MEANINGS OF MULTIETHNICITY:

A CASE STUDY OF ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN SINGAPORE

A dissertation submitted to the
Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge
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by

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

This dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted for a degree at any other University.

This dissertation is 361 pages in length and does not exceed 80,000 words (excluding bibliography).

AH-ENG LAI

ABSTRACT

This study is about the construction of the meanings of multiethnicity in Singapore. By focusing on selected arenas and processes at local and national levels, it examines the central question of how the dimensions of 'ethnic' and 'interethnic' interact and are reconciled in the continuous construction of community and identity in the context of nation-building. Its analysis ranges from detailed ethnography to discussion of broad features and issues, and links micro and macro data by juxtaposing the two levels and showing how they interact. More emphasis is placed on the local, specifically the public housing residential community, as the basic component in nation-building and mediator of national identity. At the same time, the study provides a broad picture of the larger context within which the local is located.

Theoretically this study addresses several issues involving ethnic identity and community, modes of ethnic interaction and nation-building in a multiethnic context. It confirms and elaborates on the symbolic-affective power of ethnicity; the seemingly contradictory modes of ethnic interaction; and the structuring impact of macro forces, in particular the tension and competition between majority and minority groups and the state's management of ethnicity and ethnic relations in the major arenas of culture and economy. Empirically it documents the Singapore case of how individuals, groups and the state manage ethnicity and ethnic relations for viable multiethnic living.

This study is divided into four parts. Part I consists of a discussion of some theoretical issues, an overall background of the Singapore context, a survey of local literature, and the study's research methodology. Part II focuses on the local community. It examines the multiethnic community of Marine Parade in terms of its background, everyday life, special occasions and organisations and concludes with a discussion of residents' evaluations of multiethnic living. Part III provides a broad picture of the larger societal context by examining the major arenas of tension and competition between ethnic groups and the state's management of ethnicity and ethnic relations. Part IV concludes this study with a brief summary and discussion.

CONTENTS

	Page
Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Maps, Tables, Illustrations, Appendices and Abbreviations	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgements and Dedications	xi
 PART I INTRODUCTION	
Introduction The Research Problem and Conceptual Framework	1
 Chapter 1 Theoretical Discussion, the Singapore Context and Research Methodology	6
1.1 Theoretical Discussion	6
1.2 The Singapore Context	23
1.3 Research Methodology and Issues	33
 PART II WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY	
Introduction	41
 Chapter 2 The Multiethnic Community of Marine Parade	43
2.1 Introduction	43
2.2 Origins and Main Features of Marine Parade	43
2.3 Manifestations of Multiethnic Living	58
2.4 Discussion	69
 Chapter 3 Everyday Life	74
3.1 Introduction	74
3.2 Shopping	77
3.3 Eating	79
3.4 Chatting	81
3.5 Playing	85
3.6 Neighbouring	90
3.7 Stereotyping	96
3.8 Discussion	100
 Chapter 4 Special Ethnic Occasions	104
4.1 Introduction	104
4.2 Malay Occasions	108
4.3 Chinese Occasions	120
4.4 Indian Occasions	132
4.5 Other Ethnic Occasions	137
4.6 Discussion	139
 Chapter 5 Organisations and Committees	148
5.1 Introduction	148
5.2 The HDB Area Office	152

5.3	The Community Centre, The Citizens' Consultative Committee and The Residents' Committee	163
5.4	The Muslims' Block Committee	180
5.5	The Boys' Club	182
5.6	The Merchants and Hawkers Association	185
5.7	Discussion	187
Chapter 6	Evaluations of Multiethnic Living	194
6.1	Introduction	194
6.2	Preferences for Multiethnic Living	194
6.3	The Ethnic Quotas for Public Housing Policy	206
6.4	Discussion	229
Part II	Summary	234
PART III BEYOND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY		
	Introduction	237
Chapter 7	Ethnic Assertion and Competition: Cultural	239
7.1	Introduction	239
7.2	The Promotion of Chinese Language and Culture	240
7.3	Effects on Chinese Identity	250
7.4	Effects on Minorities and Majority-Minority Relations	253
Chapter 8	Ethnic Assertion and Competition: Economic	260
8.1	Introduction	260
8.2	Economic and Educational Differentiation	261
8.3	State and Ethnic Group Responses to Economic and Educational Problems	269
8.4	Other Arenas of Ethnic Tension	276
8.5	Discussion	286
Chapter 9	Multiracialism and Nation-building	296
9.1	Introduction	296
9.2	CMIO Multiracialism in Nation-building	296
9.3	CMIO Multiracialism, Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Relations	305
9.4	Discussion	309
Part III	Summary	314
PART IV CONCLUSION		
Chapter 10	Conclusion	317
Appendices		327
Bibliography		333

MAPS, TABLES, ILLUSTRATIONS, APPENDICES AND ABBREVIATIONS

	Page
MAPS	
Map 1 Location of Marine Parade in Singapore	44
Map 2 Layout of Marine Parade	45
TABLES	
Table 1.1 Population of Singapore by Ethnicity, 1824-1990 (%)	25
Table 2.1 Distribution of Flats by Room-type in Marine Parade	46
Table 2.2 Population of Marine Parade and Singapore by Ethnicity, 1980 & 1988	51
Table 2.3 Working Persons in Marine Parade and Singapore by Occupation, 1980 & 1990	53
Table 8.1a Occupational Distribution within Working Population by Ethnicity, 1970, 1980 & 1990 (%)	263
Table 8.1b Ethnic Distribution within Occupations, 1970, 1980 & 1990 (%)	264
Table 8.2 Primary School Leaving Examination: % Passed by Ethnicity	265
Table 8.3 'O' Level Examination: % Passed by Ethnicity	265
Table 8.4 GCE 'A' Level Examination: % Passed by Ethnicity	265
Table 8.5 % of Primary Cohort Streamed to Primary 4 Normal, Extended & Monolingual Course by Ethnicity	266
Table 8.6 Highest Educational Qualification Attained by Ethnicity, 1990 (%)	266
Table 8.7 Ethnic Population of Singapore by Religion, 1980 & 1990	278
ILLUSTRATIONS	
The Local Setting (Plates 1 - 6)	72
Local Life (Plates 7 - 12)	73
Special Ethnic Occasions:	
A Malay Wedding (Plates 13 - 17)	118
Hari Raya Puasa (Plates 18 - 22)	119
Chinese Festivals (Plates 23 - 27)	126
Indian Festivals (Plates 28 - 31)	136
APPENDICES	
Appendix 1 Ownership/Management of Businesses in Marine Parade by Ethnicity	327
Appendix 2 Major Special Occasions in Marine Parade	329
Appendix 3 Organisation Structure of an HDB Area Office	330
Appendix 4 HDB Statistics on Racial Regrouping	330
Appendix 5 One People, One Nation, One Singapore	332

ABBREVIATIONS

AO - Area Office
CC - Community Centre
CCC - Citizens' Consultative Committee
CDAC - Chinese Development Assistance Council
CMIO - Chinese, Malays, Indians & Others
CPF - Central Provident Fund
EO - Estate Officer
GRC - Group Representative Council
HDB - Housing & Development Board
HMI - Housing & Maintenance Inspector
MENDAKI - Council for the Development of the Muslim Community
PA - People's Association
PAP - People's Action Party
PM - Prime Minister
RC - Residents' Committees
SAP Schools - Special Assistance Plan Schools
SINDA - Singapore Indian Development Assistance Council
ST - Straits Times/Sunday Times
STPB - Singapore Tourist Promotion Board
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Note: All currency quoted is in Singapore dollars (£1=\$3) which, unless specified, are in 1990-1992 values.

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structure and constrain but do not necessarily determine local activities. These forces, seen in their temporal and spatial contexts, are both past and present and within and outside Singapore. One specific and dominant force is the state. Because of the context of nation-building, particular attention is placed on the role of state social engineering in the formation of ethnic-related community and identity at local and national levels.

A.P. Cohen (1982) notes that there are two dimensions of belonging - membership of the part and membership of the whole. To understand this properly requires study at two levels: the nature of the relationships between a local collectivity and its constituent parts, and that between a local collectivity and the wider societal entity of which it is itself a constituent. The focus at both levels is how each gives meaning to the other. But the local is more than a mere micro-cosm of the wider entity²; it has a distinct character and integrity of its own, translating and absorbing the influences from the national level by its indigenous experiences and idioms. The anthropology of locality³ is not directed towards producing a representative profile, but to exploring the discreteness and uniqueness of particular communities, yet always situated within the wider context. It therefore has two

² The problem of synthesis in (British) community studies, i.e. making micro-sociology relevant to macro-sociology is raised by Frankenberg (1978). Epstein (1964) earlier posed the problems of relating complex urban communities to their larger contexts.

³ Academic studies on 'community' are wide-ranging. For a good overview, see Bell & Newby (1975). On the limits of 'community' as a concept, see Stacey (1969).

PART I INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem and Conceptual Framework

This study is about the construction of the meanings of multiethnicity in Singapore. The central question running through it is this: how do the dimensions of 'ethnic' and 'interethnic' interact in the continuous construction of community and identity at local and national levels, and how do these two levels bear cumulative impact on each other through intended and unintended ways?

The 'ethnic' and 'interethnic' are two sides of the same coin - they are the two interweaving threads and levels of meanings which run through the same context of relations between different ethnic groups. This study's simultaneous and equal emphasis on both dimensions underscores the central problematic of their interaction, and how to reconcile the two in the construction of community and identity.

The problematic further assumes specific importance in the context of nation-building in which a viable national identity and community is to be forged out of an ethnically diverse population, particularly where the population consists of a dominant majority and vocal minorities. In such a setting, how are the ethnic and interethnic dimensions of community and identity to be reconciled in the formation of a national identity and community? This basic question is far from new, having been often posed in the politics of new post-colonial nation-states in the 1950s and 1960s. Nonetheless, its varied and continuously developing forms are far from being understood anthropologically, and is worthy of being raised again now that

these nation-states, such as Singapore, have experienced¹ several decades of nation-building.

The central question of this study has theoretical and empirical relevance. Theoretically it addresses several issues involving ethnic identity and community, modes of ethnic interaction and local and national levels of nation-building in multiethnic societies. Empirically it concerns how individuals, groups and larger entities evolve the necessary means of managing ethnicity and ethnic relations in order for life to be socially viable and politically legitimate. The central question is answered not by testing a particular thesis or by attempting to deal with the totality of Singapore life, but by examining selected concrete arenas and processes at local and national levels and the interaction between the two.

The 'local' in this study is the public housing residential community. As 87% of Singapore's entire population of 2.7 million live in public housing, such a community is not only a fragment of the larger society but also a microcosm of it. At the same time it is also a basic component in nation-building, as public housing is an explicit state instrument of ethnic integration through the formation of multiethnic housing estates. Its choice for study and focus is thus both ideal and necessary as it enables local and national levels and processes of 'ethnic' and 'interethnic' to be understood simultaneously.

The national level relates to those social forces - historical, economic, cultural and political - which broadly

¹ Fox (1977), Y.A. Cohen (1982) and Grillo (1980) argue for an anthropology of the nation-state.

structure and constrain but do not necessarily determine local activities. These forces, seen in their temporal and spatial contexts, are both past and present and within and outside Singapore. One specific and dominant force is the state. Because of the context of nation-building, particular attention is placed on the role of state social engineering in the formation of ethnic-related community and identity at local and national levels.

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themes: indigenous views of social associations and the impact of the wider society on local identity (A.P. Cohen 1982:12-14).

In the Singapore context - physically small but socially complex - the 'local' cannot be understood without looking at the external forces impinging upon it. Nor can it be identified territorially with a large distinct region. Rather, it may be conceived socially and organisationally as a sub-system and a locus of specific activity (such as a workplace, school or organisation) and territorially as a locality (such as a residential area), in relation to a specific centre or to the wider national context in general. As such, even when the focus is on the 'local', the study necessarily moves out of it and makes references to external forces wherever relevant.

