

Cultural Riddles of Regional Integration—A Reflection on Europe from the Asia-Pacific¹

Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira²

Abstract: *As the euro crisis unfolds, political discourse on both sides of the European Union (EU)'s internal divide—"North" and "South"—becomes ever more exasperated, distant and untranslatable. At the root lies a weak pan-European sense of belonging—a common political identity thanks to which European citizens may regard each other as equals, and therefore as deserving recognition, trust, and solidarity. This paper describes some of the culture-related problems that impact directly on the formation of an eventual political identity for EU citizens. It then suggests that the enacting of an interculturalist paradigm can help untie some of the nuts—political but also cultural—that Europe faces in order to solve the economic crisis. A few remarks are dedicated in the conclusive part to cultural pluralism in Singapore, a key player in any future progress towards the integration of the Asia Pacific Region.*

Keywords: *Asia-Pacific, EU, euro crisis, European citizens, interculturalism, political identity, transcultural dialogue*

Oaks, ants, and Europeans

On Thursday May 31 2012 Thomas Steffen, a director general in the German ministry of finance caused a stir in Brussels at a conference organised by the European Commission. In response to the suggestion by Italy's Prime Minister Mario Monti, that Germany was been too slow to help indebted countries in the euro zone, Steffen urged such countries to turn from "grasshoppers" who enjoyed the summer spending a lot of money," into "ants" who worked instead during summer preparing for winter.

Phillippe Aghion, a French economist based at Harvard University, suggested for the present crisis a different fable from the same author (Jean de La Fontaine): that of the oak despising the bamboo's flexibility, until a storm comes and the first one breaks but the second survives. Steffen retorted that it was "not a German oak". He compared the "southern" (mainly Mediterranean) euro zone countries with East Germany during the re-unification process, where huge amounts of money invested have still not had satisfactory results.³

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Union Studies Association Asia-Pacific (EUSA AP), EU's Unknown Asia: New Horizons and New Beginnings conference held on the 4 – 5 June 2012, at the National University of Singapore. I thank participants for helpful comments and insights, as well as EUSA AP and the ANU Centre for European Studies for making it materially possible for me to attend the conference and write this paper.

² Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University; Centre for European Studies, Australian National University; Canberra ACT, Australia.

³ Valentina Pop, "Italy Chastises Germany for Handling of Euro Crisis," *euobserver.com*(2012),

Unthinkable as it was only a few months ago, by the middle of 2012 top EU officials were sending alarm signals publicly that something had to be done soon to fight the crisis. Olli Rehn, vice-president of the European Commission and Commissioner for Economic and monetary affairs and the Euro, warned that the single currency area could disintegrate without stronger crisis-fighting mechanisms and tough fiscal discipline.⁴

Even more disturbingly, Mario Draghi said that the European Central Bank (which he heads) could not “fill the vacuum left by member states’ lack of action.” European leaders, he added, had to decide whether to stand by the eurozone: “the sooner the vision is clarified the better for the European Union”.⁵

What steps are needed to address this profound crisis? The first and most evident one is a series of sensible economic measures. Suggestions abound. We will mention a few to illustrate.

The easier bit: economic remedies

Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman believes that with some adjustments (looser monetary policy, tolerance to possible short-term increase in inflation, open-ended lending to governments and banks) the crisis can be averted.⁶ It has become clear from the situations not only in Greece (which owes euro area governments and institutions an equivalent of 3% of the zone’s GDP)⁷ but notably in Spain (the fourth largest economy after Germany, France and Italy), that the present remedies are insufficient and more vigorous—and above all more coordinated—action is required.

Several analysts suggested that, since the euro zone’s problem is not its debt size but its fragmented structure, some sharing of the burden and some ceding of sovereignty by all the euro zone countries could tackle the difficulties successfully. Compared with over 100% in the US, the euro zone public debt is less than 90% of GDP.⁸ Concretely, they propose to “fill in two holes in the single currency’s original design.” First, to create a euro-zone, supranational system of “supervision, recapitalisation, deposit insurance and regulation” for (at least the most important) banks. Second, to mutualise eurozone governments, at least that above 60% of GDP for any particular member country, to be paid over the next 25 years, therefore limited Eurobonds.⁹

The idea of a “banking union” was also presented formally by the Commission, in order to break the vicious circle of weak banks and indebted

<http://euobserver.com/19/116443>.

