opposite end of the multiculturalism continuum, separation may be conceived in two divergent forms that are united by the fundamental belief that the differences between groups are insurmountable. Such a position views individual and group identity as both immutable and substantive. The first form of separation holds that, because differences between groups cannot be overcome, the only avenue left for political maneuver is a rigidly segregated polity—that is, apartheid. The aim is to keep the "Other" apart in order to purify and enclose a particular group identity.

The second form of separation calls for political, economic, and social autonomy for distinct groups. For most separatist movements, this calls for the establishment of a separate sovereign state. For example, this logic propelled the creation of Pakistan, and is at the forefront of the argument for the creation of Khalistan in the Punjab. This form of separation would represent the abandonment of any possibility of multiculturalism, driven by a freezing of group differences into unbridgeable binary opposition.

Finally, multiculturalism may take the form of integration. It is possible to subdivide the many formulations of multiculturalism of integration into "hard" and "mild" approaches.[14] Similarly, Ralph Grillo distinguishes between "strong" and "weak"

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[12] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 431.

[13] Cited in Ephraim Nimni, "Marx, Engels and the National Question," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, ed. Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 70.

[14] J. Citrin, D.O. Sears, C. Muste, and C. Wong, "Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion," *British Journal of Political Science* 31:2 (2001): 250.

multiculturalism.[15] Both hard/strong and mild/weak positions are united in their view that culture, understood as "a coherent cluster of beliefs, values, habits, and observances," is a natural (and therefore desirable) accompaniment of ethnic and national diversity within a single polity.[16] Both positions view collective identities as being part and parcel of natural human existence that cannot be abandoned at a whim nor need necessarily be opposed to each other. The critical distinction between the two versions rests with their stance toward concrete measures to institutionalize cultural differences in politics. "Hard multiculturalism" maintains that the very purpose of politics is to affirm group difference.[17] Therefore, proponents of approaches at this end of the continuum on the whole support the protection of minority group rights through institutional recognition of cultural difference in the public sphere, including political representation. "Mild multiculturalism," although acknowledging the diversity of cultures within a polity, holds that the business of states does not extend into cultural matters. Instead, cultural diversity is recognized to be part of the private sphere. For such a state, which is neutral toward questions of cultural diversity, the only assimilation expected from all its members is that they accept the idea of the neutral state in the public sphere. There-

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[15] Ralph Grillo, "Transmigration and Cultural Diversity in the Construction of Europe," paper given at the conference "Cultural Diversity and the Construction of Europe," Barcelona, Spain, 2000.

[16] Citrin, et al., "Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion," 249. This concept of culture is tied up with the larger debate on identity, and both terms will be used interchangeably here. The use of *identity* in place of *culture* here is similar to Parekh's understanding of diversity. In discussing multiculturalism, Parekh identifies three forms of cultural diversity—or alternatively, three forms of cultural *identity* (Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* [London: Palgrave, 2000], 2–4). The first form, subcultural diversity, refers to groups that, although they share in the broader culture, entertain different ways of conducting their life in particular areas and largely seek to pluralize but not replace the existing culture. The people that inhabit this form of diversity include gays, lesbians, followers of unconventional family arrangements, and artists. The second form, perspectival diversity, is deeply skeptical of the core principles of the prevailing culture and seeks to reconstitute it along suitable lines by intellectual dissonance; members of this group include feminists. The final form, communal diversity, involves organized communities that live within different systems of beliefs and practices comprising newly arrived immigrants and established communities with a religious tint, such as observant Jews. All three share common features, but differ in their particular relationship with the dominant culture. Subcultural diversity provides a limited challenge that is expressed through terms derived from the dominant culture, such as freedom, while perspectival diversity represents a radically different vision of life that the dominant culture either rejects or recognizes tacitly but not practically—for example, the feminist recognition of sexism and patriarchy. Communal diversity, however, springs from a plurality of established communities, each with a particular history and way of life it wishes to preserve. Applying the label *multiculturalism* to the first two is disingenuous, because many societies within history have had elements of these forms of diversity. On the other hand, the third form—communal diversity, or communal identity— is a unique feature that warrants an innovative approach to its study and development.

