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Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Working Paper No.17

Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Gadong 2015

Editorial Board, Working Paper Series

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Abstract:

Research focusing on ethnic relations in plural societies often assume the ethnic groups under discussion are natural categories. While ethnic categories appear clear and fixed at a given point, a closer examination of these categories over time demonstrate that ethnic boundaries are often fluid and can be based on a variety of criteria. The following paper focuses on the formation of ethnic identities in Malaysia with comparisons made to Fiji and South Africa. Through an examination of archival censuses, this paper attends to the following research questions, “What are the current ethnic categories in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa?” and “How have the boundaries between them developed over time?” In doing so, it addresses the issue of saliency in ethnic boundary formation.

Keywords: *Boundary Formation, Census Data, Classification, Ethnic Identities, Ethnicity, Ethnic Relations, Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa, Plural Societies*

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There is a tendency for research on ethnic relations in plural societies to view ethnic groups as natural fixed categories in conjunction with an underlying assumption of these groups' homogeneity. For example, Malay-Chinese tensions and Fijian-Indian¹ tensions are often framed merely in terms of conflict between two groups. . They rarely problematize the issue of what constitutes "Malayness" and "Chineseness" in Malaysia, and "Fijianness" and "Indianness" in Fiji in the putative order of things. Yet, as Hirschman (1987: 557) points out, while ethnic categories appear clear and fixed at a given point, a closer examination of these categories over time demonstrate that ethnic boundaries are often fluid and can be based on a variety of criteria. As such, a more thorough examination of the contingent historical processes that led to the formation of these groups can offer potential clues to the embedded tensions within the discourse and practice of contemporary ethnic social cohesion.

This paper seeks to do so by undertaking a comparative study of census data on the formation of ethnic identities in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa. This allows for an exploration of how the boundaries between them developed over time and underscores their saliency in ethnic boundary formation. The work of Christopher (2005, 2006a) on colonial and British Commonwealth censuses, and the theoretical insights of Chai (1996, 2005) on ethnic boundary formation will provide a basis for the analytical discussions of the paper.

¹ Indians in Fiji are also referred to as Indo-Fijians. This is the term that I prefer to use as it recognizes ties with Fiji.

Current Ethnic Categories: Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa

The prevailing ethnic categories in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa are listed in table 1 according to the most recent censuses in each country.

Table 1. Current Official Ethnic Categories in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa, listed according to population composition

Malaysia		Fiji		South Africa	
Bumiputera Malays (54.5%) Indigenous groups (12.8%)	67.4%	Fijian	57%	African-South African	79%
Chinese	24.6%	Indian	34%	White (Euro-South African)	9.6%
Indian	7.3%	Part European	1.3%	Colored	8.9%
Others	1.2%	Rotuman	1.2%	Indian or Asian	2.5%
		Other Pacific Islander	0.8%	Others	-
		Chinese	0.6%		
		European	0.4%		
		Others	1.5%		
Total Population (million)	21.8		0.84		44.8

Source: Malaysia (2010: 15) Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics 2010; Fiji (2008: 6) Fiji Facts and Figures on Fiji Census 2007, South Africa (2003: 12) South Africa Census 2001 in brief, figures rounded up.

In Malaysia, the category *Bumiputera*, (sons of the soil) was created in the 1950s (Andaya & Andaya, 2001: 3) and covers the Malays, which are at a majority at about 55 percent and other indigenous groups, which include the Kadazan Dusun, Bajau, Murut from Sabah, and the Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau from Sarawak. The Chinese and Indian category refers to the immigrants who came from China and India to work on the tin-mines and rubber plantations, while the category Others includes a colorful mix of those that do not fall into any of the above.

In Fiji, the term Fijians refer to the indigenous Fijian population. Rotumans are from the island of Rotuma in the north of Fiji and speak a distinct language. They share closer cultural links with Tongans, but have been part of Fiji since 1881 and are recognized as being indigenous. Indo-Fijians refers to the population that was brought in from India to work on the sugar plantations in the late 19th century and later immigrants who came as traders. The Europeans are descendants of colonial settlers who continue to play an important role in the political sector and economy. The category Part-European refers to the ethnically mixed population of European/Fijian ancestry. The Chinese refers to the population that came from China. Similar to the Indo-Fijians, the Chinese also came as indentured laborers. Other Pacific Islanders include those from neighboring island nations.

South Africa's census classification has four major categories. Africans refer to South African's majority African-South African population, which includes the Zulus who form the majority, followed by the Xhosas (South Africa, 2003: 18). The Euro-South African population refers to the European settlers, of which the Afrikaners (Dutch and French ancestry) form the majority, followed by the English (South African, 2003: 18). The Colored population consisted those of mixed parentage, and distinct communities such as the Cape Malay and Cape Colored communities in Cape Town. In fact 72 percent of the population listed as Colored reside in the Western and Northern Cape regions (South Africa, 2003). The Asian/Indian population mainly consist of the descendants of Indian laborers. It also includes other Asian communities, such as the Chinese.

The origin of these categories which have been somewhat static in the postcolonial period, can be traced back to the colonial era. The present ethnic classification system in Malaysia can be traced back to the 1891 Straits Settlements Census grouping of the population under six major headings,

which were Europeans and Americans, Eurasians, Chinese, Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago, Tamils and other Natives of India, and Other Nationalities (Merewether, 1892). In the postcolonial era, the categories of European and American, and Eurasians have been subsumed under the category of Other, while the other three categories have remained.

Fiji's first census of 1881 put in place an ethnic classification scheme that is reasonably reflective today (Fiji, 1881). The 1881 census introduced six categories, all of which are still applied today, with minor modifications. "Half-caste" was changed to "Part European," and "Polynesians" into "Other Pacific Islanders." The category of Indians (Indo-Fijians) was introduced in 1891 (Fiji, 1891-1956). While the Chinese were mentioned in the 1881 and numerated together with "Other Polynesians," a separate category for Chinese was introduced in the 1911 census (Fiji, 1891-1956).