Nonetheless, this study places relatively more focus on the local context. Its "from bottom to top" perspective subscribes to the view that local culture mediates between the individual and the social and that "local experience mediates national identity" (A.P. Cohen 1982:13). It also recognises the intricacy, distinctiveness and integrity of the ordinary individual and the local community in their capacity to act, adapt, interpret, respond and create within the larger situation. It views culture not as given and fixed but as practice (Bourdieu 1977) and experience (Turner & Bruner 1986). This is especially important to understand in the Singapore context in which a strong state defines and imposes its own notions of what is relevant for local and national life. In contrast to the dominant "top-down" official view, an anthropology of locality shows how groups and individuals remain responsive and creative under the constraints posed by

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centralised authority⁴. Furthermore, in the context of the pervasive public housing environment in Singapore, it goes beneath the uniform appearance of "HDB estates" to look at the substance and essence of a distinct community. In other words, the state-planned HDB estate need not be conceived as "non-authentic" (as opposed to the "authentic" community constructed gradually by residents [Clammer 1985a]). Instead, this study examines it, like the slum, as a culture-building world (Suttles 1968) shaped by the state as well as by residents who situationally cope, adapt and order their community (Hannerz 1969) despite as well as because of the powerful state.

Following this Introduction, Chapter 1 discusses some theoretical issues pertaining to ethnicity and ethnic relations relevant to this study. It then provides an overall background of the Singapore context, a brief survey of local literature related to the study's topic and a discussion of this study's research methodology. In accordance with the "bottom-up" approach, Part II - which forms the major part of this study - documents local ethnic and interethnic processes of community and identity construction. Part III focuses on forces 'beyond the local community', i.e. those of a national nature. An overall discussion and conclusion are found in Chapter 10 in Part IV.

Suttles (1972) points out that communities are often defined by outside agencies for administrative and political purposes and mobilisation and participation of residents are only partial and specific.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION, THE SINGAPORE CONTEXT AND
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Theoretical Discussion

Ethnicity is such a complex phenomenon that it threatens to be an unwieldy subject. Yet, its understanding is all the more important and urgent given that societies are becoming more ethnically mixed than ever before. Contrary to expectation, the mixing of diverse populations does not necessarily lead to the 'melting' of individual group characteristics (Glazer and Moynihan 1975). More seriously, ethnic competition and conflict, rather than compromise and accommodation, appear to be the norm (Despres 1975, Banton 1983, Horowitz 1985) and have actually increased in both frequency and intensity (Smith 1981). Ethnicity not only persists but is even reasserted or competes with other forms of affiliation. In its consequences, ethnicity threatens to fragment a society as much as it promises to enrich it.

Ethnicity has been variously characterised and analysed. Its significance is seen in its persistence (Barth 1970, Epstein 1978), resurgence (D. Bell 1975, Glazer & Moynihan 1975) and revival (Smith 1981). It is also analysed in terms of its "essential" natural or cultural traits. Occurring in the contexts of large-scale migrations and settlements of people, it is commonly studied as urban ethnicity (Southall 1973, A. Cohen 1974, Hannerz 1980) with emphasis on individual options, intra-group networks and inter-group competition, conflict or accommodation (Hannerz 1974, Gonzalez 1989).

Ethnicity is also significant in connection with the nation-state both within and across state boundaries (Emerson 1960, Grillo 1980, Smith 1986). For this study, three dimensions of ethnicity are relevant: ethnic identity and community; ethnic relations and interaction in a multiethnic context; and ethnicity's relationship to nation-building.

1.1.1 Ethnic Identity and Community

As with the general notion of *gemeinschaft* (Tonnies 1955), an ethnic community is characterised by emotions and sentiments which bind members together as a collective. These sentiments are attached to common traits and distinct markers such as body, descent, history, culture, traditions, core values, language and religion (Isaacs 1975, Fishman 1977, Smolicz 1981, Smith 1986). Their shared sentiments and meanings give members an exclusive sense of identity and community, and provide ethnicity with powerful cognitive, symbolic and organisational capacities for behaviour - in short, of being, behaving and belonging.

The strength and tenacity of ethnic identity are such that it assumes an appearance of 'naturalness'. This has led it to be variously characterised as primordial (Geertz 1963), inalienable (Gordon 1978) and kin-based (van den Berghe 1981). Others stress its cultural (Barth 1970), psychosocial and psychocultural (Epstein 1978, De Vos & Romanucci-Ross 1982) and symbolic (A.P. Cohen 1985, Smith 1986) features - views which this study subscribes to. Barth emphasises cultural markers in boundary maintenance while Epstein stresses the emotional and affective power of ethnic identity over the 'rational'. De Vos sees "ethnicity as a subjective sense of continuity in

belonging" in which "ethnic identity consists of subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate themselves from other groups" (p.16). Building on Barth's notion of boundary, A.P. Cohen emphasises the symbolic construction of [ethnic] communities. He sees the versatility of symbolism to assert, hide, protect, ally and assemble, hence its power as a medium for the assertion of boundaries in facing 'others' and social changes. Smith focuses on the emblems of an ethnic community's 'myth-symbol complex'.

The main features of an ethnic group - culture and common descent - require further examination. Culture is sometimes regarded as a specific ethnic emblem but is also viewed as a more general characteristic embracing other ethnic markers such as tradition, core values, language and religion. In the latter sense, culture is the store of knowledge, practices and experiences possessed by an ethnic group and serves as a powerful symbol of its identity. But although it is closely associated with ethnicity, the two are not to be equated. The focus on a cultural group is on its internal structure; what is relevant in ethnicity is the relationship between ethnic groups as all social categories operate vis-a-vis others (Boon 1982). Ethnicity by definition operates in comparison, contrast or opposition to other ethnicities. Barth sees ethnicity as a mode of identification and organisation, often on the basis of common culture, by one group vis-a-vis others and emphasises their boundaries in relation to each other (1970:9,14,16); while A. Cohen sees the usefulness of the term ethnicity only when culture groups interact in a common context (1974:ix-xi).

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As Epstein put it aptly: the connection between ethnicity and culture is [given] in the process of interaction, when ethnic groups draw from their cultures each with their own elements of affinity and identity, to mark out differences and to fix the relationship to each other (1978:11).

Common descent is often considered the other defining feature of an ethnic unit. Smith regards it as the "sine qua non" of ethnicity providing "the means of collective location in the world and the charter of the community [and] which explains its origins, growth and destiny" (1986:24); while A.P. Cohen (1985)'s notion of the symbolic community includes a symbolic common past as a means of orientation to face the present and future. Common descent may be real or putative, but the latter is more often the case and it is usually supposedly shared historical experiences which validates a group's common descent and identity (Parsons 1975:56). History in turn involves social context and change across time and space. Ethnic identity is therefore not as immutable as its "vital" characteristics make it appear to be, but is subject to ongoing construction of its contents, meanings and boundaries in changing contexts (Moerman 1965, Keyes 1981). It is thus also within a particular historical and social context that certain emblems of ethnic identity are concretely significant.¹

¹ For example, Epstein (1978) examines competing or changing identities in three different contexts of social change: class versus tribe in Africa; ethnicity and nationalism among the Tolai in Melanesia; and Jewish identity across generations.

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Several clarifications about ethnic identity also need to be made here. First, there is the implied notion that a culture is commonly shared among members of an ethnic group. While an ethnic group may possess a core of cultural values, whether or not all members subscribe to them in the same manner and to the same degree is a different matter. Depending on the context, an ethnicity may be central, peripheral or ambiguous to a group's members (Isaacs 1975:33). Cultural values and actual behaviour are mediated by constraints, opportunities, institutions and socio-economic background. Some members may be bicultural or ambiguous in their identity (e.g. couples and offspring of interethnic unions); others may choose to pass off as members of another group in specific situations (Nagata 1875) or permanently, while yet others may choose to emphasise their ethnicity. In short, culture is unevenly shared and depends on the context of change, choice and constraint. Thus, ethnic affiliation is more usefully seen as being located along a continuum of ways in which people organise and categorise themselves, ranging from chosen affiliation at one end to given membership at the other (Horowitz 1975:55).

The second clarification about ethnic identity pertains to its political significance. A. Cohen points out that in specific contexts ethnic groups are political groups organised around interests, especially economic interests, but which articulate themselves through cultural mechanisms (1974:xvi). D. Bell emphasises ethnicity as an effective strategic site for political action because it combines well the symbolic-affective (based on emotional ties) and instrumental purposes (usually for material interests) (1975:165). In general,

ethnic group identities do tend to shift with the political context. But ethnic affiliations are not simply there to be called forth for strategic reasons; rather, it is the context which largely determine to what extent group boundaries are mutable and affinities can be manipulated. Overall, what is important to understand are the concrete manifestations of ethnicity in a variety of contexts and the links between its economic, political and cultural-symbolic dimensions.

The third clarification about ethnic identity is its articulation with national and class identities. The links between ethnic and national identities in the context of nation-building are discussed in the next section. Where class is concerned, ethnicity is often associated with the articulation of group economic interests (A. Cohen 1974). A. Cohen is also of the view that where social class lines cut across ethnic groups, class allegiances override ethnic allegiances in that the poor unite against the rich; but where class and ethnicity coincide, then cultural differences may be heightened to articulate the struggle between classes. Many examples indeed show the latter, i.e. ethnic allegiances override class ones. For D. Bell, ethnicity and class together are powerful because they combine the symbolic and affective with the instrumental (1975:67). In general, it should be remembered that the individual has numerous identity options (Wallman 1983) but, depending on context, those pertaining to ethnic identity may form one of the strongest and may exist in competition or in complementarity with other identities.

1.1.2 Ethnic Relations and Interaction

As noted earlier, ethnicity by definition operates in relation to other ethnicities. 'Ethnic' implies 'interethnic', i.e. they are two sides of the same coin, and having discussed the 'ethnic', the 'interethnic' can now be discussed.

In general, it is the larger social forces operating within a society which set the broad context for ethnic relations between groups and which bring them together in concrete spheres of activity and interaction. But ethnic relations and interaction do not simply mean the articulation of diversity or difference; they involve power relations (R. Cohen 1978) which often tend to assume majority-minority dimensions. For minorities, these relations involve varied responses such as accommodation, submission, contention and revitalisation (Kurokawa 1970) and concrete fields of 'struggle' for cultural and economic rights, education, employment and political representation (Fried 1983).

The highly varied forms and processes of ethnic relations may be broadly categorised as follows: a) pluralistic coexistence and accommodation, b) acculturation and assimilation, c) competition and conflict². Most studies focus on competition and conflict, and hence on the maintenance and persistence of ethnic differences and boundaries. Barth (1970) argues that the more differences there are, the more they are generated and boundaries emerge and persist. He further suggests that in complex multiethnic systems boundary maintenance

The Chicago School set a 4-stage cycle of contact, competition, accommodation and assimilation, but this cycle is by now rejected as simplistic and deterministic.

nance is very effective in dealing with differences which in fact become highly standardised and stereotyped so that ethnic interaction can be based on these identities. Others stress competition over limited or strategic resources (Despres 1975, Banton 1983), such as housing (Suttles 1968)³. While this emphasis on differences and conflict is understandable, the importance of conflict avoidance, compromise and cooperation should not be overlooked. It has been shown how members of socially separate groups in highly divided societies such as Northern Ireland may be prejudiced about each other yet show mutual tolerance and maintain cordial or close relations, especially among those living in the same community (Larsen 1982, Harris 1986). Howell and Willis note the importance of techniques and mechanisms of social interaction in maintaining peace (1989:viii). It may be argued that commonalities, compromise and accommodation as peace themes in multiethnic societies are equally worthy of study in a world of growing diversity and conflict. This also leads us to the issues of acculturation and assimilation.

Assimilation is ideologically attractive because it appears to solve the problems of integration in multiethnic societies. However a distinction should be made between

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Space constraints do not permit further discussion of ethnicity and housing which also overlaps with the concern of this study. It is common knowledge that in many societies, separate ethnic settlements and segregated housing is a characteristic feature of ethnically divided societies. British and especially American literature on ethnicity and housing is extensive, common themes being immigrants' settlement, competition and conflict, and residential integration or segregation. For Singapore studies on ethnicity and housing, see section 1.2.1.

acculturation and assimilation. Acculturation may involve mutual exchange or may be unidirectional. The former may result in a new culture ("melting pot") or in multiculturalism in which each group maintains its distinctiveness even though some exchange takes place. In the latter case, it is usually a subordinate or minority group that acculturates to the dominant group. Assimilation is complete acculturation in which a group has lost its identity and becomes absorbed into the dominant group. ⁴ In recent years, it appears that multiculturalism as a model is gaining recognition and currency over assimilation as it professes equal status of all groups and recognises the rights of minorities. But in the final analysis, it is the specific histories and social structures which shape overall relations between ethnic groups and affect the processes of acculturation. This leads us to a discussion of ethnicity in nation-building.