[17] David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 132.

fore, a degree of assimilation is expected of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the public sphere of law and government, the market, education, and employment. The assimilation demanded of all members of the polity is an acceptance of the liberal political culture that enables the "benign neglect" practiced by the state [18]—a neglect that allows a political society to be "an association of individuals and groups living under the rule of law but pursuing separate ends or purposes."[19]

Hard Singaporean Multiculturalism

Based on the discussion above, it is possible to locate Singapore's multicultural policy within the category of hard multiculturalism. At its founding in 1965, Singapore embraced "multiracialism" as its official policy, with the racial differences within the new nation officially limited to the nomenclature of *Chinese*, *Malay*, *Indian*, and *Others* (CMIO). This racial categorization was largely a relic of census methods used during the colonial period, and reflects the three major sources of immigration to the island when the British first set up a trading post there—China, the neighboring region of Southeast Asia, and South Asians from British India. The immigrant Chinese soon developed into the majority, and by the 1960s made up 65 percent of the population. Upon political independence, the national demographic distribution stood at 75 percent ethnic Chinese, 17 percent Malays, 7 percent Indians, and a small percentage of "Others," which included everyone that did not fall into the first three categories.

   Each of the three racial categories was, of course, "a discursive practice that reduces and 'homogenizes' ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences within each category itself."[20] More succinctly, in order to construct the categories, existing differences within the groups had to be elided. As such, despite being linguistically diverse and hailing from different provinces, the category of "Chinese" required forceful homogenization through the use of Mandarin as the common language in education institutions and the media. Like the Chinese, differences within the Malay category were also eliminated, Malay was selected as the standard language for this group, and the state recognized only Malays and Muslims. As for the Indians, the defining element was geography—anyone whose ancestors originated in South Asia was categorized as Indian.

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[18] Chandran Kukathas, "Multiculturalism as Fairness: Will Kymlicka's Multicultural Citizenship," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5:4 (1997): 423–24; Chandran Kukathas, "Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference," *Political Theory* 26:5: (1998): 686-699.

[19] Admittedly, the word *neutral* here may be misleading, as no society is strictly neutral. All political institutions have a historical character that prevents them from being strictly neutral. For example, political institutions shaped by European traditions tend to produce governments and laws that are more likely to be conducted and written in a European language, their parliaments will betray some European influences in procedure, and they may practice certain holidays. Kukathas, 1998, 697.

[20] B.H. Chua, "Multiracialism as Official Policy: A Critique of the Management of Difference in Singapore," Paper presented at the workshop "Learning from London: Exploring Social Resilience in Singapore," Regent Hotel, Singapore, 28 July 2006, 2.

With the populace neatly divided into CMIO categories, the government gained a tool to manage the differences it had created earlier. By managing these differences through institutional recognition of cultural diversity, there is little doubt that Singapore practices a very "hard" form of multiculturalism. In schools, although English is the language of instruction, every student must also learn what is described as a "mother-tongue." The Chinese learn Mandarin; the Malays, Malay; and the Indians (recognizing greater linguistic variation within South Asia) study Hindi, Tamil, or Bengali. With approximately 83 percent of Singaporeans living in government high-rise housing, their racial demographics are policed to ensure that no racial enclaves develop; all the flats in each housing block are divided up proportionally among Chinese, Malays, and Indians. If an apartment is to be sold after the quotas have been filled, sellers must find a buyer who belongs to the same racial group. The need to manage the CMIO categories has also entered the political arena. Singapore practices a variant of British parliamentary democracy, and in order to ensure that the non-Chinese minority in Singapore will consistently have representation in parliament, some constituencies have become Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs). Within a GRC, a team of politicians represents a constituency, and the members of the team have to include at least one non-Chinese person.