⁴ Marc Jones and Jan Strupczewski, "Ecb, Eu Officials Warn Euro's Survival at Risk," *Reuters*(2012), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/01/us-eurozone-inflation-idUSBRE84UoE320120601>.

⁵ Louise Armitstead, "Eurozone Is 'Unsustainable' Warns Mario Draghi," *The Telegraph*(2012), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/9304027/Eurozone-is-unsustainable-warns-Mario-Draghi.html>.

⁶ Martin Hesse and Thomas Schulz Paul Krugman, "'Right Now, We Need Expansion'," *Spiegel Online*(2012), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/interview-with-economist-paul-krugman-on-euro-zone-rescue-efforts-a-834566.html>.

⁷ "Cutting up Rough," *The Economist*(2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555923>.

⁸ "The Choice," *The Economist*, no. 26 May 2012 (2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555916>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

governments lending to each other.¹⁰ But economic solutions require political agreements.

Paymasters and legitimacy scruples

Chancellor Angela Merkel has been blamed for the fate of many a Greek, and for austerity and unemployment in battered countries across Europe, she has been caricatured as a fearless, steely Prussian,¹¹ even as a Nazi,¹² labelled as inflexible and stubborn.¹³ On closer inspection, however, the most important political leader of the EU is deeply concerned that “more Europe” from the economic point of view (fiscal and banking integration), implies more sacrifices from European citizens. Neither member state nor European authorities can just assume that their citizens are happy to undertake those sacrifices. The “democratic deficit” that had long worried the architects of integration (and some scholars) in times where “output legitimacy” sufficed for European citizens not to bother asking much, has become acute and must be addressed.

Ms Merkel wants to see the “dangerous disconnection between national politics and national parliaments, and the European Parliament,” addressed, as the only way in which the monetary union can survive.¹⁴ In fact, her style of leadership apart, she may have a point, a point especially and increasingly important for ordinary European citizens. Since the beginning of the euro crisis 17 member state leaders have been ejected from office.¹⁵ With no way to influence Brussels directly, European citizens have voted against incumbents nationally, and shifted preferences to fringe and sometimes radical parties. At every election for the European Parliament the turnout across the continent has plumbed (from just above 60% in 1979 to under 45% in 2009). Fringe parties, which have done well in member state elections, do even better in votes for Strasbourg.¹⁶ An alternative could be in greater participation of national parliaments at a European level.

Elsewhere I have tried to address the problem of political integration suggesting that Europe does not have a *demos*, rather *demoi*, and that an analogical polity is not only a feasible—if hybrid and complex—solution, but also more desirable due to the specificity of Europe, its rich multi-national diversity, and the wish—or tolerance—of Europeans to only a certain degree of

¹⁰ Jan Strupczewski, "Eu Calls for Euro Zone Banking Union, Direct Bank Recapitalisations," *Reuters*(2012), <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/05/30/uk-eu-economy-eurozone-idUKBRE84ToKF20120530>.

¹¹ Michael White, "European Debt Crisis: Better Merkozy Than Bismarck and Daladier," *The Guardian*(2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2011/dec/05/european-debt-crisis-merkozy-bismarck>.

¹² Elizabeth Flock, "Angela Merkel Depicted as Nazi in Greece, as Anti-German Sentiment Grows," *The Washington Post*(2012), http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/angela-merkel-depicted-as-nazi-in-greece-as-anti-german-sentiment-grows/2012/02/10/gIQASbZP4Q_blog.html.