1.1.3 Nation-building in Multiethnic Societies

The modern state can comprise many ethnic groups or "nations" while its boundaries may also divide members of the same group. Two themes emerge from this: 1) the attempt by states to construct nations from the highly heterogeneous collection of citizens, and 2) "nations" which desire the establishment of autonomous or separate states (Bell and

4

Even so, it may be prevented from complete assimilation. Assimilation is particularly difficult for first generation immigrants because of problems of language, poverty, psychological anxieties and other adjustments to a new way of life. The nature and problems of acculturation and assimilation are also well revealed by inter-generational tensions and conflicts over ethnic identity.

Freeman 1976, Grillo 1980). The first, seen as national integration or nation-building, is of significance in both old and new states alike (Geertz 1963, Emerson 1960, Bell & Freeman 1976, Grillo 1980, Smith 1986).

Bell and Freeman define nation-building as "the formation and establishment of the new state itself as a political entity and the processes of creating viable degrees of unity, adaptation, achievements and sense of national identity among the people" (1976:11-12). Gellner regards nationalism as the element that truly "engenders modern nations" as it makes culture and will fuse with polity and thereby makes them meaningful definitions of "nation" (1986:55), while Anderson sees 'nation' as a cultural artefact that commands profound emotional legitimacy (1986:15) and defines it as

imagined political community... Imagined because its members will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community ... [National] Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (1986:13).

Taking a symbolic approach, Smith (1986) argues that

5

The idea of "nation" itself is complicated and is distinguishable from "state" (Walker 1978, Grillo 1980). The "state" is a legal and political agency whilst the "nation" is a community of people (Grillo 1980:6) with a shared culture and both are linked through the political principle of nationalism (Gellner 1986:1, 3-4, 7). The idea of nation as ethnic unit and as political entity are also often confused. Walker (1978) traces how "nation" has evolved from its original notion of common blood and descent to the present (mis)use of the term as being equated with the state. Smith (1986) differentiates "ethnic nation" as an ancient historical entity from "modern nation" as a basis for politics and government. Today, the 'nation' is more complex in its ethnic and legal configurations. As societies become ethnically more heterogeneous, multiethnic nations, each within the legal territorial boundary of a modern state, are increasingly on the rise.

Collective myth and memory is the sine qua non of a nation because there can be no identity without memory, no collective purpose without myth. Identity and purpose or destiny are necessary elements of the very concept of a nation (p.2).

He suggests that the sense of nation is possible through the construction of a 'myth-symbol complex' - that corpus of beliefs and sentiments about common descent, history and identity which is preserved and transmitted to future generations and which makes a nation unique and durable (p.15). A shared sense of identity and belonging to a national community, based on the past, present and future, is therefore the crucial element which defines and sustains a nation.

The creation of this shared identity is the key task in nation-building in new states whose multiethnic populations have diverse origins, histories and identities. Bell and Freeman point out that while much of a new state's national character may be established during an earlier period of struggle and nationalist movement, nation-building is a continual process because "ethnic, racial, class and other cleavages may continuously threaten the unity, legitimacy and existence of the state (1976:12)⁶. In many new nation-states, nation-building remains a central concern as, several decades after independence, ethnic problems remain unresolved or new ones have emerged. The central question as to how ethnically

6

The fledgling notion of a modern nation-state also comes up against more established and ancient ethnic-based views of "nation", and competes with them for the primacy of its people's identity. For example, Bataks may accept the notion of an Indonesian Republic but see Indonesia as consisting of "little nations" each with its own home territory, temperament, culture and language (Bruner, 1974).

diverse groups can be incorporated into a common and acceptable sense of nationness.

It should first be noted that ethnicity and ethnic diversity are not necessarily problematic for nation-building. In the context of the anti-colonial struggles of many new nations, the resurgence of ethnicity was a positive part of the broader nationalist upsurge against imperialism (D. Bell 1975:170). Intra-group ethnicity also aids national integration through its functioning as an extended family for social, economic and psychological support, thereby playing the role of the state's social security system (Wallerstein 1960). Such support is particularly useful for migrants and latecomers who face intense competition and rigid ethnic boundaries set up by others to protect economic interests⁷. Politically, ethnic and national identities need not be incompatible even where they are not coterminous, so long as the former remains subsumed under the latter. But ethnicity as a strategy for advancing interests has more often than not turned out to be a major source of interethnic conflict. In the post-colonial period, competition over economic, political and other resources has resulted in nepotism, corruption and even separatism (Wallerstein 1960:139, Horowitz 1985) and in interethnic conflict which threatens the unity, viability and legitimacy of

7

See for example, Bruner's study (1973) of town and village Batak in Sumatra and Hannerz's study (1974) of ethnicity and opportunity in urban America.

the new nation . Thus, depending on the context of its articulation, ethnicity is a double-edged sword.

The difficult problems of nation-building posed by ethnic differences imply that until they are resolved, the formation of a nation based on multiethnicity remains elusive or shaky. Given ethnicity's powerful affective and symbolic capacities, how ethnic cleavages and sentiments over issues of economics, culture, language and religion (Emerson 1960) are managed will therefore largely determine whether ethnicity becomes a building or stumbling block in nation-building in new states. In this management, certain "decisions of nationhood" (W.Bell 1976:285-6) and state intervention are involved.

Chapman et.al. point out that the significance of history lies not only on how the past has shaped the present but also how the present makes of the past, and of how history is used, experienced, remembered or created (1989:1). W. Bell poses the basic question underlying the concrete decisions of nationhood as what should be the new nation's history and cultural traditions (1976:293-4). Smith (1986) stresses common descent and historical memories in fostering national solidarity and a sense of rootedness, but the choice is difficult where the nation's history is fraught with ethnic tensions, such as the Malaysian case. In the realm of culture, the choice may be made all the more contentious by the dominant culture of one

Various African states experienced ethnic civil wars after independence. For an example of separatism, see Cohen's study (1969) of the Hausa. The Malaysian case illustrates ethnic conflict over economic resources, see Tan (1982) & Lim (1985).

ethnic group which is resented by others because it is seen as an imposition at the expense of their own identities. Indeed, national culture is often seen as the culture of a dominant ethnic group by others while the dominant ethnic group itself regards its culture as the national culture⁹. In the management of history and culture therefore, the judicious choice of events and aspects of history and culture to emphasis or ignore is crucial as it may either promote integration or disunity.

In the course of debate and choice over historical and cultural symbols, history, tradition and myth themselves may be subject to interpretation and revision, reconstruction and rediscovery or even outright invention (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983, Smith 1986:178). On the other hand, new nations without a rich past or strong cultural traditions may be less encumbered in the selection or creation of unifying symbols (W. Bell 1976:294). Such nations may instead manipulate cultural diversity and stress its strength and compatibility with unity. The slogans and ideologies of "multiracialism" and "unity in diversity" are reflections of this approach. However, stressing the unity and strength of diversity, even with economic unity, may still be insufficient:

Some level of national identity must exist if the state is to withstand its divisive and separatist forces ... [for] while the acceptance, even celebration, of diversity in a context of mutual respect, itself perhaps constituting an

9

Bruner's study of Bataks in Java shows that not only in the urban context do migrant Bataks from Toba have to adjust to the dominant Sundanese culture; at the national level, all other ethnic groups see the efforts of the central government to foster a national Indonesian identity as in reality a plot to further Javanese political control and to impose the dominant Javanese culture. Their response is to hold firmly to their own ethnic cultures (1974:274).

aspect of the new national culture, is a potentially viable policy, one of the prime dangers is that separate may not be equal. If it is not, then such a policy may rest on wobbly foundations since an existential basis for discontent, revolution and, if the geography is right, partition remains (W. Bell 1976:297).

Rex (1986) suggests that the minimum level of national identity for a multiethnic society lies in a secular civic culture which ensures the right of all individuals to equality of opportunity and legal and political rights for minority communities. Beyond this common culture, the creation of a multiracial society must involve an element of voluntarism, with choice of assimilation or retention of separate cultures (1986:133). Smith's suggestion of a "dual attachment" is similar: on the one hand, loyalty to the political unit in terms of citizenship rights and obligations, i.e. the public and political myth-symbol complex; on the other hand, a sense of affiliation and solidarity with one's own ethnic community, i.e. the semi-private and cultural myth-symbolic complex for each ethnic community (1986:151).

Underpinning these decisions of nationhood is thus another fundamental issue: equality. W. Bell argues that the spread of equality could help break political and economic cleavages from particularistic linkages with ethnicity. Similarly, Rex sees equality of opportunity as the key to the solution of ethnic conflict. At the same time, he recognises that this idea conflicts with the notion of cultural assimilation and the right to be different (1986:120). He thus poses the problem of a multiethnic society as that of how to ensure both equality of opportunity and tolerance of cultural differences. As a solution, he suggests a separation of society into the public

domain consisting of the economy, law, politics and social rights, and the private domain of religion, family, language and cultural arts. Equality of opportunity would apply in the public domain while multiculturalism and the right to be different can be aspired to in the private domain¹⁰.

Decisions of nationhood directly involve the state. Its decisions over the role of ethnicity in nation-building through legal, structural, administrative and ideological means set the boundaries of ethnic identities and ethnic relations, while its policies towards national integration and issues of economics, culture, language and religion affect the positions of the majority and minorities. In its policies, its own position may vary between that of close association with the interests of a dominant ethnic group and that of negotiation between groups.

The role of the state further raises questions about the relationship between local and national levels of nation-building which, as noted in the Introduction, is a dialectical one. In examining this relationship, Grillo argues that state intervention through bureaucracy and administration may result in new cultural awareness and political resentment at local levels (1980:21)¹¹, and identifies the "disjunctions" between local communities and the centre and local responses to state

10

Rex at the same time warns of differential incorporation when trying to make appropriate differential provision for those who are culturally different, as differential incorporation runs the risk of resulting in inequalities and thus creating new sources of conflict between ethnic groups.

11

Anderson makes a distinction between the official nationalism that emanates from the state and which serves the interests of the state, and the political love of the people for the nation (1986:145).

activities as important aspects. Needless to say, whether these aspects assume an ethnic dimension is what is relevant in this study. Furthermore, because of the specificity and autonomy of local life, local approaches may be instructive in the management of ethnic differences and conflicts. It may even be argued that local experience and belonging underly the emotional legitimacy of nationhood. And in the final analysis, the relations between the people and state affect not only the legitimacy of the latter but also of the fledgling new nation-state itself.

In summary, the sense of ethnic identity, relations in a multiethnic context and the role of ethnicity are the dimensions of ethnicity relevant to this study. Ethnic identity and community, involving affective and emotional ties, are largely based on shared culture and historical experience. However, there may be internal differentiation due to change, choice and constraints. Ethnicity's manifestations, the links between its economic, political and cultural aspects, and its articulation with other identities may be fruitfully understood only when set in context. Similarly, ethnic relations and interaction may be best understood within a society's historical and structural context. While ethnic competition and conflict appear to be the norm in ethnic relations and are the focus of attention, it is argued that accommodation and peace are equally important to understand in the light of growing diversity and conflict. In nation-building in multi-ethnic societies, certain decisions of nationhood need to be made to manage ethnic diversity and to create a common sense of

nationness. Cultural issues figure prominently in these decisions, as does the underlying issue of equality. The latter is of particular concern to minorities. Ideologically, assimilation and multiculturalism are the dominant models of ethnic integration but the latter is increasingly considered more acceptable because of its promise of equality and recognition of rights of minorities. The state plays a crucial role in nation-building, its policies setting the parameters for ethnic identity and ethnic relations. But local experience and response are equally important as they underly the emotional legitimacy of nationness.

1.2 The Singapore Context

Singapore poses an interesting and important case for the study of ethnicity and ethnic relations because of several features set within its urban, national and regional contexts: the ethnic and social heterogeneity of its people; the historical relations between ethnic groups and social interactions between ethnic individuals; and the state management of ethnic issues and ethnic relations.

The multiethnic character of Singapore derives from a 2.7 million population base made up of Chinese (78%), Malays (14%), Indians (7%), and various minorities such as Eurasians, Arabs, Japanese and Europeans (1%) (See Table 1.1). Its colonisation by the British, first as a Straits Settlement of the East India Company in 1824 and subsequently as a British Colony, saw it transformed from a small settlement of aboriginal seafolk and

Malay and Chinese villagers¹² to a prosperous commercial centre at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, linking East and West. With its rapid development throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries came a diversity of people who settled into various economic and social niches along place-origin, cultural and linguistic lines. The result is that ethnic communities and identities have always been a key feature of life in Singapore.