The Threat from Within: The Jemaah Islamiyah and Multiculturalism

Following the events of 11 September 2001, Southeast Asia, and especially the Malay Archipelago, has become known as the "second front" in the war against terrorism. Singapore became acutely aware of its position on this second front when Singaporeans were discovered to be among the members of the regional terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) that were detained in December 2001. The detainees were accused of planning to employ several truck bombs full of ammonium nitrate to attack the embassies of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Israel, Singaporean military facilities, U.S. naval vessels at Singapore's Changi naval base, and a local metro station frequently used by U.S. military personnel.[21] Since the initial arrests in 2002, thirty-six people are currently detained under the Internal Security Act, while nineteen others are under Restriction Orders. Indeed, the Singaporean government believes that the country is "high on the list of targets for terrorist action," arguing that it is a matter of *when* rather than *if* a terrorist strike will take place.[22]

The arrests of Singaporean JI members have made it patently clear that the threat posed by such extremist groups is not one that is normally faced in a symmetric war. As the enemy cannot be understood solely as an external threat, since it exists within Singapore's multi-racial fabric, the battle has become an ideological war for the hearts and minds of the people. In response to what has become an internal threat, the Singaporean government has established Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCCs), while also beginning to implement a Community Engagement Program (CEP) and re-empha-

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[21] Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2003).

[22] NSCC, *The Fight Against Terror: Singapore's National Security Strategy*, 11.

sizing the importance of the National Education Program for school children. IRCCs in particular were created in order to promote inter-communal harmony alongside "multi-racialism," a Singaporean variant of multiculturalism, while also aiming to increase greater understanding between the different racial groups in Singapore. Government officials hope that the IRCCs will permit religious and community leaders to build personal trust and greater confidence, thus fostering a mutual rapport that could be useful in addressing racial and religious problems on the ground. Incongruously, IRCCs were also set up in order for members of the constructed groups of CMIO to discuss their differences. As noted by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, "the primary objective is to get our irrational fears off our chest, and get to know each other better."[23]

Perhaps to supplement the establishment of the IRCCs, the government recently announced that it will begin a Community Engagement Program (CEP). Although not many details of the program have been revealed, it is believed that it will attempt to shift away from simply promoting understanding between the CMIO categories and give greater emphasis to developing a broader, overarching sense of community solidarity among adults. This desired solidarity, it has been argued, can be nurtured from racially neutral values of civility with the objective of demonstrating to participants how those values can be applied to the realities of daily life.[24] Similar to the objective pursued by the CEP, but aimed at school children, the importance of the National Education Program as a tool to transmit Singaporean values across the CMIO categories has been given new impetus. To achieve this objective, the education program has been built around the following six messages:

1. Singapore is our homeland. This is where we belong. We want to keep our heritage and way of life.

2. We must preserve racial and religious harmony. Though drawn from many races, religions, languages, and cultures, we pursue one destiny.

3. We must uphold meritocracy and prevent corruption. This provides opportunity for all according to their ability and effort.

4. No one owes Singapore a living. As a nation, we must find our own way to survive and prosper.

5. We must defend Singapore. No one else is responsible for our security and well-being.

6. We must have confidence in the future. United, determined, and well prepared, we shall build a bright future for ourselves.[25]

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[23] Ibid., 65.

[24] G. Koh, "Social Resilience and its Bases in Multicultural Singapore," Paper presented at the workshop "Learning from London: Exploring Social Resilience in Singapore," Regent Hotel, Singapore, 28 July 2006, 11.

[25] A. Tan and R. Wan, "Introduction to National Education in Singapore," in *Securing Our Future: Sourcebook for National Education Ideas and Strategies for Secondary Schools and Junior College*, eds. Steven Tan Kwang San and Goh Chor Boon (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 2003), 3–5.

When considered together, the recent introduction of IRCCs, the CEP, and the revitalization of the National Education Program (NEP) indicate that Singapore's government acknowledges not only that the CMIO categories are too entrenched to be removed, but also that the hard multiculturalist approach it practices paradoxically perpetuates precisely the racial identity distinctions that prevent cohesion and harmony. As such, it appears that the IRCCs have been created to smooth over the differences created by CMIO; the CEP and NEP bank on the probability that solidarity and fraternity can be developed over time if the different racial categories are instilled with the neutral values of civility and infused with a common national understanding. The government's new approach towards multiculturalism seems to have shifted focus away from earlier policies that emphasized racial distinctiveness toward policies that will increase civil commonality among the groups.

