

#### **Forum 4: Identities and Cohesion**

The fourth forum of Singapore Perspectives 2021, Identities and Cohesion, was moderated by Dr Mathew Mathews, Principal Research Fellow and Head of the Institute of Policy Studies Social Lab. The speakers on the panel were Professor Joel Kotkin, Presidential Fellow in Urban Futures at Chapman University, and Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, the Head of Studies in the Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Discussants included Ms Mei Lin Fung, Chair and Co-Founder of People-Centered Internet, as well as Associate Professor Daniel Goh, Deputy Head of the Department of Sociology at the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Singapore enjoys high levels of social cohesion, but the question is, how will social cohesion and harmony play out in the next decade amidst shifting identities and increasing diversity in Singapore? A topic brought up by speakers and discussant was how Covid-19 has introduced pressures within society that has widened faultlines among residents in Singapore and America.

Professor Joel Kotkin presented migration patterns and identity formation in European countries and the US, illustrating trends in attitudes and acceptance of interracial marriages and “multiculturalism of the streets”.

Mr Alami spoke on Singapore’s national identity formation, the silent threats to Singapore’s cohesion, citing the effects of international movements on Singapore’s identity, and how it can breed sentiments of exclusivism and intolerance. He also talked about religion’s role in state and politics and its contribution to public reason and morality, while acknowledging the change in non-religious sentiments and how these can introduce conflicting opinions. He ended his speech presenting three ideas for a cohesive nation in the future: having a dialogical society; negotiated and mediated secularism; and enriched *modus vivendi* that will equip people with psychological reflexes to face the surprising world where there are many unknown.

Discussant Dr Daniel Goh highlighted the issues that he thought will be prevalent in Singapore, in the next few years. They are intersectionality; importation of ideas and identities; and integration of immigrants. He noted that that model of multiculturalism might be affected by these issues.

Ms. Mei Lin Fung commented on the structural changes that affect identity formations: the digital revolution. She commented on how the 'digital tsunami' is changing all manners of communication, presenting new ideas to anyone with access.



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