South Africa's present structure can be traced to the first Union of South Africa Census in 1911, again with amendments to the terms (Moffat, 1912). The three categories used in 1911, which were adapted from the 1875 Census of the Cape of Good Hope, were "European or White," "Bantu" and "Mixed and Other Colored" (Christopher, 2002: 402). The term "White" was dropped in preference of "European" in the 1921, 1936 and 1946 censuses. It was reintroduced in 1951 and used exclusively since (Christopher, 2002: 402). The term "Bantu" has been changed to "Black African" since 1996 (South Africa, 1999). "Mixed and Other Colored" was used from 1911–1946, when it was reduced to the term "Colored" from 1951 onwards, and continues to be used in the democratic era (Christopher, 2002: 402). The term "Asiatic" was introduced in 1921 when the British India Colonial Office wanted an account on the indentured laborers working in South Africa (Christopher, 2002: 402).

Among the three countries, Fiji has its population divided among the most number of categories. It is interesting that six ethnic categories in Fiji currently cater to a mere nine percent of its population, with three categories having less than one percent of the population. While Fiji is clearly a bipolar state, a term introduced by Milne's (1981) to refer to countries where there were two ethnic groups of equal size, both South Africa and Malaysia have a third minority group that is at least eight percent of the population. The next section concentrates on the formation of these ethnicities,

with focus on the creation of the ethnicities of the dominant group in each country and the impact it has on the rest of society.

Ethnic Identity Formation: Review of Theories

Within the field of ethnic identity formation, three schools of thought prevail, which are primordialism, circumstantialism, and constructionalism. Under the primordialist approach, ethnicity is seen as being fixed, rooted and unchangeable (Geertz, 1963). Emphasis is placed on kinship and ancient history, which are regarded as “primordial attachments.” This “basic group identity” as explained by Isaac (1975 in Cornell & Hartmann 1998) “consists of the ready-made set of endowments and identifications that every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of the family into which he is born at that given time in that given place.”

This approach has been criticized as it ignores possible changes in ethnic affiliation and the construction of new ethnic categories, which change according to time and space. For example, it ignores situations where individuals choose to give up their ethnic identity and adopt another as in the case of the Pathans abandoning their identities in favor of Baluchi (Barth, 1969: 117). Furthermore, ascriptive factors which influence ethnic boundaries such as phenotype, language and religion vary according to the situation. For example, (Chan, 1983: 267) points to the Dutch (Protestant) Eurasian community in Malacca, Malaysia, who converted to Catholicism, and assimilated into the larger Portuguese Eurasian population, a few generations after the end of Dutch colonial rule. A previously rigid religious boundary that divided the Protestant and Catholic churches was no longer as important.

A contrasting school of thought has been the circumstantialist approach, which regards ethnicity as deriving from its circumstances. While acknowledging that having a shared culture continues to be important, Glazer and Moynihan (1975) argue that members of ethnic groups were also linked through ties of interest. Cornell and Hartmann (1998: 58) summarize the circumstantialist approach as, “individuals and groups emphasize their own ethnic or racial identities when such identities are in some way advantageous to them. They emphasize the ethnic or racial identities of others when it is advantageous to set those others apart or to establish a boundary between those

viewed as eligible for certain goods and those viewed as ineligible” Under this approach, ethnic boundaries are fluid and individuals adapt according to the situation.

Under the circumstantialist approach, a major influence affecting ethnic choices are access to economic or political opportunities. Olzak’s (1992) “competition theory” and Banton’s (Banton & Mansor, 1992) “rational choice theory,” have stressed the access to opportunities element. Other theorists include Hechter’s (1971) “cultural division of labor” theory and Bonacich’s (1972) “split labor market” theory. Thus competition and conflict between groups is featured strongly under this approach. This approach however, has been criticized as it fails to explain the continuous prominence of ethnicity once the need for cooperation is completed (Chai, 2005: 3).

The limitations of these two approaches led to a new approach known as the constructionist approach. The constructionist approach combines the primordialist and circumstantialist approaches, with individuals using their identities in pursuit of their goals, but doing little to shape, reinforce or transform their identities (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 73). Among the factors influencing the construction of ethnicity are shared political, economic or social interests, for example gaining employment, resistance to public policies or protection of rights from claims of other groups (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 86). Other factors include having shared social institutions or culture (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 86), or political factors such as immigration, resource competition or political access (Nagel, 1994: 157). In contrast with the circumstantial approach, ethnic boundaries may continue to persist, even after the original interest-based reasons for their creation no longer exists. An ethnic label can either be assigned to a group by others, or the group itself may assert its own identity. Cornell and Hartmann (1998: 83) also propose that ethnic identity could be “thick” where it dominates social, political and economic organization, or “thin” where it is a much less comprehensive organizer of social life. This comprehensiveness of ethnic identities can change over time.

The constructionist approach to ethnic boundary formation is both an internal and external process as Nagel (1994: 155) clearly states, “ethnic boundaries, and thus identities, are constructed by both the individual and group as well as outside agents and organizations.” Barth (1969) describes this as a “labeling process” involving the individual and others. Fenton (1999: 10) adds that ethnicity

needs to be seen as a social process, involving the moving of boundaries and identities which people themselves create.

However Barth (1969: 15) states that a group is defined by the maintenance of a boundary rather than cultural aspects such as religion and language. As he clearly states, “The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff which it encloses.” Among the factors influencing the creation of ethnic boundaries are the degree of differences among the populations, the nature of their contact, and their relative positions in the political and economic order (Hirschman, 1987: 558).