Colonial labour policies were largely responsible for the massive inflow of immigrant workers from China, India and Java to the Malayan hinterland and their concentration in separate work niches in Malaya and Singapore. Others who came independently as workers and traders similarly built up or fitted into separate economic niches along ethnic lines. In the rapidly expanding and highly competitive economic environment, this ethnic-based division of labour tended to structure the opportunities of later immigrants and generations both within and between ethnic groups. Today, the Chinese - who rapidly became the numerical majority as early as 1836 (see Table 1.1) - are economically and socially the most dominant and mobile group. On the other hand, the Malays - who form the largest minority population - face the socio-economic problems of a disadvantaged group.

Little is known of Singapore's early history. As flourishing Singhapura, it had contacts with the great Javanese empire of Majapahit in the 14th century but was later sacked by Javanese and Thai attackers. It then became a Thai vassal state and later came under the Malacca and Johor sultanates. By the time of the arrival of Stamford Raffles of the English East India Company in 1819, it was under the Temenggong of Johor. For historical accounts of Singapore before 1819, see Wheatley (1964), Muhammad Ali Abdul Aziz (1965), Colless (1969), Haji Buyong Adil (1972) and Turnbull (1989).

TABLE 1.1 POPULATION OF SINGAPORE BY ETHNICITY, 1824-1990 (%)

Year	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Others	Total
1824	31.0	60.2	7.1	1.7	100.0
1830	39.4	45.9	11.5	3.2	100.0
1836	45.9	41.9	9.9	2.6	100.0
1849	52.9	32.2	11.9	3.0	100.0
1871	56.8	27.1	11.9	4.0	100.0
1891	67.1	19.7	8.8	4.3	100.0
1911	72.4	13.8	9.2	4.7	100.0
1931	75.1	11.7	9.1	4.2	100.0
1947	77.8	12.1	7.4	2.8	100.0
1967	74.4	14.5	8.1	3.0	100.0
1970	76.2	15.0	7.0	1.8	100.0
1980	76.9	14.6	6.4	2.1	100.0
1990	78.0	14.0	7.0	1.0	100.0

Sources: Saw (1969:41) & Singapore Dept. of Statistics, Censuses of Population (1970, 1973, 1981 & 1991).

Besides economic differences, all four major Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian ethnic communities have distinct cultural backgrounds and traditions. While some Malays are native to Singapore, the majority are of Boyanese, Javanese, Bugis, Batak, Minangkabau and Malaysian origin but almost all share a common Malay culture and a common Islamic faith. Indians consist of those whose origins are in the Indian subcontinent, the majority of whom are Tamils, Malayalees, Telegus, Punjabis, Gujeratis, Bengalis and Singhalese and who profess a variety of religious faiths such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Sai Babaism and Christianity. The Chinese are subdivided into Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas, Hainanese and Shanghainese and whose religious faiths range from none to folk Chinese religion, Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity. They are also culturally divided by education medium into the Chinese-educated and the English-educated. The Eurasians are so diverse as to defy definition but, as their name suggests, have both Asian (e.g.s. Malay, Chinese, Indian) and "European" (e.g.s. Dutch, Portuguese, British, French,

Spanish) origins, and are usually English-speaking and profess the Christian faith. Overall therefore, place-origin, descent, language, culture and religion overlap to some extent with each major ethnic group. Internally, each group is also highly differentiated along similar lines¹³.

Not surprisingly therefore, ethnic relations in Singapore have historically been structured mainly by economic and social differentiation between the Chinese majority and minorities, particularly the Malays. In the post-colonial period, the construction of identity and community by individuals, groups, the state and other agencies has meant the growing coalescence around each broad category of 'Chinese', 'Malay' and 'Indian' despite socio-economic differences cutting across ethnic lines. And even though intragroup distinctions may still be relevant in certain contexts (but are increasingly irrelevant in others), these categories have become the primary basis of ethnic identification, particularly in intergroup relations.

Ethnicity and ethnic relations in Singapore are also structured by the political context. Internal autonomy in 1959 saw the People's Action Party (PAP) come into power and in 1963 Singapore joined the newly independent federation of Malaysia. However, it was expelled in 1965, amidst bitter acrimony much of which was related to mutual Chinese and Malay insecurity - the Chinese of Malay political dominance, and the Malay of Chinese political ascendancy in addition to their economic

See Clammer (1977) on internal differentiation along lines of territorial- and linguistic origins within ethnic groups.

dominance. This mutual insecurity, rooted in the economic and political developments throughout the colonial period, was now further fuelled by post-independence politics.

Singapore's sudden sovereignty led the ruling PAP to focus obsessively on Singapore's survival. Direct state intervention into various spheres of social life reflects its survivalist approach in which "forward planning" and "nipping problems in the bud" are the guiding principles. Politically, this meant the crushing of opposition, and since it came into power, the PAP has ruled Singapore as a hegemonic party and national institution (Chan 1985) exercising strong political leadership and control. In the economic realm, the PAP government's concern with how a small state of 622 sq. km can survive with nothing other than human resources has led it to stress foreign investment in a strategy of industrialisation and niche-building as a regional and global city-state, based on the principles of meritocracy, pragmatism, discipline, hard-work and excellence. How different ethnic groups fair under the rigid ethos of meritocracy within Singapore's highly competitive environment is a key issue in ethnic relations. Socially and politically, building a nation-state out of an ethnically diverse population with a complex background of economic, political, social and cultural differences has resulted in the PAP's attempt to produce an overarching national identity and an ideology of 'multiracialism'. This ideology accords separate but equal status to the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others and informs official policies on various issues related to the economy, language, culture, religion and community life.

One other major dimension affecting ethnicity and ethnic relations in Singapore is geopolitical. Singapore, with its Chinese majority and Malay minority, is situated in the Malay archipelago where Malays are the 'indigeneous' majority and Chinese the 'immigrant' minority. Because of ethnic differentiation and Chinese dominance in its historical development, Singapore is viewed by some as a Chinese place, or even state, in Southeast Asia, although different meanings are attached to this view by Chinese and Malays in the region. To some extent, both Singapore and Malaysia serve as employment and emigration outlets for each other's dissatisfied Malay and Chinese minorities respectively. To some extent too, the ethnic identities of Chinese and Malays in Singapore are shaped by the comparison of their economic and political positions with those of the Chinese and Malays in Malaysia. Finally, the Chinese' position in Singapore is structured by the historical experiences of the Chinese immigrant minorities in Southeast Asia; on the other hand, the Malays' position in Singapore are viewed by some as a disadvantaged indigenous minority.

Ethnic interaction may be understood within the above contexts. Historically, ethnically differentiated development during the colonial period resulted in limited interaction, the maintenance of rigid ethnic boundaries, strong stereotyping and an underlying sense of insecurity and fear of dominance by Chinese and Malays of each other. On three major occasions ethnic violence did break out - the first as immediate post-World War II score-settling, the second in 1950 involving the legal tangles of an individual but in which religious and anti-colonial sentiments were aroused, and the third during the

acrimonious atmosphere of Singapore's short-lived stay in Malaysia. On the other hand, despite social separation, limited interaction and a history of tension, cultural exchange, such as in cuisine and language, and interpersonal relations, such as friendships and intermarriages, have always taken place.

The significance of this study's focus - the construction of the local multiethnic community - can thus be appreciated against the above background. Until the 1960s, Singapore's population mostly lived in separate ethnic settlements. Large scale resettlement into public housing estates since then has meant that, for the first time, residents of different ethnic backgrounds have to live together in the same environment. This policy of multiethnic living through public housing is part of the state's policy of nation-building based on multiracialism and is implemented through the Housing and Development Board (HDB)¹⁴. As the basic building block and symbol of multiracialism, such planned communities raise many questions and issues about ethnic interaction within them.

The background and main features outlined above also form the broad framework for understanding the second part of this study: the national forces affecting ethnicity and ethnic

14

Set up in 1961 with extensive roles to resettle, design, construct and manage, the HDB quickly expanded its initial focus from providing basic housing needs to the need to housing the nation and by 1990 it had reached the target of housing 87% of Singapore's population. Since 1988, there have been several major changes in HDB's role, including the set up of Town Councils to replace its management of estates. For two accounts of HDB's role in the government and politics of Singapore and its performance as a bureaucracy, see Quah (1985 & 1987).

relations in Singapore, among which two are focussed on. The first is the state's ideology of multiracialism. The second is the phenomenon of ethnic assertion and competition which has been taking place in Singapore since the early 1980s in the context of rapid social change. This phenomenon includes a growing public discourse on ethnic issues, overt expressions of minorities' discontent about Chinese dominance and their own positions, and assertions of ethnic identity by all. Relations within each ethnic community; between ethnic groups, especially between the Chinese majority and minorities; and between the state and individual groups are all simultaneously involved. A third dimension pertaining to ethnic geopolitics which have the potential of affecting ethnic perceptions and relations between Chinese and Malays in Singapore and Singapore's ethnic image in the region is also briefly discussed.

1.2.1 Studies on Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations

Ethnicity and ethnic relations in Singapore have traditionally been regarded as highly sensitive subjects, their public discourse being considered the purview of political elites. While "coffeeshop talk" abounds, there is little documented knowledge about ordinary people's responses and experiences. "Sensitivity" has also turned a potentially rich vein of research into an under-studied area, particularly that of ethnic relations.

Existing studies may be classified into three broad categories. The first are works on individual ethnic groups and which form the bulk of studies. They are mostly historical, sociological and anthropological in approach and range in focus from history to social structure and responses to social

changes . Most studies on sub-categories within each community are unpublished academic exercises . The second area of studies focuses on the themes of ethnic diversity, ethnic integration in nation-building and the relationships between ethnic and national identification. Empirical studies on these aspects are mostly survey-based, using quantitative statistical analysis, and draw out broad trends . Descriptive and analytical works in this second category of studies examine 1) cultural diversity and interaction, 2) the ideology of multiracialism and 3) ethnicity and nation-building . The

15

General works on the Chinese include those by Song (1923), Freedman (1962, 1979a, 1979b), Purcell (1967), Yong (1970), Lee (1978), Yen (1986), Wang (1989). There are also many studies on specific aspects of Chinese society such as voluntary organisations, see Yong (1971), Carstens (1974), Hsieh (1978), Yen (1981), Cheng (1985), Tan (1985); secret societies, see Mak (1982); and religion, see Topley (1961), Wee (1977). Major works on the Malays include those by Djamour (1965), Sharom Ahmat & Wong (1971), Bedlington (1974), Hanna (1966), Kassim Ismail (1974), Betts (1975), Tham (1977), Shaharuddin Maaruf (1986), Li (1986) and Wan Hussin Zoohri (1990). Classic works on the Indian community include Arasaratnam (1970), Mani (1975, 1978) and Sandhu (1969). See Blake (1973) and Daus (1989) on Eurasians. For a detailed literature survey on each ethnic category by theme and sub-categories, see Chen (1986).

16

See for example, Mathew (1975) on Syrian Christians; Chiang (1977) on Hainanese; Yogarajah (1979) on Ceylonese; Chew (1980) on Bataks; Ibrahim (1981) on Sikhs; Lim (1986) on Arabs & Pavadarayan (1989) on Chettiars and Sindhis. Published works on the Chinese Babas include those by Png (1969), Chia (1983) and Clammer (1976, 1980).

17

For example, Chew-MacDougall (1982) show the concurrence of high levels of ethnic and national identification, while Chiew (1971, 1983) and Chiew & Tan (1990) show high levels of national identity and a trend towards depluralisation and structural integration.

18

See Clammer (1982, 1985a, 1985b), Chiew (1983), Tham (1971), Wu (1982) and Siddique (1990) on cultural diversity and interaction. On multiracialism, see Benjamin (1976), Clammer

(Footnote Continued)

third category of studies focus on specific issues and themes such as minorities, intermarriage, education and language¹⁹. Overall, studies on ethnic relations and interaction are lacking and those that exist tend to be very general in nature.