A Constant Process: Ongoing Issues with Singapore's Hard Multiculturalism

On balance, the fact that Singapore has yet to experience a terrorist attack along the lines of the London transit bombings of 7 July 2005 may indicate the success of the hard multiculturalism practiced by the Singaporean government in managing cultural difference within its borders. With its creation of a particular brand of difference—the CMIO grouping—the Singaporean government has done a stellar job in ensuring that social harmony has been maintained. Furthermore, many of the policies extending from the creation of CMIO categories may possibly be instructive for other countries. For example, teaching of the "mother-tongue" in schools coupled with the use of English as the chief language of instruction has ensured that Singaporeans have been empowered with a common language that they can use to relate to one another. Additionally, the use of racial quotas in public housing has prevented the creation of ethnic ghettos where communities become more and more isolated from the greater polity.

However, today's success should not be taken for granted in the future. The Singaporean model of multiculturalism has worked for a substantial period of time, but the government must constantly safeguard this harmony, because it has been imposed from the top and lacks any qualities of natural, organic development. It is thus unsurprising that, faced with the global jihadist threat and the fear that elements of its own population may be seduced by jihadist ideology, the government has altered its policy to emphasize commonality and a shared destiny. It would simply be imprudent to do anything less. Nevertheless, Singapore's multicultural approach reveals the following three weaknesses:

- The government's approach to managing Singapore's society by means of categorization in the CMIO model challenges the objective of cohesiveness, as society becomes less able to look beyond the established differences separating each group

- Categorization based on defined differences gives rise to negative stereotyping

- A constant emphasis on difference hinders the natural development of shared commonalities.

First, the government, by establishing the CMIO categories, created artificial differences in order to sustain the categories. Ironically, constant compartmentalization of Singaporeans into CMIO molds may accentuate racial stereotypes and lead individuals to focus on each other's skin color while the government constantly reminds its citizens to look beyond superficial differences.[26] Further, in order to celebrate as well as inculcate the importance of racial harmony in Singapore, organized mass events may often inadvertently undermine the attainment of true harmony due to the manner in which they are celebrated. It is possible to argue that commemorating racial harmony may have raised an awareness of inter-racial "realities" that may not have existed before. The majority of such events often consist of cultural performances attended by participants in ethnic costumes. While this allows for the interaction of people of all hues in a non-threatening environment to foster closer bonds, it does not accurately reflect the natural setting in which the different races interact on a daily basis. Consequently, the manner in which racial harmony is celebrated in Singapore leads to the creation of racial caricatures that further prevent individuals from understanding one other.

Second, an unfortunate consequence of the CMIO categories is that negative stereotyping often occurs. Creating a category requires that it be filled with content. Unfortunately, this content is at times negative, with supposedly real differences becoming entrenched and reproduced.[27] This racial stereotyping due to the creation of distinct categories in Singapore often leads to issues that have little to do with group identity but come to be understood through a racial lens.[28] For example, the Malay-Muslim community is perceived to be predisposed towards drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and high divorce rates, as well as being burdened with a perceived inability to perform as well as other racial groups in the educational and economic spheres. Moreover, this stereotyping is further exacerbated when it is related to supposedly "negative" cultural practices, and when attitudes are seen to be linked to Islam. For example, the high divorce rate is sometimes tied to the right to marry at a younger age under Islamic law than that allowed by the civil code.[29]

The decision not to conscript Malay men into the army during the first twenty years of Singapore's armed forces provides another example of how the categories negatively influence reality. When the groups making up the Malay category—a diverse array of indigenous communities, such as the Javanese, Minangkabau, Baewanese, Achehnese, and the Malay—were lumped together, members of this category were perceived to suffer a potential moral conflict if Singapore ever had to fight a war with Malaysia or Indonesia (with their predominantly Muslim populations, which were also understood to be "Malay," in the same sense as the category was used in Singapore).