Recent literature in the area of ethnic boundary formation has focused on population size being an influencing factor (Chai, 1996: 289). Chai (1996: 289) argues that the ideal size of a group would be somewhere about half the size of the population, as a group with too few members may be overshadowed. In particular, the “optimal size of the group would be considerably larger than the number of migrants from any single community of origin” (Chai 1996: 289). However, a group must not grow too large as resources obtained from its membership will need to be shared over a larger number of individuals. This assumes all power is shared equally. Should a particular group have more political power, its boundaries will be smaller. This theory will be applied later on in the paper.

The Colonial Census and Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa

Colonialism often marked an important point in ethnic boundary formation (Fenton, 2003). A major tool used from the colonial period onwards in defining a population is the census. The role the colonial census in shaping ethnic identities and its implication for postcolonial states has been studied by scholars (Anderson, 1991; Cohn, 1987; Hirschman, 1987). As Anderson (1991: 184) clearly states, the census imposes a “totalizing, classificatory grid” on the population, as it provided the ability to draw distinctions and boundaries among “peoples, regions, religions, languages.” People began to see themselves as members of specific groups and communities (Anderson, 1991).

In preparing census classifications, Hirschman (1987) states that colonial authorities undertook the task of formulating a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive ethnic categories to classify the population, changing them as circumstances changed. In what Anderson describes as an imagined community, these categories overtime became more visible and exclusively racial (Anderson, 2002). Kertzer and Arel (2002: 5) state that the use of identity categories in the census created a “particular vision of social reality.” Nagel (1994: 157) refers to this as the “political construction” of ethnicity. This would have a tremendous impact on the creation of politically influential ethnic groups (Kertzer and Arel 2002: 31).

British colonial immigration policies also resulted in changing the demographic landscape in Malaysia, Fiji, and South Africa which in turn contributed towards developing ethnic awareness. New immigrant groups became ethnic groups, with groups either assimilating into already existing ethnicities or developing their own ethnicities (Nagel, 1994: 157). Thus British colonial “divide and rule” policies required it necessary to be able to identify and quantify societies that were perceived as being fragmented (Christopher, 2006a: 343).

Christopher’s (2005: 104) analysis of the census and racial categories in the Commonwealth observed that “racial classification has been an integral part of the majority of colonial and even postcolonial censuses within the territories of the former British overseas empire.” He states that the classification system adopted in the colonies sought to address three major issues. Firstly, it was necessary to determine the boundary between the colonizer and the colonized, secondly it was important to distinguish recognizable groups within the indigenous community and thirdly, there was a need to distinguish between the immigrant communities (Christopher, 2005).

The category of European or White existed in all the ten colonial censuses (1871-1947) available for the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and British Malaya (Hirschman, 1987: 571-577). In the postcolonial period, the category was relegated into the “Others” category (Hirschman 1987: 578). The category European existed in all of Fiji’s nine colonial census, and continued in its four postcolonial censuses (Fiji, 1881; Fiji, 1891-1956; Fiji, 2010). Similarly, South Africa had the category since its first census in 1865 for the Cape of Good Hope, and continued with its remaining fifteen censuses up to present day (Christopher, 2002).

The biggest challenge in setting the boundaries of Europeans or White, was defining who was a European, especially in classifying the mixed offspring. All three countries solved the problem by introducing the category of “Eurasian,” in the case of the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and British Malaya, and “Part-European” in the case of Fiji. In the case of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Orange River Colony, Transvaal, which all later became South Africa, the categories “Mixed and Others” and “Mixed and Other Colored,” were introduced, which later changed to “Colored” (Christopher 2006b: 120). Interestingly, not all Europeans were considered suitable to be included into the “European and American.” In the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and British Malaya censuses, Armenians and Jews were classified separately in the censuses from 1871-1947 (Hirschman 1987: 571-577).

It is also useful to note that the creation of the “Mixed” categories did not go unchallenged, even in the colonial period. In Natal, Christopher (2005: 107) reports that the mixed population in Natal were successful in obstructing attempts to be classified separately from the Europeans in the 1891 census. In Fiji, enumerators were informed to “align the children with male parent” when unsure (Fiji 1891-1956).

Christopher (2005) reports that the colonialist attempts to classify the natives proved problematic as the boundaries between groups were fluid and the lack of knowledge among the colonial administrators led to detailed classification schemes which at times led to unmanageable outcomes. For example the 1881 British India census led to over 11,000 castes and subcastes which were later reduced to 3000 (Mohanty and Momin (1996) in Christopher, 2005: 109).

In the Straits Settlements & British Malaya, Fiji and South Africa, the British authorities’ preoccupation with who is a native can be seen in the expansion of ethnicities and constantly changing criteria. For example, the 1911 Census of the Straits Settlements had twenty-two sub-ethnicities under the major heading of Malay & Allied Races², while South Africa’s expansion of ethnic

² Achehnese, Amboinese, Balinese, Bandung, Banjarese, Bantamese, Batak, Borneo Races, Boyanese, Bugis, Bundu, Dayak, Dusun, Javanese, Jawi Pekan, Kadayan, Korinchi, Malay, Rawanese, Sulu, Sundanese, Totong.

categories reached its peak in 1936, where the 1936 South African census listed seventeen sub-ethnicities under the major category of “Natives”³.

While the colonial authorities in Malaya and South Africa were keen to know the diversity within the native population, in Fiji, attempts to safeguard the native population included expanding the categories for all those regarded as immigrant. Among its previously established categories, the 1936 census adopted the categories of Polynesian, Melanesian, Micronesian, and expanded the category of “half-caste” leading to sixteen subcategories⁴ just within these four larger headings. The 1947 census led to an explosion of forty sub-ethnicities as it sought to further explore the issue of miscegenation among the whole Fijian population.

