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DRAFT

Islam and Citizenship Education in Singapore: Challenges and Implications

Charlene Tan

Abstract

The religious diversity of Singapore, coupled with the current phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, makes the management of religion a paramount concern for the Singapore government. By examining the developments of Islam in Singapore, the paper explores the challenges and implications these developments have on citizenship education in the country. This paper argues that there is a need for a form of citizenship education in Singapore which takes into consideration the multiplicity, complexity and intersection of religion and citizenship. It is further argued that what is needed is not just socialisation into a particular state-sanctioned set of values and views, but an awareness and appreciation of the different religions, especially Islam. The Singapore experience provides a useful case study on the issues and challenges faced by the governments and citizens of plural societies in the midst of Islamic revivalism.

Introduction

Singapore is a religiously diverse country. The 2000 national census reports that 85 per cent of the population in Singapore profess to belong to a religion, and a recent survey shows that almost 82 per cent of adolescents believe in some sort of deity (Chew, 2005). A majority of the population are Buddhists (42.5%), followed by Muslims (14.9%), Christians (14.6%), Taoists (8.5%) and Hindus (4.0%) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2000). There are also adherents of other religions (0.6%) as well as those who profess to have no religion (14.8%). Among the ethnic groups, the Malays are the most homogenous with 99.6 per cent of Malays who are Muslims. The rest of the Muslims comprise a small number of Chinese, Eurasians, and those of Arab and South Asian descent (Kadir, 2004). As almost all Muslims are Malays in Singapore, this article shall focus on Malay-Muslims, and use the two terms, ‘Malays’ and ‘Muslims’ synonymously.

The religious diversity of Singapore, coupled with the current phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, makes the management of religion a paramount concern for the government. Given the fact that citizens have local and global ties and commitments beyond those to the nation-state, there is a potential conflict between the national loyalty of citizens and trans-national loyalty of religious believers. This is particularly relevant to the Muslims in Singapore. How does the current phenomenon of Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism affect the Muslims in their role as Singapore Muslims? How does it affect the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore? What are the implications of Islamic revivalism for citizenship education in Singapore? These are the questions that will be explored in this paper. By examining the developments of Islam in Singapore, the paper explores the challenges and implications these developments have on citizenship education in the country. This paper explains that citizenship in Singapore is characterised by “civic republicanism” where the emphasis is on passive, rule-following citizenship. The paper also

discusses the concept of “religious pragmatism” in Singapore where the government adopts a utilitarian approach towards religions and aims to promote religious harmony in citizenship education. This paper argues that there is a need for a form of citizenship education in Singapore which takes into consideration the multiplicity, complexity and intersection of religion and citizenship. It is further argued that what is needed in citizenship education in Singapore is not just socialisation into a particular state-sanctioned set of values and views, but an awareness and appreciation of other religions, especially Islam.

An Introduction to Islam and Islamic Education in Singapore

Islam was spread to Southeast Asia around the 14th century by Arab and Indian traders. Though the sultans’ conversion, a Muslim community was formed in Singapore at the beginning of the 19th century, comprising South Asians and Arab Muslims (Siddique, 1986, quoted in Kadir, 2004). When Singapore became a British colony in the 19th century, the British, while recognising the sultans as guardians of the Islamic faith, tried to impose secular laws over shar’iah or Islamic laws and control the Islamic bureaucracy (Mutalib, 2004). To facilitate the communication between the British and the Muslims, the Muslim Endowments Board was set up in 1906 and the Muhammedan (sic) Advisory Board in 1915 so that the Muslim representatives could negotiate with the British government regarding the administration of Muslim affairs (Kadir, 2004). The introduction of the Muslim Ordinance in 1957 and the establishment of the *Shariah* Court in 1958 formally placed the Muslims in Singapore under the Islamic law, *shariah*. After Singapore’s independence in 1965, the Singapore government wanted a central body to govern and administer Muslim affairs. The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), also known as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, was established in 1968 as a statutory body to advise the President of Singapore on all matters relating to Islam in Singapore. MUIS’ mission is to broaden and deepen the Singaporean Muslim Community’s understanding and practice of Islam, while enhancing the well being of the nation (MUIS, 2005). This is done by setting the Islamic agenda, shaping religious life and forging the Singaporean Muslim identity. It promotes religious, social, educational, economic and cultural activities for the Muslims in accordance with the principles and traditions of Islam as enshrined in the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Among its principal functions are the administration of pilgrimage affairs and *halal* certification, the construction and administration of mosques development and management, and the administration of Islamic religious schools and Islamic education.