¹³ John Vinocur, "Merkel's Stubborn March of Folly," *The New York Times*(2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/opinion/merkels-stubborn-march-of-folly.html>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ "An Ever-Deeper Democratic Deficit," *The Economist*(2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555927>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

integration.¹⁷ This has been characteristic of the European project right from the start.¹⁸

Yet what can be the ground for such hybrid, or “analogical” integration? If it is true that political union can create some common identity, it is also true that at least some cultural affinity predisposes and enables the existence of a polity.¹⁹ However the source of political unity, the common identity requires a weaker, analogical character, whereby European citizens can relate to each other with some level of closeness, even though much less than the closeness that exists between compatriots.²⁰

One condition for the emergence of a common political identity is an open inclusive public sphere that allows European citizens to discuss and participate in the construction and life of the polity, allowing for their cultural differences to be taken into account inasmuch as possible.²¹ Yet an open space that excludes no one is still not enough. Beyond pure tolerance, it involves recognition, interrelation and intercultural exchange. Let us investigate this further.

In search of roots for European solidarity

The fabled controversy about ants and grasshoppers, oaks and bamboos, which occurred recently not in the kindergarten of a remote European town, but among high ranking officials and scholars at the headquarters of the European Union in Brussels, is very telling. The crisis, Anton La Guardia remarks, “has confirmed countries in their prejudices.”²²

Sharing burdens and giving up more sovereignty, even if in a controlled, limited way, requires the implementation of greater integration. But both, economic and political integration imply a sense of solidarity, of common political (“European”) identity that justifies at least moderate sacrifices being made for each other. Michael Burda considers that “The limit of German brotherhood extended to East Germany,” and Germans “saw what happened with two trillion euros over the past 20 years. And these are people they love. They don’t consider the Greeks their brothers.”²³

Yet clichés are not patented to Greeks and Germans alone. Europe is a region of the world in which many national groups have defined themselves, for

¹⁷ Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Eu Citizenship and Political Identity: The Demos and Telos Problems," *European Law Journal* 18, no. 4 (2012).

¹⁸ Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Is Europe Still Worth Fighting For? Allegiance, Identity, and Integration Paradigms Revisited," (2012).

¹⁹ See: Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Liberal Democracy: Culture Free? The Habermas-Ratzinger Debate and Its Implications for Europe," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of European Studies* Volume 2, No 2 / Volume 3, No 1., no. May/June 2011 (2011).

²⁰ Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Eu Analogical Identity - or the Ties That Link (without Binding)," *Australia National University Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series* 1, no. 2 (2010).

²¹ Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Veils, Crucifixes and Public Sphere: What Kind of Secularism? Rethinking Neutrality in a Post-Secular Europe," (Forthcoming).

²² Anton La Guardia, "The Ailing Euro," *Diplomaatia*, no. June 2012 (2012), [http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1428&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=606&cHash=2585e667a0](http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1428&tx_ttnews[backPid]=606&cHash=2585e667a0).

²³ Reported by: Nicholas Kulish, "Germany Looks to Its Own Costly Reunification in Resisting Stimulus for Greece," *The New York Times* (2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/26/world/europe/german-reunification-pains-inform-stance-on-greece.html?pagewanted=all>.

centuries, at least partially in reference to “the other” next door who is not “like us”. At any rate, the reality is more complex. Europeans do find some similarities with each other when they are abroad, say in Africa or Asia. For all their differences, they usually like to think of themselves as not the same as (even if often in sympathy with) Americans. When they work at supra-state institutions (e.g. the EU, or the Council of Europe), participate in student mobility programs (like Erasums), or express conceptions of culture and life-style (say, about food, history, the economy, the state), they find themselves less far from each other than they thought they were. Using Mr Burda’s image above, they may not perceive themselves as siblings, but perhaps as “cousins” or “distant relatives,” someone they know either because they have done business together, because geography has made them visit each other often, or even because they have fought wars against each other several times along the centuries.