In the censuses of the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, the Chinese and Indian populations were listed separately, with the sub-ethnicities listed according to linguistic differences. South Africa included a category of “Asiatics” in the 1904 censuses in Natal and Transvaal and this continued into the censuses of the Union of South Africa from 1911 onwards (Christopher, 2002).

Observing how the issue of ethnicity was handled in the postcolonial era, Christopher (2006a: 344) analyzed censuses from seventy-one countries in the Commonwealth conducted in the millennium.⁵ He found that the question of citizenship or nationality was used in 50 censuses, race or ethnic group was used in 43 censuses, while 25 censuses used language as a question. South Africa’s 2001 census included all four questions—citizenship, ethnicity, language and religion. Malaysia’s 2000 census included citizenship, ethnicity and religion, leaving out language, while Fiji’s 1996 census had ethnicity and religion only. Questions imposed in censuses either have been or

³ Zulu, Basuto, Xosa, Pondo, Barolong, Shangaan, Fingo, Mashona, Bechuana, Tembu, Baca, Bavenda, Ndebele, Pondomise, Swazi, Tonga, Mozambique

⁴ **P.E.N.D.** (Person of European and Native Descent, previously addressed as “half-caste”): Anglo-Fijians, Anglo-Polynesians, Others.

Polynesians: Cook Islanders, Ellice Islanders, Futunans, Niue Islanders, Rotumans, Samoans, Tongans, Wallis Islanders

Melanesians: New Caledonians, New Hebrideans, Solomon Islanders

Micronesians: Caroline Islanders, Gilbertese

⁵ Census dates ranged from 1996–2006.

have the potential of becoming boundary marker. The issue of which ascriptive characteristic becomes the major boundary marker will be discussed in the next section.

Ethnic Boundary Formation: Peninsula Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa

Chai's (1996, 2005) theory on ethnic boundary formation using population size as a major influencing factor, will be applied in discussing ethnic boundary formation in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa. Chai sets down five propositions influencing ethnic boundary formation. Firstly, he proposes that in societies undergoing modernizing structural changes, such as large-scale political consolidation, individuals will migrate to urban population centers (principle 1) (Chai, 1996: 286, 289). Facing competition for jobs and other scarce resources, there will be an incentive for individuals to band together in the battle for economic and political resources.

Secondly, Chai (2005) proposes that the boundaries for any large-scale group will be based on one or a combination of the four ascriptive characteristics which are race, language, religion or region of birth (principle 2). The boundaries will encompass these attributes rather than cut across them.

Thirdly, groups will incorporate members until a "minimum winning coalition" is formed (principle 3). This coalition is generally defined at slightly over fifty percent of the population, where it is then able to exert some power. If it gets any larger than needed for its purpose, resources will have to be spread over a larger number of individuals, leading to smaller portions for everyone. However according to the fourth proposition, should the group have relative greater economic and political power than its competitors, its boundaries will become more rigid at a smaller group size (principle 3a).

Fifthly, the most salient boundary in cases where there are multiple potential boundaries, will be the one where individuals share a common position within the economic and political structure (principle 4).

Finally, Chai's (2005: 12) theory implies that the boundary that becomes salient and defines the largest ethnic group, also has an influencing factor for all other ethnic groups in the country. Using

this theory, the next section examines the ethnic boundary formation of the largest ethnic groups in the earliest time-period, which are the boundaries of “Whiteness” in South Africa, “Malayness” in Peninsula Malaysia and “Fijianness” in Fiji.

The discussion on the formation of “Whiteness” in South Africa is confined to the earliest British settlement which is the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. Four censuses were conducted between 1865-1904, before the Cape Colony became part of the Union of South Africa. The discussion of “Malayness” is also confined to the earliest British settlements in colonial Malaya, which were the Straits Settlements, incorporating the states of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Five censuses were conducted between 1871–1911, until it was merged into the Census of British Malaya in 1921.

South Africa: Defining “Whiteness”

South Africa attracted a large number of Europeans from different parts of Europe whose main aim was to settle.⁶ This is in contrast to Malaysia and Fiji, where most Europeans were there as colonial administrators and planters. Unlike South Africa, which went through a process to create a “White” (Euro-South African) identity, it is perhaps safe to assume that the ethnic identity of the colonialists in Malaysia and Fiji was already formed in the United Kingdom prior to arrival in the colonies. In the Cape of Good Hope, the earliest of British Colonies, the censuses of 1865 and 1875 list the Europeans as the largest group at around 36 percent and 33 percent of the total population. A comparison of the population groups from the first census of the Cape of Good Hope in 1865 to the final census in 1905 is provided below. Cape of Good Hope was incorporated into the census of the Union of South Africa Census in 1911.

Table 2. Ethnic Groups and Population Composition in the Cape of Good Hope

⁶ In fact, Lester (2001: 16) quotes, “When the first British settlers to arrive on the eastern Cape frontier were told that Britain ‘had now sent her Sons and Daughters to cultivate the arts of civilized life amidst the long neglected natives of the third Quarter’³ the word ‘natives’ was taken to mean Afrikaners as much as it did Africans.” The Dutch-speaking colonist or Afrikaners was constructed negatively under the British colonial project (Lester, 2001: 15). Many of the “problems” posed by the Afrikaners were ascribed to the effects of Dutch East India Company rule. Lester argues that “only an intermittent assimilation of new European ideas, and even then the worst kind of republication ones” were allowed to be filtered through to the Cape. (Lester 2001: 15).