In terms of education, Muslim children receive an Islamic education from a young age from their family as well as the mosques and “madrasah” which are Islamic religious schools. Under the Administration of Muslim Law Act, all the madrasah in Singapore came under the control of MUIS. Historically, madrasah were built by Muslim philanthropists to provide Islamic education for Muslim children and the earliest one was Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiyyah in 1912. Under the Education Act, each madrasah has its management committee whose members are appointed by Ministry of Education (MOE) in consultation with MUIS. There are currently six full-time madrasah and twenty-seven part-time mosque madrasah in Singapore. The madrasah aim to produce the religious elites to lead the community on religious matters, while mosque madrasah provide part-time basic Islamic education to students who attend government schools (Our Madrasah, n.d.). Both religious subjects such as Islamic Education and Arabic language, and secular subjects such as English and Mathematics are taught in the madrasah. Students enrolled in these madrasah sit for national examinations set by the Ministry of Education (MOE): the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) at the end of the primary school, and the Cambridge Board General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations for secondary and pre-university students. On

the other hand, mosque madrasah only offer basic religious subjects since its students are already attending full-time government schools and taking the national examinations as part of the requirements by MOE. Besides the mosques and madrasah, Muslims may also receive religious instructions from private Islamic kindergartens, and programmes and activities organized by Muslim organizations such as MENDAKI and People's Association Malay Activity Coordinating Council (Mesra).

Islamic Revivalism and Challenges for Singapore

A number of writers have noted the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in Southeast Asia and the Re-Islamisation in Singapore (Desker, 2003; Kadir, 2004; Millard, 2004a; Fernandez, 2005; E. Tan, 2005). This is evident in their attire, diet, religious observances and social interactions (e.g. "Don't Arabise Malay culture", *The Sunday Times*, 18 April 2004; "Is it cool for Singapore Malays to go Arab?" *The Sunday Times*, 25 April, 2004). Muslims in Singapore are influenced by the religious events, doctrines and movements across the world. Mr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs in Singapore pointed out that Wahhabism, an extreme teaching of Islam from Saudi Arabia "has touched Indonesia and influenced us here in Singapore" (quoted in Millard, 2004b). He added that "feeling of sympathy among local Muslims for Muslims in dire conditions elsewhere is to be expected" (Yaacob, 2006). Islamic religious teachers in Singapore noted that a minority of Muslims in Singapore are sympathetic to extremist arguments forwarded by the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) – an extremist Islamic group in South-east Asia (Hussain, 2005). To this group of people, they believe that the Singapore government is opposed to Islam, that Muslims in Singapore are oppressed, and that Muslims should not mix with non-Muslims. An Islamic religious teacher in Singapore cautioned that this group of Muslims risk becoming militant and are likely to support and become involved in terrorism (ibid.).

The Islamic revivalism in Singapore reflects the intersection between national and religious identities and the tensions, complications and conflicts that could result from the "plural identity in the same individual" (Breidlid & Nicolaisen, 1999, pp. 148-149, quoted in Chidester, 2000, p. 45). The tensions could result from the multiple duties and loyalties a religious believer faces as a citizen of a country. Complicating the issue is the fact many citizens have local and global ties and commitments beyond those to the nation-state (Jackson, 2003). There is a potential conflict between the national loyalty of citizens and trans-national loyalty of religious believers. This is particularly relevant to the Muslims in Singapore. A National Survey on Religion in 1989 reported that 95 per cent of Muslims view religion and religious education as important, the highest among the religious groups in Singapore ("Religion in Singapore: report of national survey", *The Straits Times*, 8 April, 1989, p. 20). A Gallup survey of 1000 households in 2000 showed that Malays identified chiefly with religion, while Chinese identified primarily with ethnicity and neighbourhood (Kadir and Horiuchi, 2003, quoted in Kadir, 2004). The potential conflict between national and religious loyalties also blurs the distinction between public and private sphere. One consequence of Islamic revivalism is that Muslims may find it increasingly difficult to put national interests above the personal desire to take one's faith seriously – even if it means to express one's religious views in the public arena. Chidester (2000) argues the traditional models for managing religious diversity, which have been based on the distinction between the public and the private, have to be rejected. There is a need to locate the study of religion within the constant process of struggle and negotiation over citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Chidester, 2003). The tensions arising from the potentially conflicting national and religious identities in citizens are evident in the case of Malay-Muslims in Singapore.