If solidarity (even a mitigated one, because it is trans-statal across Europe) is to operate from one member state to the other, from one region to the next, from one European citizen to the one in front of her, there has to be something they can feel as possessing in common,²⁴ something that identifies them as part of the same political community, even if such political community being a collection of states, is not itself a state. A common identity that makes the other 27 member states and especially the other 16 eurozone countries, see with concern, at least to a certain extent as their own, the problems Greece is facing.²⁵

In a very interesting comparative analysis between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the present predicament of the EU, Krastev expresses astonishment before “the horrifying inability of the southern debt-ridden countries to ‘translate’ their concern into German,” and at the “growing failure of Germany to ‘translate its proposed solutions into the local languages of most of the other member states.” The problem is not, in his view, one of diverging interests, but rather of “lack of empathy.”²⁶

And empathy, that capacity to “enter” into not only what the other “feels” but also what happens to him and the way he experiences it, certainly facilitates solidarity. In order to understand the other in that way, with empathy, some perceived commonalities help. Not comprehensive commonalities perhaps, but at least those that permit solidarity at the level of a broad political community, as is the case of the EU. Thus we can speak of (common) political identity as that atmosphere that allows solidarity.

In order to come to existence, political identity requires some material elements that are substantive—for instance the familiar political culture of

²⁴ See an explanation of the problem in: Pablo Cristóbal Jiménez Lobeira, "Exploring Cosmopolitan Communitarianist Eu Citizenship – an Analogical Reading," *Open Insight: Revista de Filosofía* 2, no. 2 (2011). And possible answers in: Pablo C Jiménez Lobeira, "Normative Conceptions of European Identity - a Synthetic Approach," *Australian Journal of Professional and Applied Ethics* 12, no. 1 & 2 (2010).

²⁵ Maxime Pinard, "L'Europe, Ce Géant En Mal D'identité," *Le Monde*(2012), http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/05/16/l-europe-ce-geant-en-mal-d-identite_1701613_3232.html.

²⁶ Ivan Krastev, "How Real Is the Risk of Disintegration? The Lessons of the Soviet Collapse," *Diplomaatia*(2012), [http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1426&tx_ttnews\[b ackPid\]=606&cHash=540e9b202a](http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1426&tx_ttnews[b ackPid]=606&cHash=540e9b202a).

human rights—and others that are formal—as is an open and inclusive public sphere, that sets an atmosphere for dialogue. But it also requires active elements that realise, build and renew the collective identity of the political community. One of them is relationality, which operates through intercultural exchange.

Interculturalism: towards a common identity

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the instant solution to the present economic crisis in Europe is interculturalism. As has been shown above, the problems are very specific and demand adequate (and urgent) action. Yet it is also clear that economic solutions require political decisions, and in democratic polities—like every single member state of the EU—those decisions require legitimacy—the mandate or at least assent—of the citizens. But such assent becomes a difficult issue because European citizens can hardly see themselves as part of the same community, as “political siblings,” in the way in which they see compatriots in their own member state.

Interculturalism starts from the idea that culture is an undeniable aspect of being human, and therefore of human beings and human groups. Like multiculturalism, it agrees that cultural differences should be acknowledged in constitutional democracies, in order to ensure for culturally diverse individuals and groups some respect and tolerance, and to avoid explicit or implicit discrimination on the basis of those differences. But beyond multiculturalism, interculturalism suggests another step: that of the cultural interaction and exchange. Under a relational paradigm whereby I do not only respect the other but actually converse with her, learn from her, appreciate her in what she is—also in her culture, and expect a similar attitude in return, the barriers of strict tolerance, which end up creating ghettos and even parallel societies, recede.²⁷

One obstacle to this relational interaction is the absence of a common language. Krastev’s image of Germans and Greeks not being able to “translate” into the language of the other their views and needs as the crisis continues to unfold and the EU is on the brink of collapse, is a powerful image. He was not, of course, speaking of literal translations from Greek to German, and the other way around—a considerable amount of the EU’s yearly budget is destined to pay for translations to its 23 (soon 24) official languages. But what can constitute that transcultural language that facilitates dialogue?