Ethnicity appears as a common dimension in the literature on housing. One important aspect is the resettlement and adjustment problems of individual ethnic communities in HDB estates²⁰. Most other housing studies draw generalisations or make broad comparisons across ethnic groups on specific activities in the new estates, such as housing satisfaction and neighbouring²¹. Again, qualitative studies on ethnic interaction in these communities are seriously lacking. The historically unprecedented formation of local multiethnic communities under the public housing programme remains little understood despite its nation-wide scale and the explicit aim of public housing as an instrument of ethnic integration; most studies generally assert that desegregation takes place in these communities (Hassan 1968; Yeung 1973).

(Footnote Continued)
 (1985a) & Siddique (1989); on nation-building, see Chan (1971) Chan & Evers (1973), Chew (1986) and Siddique (1989).
¹⁹

See Clammer (1988) on minorities; Kuo & Hassan (1974), Hassan (1974) and Kuo (1979) on intermarriage; Chan (1984), Gopinathan (1979, 1980) and Puru Shotam (1987, 1989) on education and language.
²⁰

For examples of resettlement by ethnic groups, see Ganesan (1966) on Indians; Zahrah Munir (1965) and Roziah Ismail (1982) on Malays; and Tan (1965) on Chinese.
²¹

See Riaz Hassan (1968, 1976) & Yeung (1973) on the former and Chang (1975), Choo (1976/77), Riaz Hassan (1977) and Wong et.al (1985b) on the latter. Riaz Hassan's case study (1977) also broadly examines ethnic interaction among neighbours.

This study hopes to contribute towards filling the gap in knowledge about the concrete arenas and processes of ethnic relations and interaction in the complex Singapore system. It also hopes to contribute to the anthropology of the post-colonial multiethnic nation-state at both local and national levels. Here, I must make it clear that I use the main 'Chinese', 'Malay', 'Indian' and 'Eurasian' categories as 'middle-range' conceptual categories. More than being just census or political/administrative categories, they "lie between a higher national identity and the lower particularistic categories and which must form the starting point for any serious study of community complexities" (Siddique & Puru Shotam, 1982:3). The use of the terms 'race' and 'ethnic' also needs to be clarified. In the Singapore context, 'race' is referred to in state, census and folk usage. I shall use the term 'ethnic'; where 'race' is used, it implies its reference according to official or popular conception.

1.3 Research Methodology and Issues

Research for this study was based on a year's fieldwork and four months of library work in Singapore. Other information was gathered from discussions with individuals, attendance at several talks and seminars and from close monitoring of developments taking place in Singapore throughout the fieldwork and writing-up periods. As information was mostly gathered from fieldwork, its discussion is relevant.

1.3.1 Fieldwork

There are old and new public housing estates in Singapore. I chose a community with a reasonable maturation period to

provide a good gauge of consolidated patterns, while field and library research provided the basis for understanding its initial years. Marine Parade, a 15-year old public housing estate, is an ideal and significant site because of its age, historical background and varied ethnic and social mix (see Chapter 2 for details). Its size (it is the smallest estate in Singapore) was also a factor in considering the practicalities of research by a single individual.

Fieldwork in Marine Parade began in early August 1988 when I first moved there as a flat-owning resident and lasted till end September 1989. After fieldwork, I continued to live there and met informants in chance encounters and made the occasional observation. Fieldwork was based on in-depth conversational interviews and participant observation. Accounts were gathered from 100 individuals (some from the same family) of Chinese (45), Malay (35), Indian (10) and Eurasian (10) backgrounds, these ethnic categories serving as general sampling criteria. Their different socio-economic backgrounds (indicated by room-type) was also taken into account. For Chinese, Indian and Eurasian informants, their distribution across all room-types (2-, 3-, 4- and 5-room) was fairly even. In the case of Malay informants about 70% of those interviewed live in 3- and 4-room flats, 20% in 2-room flats and the remaining 10% in 5-room flats. Both distributions - by ethnic background and by flat-type for each ethnic category - do not conform to their respective distributions in Marine Parade. This is largely because of the uncertain conditions and problems of anthropological fieldwork in the urban, public housing setting, in particular those affecting access. In some cases, it was

impossible to gain access to an individual by ethnic background and room-type, and I had to be content with meeting just one or the other criteria. I could not afford to be more choosy, given the social and time constraints of fieldwork.

The combined significance of ethnicity in Singapore, the focus of my study and the ethnic statuses of my informants and myself directly affected fieldwork conditions and posed several issues. Research in an urban, public housing setting also raised some practical problems. Prior to the discussion of these problems and issues, some preliminary points about my fieldwork need to be made.

First, I found myself in the unique position of being simultaneously a foreign anthropologist from Malaysia, a local anthropologist by virtue of my marriage to a Singaporean and six years of residence in Singapore, an in-group investigator in relation to Chinese informants and an out-group investigator to non-Chinese informants, and a Chinese minority member from Malaysia and a Chinese majority member in Singapore. These positions were mainly thrust upon me by both objective circumstances and the subjectivities of informants. Second, fieldwork throughout took place in a context of growing public discourse on ethnicity and ethnic relations. The plethora of issues raised provided a spontaneous and current basis for observation and discussion. Third, given the sensitivity of ethnic relations, it was impossible to use a tape-recorder during interviews. Instead, I made detailed notes based from memory. The quality of information obtained also obviously varied among my informants. Conversations with working residents tended to be a shorter but more succinct one- or

two-time affair as they had limited time, while those with other informants were spread over several encounters.

1.3.2 Some Issues and Problems of Fieldwork

The large scale, uniform and high-rise setting of public housing required specific strategies of observation and access. Public spaces provided key locations, and I made numerous contacts in coffeeshops, hawker centres, void-decks and playgrounds. In these sites, long discussions were sometimes held; at other times I just listened or eavesdropped. But gaining access to those who did not frequent public places was more difficult and I adopted two other approaches - knocking on the door and introductions. The knock-on-the-door approach required resourceful ways of choosing which doors to knock on within a pre-selected block of flats. One effective way was through the religious emblems on doors since religion, to some extent, coincides with ethnic background in Singapore. I was seldom wrong except in some cases based on interethnic marriages but given the difficulty of locating such cases, I was only too glad to encounter them. In the third approach, introductions and discrete suggestions were obtained from those I met in public areas or through the knock-on-the-door approach.

Like any fieldworker, I faced the problem of suspicion. I was variously misconstrued as a salesgirl, plainclothes police-woman, undercover anti-litter official, government agent, Christian proselytizer, donation-seeker and well-disguised confidence trickster. In public places I tried to allay these initial fears of residents and exposed myself to their scrutiny by making frequent public appearances in everyday activities.

My project itself also raised suspicion initially, but on the other hand, overcoming this suspicion reflects not only on my ability to win trust but also informants' ability to identify with my project despite its sensitivity. One of the first items they wanted to know was what I was studying and why. I explained as frankly as possible and left them to judge my authenticity and sincerity. In the knock-on-the-door approach, most residents quickly sized me up and made snap decisions whether or not to let me into their homes. Once I was accepted, they also opened up easily. It struck me that they wanted both to hear my opinions and to be listened to. I was also asked what I would do with my findings. My reply "write a book" drew much approval, but at the same time cautionary remarks such as "don't write like Salman Rushdie" or "don't get into trouble with the government". Overall, once assured of my bonafides, they treated me as a guest, friendly stranger and co-resident.

A critical factor in my fieldwork was the relationships I built with informants. Our encounters were dialogues; I was often questioned about my personal life and my views - this I turned into a methodological tool for gathering information and building rapport. My gender greatly facilitated access and rapport with informants. In the knock-on-the-door approach, I usually gained access through the women first, mostly by sharing views about marriage, children and women's education, roles and expectations (my being a married mature woman student who postponed childbearing was considered unusual by them and often served as a starting point of discussion). Additionally, my former work background as a researcher with the HDB also

enhanced my credibility - many informants wanted to know about various housing policy matters or to discuss their grievances (and in several cases I helped them).

However, the single most important factor affecting my relationships with informants was my ethnic background. It was one of the first items most informants explicitly confirmed with me. Once it was established that I was Chinese, it was presumed, by both Chinese and non-Chinese alike, that I had certain values and attitudes towards my own ethnic community and to other communities. My Chinese status as a minority member from Malaysia and as a majority member in Singapore were also often used to reinforce their own views. This was revealed by remarks such as "As a Chinese from Malaysia, you should know how we Chinese..." and "You should understand the minorities, you come from Malaysia". This tendency among my informants to presume my ethnic orientation meant tremendous effort and care in negotiating and manipulating my ethnic insider-outsider, Chinese minority-majority and local-foreign statuses. Depending on the informant, I put these multiple statuses to advantage to win trust and to discuss issues. They also gave me the advantage of both empathy and detachment. As one informant said to me: You are in a good position to know, you have been on both sides of the fence.

At the same time as I was supposed to be Chinese, access and rapport with non-Chinese informants required an ability to step in and out of several cultures to a certain degree. Besides speaking Malay, I also adapted my form of dress, manners and code of courtesy appropriately, such as when invited to a meal, wedding or religious event. Cultural

switching and politeness became valued not just for itself but also as a measure of sensitivity and respect accorded to each particular ethnic community and, on my part, as a Chinese majority member towards minorities.

But my identification as a Chinese majority member by minorities also posed specific problems. I could not plead ignorance regarding many issues and problems of majority-minority relations and ethnic minorities. I was expected to know, discuss, express opinions, take sides and even make a stand as a Chinese. For example, I was asked my view on the offer of permanent residence to Chinese HongKongers and the promotion of Mandarin. I was expected to respond to charges of Chinese domination and ethnic discrimination of minorities. I was constantly under scrutiny in these matters as a member of the majority group as much as a researcher. I was also expected to show an ability to face criticisms of my own ethnic community without appearing defensive. In discussing ethnic issues therefore, I found myself often prefacing my questions with "You can be frank with me even though I am a Chinese...". (Informants too usually began their remarks with "Frankly...", "Don't mind but I tell you ah ..." or "Do not be offended but...". I also used other informants' encounters and incidents to demonstrate that I could take and make criticisms of the Chinese, as well as to serve as a basis for discussion. These strategies seldom failed to get at inner feelings while at the same time preempted the possibility of offence or embarrassment. For some informants, I also provided the rare chance to vent their frustrations and to relate grievances to a member of the majority.

On the whole, without necessarily having to agree with informants all the time, showing an ability to discuss openly-mindedly and sincerely enhanced my legitimacy and won trust besides generating information. Furthermore, to minority informants, my interaction with them represented a rare but serious interest in their cultures and problems by a member of the dominant majority. Far from being antagonistic or suspicious, they implicitly and explicitly expressed their appreciation of my efforts as a majority member trying to understand them.

This chapter has focused on ethnicity's capacity for identity, community and mobilisation; social interaction in a multiethnic context; and nation-building in multiethnic societies. The Singapore case serves as an illuminating case for these three dimensions of ethnicity because of its complex ethnic population within an equally complex urban, social and political structure. A brief discussion of some major issues and problems of doing field research in such a setting puts into perspective the limitations of this study as well as its contribution.

PART II

WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

PART II INTRODUCTION

As noted in the Introduction in Part I, the anthropology of locality - the main focus of this study - centres on two themes: indigeneous views of social associations and the interactive processes between national forces and the local community. Part II addresses these two themes by examining the local multiethnic community of Marine Parade.

For A.P. Cohen (1982) the significance of local community is not at the level of structural definition but in terms of its symbolic meanings held by people¹. The cultural experience of community, or how people construct a symbolic community which provides meaning and identity, is the community's key defining feature. Viewed another way, it is the "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1975:5) spun around local life in the ongoing process of the community's construction which is of essence here. At the same time, the local community involves complex modes of differentiation within it. Their meanings and the means by which they are managed - through structures of belonging such as the family, neighbourhood, friendship and organisation - are therefore different to different people in the same community. In Singapore, the local community's ethnic mix lends a further dimension to its differentiation. Within such a community therefore, there are two simultaneous processes of interaction - ethnic and interethnic - and two senses of community - ethnic community and place-community.

1

For related perspectives of local place identity, see Lynch (1960) and Tuan (1977).

The former has specific interests and symbols and the latter has common interests and a different, more general body of symbols.

Consistent with the above, Part II examines major arenas of local culture in the local multiethnic community of Marine Parade, focusing on local processes, experiences and meanings of ethnic-related community and identity. It uncovers the contents and patterns of behaviour and perception, identifies similarities and differences, and examines how these are formed, expressed and maintained or changed. Given their potential for conflict, it also emphasises how differences are reconciled. But even as the focus is on the local community, broader processes are frequently referred to to show the interplay between the national and the local. In particular, it takes into account the larger context of a strong state which defines and imposes its notion of what a local community should be. Yet, at the same time, it considers how the ordinary individual and the local community interprets and responds actively to state policy and practice.