	European	Malay	Hottentot	Fingo	Mixed and Others	Kafir and Betschuana
1865	36%	-	16%	-	27%	20%
1875	32.8%	1.5%	13.6%	10.2%	12.1%	29.7%
1891	24.7%	0.9%	3.3%	15%	16.2%	39.8%
1905	24.1%	0.6%	3.8%	12.9%	12.4%	46.2%

Source: Censuses of the Cape of Good Hope 1865-1905: Southey, R. (1866), Mills (1877), Cape of Good Hope (1892) (1905).

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 in the Cape Colony led to rapid demographic and social change in Cape Town and throughout the Cape Colony. The increase in economic activities in Cape Town increased rural to urban migration and affected the previous relatively self-sufficient communities. Table 3 shows an estimate of the population of Cape Town from 1806–1904, with the population doubling with each census year. This is inline with Chai’s (1996) first principle of modernizing structural change being a condition for ethnic group formation.

Table 3. Population of Cape Town, South Africa

Year	Population Size
1806	16,000
1865	27,000
1875	45,000
1891	79,000
1904	170,000

Source: Censuses of the Cape of Good Hope 1865-1905: Southey, R. (1866), Mills (1877), Cape of Good Hope (1892) (1905)

Among the four possible ascriptive characteristics of phenotype, religion, language and place of birth being a boundary marker, phenotype clearly stood out as the most obvious marker based on the Chai's (2005) "minimum winning coalition" argument. The 1875 census of the Cape of Good Hope shows that about 52 percent of the total population adhered to the Christian faith, with 24 percent belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church. In Cape Town, which was the urban center, almost 77 percent of the population adhered to Christianity (Mills, 1877: 349). Any ethnic alignment along religious lines would have created an extremely large group size.

In discussing region of birth as a possible boundary marker, 95 percent of the population had been born in the Cape Colony, with 79 percent of the population classified as European or White, had been born in the Cape Colony in 1875 (Mills, 1877).⁷ Thus, any alignment based on region of birth would also be impracticable, especially when the Afrikaners no longer saw the Netherlands as their homeland.

The 1865, 1875 and 1891 censuses did not collect any information based on home language as it was deemed to be too costly. However, it could be expected that Afrikaans, the language spoken by the Afrikaners was also the dominant language for the population classified as Colored. This would have also created an impracticable boundary marker. This just leaves phenotype as a possible suitable boundary marker, thus the creation of "Whiteness" as an ethnic identity.

It is important to note that the "White" (Euro-South African) group was not homogenous. Through a comparison of religion with birthplace, the 1891 census was able to provide estimates of the diversity within the European population. Those of Dutch and French origin were numbered at 230,000, English, Scottish, Irish at 130,000 and Other Europeans at 16,000 (Cape of Good Hope, 1892: xvii). This estimates show that the Afrikaners were the dominant group at about 61 percent. However in the urban area, the English dominated at close to 38 percent of the European congregation belonging to the Church of England while figures for European adherents of the Dutch Reformed Church was at 32 percent (Cape of Good Hope, 1892: xxxix). Table 4 shows how urbanized the English population was.

This had risen to 86 percent in the 1891 census (Cape of Good Hope, 1892)

Table 4. European / White Population and Religious Denomination, 1891

Denomination	Urban	Rural
Dutch Reformed Church	32.87	83.95
Church of England	38.12	7.7
Presbyterians	7.05	1.32
Independents	1.05	0.25
Methodist	9.98	3.59
Lutherans	4.8	1.71
Baptists	2.93	0.98
Other Protestants	2.75	0.5
Total	100	100

Source: Cape of Good Hope (1892)

It is also important to note that the English and Afrikaner did not occupy the same economic and political position. In fact Afrikaners who had been forced to migrate to the cities often entered the job market on the lowest rungs, hardly higher than the equally unskilled African labor force and far beneath the skilled English worker. The ratio of the per capita incomes of the Afrikaner and English is estimated to have been as high as 100: 300 in 1910 (Bickford-Smith, 1995).

However since there were no other contending boundary markers, phenotype appeared to be the strongest factor for group formation. Despite having political and economic dominance, the English and closer allies, Scottish and Irish, made up under nine percent of the total population in 1891, a size too small to survive. With a rapidly growing African population (referred to in table 2 as Kafir and Betshuana), it would have made strategic sense for the English to boost their population size by aligning with the Afrikaners based on phenotype affiliation. Presently, the Euro-South African category in South Africa includes the descendants of the early Dutch, French and British settlers.

Peninsula Malaysia: Defining “Malayness”

Scholars of Southeast Asia, including anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and linguists have found that the term “Malay” or what constitutes “Malayness” remains a difficult one to answer. As Barnard and Maier (2004: xiii) put it, “The nature or essence of ‘Malayness’ remains problematic—one of the most challenging and confusing terms in the world of Southeast Asia.” Among the features defining Southeast Asia as a region is the high level of migration that occurred. The ease of migration through the region and lack of boundaries facilitated the exchange of people within Southeast Asia thus contributing to the mixture of ethnicities (Andaya, 2008).

In accordance to Chai’s (1996) principle 1, colonialism and the demographic shifts that came with it resulted in increasing ethnic awareness. Colonial immigration policies, which needed labor for tin mining and agriculture plantations resulted in a huge influx of immigrants. The large scale migration that took place from 1850-1920 contributed towards changing the demographic composition of the country (Hirschman and Suan-Pow, 1979: 2). In 1911, the Malayan Peninsula had a population size of only 2.3 million. However by 1947, this had doubled to 4.9 million with the growth being entirely due to immigration (Hirschman, 1980: 104-105). Migrant workers came from China, India, with the third largest migrant group coming from the then Dutch East Indies islands of Java and Sumatra (Kaur, 2008: 5-6). These laborers soon outnumbered the Malay population in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, resulting in rapid political and economic changes (Hirschman, 1986: 336).

