This is the story of Singapore’s multicultural diversity seen through a unique feature – the kopitiam (coffeeshop) – found mostly in the HDB estates in which 85% of Singapore’s population live. Often viewed as a quintessential feature of Singapore everyday life and public culture, the kopitiam is one among several institutions and spaces in Singapore within which are embedded dynamic aspects and processes of migration and social-cultural diversity, set within the larger context of Singapore as a rapidly changing and globalizing city.

Originally a small-scale set-up serving drinks, nibbles and sometimes meal foods, the kopitiam has undergone a major transformation over the years. This talk examines the following aspects of the kopitiam’s cultural and social diversity: 1) foods and stalls, 2) owners, stallholders and workers, 3) customers, 4) social activities and cultural politics, and 5) local and international connections. In doing so, it explicates the historical, social and cultural evolution of the kopitiam as a site of Singaporean multi-culturalism.