Among others, Mauricio Beuchot has suggested that such common ground could be constituted by the idea of human rights.²⁸ His main concern is the problem of cultural plurality present in several Latin American countries, eminently in Mexico, where still today a mainstream Western culture, mainly come from Europe through Spain, must interact with many pre-Columbian indigenous cultures which have survived into the XXI century.²⁹ The idea could

²⁷ Pierpaolo Donati, "Beyond the Dilemmas of Multiculturalism: Recognition through 'Relational Reason'," *International Review of Sociology* 19, no. 1 (2009).

²⁸ Mauricio Beuchot, *Interculturalidad Y Derechos Humanos*, Filosofía (México, D. F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Siglo XXI, 2005).

²⁹ Mexico for example recognises, besides Spanish, more than 60 other languages, come from Aztecs, Mayans and other peoples, and used by their descendants in everyday life. Nahuatl, for instance, the language spoken by the Aztecs and preserved through the Conquest thanks to the work of Spanish missionaries that put this and other languages into writing, is spoken by over 4 million people. See: "Catálogo De Las Lenguas Indígenas Nacionales," Instituto Nacional de las Lenguas Indígenas (INALI), <http://www.inali.gob.mx/clin-inali/#agr>.

be useful, *a fortiori*, in Europe, cradle of the modern conception of human rights.

They are a concept deeply rooted in the culture of Europeans, a ground on which everybody roughly agrees. Greeks may not be siblings to Germans, but certainly they are a people who believes deeply, as Germans do, in human rights—Greece has plausible claims to be one of the springs of European (and Western) civilisation. The two countries may be different, but not as different so as not to have certain similarities, even if as “distant relatives” in the European family.

To conclude I must mention that interculturalism is always closely related to education, because the attitudes and dispositions for intercultural exchange require not only rationality on the part of the actors, but also certain virtues that may not come naturally to everyone, the capacity to listen and learn from the other for instance. Another aspect essential to interculturalism as the engine that propels the construction of political identity is its capacity to harmonise unity and diversity, which has been developed by Beuchot’s “analogical hermeneutics” to suggest an “analogical cultural pluralism,” which again for lack of time I leave for a forthcoming article.

Interculturalism, together with other factors, can contribute to the creation of an identity that respects and cherishes national diversity, but that provides too the minimum of unity necessary for the European polity to survive.

Singapore: An Interesting Microcosm for Europe?

A reader might wonder how a tiny island in Asia, a city-state with less than 1% of the population of the EU could be of any relevance to the topic we are dealing with. To be clear, neither am I stating necessarily that the European experience should be applied in Singapore, or that Singapore should be taken as a model of harmony for Europe. Others might be better placed to argue for or against these propositions. At this stage, I would just like to carry out a preliminary exploration into this “microcosm” for two reasons.

First, because Singapore has striven to harmonise different cultural groups right from its constitution as a unitary parliamentary republic, nearly 50 years ago. Some of the minorities who present a challenge to a common identity have cultural traits similar to those of minorities and immigrants in Europe, (those of Muslim background). What has the experience of Singapore been in this respect? That might be of interest to the EU.

Second, because Singapore is and will be a key element in the development of any successful integration of the Asia Pacific Region. Due to its location, its size and its prosperity, it is in Singapore’s interest to live in a peaceful and prosperous region, and to cultivate links of exchange with surrounding countries. How feasible can that be in the Asia Pacific? How much do cultural differences matter if one is to judge from past (and present) European experience? That might be of interest to Singapore and indeed to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or even to the ambitious Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

Singapore is a city-state with over 5 million inhabitants.³⁰ Consistently for more about centuries, the ethnic composition of the population has remained

³⁰ Shirley Hsiao-Li Sun, "Social Reproduction and the Limits of a Neoliberal Approach: The Case of Singapore," *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 223.