Part II consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 describes the background and main features of Marine Parade; Chapters 3 and 4 examine ethnicity and ethnic relations in everyday life and on special occasions respectively; Chapter 5 looks at the negotiation and management of ethnic relations and identity at the group and organisational levels, especially those of a parastatal and parapolitical nature; and Chapter 6 documents and discusses residents' evaluations of multiethnic living.

CHAPTER 2

THE MULTIETHNIC LOCAL COMMUNITY OF MARINE PARADE

2.1 Introduction

An understanding of the construction of the multiethnic community must start with its origins and its key background features. This chapter sketches an overall picture of the community of Marine Parade. It first describes the community's historical origins and main features and provides the demographic background to its ethnic and social mix. Then, through a brief "tour" of its vicinity, the manifestations and symbols of its ethnic-related characteristics are initially encountered. Indicative of the dimensions, issues and problems of ethnicity and ethnic interaction, their introduction here opens the way for their elaboration in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Origins and Main Features of Marine Parade

2.2.1 Historical Background and its Residents

Marine Parade is a typical housing community that is planned, constructed and managed by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) under the Singapore government's public housing programme. Its 40,000-odd residents occupy 1,350 (17%) rental (2-room) and 6,522 (83%) purchase (3-, 4- and 5-room) flats in 56 blocks (see Table 2.1) of various designs (common or segmented corridor [2-, 3- and 4-roomed flats] and point block [5-room flats] and various storeys (10-, 16- and 24-storeys). Built in two phases between 1971 and 1976 on 50 hectares of land reclaimed from the sea off the southeast coast of Singapore (see Map 1), it derives its name from the road

fronting it. The two phases coincide with two well-demarcated and largely self-contained areas (see Map 2). Phase 1, built between 1971 and 1973, houses 73% of Marine Parade's total population¹ in 39 blocks of mixed-room flat designs while Phase 2, built between 1973 and 1976, houses the remainder 27% of residents in 17 blocks (see Map 2 for layout of blocks by room-type). Each phase, with its own market, hawker centre and shops (see Map 2) is planned for a high degree of sufficiency in basic needs. The shopping area in Phase 1, designated the neighbourhood centre, has a smaller number and range of shops while the town centre located in Phase 2 has a larger number and range of shops and facilities including polyclinic, post office, library, police post and the community centre.

MAP 1 LOCATION OF MARINE PARADE IN SINGAPORE

¹ Much of my fieldwork was conducted in Phase 1 but for convenience I shall refer to it as Marine Parade.

MAP 2 LAYOUT of MARINE PARADE

LEGEND

shops	AO - Area Office
2-room flats	NPP - Neighbourhood Police Post
3-room flats	YWCA - YWCA Childcare Centre
4-room flats	BC - Boys' Club
5-room flats	RC - Residents' Committee
playcourt	PAP - People's Action Party branch and Education Centre
playground	K - Kiosk
	SCC - Senior Citizens' Club

TABLE 2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF FLATS BY ROOM-TYPE IN MARINE PARADE

Room-type	No. of blocks	No. of flats	% of total Flats	National Total (%)
1-room	-	-	-	6.6
2-room	5	1,350	17.1	7.0
3-room	18	3,122	39.5	40.9
3/4-room	4	-	-	-
4-room	12	1,798	22.7	30.5
5-room	17	1,632	20.7	11.2
Executive	-	-	-	3.0
HUDC	-	-	-	0.8
Total	56	7,902	100.0	100.0

Source: HDB Annual Report 1988/89, pp.71 & 76.

Marine Parade's first residents consisted of two categories: the voluntary and the resettled. Most voluntary residents were those who aspired to own homes in the area and they bought flats of varying sizes, while the others were those who accepted allocated rental accommodation in the area. Resettled residents came mostly from the surrounding areas which were claimed for redevelopment. They tended to move into rental (2-room) and smaller purchase (3- and 4-room) flats on terms of instalment payments stretched over maximum periods. The first residents moved into Marine Parade in 1974, followed by others throughout the late 1970s.

Many of the surrounding areas from which Marine Parade's original residents, both voluntary and resettled, came were historical ethnic settlements or had significant concentrations of ethnic populations. They include Telok Kurau (Malays, Chinese Babas), Eunus (Malays), Geylang (Malays), Joo Chiat (Chinese, Chinese Babas), Katong (Chinese, Chinese Babas, Eurasians), Kembangan (Malays), Siglap (Chinese, Chinese Babas, Malays), Chai Chee (Chinese) and Bedok (Malays, Eurasians, Chinese). Together, these areas formed the distinct "East

Coast" of Singapore which was and is still identified as an area with diverse ethnic populations. According to accounts of former residents now living in Marine Parade, most of these East Coast communities were ethnically homogeneous streets or villages separated from each other by tracts of farmland, lanes and vacant land. A distinction was also made between the "town" areas of Joo Chiat and Katong with their markets and shops and the "village" areas. There were also small pockets of ethnically heterogeneous communities scattered about, some of which straddled these boundaries. These local communities were built up in part through colonial policy and in part through the processes of niche-building and settlement along ethnic and sub-ethnic lines since the late 1800s.² Although interethnic contact did take place, such as through work on farms and shopping, and some settlements grew ethnically mixed over time, it was limited.³ Former residents describe their previous communities and their wider localities in ethnic terms

2

Examples include Kaki Bukit, Kampung Melayu, Kampung Kembangan and Kampung Panchitan (Malays); Kampung Batak (Bataks); Ambo Sooloh (Buginese); and Jalan Hong Keng, Lorong Wali, Lorong Kanching and Kampung Chai Chee (Chinese). According to one resident, his previous community in Jalan Manggar within the larger "Malay" Eunos area had many Punjabi residents. Another mentioned that Jalan Rage was a very mixed area consisting of Chinese, Babas, Malays and Indians. Kampung Melayu was established as an official Malay settlement with a grant from the colonial government in 1927.

3

Many Indian-Muslims and Chinese, especially Chinese Babas, settled in the "Malay" areas, such as Geylang and Jalan Eunos, during and especially after World War 2. The Chinese settled in Geylang even earlier, in the late 19th century. For personal glimpses of interethnic contacts among residents within and between these communities, see Wee (1989) and Shaik Kadir (1989).

such as "Malay village", "Chinese village" or "Eurasian area" and themselves as "orang [people] Eunos" or "orang Geylang".

For many, resettlement from their long-established communities was initially viewed with reluctance and resentment, and highrise flat-living was a totally alien, even frightening, prospect.⁴ But the offer of Marine Parade was not immediately condemned. Many had inspected its site when reclamation and construction was in progress. Some feared the reclaimed land "might subside and the blocks collapse" but this was counterbalanced by it being "just beside the sea and near to where we live". Other alternatives were considered too far away or "too Chinese" (by some non-Chinese) or "too Malay" (by some non-Malays), whereas Marine Parade was built out of an ethnically neutral sea. The residents also did not know who to expect as their new neighbours and co-residents as flat allocation within the chosen estate was not by selection but by balloting. More likely than not, they would find themselves with neighbours of different ethnic backgrounds living next door, along the same floor and within the same block. In the much enlarged new setting that would include many unfamiliar "others", they allayed their anxieties with the knowledge that some of their neighbours and friends would also move to Marine Parade. Indeed, some planned the same choice of estate so that they could remain together. In this way, they were somewhat assured that Marine Parade's population would be multiethnic,

4

For examples of anthropological studies of people's responses to impending resettlement, see Chew (1982) and Julita Mohd Hussein (1981/82). See Gamer (1972) for a political analysis of resettlement and Lim (1985) for an official view.

"not too this or that". On the part of the HDB, the attempt at multiethnic housing at that time was in general rather than specific terms. Resettlement was its main priority and allocations made tried to accommodate as far as possible people's choices of resettlement sites⁵. Within the estate, the ballot system of allocation in which every applicant stood an equal chance of obtaining a particular unit of a pre-chosen flat-type also served to some extent as a fair and automatic means of interethnic mixing⁶.

Among other major adjustments⁷, the new surroundings in Marine Parade required new orientations to the behaviour of ethnically different residents and neighbours. Many of those who had always lived within ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods or had only limited interethnic contacts previously experienced initial "culture shock". It is this "shock" and how ethnic differences are manifested and dealt with which form the

⁵ Whether resettlement was dispersed or en bloc (a cluster of blocks) was incidental rather than deliberate and depended on the availability of blocks and units at the actual time of resettlement-allocation. The construction of flats tended to be en bloc and to some extent therefore, resettlement into them also tended to be so. Dispersed or en bloc resettlement also depended on the resettled's ability to afford. Chew's (1982) and this study found that the bulk of resettled Malay villagers opted for (and therefore clustered in) 1- and 2-room rental flats and 3-room purchase flats. Adjustments through en bloc resettlement appears smoother but it also means that residents and neighbours tend to be of the same ethnic background.

⁶ This ballot system was later replaced by one of selection to speed up allocation but it is felt that it favours those higher up the waiting list in each selection exercise.

⁷ See for example Chua et.al. (1985b) for a study on the resettlement experiences and Suriani Suratman (1986) on Malays living in flats which includes aspects of resettlement. However, both studies do not discuss adjustments to ethnic "others".

focus of the following chapters. At the same time, going beyond the comforting visits to former home-places and chance encounters with old neighbours and friends, ethnic communities were quickly reconstructed as a means of adjustment. Those who were already used to multiethnic living or were less skeptical about it faced fewer problems of adjustments but nonetheless they had to adapt themselves to multiethnicity in the changed residential setting. For the young who have grown up in Marine Parade over the last fifteen years, there is little or no comparative context - they know no other ways of living.

Many of Marine Parade's original residents have moved out while others have moved in. More than half of 5-room flat-owners and even more from 3-room flats have moved since 1976 (ST 6.8.90), these moves speeding up in the late 1980s. However, the phenomenon is not unique to Marine Parade but has been occurring throughout Singapore due to various factors such as new family formation, rising incomes and HDB schemes for homeownership. Three patterns are discernable in these movements of population within and in and out of Marine Parade. The first involves the newly-married who move out of their parents' homes to set up their own. In the second pattern entire families move out in a process of upgrading from rental to purchase flats, from smaller to bigger purchase flats or from public to private housing. Apart from the rental cases, these movements are possible through the active buying and selling of flats, particularly of 3- and 4-room ones, in the resale market that has been so active in the late 1980s that Marine Parade is one of the top ten housing estates.

However, despite the continuous movement of people in and out of it, Marine Parade's multiethnic population has remained consistent in composition. In 1980 by which time Marine Parade was fully completed and most flats occupied, its population was 67.6% Chinese, 24.8% Malay, 5.4% Indians and 2.2% other ethnic minorities, and in 1988 the proportions were 65% Chinese, 25% Malays and 10% Eurasians, Indians and other ethnic minorities (see Table 2.2). These broad ethnic categories are further differentiated along place-origin, linguistic, cultural and religious lines consistent with those at the national level elaborated in Chapter 1. It is this multiethnic background - evolved through a combination of personal choice and official allocation - that has become one of Marine Parade's key defining features since its inception and which makes it a significant location for understanding ethnic relations.

TABLE 2.2 POPULATION OF MARINE PARADE AND SINGAPORE BY ETHNICITY, 1980 & 1988

Ethnicity	Marine Parade			National Population	
	1980	%	1988 (%)	1980 (%)	1988 (%)
Chinese	26,168	67.6	65	76.9	76.1
Malays	9,578	24.8	25	14.6	15.2
Indians	2,106	5.4}	10	6.4	6.5
Others	847	2.2}		2.1	2.2
Total	38,699	100.0	100	100.0	100.0

Source: Singapore Census of Population 1980: Release no.1 pp.2 & 19, Yearbook of Statistics 1989:29. Figures for Marine Parade for 1988 are estimates provided by the Marine Parade Area Office.

Although figures for these sub-categories among Marine Parade's residents were unavailable, I came across most of these in the course of my fieldwork.