The Chinese made up the largest group of immigrants, and within the Straits Settlements states of Malacca, Penang and Singapore, increased from a mere 14 percent of its population in 1881 to being larger than the Malays in 1891. Table 5 shows the ethnic group size of both communities.

Table 5. Proportion of Malays and Chinese to Total Population in the Straits Settlements

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1931	1947
Malay	43%	38%	35%	29%	22%	20%
Chinese	14%	44%	49%	52%	60%	66%

Source: Censuses of the Straits Settlements 1891, 1901, 1911, Census of British Malaya 1947 (Merewether, 1892; Innes, 1901; Marriott, 1911; Vlieland, 1932; Del Tufo, 1947)

While the demographic changes were not as dramatic as in the Straits Settlements, a similar pattern can be observed in the Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. While the Malays were in the majority at about 52 percent of the total population in the Federated Malay States in 1891, by the following census year of 1901, they had diminished in size to 42 percent, while the Chinese were at 44 percent. This gap increased and by 1931, the Malays were 23 percent of the population in the Federated Malay States, with the Chinese almost doubling them at 45 percent.

By the early 20th century, the threat of the “Chinese invasion” had caught the attention of the Malay intellectuals, who wrote about the survival of the Malays, and set the criteria for “Malayness” which had previously been a fluid category. A Malay was defined as one who adhered to Islam, habitually spoke Malay and practiced Malay culture. Among the four ascriptive characteristics, religion and language—*agama dan bahasa*, were seen as the boundaries defining Malayness (Nagata, 1974).

Applying principle 2, religion and language appear to be the most logical boundaries to be used in order to create “a minimum winning coalition.” In a society that was predominantly East and Southeast Asians, using phenotype as a marker was clearly impossible given the similarities of features and skin tone. The place of birth criteria was also not practical as the majority of the population, including those that were categorized as “Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago” were not born in the Malayan Peninsula. As Vlieland (1949: 61), Superintendent of the 1931 Census states, “It is commonplace that Malaya is full of ‘foreign’ Malays.” Commenting on the 1947 census, he compares the increases of the Malay population in the states of Selangor, which was at 26,600 in 1891 and had increased to 185,300 in 1947. Even with the most generous natural increase rate, he states that the “...1891 population could not conceivably have increased naturally to more than 53,200 (i.e., doubled) by 1947, it follows that 132,100 of the ‘Malays’ in Selangor were of stock immigrant since 1891. In other words, not more than 29 percent of the ‘Malay’ population in this State can be of stock settled there for more than 55 years. The actual percentage is probably lower” (Vlieland, 1949: 61). He made a similar observation of the state of Johor and calculated that the actual proportion of “Malays” “who are of even 36 years standing in the country is less than 40 percent” (Vlieland, 1949: 61).

This leaves language and religion as possible boundary markers. Religion appears to be the stronger boundary marker, as the superintendent of the 1931 census reports, “...most Oriental peoples have themselves no clear conception of race, and commonly regard religion as the most important, if not the determinant element” (Vlieland, 1932: 73). With over ninety percent of the population in the “Malay and Other Natives of the Archipelago” category adherents to Islam, religion would appear to be the strongest boundary marking the Chinese / non-Chinese divide.

The first time that the question of religion was posed in the census was in 1911. Table 6 shows the population size for the different religious denominations in the Straits Settlements.

Table 6. Religious Affiliation and Population Size in 1911

Religion	Number of adherents	Percentage of total population
Chinese Religion	363,788	50.8%
Islam	266,299	37%
Hinduism	52,638	7.4%
Christianity	27,682	3.9%
Buddhist	2774	0.4%
Judaism	775	0.1%
Total Population	714,069	100%

Source: Census of the Straits Settlements 1911 (Marriott, 1911)

In 1911, over half the population followed Chinese religious beliefs. While there are no data linking religion with ethnicity, it can be expected that the majority of the adherents were Chinese. Adherents to Islam were at 38 percent, smaller compared to the Chinese religion, but certainly bigger than the Malay ethnic group size of 29 percent.

However a boundary based on Islam still resulted in the boundary of Malayness being smaller than half of the population, leading to still some flexibility in who was classified as a Malay. The 1911 Straits Settlements census had an almost threefold increase⁸ in the number of sub-ethnic groups under the Malay and Other Natives heading, and this continued till the 1947 census.

While religion was an important boundary marker, it was not exclusive. Non-Muslim aboriginal groups were seen to be part of the dominant Malay ethnicity. Perhaps the inclusion was seen as suitable as in spite of not fulfilling the religion criteria, these groups aligned with the place of birth

⁸ Aborigines, Achinese, Amboinese, Batak, Balinese, Bandung, Banjarese, Bantamese, Boyanese, Bugis, Bundu, Dyaks, Dusun, Javanese, Jawi Pekan, Kadayan, Korinchi, Malays, Other Dutch Borneo, Rawanese, Sulu, Sundanese, Totong. Only nine sub-ethnicities were listed in the 1891 and 1901 censuses.

criteria. A similar pattern can be observed with the Samsam. Samsam is the term given to the Siamese who intermarried with the local Malay population. The language spoken was a hybrid of Malay and Thai, with some members becoming Muslim while others retained their Buddhist faith (Nagata, 1979: 51). While the Siamese population had been recognized from the first census of 1871 until the 1947 census, the Samsam were only recognized as a separate community in the 1901 Straits Settlements census and classified under the “Malay and other Natives of the Archipelago” category (Innes, 1901).

On the other hand, not all groups or individuals who professed Islam were incorporated into the larger Malay ethnicity. The 1911 census noted that “the Muhammadan population” included 154 Chinese, yet they were classified under the Chinese category (Marriott, 1911). The Arabs, who were Muslim and had intermarried with the Malay population, and probably closest to the definition of Malayness, were classified under “Other nationalities” (Marriott, 1911).