The first challenge faced by Malay-Muslims is the threat of religious fundamentalism, which was felt acutely in the arrests of Jemaah Islamiah (JI) terrorists in December 2001 and August 2002 for attempting to commit violent attacks against western embassies and Singapore key points (Tan, 2002; Desker, 2003). The former Senior Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew explained that it was peer pressure from the Middle East that convinced Singapore Muslims to join the JI to fight for all oppressed Muslims worldwide (quoted in Hong, 2003, p. 5). To the small group of Muslims in Singapore, they are faced with the conflict between the national loyalty of citizens and the trans-national loyalty of religious believers. This tension also has implications for inter-religious harmony in Singapore. The rise of religious fundamentalism and the terrorist attacks by extremist Islamic group worldwide have contributed to inter-religious tensions between the Muslims and others in Singapore (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-charge of Muslims Affairs noted that “certain recent events may have affected trust and confidence levels between the various communities” (“Code on religious harmony to be unveiled early next year”, *Channel News Asia*, 21 October 2002). The former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong highlighted what he called “irrational fears” among Muslims and non-Muslims in the wake of the arrests of 15 Muslim men for terrorism-related activities that are festering beneath the façade of religious harmony (Fernandez, 2002). Many Malay-Muslims in Singapore were consequently affected by the public scrutiny, as pointed out by the MUIS President:

Not only did it [the Muslim community in Singapore] have to grapple with the shocking revelation that some members of the community were involved in insidious activities that threatened society’s peace and harmony, it also had to contend with unrelenting public scrutiny over the tenability of Islamic practices in a modern, secular and multiethnic polity (Haji, 2002, p. 2, quoted by E. Tan, 2005)

Secondly, it is difficult to separate the public sphere from the private sphere for Muslims in Singapore. In fact, more religious believers and groups are inclined to share their religious views on national matters in the public domain. A survey shows that six out of 10 want the Government to consider religious beliefs when making policy (Low, 2005). This is unsurprising since national policies and debates on issues such as stem-cell research, organ donation and casinos are intricately linked to moral and religious considerations. Religious believers argue against the relegation of our deepest held convictions to the private sphere and pretend that they have no bearing in the political arena (Chui, 2005). A good example is the year-long debate on whether Singapore should have a casino on the island. The debate saw many religious believers stating their religious convictions against the building of the casino, and statements from religious groups objecting to the casino. The anti-casino lobby included MUIS which publicly aired its stand after seven Muslim organisations urged the council in a joint statement last month to convince the Government to refrain from legitimising the casino industry (Azhar, 2005). It is evident that the Muslims saw a greater need to assert their views in public.

The third concern is the impact Islamic revivalism has on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore. While negative or inflammatory remarks about another religion could be made quietly in the past, modern technology – with blogging, emailing, SMS-ing and internet chatting – has allowed information, news and rumours to spread fast and wide. In the current climate of religious tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims, this individualistic expression of speech can potentially aggravate inter-religious distrust and conflicts. In such a climate of religious tension between the Muslims and non-Muslims, it is likely for misunderstanding to occur. A recent example is the case of three Chinese non-Muslim youths who were convicted in court for posting inflammatory remarks

against Muslims. In the first case, two men (aged 27 and 25 years old) were jailed for spewing vulgarities at the Muslim Malay community, comparing their religion to Satanism (Chong, 2005). Apparently, their remarks were posted after a Muslim wrote to the press asking if cab companies allow dogs to be transported in taxis. This question is important to the Muslims whose religion forbids them to come into contact with a dog's saliva. It is reported that their remarks on the blogs sparked off more than 200 comments, some of which involved the slinging of racial slurs at Chinese and Malays ("Opinion on Net not an unfettered right", *The Straits Times*, 8 October, 2005). Although they are young Singaporeans who have learnt about moral values in schools and claimed to have friends who subscribe to that religion (Nadarajan 2005), they remain so extreme and misguided in their views towards that religion. In the second case, a 17-year old boy was convicted for posting offensive comments about Malays and their religion on his blog, calling it "The Second Holocaust". Rather than sentencing him to jail, the judge ordered that he be sentenced to 180 hours of community work at Malay-Muslim welfare organisation under a Malay-Muslim probation officer who can "act as a positive Malay role model" for the youth. This sentence was welcomed by Muslim community leaders; a Muslim leader said: "You can give a jail sentence but after the sentence, he may still not understand the other side of the story and the culture" (quoted in Chong, 2005).