However Marine Parade's Chinese population is about 9% below, its Malay population about 10% above, and the Eurasian, Indians and "others" categories about the same, as the national proportions (see Table 2.2). Within the estate, Malay residents are largely concentrated in 2- and 3-room flats with a growing number in 4-room flats while the other ethnic categories are found across all room-types (exact figures are unavailable). In the movements of population mentioned earlier, the general trend is that there are more Malays among those moving into 3- and 4-room flats and more Chinese among those moving into 4- and 5-room flats (as well as from public to private housing). The imperfect fit of its ethnic population distribution with national figures, and the concentration of Malays in certain room-type blocks, have caused Marine Parade to be identified as a "Malay enclave" (ST 7.1.89) and subjected to a national policy to correct ethnic "imbalances". Aimed at curbing what the government sees as a nation-wide trend towards the formation of "racial enclaves", the policy imposed in March 1989 sets maximum "racial" limits for Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others flat-owners at every level of block and neighbourhood in all public housing estates. With direct implications for both ethnic ties and interethnic relations, the policy is deeply controversial. Chapter 6 examines it against the reasons for the population movements and against residents' responses to ethnic needs and multiethnic living.

Apart from its "Malay enclave" image held by outsiders, Marine Parade is also often viewed as a "middle class" estate; it has higher than national proportions of 5-room flats (see Table 2.1) and professional and managerial workers, and lower

than the national proportion of production workers (see Table 2.3). It is also the envy of many residents of other housing estates because of its choice location in relation to the sea, city, facilities and other housing estates. However, it does have its share of 2- and 3-room flat-dwellers. In fact, its 2-room flats number 21/2 times, and its 3-room flats equal, the

TABLE 2.3 WORKING PERSONS IN MARINE PARADE AND SINGAPORE BY OCCUPATION, 1980 & 1990

Occupation	Marine Parade 1980 (%)	Singapore	
		1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Professional & Technical	15.0	8.8	15.7
Administrative & Managerial	7.1	4.9	8.2
Clerical	23.4	15.5	13.25
Sales	10.8	12.3	} 13.2
Services	10.7	10.4	
Production & related	26.9	40.4	43.8
Agriculture & Fishing	0.4	1.9	0.3
Not classifiable	5.7	5.8	5.4
Total	100.0	100.0	99.85

Sources: Singapore Census of Population 1980: Release no.5 p.79, Singapore Census of Population 1990: Advance Data Release p.53.

Note: Figures for Marine Parade available for 1980 only. Figures for 1980 are for working persons aged 10 & above, figures for 1990 are for working persons aged 15 & above.

national proportions and it has no executive flats, unlike other estates (see Table 2.1). Furthermore, if the 1990 occupational distribution of its working population is still more or less the same as in 1980 (more recent figures are unobtainable) and are compared with the national distribution in 1990 (see Table 2.3), then Marine Parade's residents are no more or no less "middle class" than Singaporeans are in general. Indeed, in the status and prestige system in Singapore in which the public-private housing distinction is a

key criterion and symbol, Marine Parade is viewed by some private housing dwellers as an "eyesore" along "Condominium Row" in the East coast and as a "mistake" of allocating prime land to public housing⁹. But whether pertaining to the ethnic or class backgrounds of its residents, it is doubtless that Marine Parade, since its inception 15 years ago, has been and still is a dynamic community undergoing rapid and constant changes reflective of the larger Singapore society.

2.2.2 A Planned and Managed Environment

As noted earlier, Marine Parade was planned by the HDB. Planning covered the entire design and layout of most of its buildings (residential blocks, shops, markets, hawker centres, community centre and play areas) and spaces (seating areas, footpaths, car parks and green areas) (see Map 2). Planning also provided some educational institutions from kindergarten to secondary school levels within and around Marine Parade. But unlike some other larger estates, Marine Parade does not have additional facilities such as sports complexes and religious sites; instead, its residents use those near by¹⁰.

⁹ Incidentally, all this makes Marine Parade a suitable case for the study of social and housing class stratification and of hidden poverty in Singapore. In the course of my fieldwork, I came across numerous cases of the poor and needy who were somehow forgotten behind the predominant notions of "affluence" and "flat upgrading" and political priorities of "grassroots mobilisation". I also encountered residents who aspired to move into private housing as soon as possible.

¹⁰ Places for religious worship in nearby Eunos, Katong and Telok Kurau include several Muslim mosques, Christian churches and Hindu, Sikh and Chinese temples. Many of these were built long before Marine Parade's existence and formed part of the former communities of Marine Parade's first residents. At the time of fieldwork, the construction of a mosque for residents of Marine Parade and nearby Siglap was in progress.

At the time of writing, the HDB announced that it would upgrade buildings and spaces in Marine Parade and other older estates, as it was felt that a sense of community was lacking due to the constant movement of people in and out of it.

The HDB also undertakes some major aspects of physical and social management of Marine Parade¹¹. Under its system of management, estate maintenance and the implementation of HDB policies and rules at the everyday level is delegated to HDB's island-wide network of area offices. The Marine Parade Area Office (AO) manages both private flats and public areas as part of physical management. The former involves lease or tenancy administration (e.g. payments) and maintenance (e.g. repairs and renovations) while the latter covers maintenance of all public spaces. Its car park and market-hawker centre management is largely of an administrative and enforcement nature.

The AO's social management of Marine Parade covers a wide spectrum of residential living within the larger state notion of what should be a public housing community and community development. Aspects covered range from littering to the promotion of community identity. Central to this role are its legal powers provided under various legislation such as the HDB Act 1961 and the HDB (Penalties) Rules 1980. These powers

11

Since January 1990 there have been drastic changes in HDB's role in local estate management. The AO's maintenance and management of common areas has been turned over to the newly set up Marine Parade Town Council. The HDB branch office (the AO renamed) retains only its functions of overseeing tenancy and leases and carparking while other functions not in line with public housing are passed onto other public or private bodies. Increasingly too, community problems are passed onto the Residents' Committees to address.

enable the HDB to enforce policies and regulations whose violations involve penalty fines and, in serious cases, prosecution and eviction. Thus, its management of common spaces is sanctioned by the Common Property and Open Spaces Rules (1988) under which fines may be imposed for "anti-social" acts such as vandalism, excessive noise, damage to turf and choking rubbish chutes with bulky discards. "Pet dog nuisance" (incessant barking, defecation, harassment of residents) is checked by a rule passed in 1989 which allows only one "toy" dog (small breeds) per household, violation of which brings a fine of up to S\$4,000. HDB anti-littering squads on patrol can book and fine offenders. Offenders of "killer litter" (litter that injures) may be prosecuted or even evicted. Violation of tenancy agreements such as harbouring illegal immigrants, illegal subletting and use of premises for immoral or illegal activities may lead to prosecution and eviction.

In its everyday social management, the AO addresses various community matters which arise. These range from individual residents' tenancy problems, in which case it may provide referral services to relevant organisations (if financial and welfare issues are involved), to disputes or complaints in which case it might mediate. It also works closely with local official organisations such as the Residents Committees (RCs) and the community centre on various problems, issues and projects, such as the promotion of national

campaigns. AO and RC officers also meet regularly to discuss community issues ¹².

For residents, living in such a highly planned and managed environment has several implications. First, it means that they are often affected by official intervention into their everyday life, be it through the HDB's implementation of policies and rules or through the activities of parapolitical community organisations. Chapter 5 focuses specifically on the HDB's management of ethnic disputes and examines the role of community organisations while Chapter 6 will discuss the HDB's controversial racial quotas for housing policy. Second, living in such a highly planned environment necessarily involves participation in public life because of residential proximity and the intensive use and sharing of common spaces. For the same reason, it is not always possible to preserve some privacy within one's own flat. As we shall see, both private and public areas are imbued with various manifestations and symbols of ethnic identity as a means of negotiating this proximity and sharing, and it is these which give form, content and meaning to Marine Parade's multiethnic character. Shared public spaces also served as venues for activities in everyday life and on special occasions during which ethnic and interethnic issues and problems are articulated. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss some of these in detail.

12

For a discussion of the management and accountability of the HDB over time, using Marine Parade as a case study, see Siddique (1989). For an official view of estate management, see Chong, et.al. (1985).

2.3 Manifestations of Multiethnic Living

Against this background, the symbolic expressions of multiethnicity are plentiful and are best encountered through an initial "tour" of the community's private and public areas. In this way, some idea of its scope, significance and implications can be sensed.

2.3.1 In Private Spaces

Private spaces are essentially residents' home grounds and are the most controllable part of their living environment. Whether as a place to spend the day or to return to, the home is one place where residents find space for self-realisation and expression. The highly standardised design of public housing, both at the level of the individual flat and the general surroundings¹³, further provokes residents to personalise their homes. It is not surprising therefore that the home grounds is the prime site for residents' self-expression and front-stage setting for impression management (Goffman 1969).

Most residents, irrespective of ethnic and economic backgrounds, use various cultural objects to convey symbolically certain sentiments in their homes. The huge variety of decor and paraphernalia drawn from their respective cultural stores effectively turn their homes into cultural displays. Individually and cumulatively, such displays not only add

13

Until 1989 for example, residents were not allowed to paint their doors any colours they wished - the reason apparently being that top HDB officials thought residents' poor aesthetics might 'spoil' HDB designs!

colour to multiethnic living in a literal sense; they also become symbols of ethnic identity and differentiation ¹⁴.

Corridors convey this rich myriad of colours and symbolism through their motley mix of items. Plants may reveal ethnic preferences: Malay residents like edible plants (serai, chilli) while Chinese residents prefer "good luck" plants (kumquat, chrysanthemum and Goddess of Mercy bamboo). Blue plant pots suggest an Indian family while those with dragon motifs tell of a Chinese taste. Pet birds in cages indicate the household is likely to be Malay or Chinese, bird-rearing being a popular hobby in both cultures.

The entrances of flats provide clear indications of their occupants' religious-ethnic backgrounds. The entrance mediates between public and private space, and is also the threshold over which the "good" is invited and the "bad" repelled. As such, it often assumes religious as well as aesthetic meanings which are stated mostly through religious symbols placed at its significant points. Because of the strong overlap between religion and ethnicity, these symbols also serve as fairly reliable indicators of ethnic background.

The entrances to Chinese homes are the most varied in their cultural-religious artefacts, reflecting the diversity of Chinese religious-folk beliefs. Some are adorned with red cloths, couplets and red lanterns, others carry dragon-phoenix designs and lion figures, and yet others have red altars and

For a discussion of traditional Malay and Chinese expressions of urban forms, see Evers (1978) and for a discussion of symbolic, mainly religious, adjustments of house forms to HDB designed flats, see Chua (1988).

urns for prayers. Some homes are protected by deities such as Zigong, Kwan Yin and Twa Pek Kong whose pictures stand atop doors, while others turn away evil with Taoist trigrams or ensure harmony between the human and spirit worlds with yin-yang emblems. Christians may have inscriptions referring to Jesus or a biblical verse on their doors. The Catholic Christian household is often denoted by portraits of Jesus and Mary and palm leaves hung at the entrance. Christian symbols suggest that the occupants are probably Eurasian, Chinese, Chinese Baba or Indian or some combination but seldom Malays. Guru Nanak's portrait overlooking a door denotes Sikh occupants, while that of Sai Baba graces probably an Indian home. Many Hindu homes have mango leaves strung across their entrances and pictures of Lord Ganesh and other deities on their doors while their floors are inscribed with kolam. The leaves symbolise plentifulness and usefulness, the deities bring peace, security, protection and goodness while the kolam invites good luck and shuts out misfortune. Most entrances to Muslim (mostly Malay or Indian) homes are adorned with khat calligraphy (artistically inscribed Islamic quotes) which praise Allah, attract angels and repel evil.

The symbolic meanings of home culminate in the living room. Being the setting where family, relatives, friends and visitors are gathered for daily and special activities, it provides the most vivid and prominent display of cultural and religious artefacts.

In Muslim homes, one item seldom missing is a picture of the holy site of Masjidilharam in Mecca where Muslims congregate on their Haj pilgrimage. It occupies pride of place in

the sitting room (and sometimes also in the kitchen or bedroom), further enhanced by surrounding Khat frames. For Malays, decor items drawn from Malay culture add a further cultural element to living room display, such as kites, jong (miniature race boats) and keris (dagger). Common Chinese living rooms display cultural items such as red ribbons and gold nuggets tied to plants, porcelain vases and brush paintings. For shenists, a large lighted altar with the icons of various deities, often together with ancestral tableaux, usually occupies a significant space facing the door. Similarly, a lighted altar for Lords Vishnu, Ganesh, Krishna and other deities occupies a significant corner of the living room in many Hindu homes. For Christians, crosses, icons of Jesus, Mary and saints and pictures of biblical episodes (e.g. the last supper) occupy important locations in the living room. Other decor items especially those drawn from cultural backgrounds may confirm the residents' ethnicity, such as red banners and pussywillow for the Chinese and Chinese Baba. Of course home displays may not reveal religious and cultural differences between individuals within the home. There are also elements in decor which are non-ethnic based or confined to only one ethnic category. Nonetheless, home displays on the whole strongly suggest the religious and ethnic backgrounds of their occupants.