The Arabs were an influential group in the Malay Peninsula and had a long history of intermarriage with the Malay population and its royal families (Andaya, 2001: 96). They were recognized as a separate identity by census-makers from 1881-1947 (Hirschman, 1987: 571-577), though annotations to these censuses suggest that the recorders were dubious as to the validity of these claims: “It is extremely doubtful whether those who so describe themselves ... have any real claim to be considered members of that race,” (Census Department 1911 in Nagata, 1981: 104). Though they had a long history of intermarriage and were Muslims, the Arabs were first listed alphabetically under the 1871 and 1881 censuses and then placed under the category of “Other Nationalities”/ “Other Races” in all censuses until 1947 (Hirschman, 1987: 571-577).

Despite the exceptions with the Samsams and Arabs, religion remained a powerful boundary marker for Malayness. Groups which originated from Indonesia began to adopt Malay as their language. Calculations based on the number of language speakers provided in the Straits Settlements Census of 1911 show that there were increases in the number of people who spoke Malay as a first language and a decrease in other languages for those who were classified as “Other Natives from the Archipelago.”

Table 7. Comparison of Ethnic Group with Language Spoken in 1911

	Ethnic group	Language speakers	Percentage increase or decrease
Achinese	224	101	-55%
Boyanese	5911	4509	-24%
Banjarese	154	34	-78%
Bugis	1335	722	-46%
Dusun	114	91	-20%
Javanese	18170	12446	-32%
Totong	191	143	-25%
Kadayan	742	543	-27%
Malays	209,008	246582	15%

Source: Census of the Straits Settlements, 1911 (Marriott, 1911).

While there is no evidence that individuals switched to Malay, it was the only language that had a remarkable higher number of speakers at 37,574, compared to its ethnic group. The 1911 Census recorded the English speaking population at 12,228, a figure that is a little less than the numbers shown for Europeans and Americans, and Eurasians. Based on the above principle, grouping migrants from Indonesia who were already viewed as being closer in culture to the Malays in the “Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago” category of the 1891 census, provided a small but significant increase to this overall category. Nagata (1979: 45) adds that the close cultural, religious and linguistic affinities of all the Malay and Indonesian-origin peoples, who almost all are Muslims, may have undoubtedly helped in this easy identification and “census assimilation.”

Fiji: Defining “Fijianness”

In applying Chai’s (2005) principles to ethnic boundary formation for indigenous “Fijianness” in Fiji, it departs from the usual pattern as observed with Malaysia and South Africa. While the boundaries for “Malayness” was created in opposition to “Chineseness,” and “Whiteness” in opposition to Africans, the boundaries of “Fijianness” went through two adaptations, firstly it was constructed against the Europeans, and later against the Indo-Fijians.

Ratuva (2000: 60) states that before colonization, Fiji was a heterogeneous society with relatively autonomous sociopolitical entities. Voluntary migration and war led to fluid geopolitical boundaries. The land tenure systems and subcultures differed among different localities, influencing who was seen as *i taukei* (local) or *vulagi* (visitor) (Ratuva, 2000: 60).

Through colonization, Fiji experienced modernizing structural changes with the focus surrounding the ownership of land. To prevent land from being appropriated by white capitalists, Fiji’s first colonial governor, Sir Arthur Gordon set aside 83 percent of Fiji’s land to indigenous Fijians. Colonial rule centralized Fijian society, bringing it under a single political identity (Norton, 1990).

The creation of the Native Administration unified the previously independent chiefdoms, and was based on the sociopolitical structures of the predominant eastern chiefdoms, which was generally more hierarchical and hereditary than the smaller, flexible, egalitarian systems in the west (Ratuva, 2000: 62). The “Fijian” language was based on an eastern missionary-developed dialect (Lawson, 1990: 67-8). The western and central regions with more egalitarian customs and smaller, decentralized political units were subordinated in the process (Norton, 1990: 20). Thus colonial native policy succeeded in reinventing a homogenous ethnic identity, which later became institutionalized (Ratuva, 2000: 87)⁹. In line with Chai’s first principle, modernizing structural changes, in this case colonialization, marked a shift towards increasing ethnic awareness.

⁹ Under the 1876 Native Affairs Ordinance, twelve provinces were created, each headed by existing chiefs, with provinces further divided into districts and headed by lesser chiefs. The highest assembly in this structure was the Great Council of Chiefs. This whole structure was created by colonial authorities as the “traditional” parliament for chiefs to discuss issues of concern to the indigenous Fijians. Provincial and District Councils were also created and attended by relevant chiefs. This chiefly system became institutionalized as the unquestioned political and cultural guardian of indigenous Fijians.

However, the creation of the indigenous Fijian identity based on place of birth as the main ascriptive characteristic resulted in the indigenous Fijian population being ninety percent of the total population in 1881. This is way over the fifty percent criteria as stated in Chai's second principle. Among the possible reasons why the group size remained feasible was firstly, it was drawn against the boundaries of "Europeanness," which as the colonial master, held the political and economic power. A large group may have felt to be necessary to counterbalance this.

Secondly, as Kaplan (1998: 204) notes, Fijian identity was intricately bounded up with Fijian society, which was based on hierarchy and communalism. Fijian chiefly leadership was seen to be a necessary feature in maintaining Fijian culture and continuity (Kaplan, 1998: 204). Thus much of the boundaries of Fijianness was dependent on a few people in leadership positions, making the decisions in conjunction with the colonial master. How representative the sense of Fijianness may have been with the rest of the population remains unknown. Kaplan (1998: 211) notes opposition of the Vatukaloko, living in the north of Fiji's largest island to colonial encroachment, using this as an example of the non-homogeneity in indigenous Fijian identity.