Citizenship Education in Singapore

To understand the implications Islamic revivalism has on citizenship education in Singapore, it is necessary to have a background knowledge of citizenship in the country. The model of citizenship education in Singapore has been described as civic republicanism (Hill & Lian, 1995; Berlach, 1996; Han, 2000; Sim & Print, 2005). Drawing on the ideas of Oldfield (1990) and Marquand (1991), Hill and Lian (1995) note that this tradition focuses on the citizen performing the duties associated with the practice of citizenship. This is contrasted with the tradition of liberal individualism which defines citizenship in terms of rights and status. Gopinathan and Sharpe (2004) add that what is promoted is "passive, responsible, rule-following citizenship" (also see Boshier, 1994; Chew, 1998). The government does not see its role as building strong political institutions for active citizenship but providing strong political leadership for its citizens whose duty is to support the leadership (Koh & Ooi, 2002; Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). This form of citizenship education in Singapore belongs more to that associated with the traditional view of citizenship education in which knowledge of the country's history is taught to the individual, who is also encouraged to develop loyalty and patriotism with regard to the country (Han, 2000). In studying the citizenship values in Singapore, Malaysia and China, Kennedy (2004) notes that what is common in these three countries is an outright rejection of the centrality of the individual to economic, social or political development. He explains:

Rather, the emphasis is on the collective entity, whether it be the family, the community or the State itself. The message is clear: individuals are subject to a 'greater good'. At the same time there is an underlying appeal to authority... . In the same way, the emphasis for citizens is not so much the rights they enjoy but the responsibilities they have towards family and the community (Kennedy, 2004, p. 15).

Examples of the collective concerns in civic republicanism are "providing a guide for behaviour in daily life", "fostering an appreciation for the heritage and strengthening national identity" and "fostering family values" (Lee, 2004). In contrast, citizenship education in the West emphasises individual rights which stem from the ideology of individualism (Lee, 2004b). Print (2000) points out that being a "good citizen", rather than active participation, is

regarded as more important in most of the Asian schools. In such a context, a “good’ citizen” is generally interpreted as one who contributes to society, translated to mean support of the family and a set of prescribed values. In other words, there is a distinction between the conception of civics education that stresses commitment to the state and a preconceived set of ‘good’ citizen values and one which stresses active participation in civic action, democratic rights and social enhancement (Print, 2000, p. 19).

Another feature of citizenship education in Singapore is the distinction between public and private spheres. This is linked to the concept of “multiracialism” in Singapore. Hill and Lian (1995) explain that multiracialism emphasises a depoliticised and culturally defined notion of “race”. This refers to interesting, colourful and personal lifestyles which belong to the private domain of family and religious belief. They are all kept distinct from public or national issues which are the responsibility of the state (Hill & Lian, 1995, p. 33). To be a citizen in Singapore is to be a member of a multiracial community where one fulfils the responsibilities that go with it. This distinction between public and private domains recognises the status of ethnic communities while ensuring meritocracy in an ethnically plural societies. The ideal of a multicultural society is to provide equality of opportunity in the public domain and the concomitant practice of multiracialism in the private domain. Under this distinction, ethnic groups only enjoy cultural rights and do not have political or economic significance (Rex, 1986, quoted in Hill and Lian, 1995, p. 101).

Religious Pragmatism and Citizenship Education in Singapore

Religion plays a significant role in citizenship education in Singapore. The government’s approach towards religion can be described as “religious pragmatism”, which is traced to the ideology of pragmatism in Singapore. Writers such as Vasil (1984), Chua (1985), Quah (1990), Tan (1995), Ho and Gopinathan (1999) and Ho (2000) have identified pragmatism as the ruling ideology of the government in Singapore. Policies are made and put forward as hard-headed choices which may seem unfavourable at a particular time but they are accepted as they achieve societal efficiency for the common good (Tan 1995). The government is able to justify these pragmatic implementations by reaping the results as promised in terms of economic growth and political stability (Quah 1990). This pragmatic slant is seen in the moral education programmes in Singapore schools. The Civics and Moral Education (CME) materials in schools reflect the dominant economic rationality and pragmatism of the government (Chew, 1998). Essentially it is “a training of students towards imbibing pragmatic values deemed to be important for Singapore’s achieving social cohesion and economic success, rather than moral education as a developing towards intrinsic commitment to and habituation in the practice of values defended on autonomous moral considerations and not mere national expediency” (Tan & Chew, 2004, p. 597).