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[26] Yolanda Chin and Norman Vasu, "Rethinking Racial Harmony in Singapore," *IDSS Commentaries*, No. 54 (20 June 2006), 2.

[27] A.K. Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 161.

[28] Chua, "Multiracialism as Official Policy," 5–6.

[29] Ibid., 6.

As expressed by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, "It would be very tricky business for the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) to put a Malay officer who was very religious and who had family ties in Malaysia, in charge of a machine gun unit."[30]

A third and final problem for the hard multiculturalism approach practiced in Singapore is that the constant emphasis on differences between groups does not foster an environment in which people understand the commonalities they share. The danger of being aware only of differences—and, moreover, of being overly aware of negative differences—is that groups can become alienated from Singaporean society as a whole. Members of alienated groups may then be attracted to, among other things, jihadist ideology, with its ready-made larger community in which they can immediately find solace. Further, one could argue that the differences have become so entrenched that they may inhibit the development of commonality in the future. For example, senior members of the Singaporean government have in the past admitted how difficult it would be to create a strong, national identity to displace the racial identities and officially sanctioned differences that were put in place at independence. According to then-Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, "They [racial fault lines] are not going to disappear in 20, 30, 40 years. But if we are aware of it, it is like living with an earthquake fault. We can build buildings which may be able to stand the shocks."[31]

Mr. Goh Chok Tong, during his tenure as Prime Minister, also held a pessimistic view, similar to Mr. Lee. He maintained that, "In a crunch, where the interests of the tribe and the state diverge, can we be sure that the sense of belonging to the state will be stronger than the primordial instinct of belonging to a tribe? Are Singaporeans of different races prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of Singapore if there is a divide amongst the tribes?"[32]

Conclusion: Incorporating Multiculturalism to Counter Jihadist Ideology

Jihadist ideology is at root highly polarizing and absolutist. In the worldviews of hardcore jihadists such as Osama bin Laden of Al Qaeda and Hambali (the *nom de guerre* of Riduan Isamuddin) of Southeast Asia's Jemaah Islamiyah, the world is irrevocably divided between the *Dar al-Islam* (House of Islam) and the *Dar al-Harb* (House of War). There can be no middle ground. Even Muslims who do not buy into the extremist Islamist storyline are considered apostates and can be punished harshly, even killed. Clearly, if one wants to counter ideological support for radical Islamist terrorism, one needs a countervailing set of ideas that emphasizes the common humanity of all people, regardless of color and creed.

These countervailing ideas must exist at two levels. At one level, we would need a strongly articulated moderate Islamic philosophy that attacks and undercuts the philosophical bases of radical Islamist and Salafist ideology, addressing hot-button issues such as, for instance, the contemporary relevance of an Islamic state, or caliphate; the

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[30] Quoted in the *Straits Times* (8 February 2001).
[31] Lee Kuan Yew, Speech at a Parliamentary Debate on Singapore, 6 May 1999.
[32] Goh Chok Tong, Speech at a Parliamentary Debate on Singapore, 5 May 1999.

meanings of jihad; and critically, the question of coexistence with non-Muslims within the same geographically demarcated polity. All these topics have been richly and accessibly addressed by well-known moderate Muslim scholars, such as Khaled Abou El Fadl, Abdulkarim Soroush and, within Southeast Asia, Ulil Abshar Abdullah and Azyurmadi Azra. Putting across the moderate Muslim viewpoint, however, is not enough. This effort has to be supported by well-conceived policy regarding multiculturalism. This, as we have seen, is easier said than done. Within pluralistic polities, multiculturalism should contribute to political stability by assuring disparate ethnic groups that their distinct cultural and religious identities enjoy legal protection and high status. At the same time, too strong an emphasis on difference could dilute the all-important sense of overarching commonality and shared destiny that all multi-ethnic societies need in order to function optimally. This is where hard multiculturalism in particular may unwittingly provide a soft ideological underbelly for jihadists to exploit. This is why the ultimate efficacy of Singapore's approach of hard multiculturalism in an era of transnational, globalized, religiously motivated terrorism is by no means a foregone conclusion.