Finally, indigenous Fijians forming a huge majority of the population was quickly challenged over the next few decades. Colonial policies which brought in indentured laborers from India to work on the plantations, work which they saw as being unsuitable for Fijians, shifted the ethnic balance in Fiji. Table 8 shows the ethnic distribution in colonial Fiji from the first census in 1881 till the last one in 1966.

Table 8. Ethnic Distribution in Fiji from 1881-1966

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1936	1946	1956	1966
Fijian	90%	87%	79%	62%	54%	49%	45%	43%	42%
Indian (Indo-Fijian)	0.5%	6%	14%	29%	39%	43%	46%	49%	51%
European	2.1%	1.7%	2%	2.7%	2.5%	2%	1.8%	1.9%	1.4%
Part-European	0.6%	0.9%	1.3%	1.7%	1.8%	2.3%	2.4%	2.3%	2%

Source: Fiji (2010): Key Statistics: Population by Ethnicity 1881-2007.

By 1911, the Indian population was almost a third of Fiji’s population and the boundaries of “Fijianness” began to be seen in opposition with “Indianness.” The ascriptive criteria of place of birth, became closely tied with membership of *mataqali* (clan). The colonial authorities were keen for the boundaries of Fijianness to remain firm. The 1936 census defined a Fijian as “a Native whose name has been recorded as a member of a landowning family by the Native Lands Commission” (Fiji, 1891-1956: Burrows, 1936: 10).

Kaplan (1998: 205-206) reports of a case in 1912 where a formerly indentured Indian man married a local Fijian woman and petitioned to be “treated as a native.” He was already working as a member of his village community and willing to assume all related taxes. While the local officials, and the British secretary for Native Affairs approved his request to be registered as a member of the clan, the Governor in Council expressed concerned and did not grant approval. What was of concern was the issue of opening access to land. Thus the boundary defining Fijianness, extended beyond place of birth, to membership of a clan and the land rights that it incorporated. The requirement for membership of a clan in addition to place of birth was deemed necessary, as by 1936, almost three-quarters of the Indian population was born in Fiji.

Table 9. Percentage of Indians (Indo-Fijians) born in Fiji

	1911	1921	1936	1946
Born in Fiji	27%	44%	72%	85%

Source: Fiji (2010): Key Statistics: Population by Ethnicity 1881-2007.

Ethnic awareness was heightened by the mid 1930s, when Indo-Fijians were given minor representation in the Legislative Council, and were campaigning for democracy. By 1936, Kaplan (1998: 207) reports that the Indo-Fijian population was portrayed as being threatening and disorder by the colonial authorities and Fijian chiefs.

What is interesting in Fiji's case is despite facing an "Indian" invasion and falling to below fifty percent of the population from 1936 onwards, the boundaries of "Fijianness" which were place of birth and membership to a clan, continue to hold against other ethnic groups. The 1936 census adopted the classification of Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian (Fiji, 1891-1956 in census of 1936: 10), further distinguishing the migrant population. The Melanesian population included Solomon Islanders and New Hebrideans who were recruited to work on the cotton plantations that were established during the American Civil War. This group had previously been classified as "Polynesian" in previous censuses. While some members intermarried with Fijian women, most were repatriated. The children of the relationships continued to be classified as "Polynesian." The Part-European population, which had always been small enough to be absorbed into the Fijian ethnicity remained unassimilated. Other non-Fijian Pacific Islanders also remained unassimilated into Fijian society. The boundaries of place of birth together with membership of a clan, remained strongly adhered to despite decreasing numbers. It is perhaps arguable that Chai's principle 3a applies here as groups with more economic and political power will be of smaller size. Next to the Europeans, the Fijians had their place well-preserved due to the Deed of Cession of 1874. Though experiencing a sharp decrease in population size, they remained about forty percent and their chiefs still held power.

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, in each country, a different ascriptive characteristic became salient for the largest ethnic group. For instance, South Africa adopted phenotype as a boundary marker in discourse and practice, while religion played the role of boundary marker in Malaysia. In Fiji, place of birth together alongside membership to a clan established the boundaries of “Fijianness”. Significantly, boundaries of normative identity formation for the excluded ethnic groups have developed largely in contra-distinction against these dominant boundaries. The contingent character of these formations highlights the provisional and unresolved tension of the putative ethnic social cohesion in the cases studied.

With phenotype being such a strong determinant of ethnicity in South Africa, ethnic groups developed along the color line as evidenced by the creation of the Cape Colored community. While ethnicities based on other ascriptive characteristics such as religion developed, eventually a color-based boundary took precedence. For example, the Cape Malay population with a more religious based (Islam) identity formation eventually became imbricated and subsumed with the Cape Colored population. This is despite the term “Malay” being in use longer than the term “Colored” (Bickford-Smith, 1995).

In Malaysia, religion plays a dominant role in how people organize themselves. While the Islam / non-Islam boundary marker continues to divide the population, the saliency of religion as a boundary marker can be observed in other ethnic groups as well. For example, “Indianness” is associated with being Hindu, and “Chineseness” with Buddhism / Taoism, and to a certain extent Christianity. The non-Muslim indigenous groups are under pressure to convert to Islam and ethnic tensions in Malaysia currently express themselves in religious terms.

In Fiji, the place of birth together with *mataqali* (clan) criteria strongly creates an insider / outsider dichotomy. Despite residing in the country for generations, non-Fijians, which include Indo-Fijians, Europeans, Part-Europeans, and Other Pacific Islanders, continue to be seen as outsiders. Conflicts center primarily on indigenous rights, which negatively affect ethnic social cohesion.

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