Singapore adopts a “tolerantly neutral stance towards religious institutions, with occasional patronage of certain religious institutions or occasional action to control religious excess where necessary” (Ling, 1987, p. 2). Religion is part of the “cultural curriculum” used to enhance social cohesion, political identity and loyalty to the state (Tan, 1994; Gopinathan 1999; Tan, 2000). Tamney (1988) states that the government’s deployment of religion as a sustainer of shared social values means that it defines what is acceptable religion, expects all religions to adjust to the state ideology, and homogenises religion by permitting inter-religious differences only if they complement each other (also see Ackermann, 1999). The distinction between the public and private domain – another key feature of citizenship education in Singapore – is also exercised in religious matters. Chua (1995) notes that religious institutions are seen as having no legitimate role in political debate and activity and hence the values conveyed by these religious institutions are seen as appropriate to the private

sphere only (p. 193). The government passed a Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1989, stipulating that “no religious groups are involved in politics” and that “religious organisations not stray beyond the bounds of educational, social and charitable work”. The government has also advocated the enlarging of the “common space” as a means of ensuring that Singaporeans interact in the public sphere without the identity markers of religion, language, and race creeping in (E. Tan, 2005). The Declaration of Religious Harmony introduced in 2003 serves to remind all people of Singapore that “religious harmony is vital for peace, progress and prosperity in our multi-racial and multi-religious nation” and that they should “ensure that religions will not be abused to create conflict and disharmony in Singapore”.

The concept of “religious harmony”, highlighted in citizenship education in Singapore, is premised on the importance of using religious values to promote national unity and maintaining national identity. It is part of the set of secular shared values (Our Shared Values) promoted by the government in Singapore. These Shared Values are (1) Nation before community and society before self, (2) Community support and respect for the individual, (3) The family as the basic unit of society, (4) Consensus in place of conflict, and (5) Racial and religious harmony. A concerted effort to promote religious harmony in citizenship education is seen in the launch of National Education (NE) in 1997. NE aims to develop in all Singaporeans national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future. One of six messages of NE is the preservation of racial and religious harmony. The government explains that the promotion of greater understanding of different races and religions is achieved by infusing it in the formal curriculum through subjects such as Civics and Moral Education, Social Studies and History, as well as outside the classroom via sports and enrichment programmes (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2004). The focus is citizenship training where students are inculcated certain national values for economic and political socialisation (Chew, 1998; Tan & Chew, 2004). Factual knowledge of the religions is taught in the Civics and Moral Education (CME) which is compulsory for all students but not examined. Mr Hawazi Daipi, then Senior parliamentary Secretary, explained that students are exposed to the different religious and cultural customs, beliefs and practices in Singapore’ through CME. The purpose, he added, is to “foster the value of respect for others in our students from the primary to pre-university level, rather than impart religious beliefs to them, which should not be the role of our schools” (quoted in Remaking Singapore Committee, 2004, p. 2). The approach used in the teaching of religious knowledge is the “teaching about religion” approach, as contrasted to the “teaching of religion” approach (C. Tan, 2005). The government has chosen to identify and highlight on only those elements of religion – the common moral teachings - which are directly relevant to the inculcation of national values. Other aspects of the belief systems are either omitted (the exclusive claims and rituals) or mentioned in passing (the metaphysical concepts). Activities in the Civics and Moral Education (CME) textbook include asking students to factually identify the religions associated with the respective places of worship, understand the various religious symbols, and complete a crossword puzzle to know more about the major systems of beliefs in Singapore, and fill in the blanks to know more about the religious festivals in Singapore. The objective is to highlight the commonality among the various religions: “Each system of beliefs may be based on different fundamental beliefs and practices, but ALL emphasise universal values” (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2001, p. 21, the capitalisation is in the original text). Information about the seven belief systems (Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, and Taoism) is provided in the Reference section. In line with the “teaching about religion” approach, the treatment of the various religions is highly descriptive, and exclusive and controversial claims are omitted. There is no mention of sensitive and potentially offensive words and issues like hell,

condemnation, and the fate of those who subscribe to other religions. The various religious beliefs are left vague and abstract, leaving a number of questions unanswered. For example, in the write-up on Islam, there is also no reference to heaven or hell. The notes state that those who live good lives will be rewarded and those who are evil will face punishment (ibid., p. 53). But there is no elaboration of what reward and punishment entail. It is therefore difficult to see how the “teaching about religion” approach is helpful for students to have a better understanding and appreciation of the various religions, including Islam.