roughly the same: above three quarters Chinese, close to 14% Malay, and 7% Indian.³¹ Singapore, in turn, is surrounded by what Mutalib calls “the Malay world” of Southeast Asia, consisting of 250 million people with ethnic, linguistic and religious affinity.³² Notwithstanding their being the indigenous ethnic group, the Malay Muslim community has remained on the socio-economic and political margins of society. Malays are underrepresented in the armed forces, police, intelligence services, the judiciary, university enrolments, average household income and house ownership.³³

Since practically all the Malays are Muslims (compared to two-thirds of Chinese who are Buddhists or Taoists, and 55% of Indians who are Hindus).³⁴ Therefore this specific minority issue acquires in Singapore not only racial, socio-economic, geo-political and historical, but also religious tonalities. Singapore’s “minority dilemma”³⁵ can be articulated, at least from the point of view of the city-state’s political identity, in terms of the challenge of promoting the unity of the political community (all Singaporean citizens) while respecting and integrating a distinct minority which has lagged behind in the country’s development to this date. “Integration” cannot mean simple assimilation to the majority culture (ethnic Chinese), any more than “respect” can mean letting Malays drift away as a parallel sub-society.

Defined by Mutalib as an “illiberal democracy” operating under a “one-party system” which seeks to ensure “compliance with its worldviews and the preservation of its electoral mandate” in return for economic prosperity for citizens, the Singaporean government-state has used three strategies on its “nation-building” strategy: multiracialism, meritocracy and secularism.³⁶

Initially multiracialism was implemented through the adoption of four official languages (Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English), the introduction of compulsory National Service, the use of English as the main language for administration and an integrated school system. The original inspiration of a social “melting pot” for Singapore turned into a more modest aspiration to at least a “salad bowl,” but eventually it turned into a “return to ethnic roots” policy around 1980. Meritocracy contained the idea that citizens should be able to advance in society “solely” thanks to their “hard work”. “Secularism” entailed that all communities in the Republic were free to engage in their respective religious pursuits but mindful, at the same time, “about the equal need to respect the different religious bearings of fellow citizens”.³⁷

Since the country’s independence, the Singaporean government has declared Malay the “national language,” chosen Malay lyrics for the national anthem, offered free tuition and bursaries for post-primary level Malay students, lowered the cost of land for building mosques, instituted a ministry for Muslim affairs,

³¹ Hussin Mutalib, "Singapore Muslims: The Quest for Identity in a Modern City-State," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2005).

³² Comprising to different extents countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, or Thailand, among others. See: Hussin Mutalib, "The Singapore Minority Dilemma," *Asian Survey* 51, no. 6 (2011).

³³ Lily Zubaidah Rahim, "Governing Muslims in Singapore's Secular Authoritarian State," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 66, no. 2 (2012).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁵ Mutalib, "The Singapore Minority Dilemma," 1171.

³⁶ Hussin Mutalib, "Singapore's Ethnic Relations' Scorecard," *Journal of Developing Societies* 28, no. 1 (2012): 32 - 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

and establishing a “presidential council” of minority affairs.³⁸ However it seems that the third aspect of the nation-building strategy, secularism, has created at least as many problems as it intended to solve. This happens both, due to a “zealous maintenance of secularism as State ideology, at a time when religious revivalism has been on the ascendancy in the Republic,” but also due to the conceptions that the different faiths have about the relation between politics and religion.³⁹ More specifically,

For Malays, the dictum of giving Caesar and god their respective domains comes in conflict with the Islamic Faith, which looks at religion as an all-encompassing “way of life.” Thus, secularism has enabled the State to legislate a number of parliamentary bills that were objected to by religious communities... Intriguingly, these governmental maneuvers seem to show that in the main, the burden to comply with the rule of separating religion from politics falls on the shoulders of the citizens, more than the State.⁴⁰

The unsatisfied wish by the Malay community to independently manage their *madrasahs* (Islamic religious schools), and the banning of *tudungs* (Islamic headscarves) on grounds of school uniformity (from which Sikhs, however, are exempted) have only added to the tension. And Malays are required, even in public discourse by Lee Kuan Yew—according to Rahim view the Singaporean equivalent to Kemal Atatürk in Turkey⁴¹—to show their allegiance to Singapore given not only their race, but also their Muslim religion, especially after 9/11 in 2001.⁴²