Implications for Citizenship Education in Singapore

There are two main implications for citizenship and citizenship education in view of the current trend of Islamic revivalism in Singapore. There is a need for a form of citizenship education which takes into consideration the multiplicity, complexity and intersection of religion and citizenship. Such an emphasis is consistent with the practice in many countries to move from a formal and passive (education about) to a more active and participative (education through) approach to citizenship education (Kerr, 1999; Cogan & Derricott, 1998; [Kymlicka, 1999](#); Thomas, 2002). The aim is to introduce more creativity, debate and discussion into the curriculum so as to prepare its citizens for global citizenship. As mentioned earlier, religious groups such as MUIS are increasingly making their voices heard in public places. Lessons on active citizenship, democratic involvement, and the balance between civic and religious duties could be included in citizenship education. The last point is especially pertinent for the Muslim leaders in Singapore to educate the followers against subscribing to the teachings of the extremists. Already, there is evidence that the Muslim leaders have taken steps to engage the Muslims actively in understanding the Islamic teachings, and in grappling with their concurrent identity as Singapore Muslims. For example, a book entitled “Muslim, Moderate, Singaporean” published by Perdaus and the Al-Khair Mosque in 2003 sets out six principles of moderation as guidelines for Singapore Muslims in making their ideological stand on various issues are outlined to help them fulfil their duties as citizens and Muslims (Muhammad, 2006). The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) was formed 2003 to counsel the detainees involved in the JI incident, offer expert opinion on JI’s misinterpretation of Islam, produce counter-ideological materials and conduct public education for the Muslim community on religious extremism (Muhammad, 2006). Muslim scholars also introduce the Asatizah Recognition System to regulate religious instructions. Muslim institutions such as mosques and civic groups also organised seminars and dialogues to promote understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Islamic education programmes have also been revamped to make lessons relevant and interesting to young Muslims in Singapore (“Islamic lessons get more interactive”, *The Sunday Times*, 1 January 2006). The latest initiative is the Singapore Muslim Identity Project by MUIS to develop the Muslim community to be religiously profound and socially progressive. Part of the project is the publication of a booklet to “help Muslim Singaporeans understand their roles as Muslims and as citizens and to excel in both”, in the words of the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Yaacob Ibrahim. The booklet lists attributes that Muslim Singaporeans should possess, including holding strongly to Islamic principles while keeping pace with modern society, appreciating other civilizations, and learning from other communities (Ng, 2006). MUIS also welcomes both Muslim and non-Muslim Singaporeans to debate on the issues and challenges facing Muslims in Singapore. All these efforts signal a shift from focusing on duties and responsibilities of a citizen, to broader issues such as the rights and status of Muslim citizens who have to juggle with their dual identity as Singapore Muslims in a multi-religious country.

Secondly, there is a need to review the citizenship education to promote greater understanding and appreciation among the students of other religions, especially Islam. Despite some teaching of religious knowledge in citizenship education, there is an ostensible deficiency of religious understanding and appreciation among the students in Singapore. Evidence that this is common among students in Singapore is seen in a recent survey conducted by Chew (2005). Chew administered a questionnaire to 2779 students aged 12-18 in 6 educational institutions and interviewed 89 religious switchers. Her research showed that the average adolescent in Singapore knows very little about religions in Singapore, despite their learning of religions during the CME period. For example, when asked how many religions there were in Singapore, 91% of them said there were only four (Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam) although three more are listed in the CME textbook (Confucianism, Sikhism, and Taoism) and other religions such as the Bahá'í Faith and Zoroastrianism exist in Singapore. Another finding of the research is the students' concept of religious tolerance. The study found that Singapore adolescents generally possess a high level of religious tolerance and are careful not to utter the offending the phrases. Chew (2005) concludes that this may be due to the teaching in the CME component in secondary school which emphasises the need for religious harmony. Interestingly, 76% said that they do not ever talk about religion so as to avoid possible cause of conflict. To the students, tolerance does not mean sincere respect and understanding of each other's religion so that common grounds can be found. Their religious tolerance is based on ignorance and fear rather than an appreciation of the different faiths in Singapore. By not talking about religion, especially the religious beliefs of others, they evince a keen sense that religion is a sensitive topic and religious ignorance is preferred to engagement. A number of Singaporeans themselves have also noted that there is little inter-religious interaction in Singapore (e.g. Osman, 2005; Heng, 2006). While such ignorance may be present in Singapore all along and has not posed any inter-religious problems, it has now surfaced due to the current period of religious tension in the aftermath of the JI arrests. This threatens religious harmony in Singapore since the harmony among religions is understood by students as religious ignorance and fear, as Chew (2005) has pointed out in her research.

For the teaching of religious knowledge to be truly meaningful and morally beneficial, there is a need to go beyond the "teaching about religion" approach. More curriculum content and time should be devoted to a study of the major religions in Singapore, including pointing out the errors of extremist teachings in the religion. As pointed out earlier, information about the various religions, including Islam, is covered superficially in the Civics and Moral Education (CME) textbook. A more appropriate approach is exemplified in a publication, "Religions in Singapore" by Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) which comprises religious leaders and lay persons from the major religions in Singapore. In an essay on "Islam" written by a Muslim, it clarifies the meaning of jihad:

It is therefore shocking that some quarters of the media are trumpeting that Jihad means Holy War. Jihad is any all-out but legitimate effort to remove any kind of evil whether it is corruption, ignorance, superstition or the enemy occupying one's country's territory. To propagate the teachings of the Quran peacefully is a Jihad, while the Greater Jihad is to fight one's evil desire, the ego within. There is no word in the Quran or *Hadith* meaning for 'Holy War' (Inter-Religious Organisation, 1999, p. 135).

Students need to see the relevance of the religious teachings in their everyday lives, and be given the opportunity to discuss, debate, reflect, imagine, empathise and internalise them. This call has been echoed by Singaporeans themselves who advocate more open discussion

on religious beliefs and differences and friendship across religious boundaries (e.g. Han, 2005; Siah, 2005). An example of such inter-religious exchange is a recent dialogue organised by the People's Association Malay Activity Coordinating Council (Mesra). The dialogue was on understanding Islam and it was attended by both Muslim and non-Muslims. Sensitive issues such as the Islamic teaching of Muslims not allowed to come into contact with dog's saliva and the meaning of jihad were discussed honestly and constructively (Zakir, 2006). It is reported that the participants welcomed the effort to strengthen inter-religious ties and wanted more such dialogues on other religions.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion suggests that the current approach of passive citizenship and the emphasis on religious harmony in citizenship education are inadequate in a post-JI arrest era. Muslims in Singapore face a tension between what he or she needs to do to be true to the religion's doctrinal purity, integrity and distinctiveness against those of other religions while at the same time not adopt a non-tolerant antagonistic posture (Tham, 2005). Hong (2003) questions whether Singapore's "religious harmony has been to date only superficial: perhaps cross-faith and cross-ethnic group ties need to be deepened and strengthened" (p. 9). Thomas (2002) argues that Asian educators need to deliver a form of civics education which gives opportunities for learners and teachers to discuss the role of participation in decision-making affecting social issues. In particular, Jackson (2003) avers that they need "to employ methods that take account of the debates about culture, nationality, ethnicity and religion and, crucially, that engage students by connecting with their personal experience and concerns" (p. 19).

There are indications that the Singapore government is moving towards that direction. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced recently that a Community Engagement Programme will be launched to build a network of people from all ethnic groups and religions. What is new is the explicit aim to move beyond traditional religious and community bodies to include schools (Zuraidah, 2006). This paper has argued that the next step for the government is to evaluate the current model of citizenship and citizenship education. What is needed is not just socialisation into a particular state-sanctioned set of values and views in the citizenship education in Singapore, but an active appreciation of and engagement with other religions, especially Islam. The Singapore experience provides a useful case study on the issues and challenges faced by the government and citizens of plural societies in the midst of Islamic revivalism. In the aftermath of the September 11 event, Bali bombing and the JI arrests, and the on-going terrorist threats and religious tensions and conflicts in Europe and Asia, a revamp of the citizenship education in Singapore may no longer be an option for the government.

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