Reportedly, the former Prime Minister (and now “Minister Mentor”) Lee Kuan Yew considers Islam an obstacle to progress (at least in Singapore), a religion which unlike the other ones cannot be integrated, and which makes its faithful “distinct and separate”.⁴³ And the no-*tudung* policy for schoolgirls has, in Rahim’s words,

Raised questions pertaining to the rights of religious minorities in the secular authoritarian state, its multicultural and multiracial credentials, the rights of children to education, the actual religious obligations of Muslim women, the perceived threat of Islamic revivalism and the national security agenda of the predominantly Chinese society in an overwhelmingly region.⁴⁴

At stake appears to be the “Sino-centred national identity and, perhaps most significantly, the PAP government’s fear of loosening its grip on power.”⁴⁵ Rahim seems to place in the State’s “assertive secularism” an obstacle to “the nurturing of religious harmony and the promotion of a genuinely multiracial and democratic society”.⁴⁶

³⁸ Ibid., 44.

³⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁴¹ Zubaidah Rahim, "Governing Muslims in Singapore's Secular Authoritarian State," 179.

⁴² Mutalib, "Singapore's Ethnic Relations' Scorecard," 34, 49.

⁴³ Zubaidah Rahim, "Governing Muslims in Singapore's Secular Authoritarian State," 170.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 183.

Europe, Asia Pacific and their cultural riddles

As stated at the beginning, the pretence of this article is that of a preliminary exploration. From the point of view of cultural backgrounds, Islam seems to be very important in both regions. It is true that the situation in Singapore is not representative of the whole of Asia Pacific. Indeed, as seen above, Singapore represents almost an anomaly in its immediate surroundings, what Mutalib calls "the Malay world". Further research about the way in which Buddhists, Christians and other minorities are perceived and tolerated in countries like Indonesia or Malaysia would help to complete the picture.

However what has been exposed here is enough to see the importance that religious, ethnic and other differences can have for the cohesion, the political identity of entities which go from city-states like Singapore, to supra-national, stateless polities such as the EU.

Interculturalism, the active recognition of, learning about, and interaction with "the other" in the political community, can provide a useful way to addressing the cultural riddles that arise on each polity. At the same time, it is clear that the source of unity, the "political identity" that holds together polities may not necessarily coincide in the cases of Europe and the Asia Pacific. In fact, it may be different. It would seem that in the EU a certain commonly shared idea of human rights has overall acceptance. That would not necessarily be the case in the Asia Pacific.

References

- Armitstead, Louise. "Eurozone Is 'Unsustainable' Warns Mario Draghi." *The Telegraph* (2012), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/9304027/Eurozone-is-unsustainable-warns-Mario-Draghi.html>.
- Beuchot, Mauricio. *Interculturalidad Y Derechos Humanos*, Filosofía. México, D. F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Siglo XXI, 2005.
- "Catálogo De Las Lenguas Indígenas Nacionales." Instituto Nacional de las Lenguas Indígenas (INALI), <http://www.inali.gob.mx/clin-inali/#agr>.
- "The Choice." *The Economist*, no. 26 May 2012 (2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555916>.
- "Cutting up Rough." *The Economist* (2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555923>.
- Donati, Pierpaolo. "Beyond the Dilemmas of Multiculturalism: Recognition through 'Relational Reason'." *International Review of Sociology* 19, no. 1 (2009): 55-82.
- "An Ever-Deeper Democratic Deficit." *The Economist* (2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21555927>.
- Flock, Elizabeth. "Angela Merkel Depicted as Nazi in Greece, as Anti-German Sentiment Grows." *The Washington Post* (2012), http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/angela-merkel-depicted-as-nazi-in-greece-as-anti-german-sentiment-grows/2012/02/10/gIQASbZP4Q_blog.html.
- Guardia, Anton La. "The Ailing Euro." *Diplomaatia*, no. June 2012 (2012), [http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1428&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=606&cHash=2585e667ao](http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1428&tx_ttnews[backPid]=606&cHash=2585e667ao).

- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo C. "Normative Conceptions of European Identity - a Synthetic Approach." *Australian Journal of Professional and Applied Ethics* 12, no. 1 & 2 (2010): 159-70.
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Eu Analogical Identity - or the Ties That Link (without Binding)." *Australia National University Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series* 1, no. 2 (2010).
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Eu Citizenship and Political Identity: The Demos and Telos Problems." *European Law Journal* 18, no. 4 (2012).
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Exploring Cosmopolitan Communitarianist Eu Citizenship – an Analogical Reading." *Open Insight: Revista de Filosofia* 2, no. 2 (2011): 145-68.
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Is Europe Still Worth Fighting For? Allegiance, Identity, and Integration Paradigms Revisited." 2012.
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Liberal Democracy: Culture Free? The Habermas-Ratzinger Debate and Its Implications for Europe." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of European Studies* Volume 2, No 2 / Volume 3, No 1., no. May/June 2011 (2011): 44-57.
- Jiménez Lobeira, Pablo Cristóbal. "Veils, Crucifixes and Public Sphere: What Kind of Secularism? Rethinking Neutrality in a Post-Secular Europe." (Forthcoming).
- Krastev, Ivan. "How Real Is the Risk of Disintegration? The Lessons of the Soviet Collapse." *Diplomaatia* (2012), [http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1426&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=606&cHash=540e9b202a](http://www.diplomaatia.ee/index.php?id=242&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1426&tx_ttnews[backPid]=606&cHash=540e9b202a).
- Kulish, Nicholas. "Germany Looks to Its Own Costly Reunification in Resisting Stimulus for Greece." *The New York Times* (2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/26/world/europe/german-reunification-pains-inform-stance-on-greece.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Mutalib, Hussin. "The Singapore Minority Dilemma." *Asian Survey* 51, no. 6 (2011): 1156-71.
- Mutalib, Hussin. "Singapore Muslims: The Quest for Identity in a Modern City-State." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2005): 53-72.
- Mutalib, Hussin. "Singapore's Ethnic Relations' Scorecard." *Journal of Developing Societies* 28, no. 1 (2012): 31-55.
- Paul Krugman, Martin Hesse and Thomas Schulz. "'Right Now, We Need Expansion!'" *Spiegel Online* (2012), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/interview-with-economist-paul-krugman-on-euro-zone-rescue-efforts-a-834566.html>.
- Pinard, Maxime. "L'europe, Ce Géant En Mal D'identité." *Le Monde* (2012), http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/05/16/l-europe-ce-geant-en-mal-d-identite_1701613_3232.html.
- Pop, Valentina. "Italy Chastises Germany for Handling of Euro Crisis." *euobserver.com* (2012), <http://euobserver.com/19/116443>.
- Strupczewski, Jan. "Eu Calls for Euro Zone Banking Union, Direct Bank Recapitalisations." *Reuters* (2012), <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/05/30/uk-eu-economy-eurozone-idUKBRE84ToKF20120530>.
- Strupczewski, Marc Jones and Jan. "Ecb, Eu Officials Warn Euro's Survival at Risk." *Reuters* (2012), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/01/us-eurozone-inflation-idUSBRE84UoE320120601>.

- Sun, Shirley Hsiao-Li. "Social Reproduction and the Limits of a Neoliberal Approach: The Case of Singapore." *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 223-40.
- Vinocur, John. "Merkel's Stubborn March of Folly." *The New York Times* (2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/opinion/merkels-stubborn-march-of-foolly.html>.
- White, Michael. "European Debt Crisis: Better Merkozy Than Bismarck and Daladier." *The Guardian* (2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2011/dec/05/european-debt-crisis-merkozy-bismarck>.
- Zubaidah Rahim, Lily. "Governing Muslims in Singapore's Secular Authoritarian State." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 66, no. 2 (2012): 169-85.