The home is, however, not merely a container of culture. In the context of multiethnic living, it is also a conveyor of meanings cross-culturally. Cumulatively, homes manifest not only ethnic diversity but also differentiation and identity. Through overt displays, residents state explicitly to their

neighbours and visitors who they are and, implicitly, how neighbours and others should behave. In the multiethnic context, display thus distinguishes between neighbours of different ethnic backgrounds. As residents Latipa and Meena put it:

When people see the khat they know this is a Muslim home. Otherwise, how to know? All look the same. Also, this is our ibadat (act of religious devotion). When another Muslim comes, they can see that we are religious (Latipa).

From the mango leaves [strung above the door] you can tell this is an Indian home. If not, cannot tell, all the same! Before, I had banana trees outside my house. Before, banana trees means Indian home (Meena).

The use of religious symbols is especially significant. In themselves they reflect the importance of religion in the lives of residents. But as noted earlier the strong overlap between religion and ethnicity results in religion becoming an ethnic marker. Thus, although the placing of religious emblems at entrances and in living rooms has always been practised, their display is no longer confined within the religious belief system itself or to impress other members of the same faith. In the new context of multiethnic living it assumes an additional symbolic meaning - differentiation and a statement of identity vis-a-vis others. This differentiation goes beyond the first level of categorisation of differences. As subsequent chapters show, majority-minority relations and economic, cultural and religious changes and competition in the wider society have led to ethnic assertion in which culture, language and religion are the major emblems emphasised. Thus, in religious competition, the door-to-door religious proselytizers who use religious symbols at entrances to guide them to their targets may receive the response "Can't you see from my

door that I am a _____?"¹⁵. At the local level therefore, display emblems become regular reminders and strategic statements of who people are.

2.3.2 In Public Spaces

Public spaces include corridors, void-decks, pathways, play areas, seat corners, green areas and the neighbourhood centre. These spaces constitute the realm of public everyday life, made up of the routine activities of ordinary people. I broadly categorise these activities into the social and economic. Other major agents in local life are the state and organisations whose various interventions and activities I refer to as "official". All three categories of activities are highly visible, with their ethnic-related features expressed both implicitly and explicitly.

a) Social Activities

The multifarious social activities of public life take place mostly in the mornings, evenings and especially at weekends. The following descriptions illustrate some of their most common ethnic and multiethnic aspects.

One evening in the neighbourhoods: Along a footpath, some Chinese residents walk their pet dogs. Malay passers-by take care not to be sniffed by the animals. At one end of the void-deck of block 5, a group of Chinese women sit chatting. At the other end, two Indian boys are studying. In the next block, some Malay youths are cleaning their motorbikes in the void-

Some residents recall how, during ethnic fighting in 1950 religious emblems on doors served to indicate which homes to attack.

deck. In the playground, young children of diverse ethnic backgrounds play together, some of them shouting expletives as the game gets exciting. A batch of young Malay boys play football in a grass patch while an older group of Malay, Chinese and Indian boys play football on the basketball court. A few Chinese youths try to play basketball at one end of the same court. In another neighbourhood, a group of old Hainanese women chat loudly at one end of a play area while at its other end three Malay and Eurasian youths sing and strum guitars. Outside the Boys' Club, eight Malay youths chat and sing while a great commotion goes on inside it as other Malay and Chinese boys play. Across the street, a large group of Malay youths play sepak takraw and others watch, chat and sing. Along the street, a boisterous group of Chinese and Eurasian boys tease each other, eyed by another group of Chinese youths who regularly occupy the street corner.

One morning in the neighbourhood centre: The centre is the main public site which captures the sights, sounds and smells of local life. From morning till night, it is very active, for here is where the shops, market and hawker centre are located and access paths run through. In the ubiquitous coffeeshop and hawker-centre a wide variety of Chinese, Malay and Indian foods is available and there is incessant 'coffee-shop' talk. The bird-singing corner nearby presents a marvellous sight and sounds of birds and their keepers - young and old Chinese and Malay men - listening, comparing and competing over their pets' singing superiority. Nearby, two Eurasian and Malay men concentrate on a game of dam (Malay chess), watched by four Chinese youths. Scattered about the

centre are various single- or mixed-ethnic chat groups (e.g. Chinese-Hainanese; Malay; Malay, Baba Chinese and Chinese; and Eurasian, Chinese and Baba).

The public life of Marine Parade reveals a colourful and wide variety of activities. Cumulatively, they provide a sense of familiarity and community through their routine occurrences. At the same time, they embody a gamut of ethnic-related issues and aspects of public life, some of which are problematic and others not. Chapter 3 discusses the processes and problems of ethnic interaction and differentiation in some of these activities.

b) Economic Activities

The occupational backgrounds of Marine Parade's residents are tremendously diverse (see Table 2.3). But like elsewhere in Singapore the vast majority of them, with the exception of local traders and cleaners, find their sources of livelihood outside the local community. Because of this direct link with the national economy, a discussion of it and its ethnic dimensions is relevant and this is found in Chapter 8. Here, the focus is on the single most important local economic activity of retail trade.

One outstanding feature of this local economy is the clearcut ethnic patterns of ownership and management (see Appendix 1). In the neighbourhood market, 93% of stallholders are Chinese, and all vegetable, fruit, flower, poultry and fish stalls, with the exception of one (poultry) are run by Chinese traders. The pork and roast meats sellers are, of course, all Chinese. Out of the 22 small grocery stalls, 18 are run by Chinese; the remaining ones are run by Malays (two) and Indian-

Muslims (two). Neighbourhood shops show a similar pattern of dominant Chinese traders. Together they manage 80% of the 48 shops which include medicinal halls, department store, clinics, grocer stores, bread shops, laundry, bookshop, photoshops, hairdressing saloons and coffeeshops. Similarly, most foodstalls in the two coffeeshops are operated by Chinese. The remaining grocery and stationery shops and foodstalls are run by Malays and Indian Muslims. The hawker-centre has 18 stalls in the Chinese food section and six stalls in the Muslim section. Scattered about the neighbourhoods are seven kiosks selling and an assortment of small items, six of which are run by Indian Muslims¹⁶. This ethnic pattern is repeated in the town centre. Here, with the exception of one grocer shop, 11 foodstalls and three kiosks which are managed by Indian-Muslims, all shops and stalls are Chinese-owned.

The dominance of Chinese traders in the ownership/management of trades in Marine Parade is due in part to the numerical majority of its Chinese population. But more significantly, they reflect the ethnic patterns of economic activities and relationships in the wider economy. The distribution of trades in particular reflects ethnic niches. The Chinese dominate in most trades which at the local level include market produce, groceries, foods and personal services.

16

Informal traders also make their appearances at strategic locations in the neighbourhoods, such as the Malay cake- and jamu-sellers; the Indian milkman and kacangputih (nuts) seller; and the Chinese icecream-seller, cobbler, fortune-teller and buttons-maker. Three Malay and two Chinese trishawmen ferry shoppers and young children while two Indian men have the monopoly of car-cleaning.

Those enterprises run by Indians and Malays - foodstalls, groceries, kiosks and stationeries (Indians) and foodstalls, groceries and hairstyling (Malays) - similarly reflect the niches of economic minorities. Ethnic specialisation and differentiation of trades is most conspicuous in cooked foods¹⁷. In Marine Parade, ethnic foods are sold by stallholders of their respective ethnic backgrounds. A wide variety of Chinese noodles, rice, meat and dessert dishes are sold by Chinese stallholders, while Malay and Indian stalls also sell a wide variety of foods such as breads, rice and spicy hot dishes. For Malay and Indian traders, the sale of ethnic foods is one of the two strongest economic niches which they have established, the other being groceries.

The economic activities observed in the local community raise various ethnic-related economic issues. At the local level, they concern trader-client relations and traders' organisation to maintain their competitiveness - these are discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. Ethnic patterns and issues in local economic life also reflect those at the wider national level pertaining to economic niches, opportunities, organisation, educational qualifications and economic culture and ideology. Their historical roots and contemporary dynamics are discussed in Chapter 8.

c) Official Activities

17

In Singapore, the predominant mode of categorisation of food dishes is by ethnic origin, the main categories being Malay, Chinese, Indian, Peranakan (Chinese Baba) and Western foods. Where dishes are common or affected by cross-cultural influences, they are nonetheless identified in ethnic versions and variations, e.g.s rojak (mixed fruit) and fried noodles.

Official activities pervade public life through a myriad of pictures and posters on walls of lift-landings, void-decks and throughout neighbourhoods. Some of the largest official objects are wall murals in every neighbourhood. These were painted by RCs in a National RC Mural Painting Competition, an event of the 1988 national Community Week organised by the Ministry of Community Development. Except for two, all the murals are based on the Week's overall theme of "Social Cohesion" and its six "core values" (pride in our multicultural heritage; racial harmony; religious tolerance; care and concern; spirit of voluntarism and our common destiny). These values are expressed in symbolic pictures such as students, soldiers and policemen, civil defence exercises, mass rapid transport, Singapore Air Forces fighter jets, information technology, Chinese and Malay dancers, and four men of different ethnic backgrounds rowing a dragon boat. Posters proclaiming official campaigns and rules bear diverse messages such as "Burn joss-stick paper in containers", "Keep the environment clean, green and beautiful", "Put it [cigarette] out before you enter", "Get rid of stagnant water - mosquito breeding can infect you with deadly dengue fever", "Flush toilet or Fine \$150", "Urinating in Lifts is an Offence", "Be Courteous", "Speak More Mandarin, Less Dialect" and "Stand Up for Singapore". Other posters announce official events such as Family Day, Community Week, Ministerial Walkabout, National Day dinner and activities such as courses, tours and competitions held by local community organisations.

Official pictures and posters constantly confront residents as an integral part of their daily life. They

announce, inform, exhort and remind people, as residents and citizens, of a multitude of things, events and social responsibilities in their daily lives. Through them, the broad goals of nation-building and the specific messages of various campaigns promoted by the government and its various agencies are spelt out in succinct ways in order to reach the local community and individuals. One dominant theme in this "picture and poster" part of local life relates to ethnicity and ethnic relations. The most prominent mural, for example, portrays a flutter of "flags" consisting of the national flag at the forefront, a Chinese banner, a Malay flying carpet and an Indian saree - symbolising "We Celebrate in Unity". And as noted earlier, "Pride in our Multicultural Heritage", "Racial Harmony" and "Religious Tolerance" are three major core values promoted by the murals. These and poster themes such as "Speak more Mandarin, less dialect" and "Many Races, one Nation" spell out clearly official ideologies pertaining to ethnicity and ethnic relations in nation-building. Their prevalence is indicative of both the state management of ethnicity and ethnic relations and the dominance of the government and its para-political organisations. Chapter 5 will examine the roles of the latter in ethnic relations and politics and residents' responses to them, while Chapter 9 will discuss the state's ideology of multiracialism.

2.4 Discussion

The construction of Marine Parade from a "start from scratch" space to a place imbued with meanings of home and public community life has so far taken fifteen years. Several

underlying ethnic-related features are significant to its development and residents' sense of place-identity: 1) its historical background, which includes its siting on ethnically neutral grounds reclaimed from the sea; its proximity to previous ethnic settlements and its geographical location within a wider area heavy with past and present ethnic connotations; 2) its multiethnic population and 3) its shared spaces. Residents constantly make references to these features in their definition and characterisation of their community. For the resettled, the elements of the first feature are especially meaningful. Through them, Marine Parade provides a vital link to the past from which they underwent a sharp break brought about by resettlement. In the move from living in largely ethnically homogeneous settings to a multiethnic one, they enabled residents to face the changes and the unknown by providing a sense of continuity, stability and control. For newcomers and those younger who have grown up in Marine Parade, its multiethnic setting is taken for granted.

Within the context of an ethnically diverse living environment, home displays, usually cultural-religious symbols, not only enable residents to gain control over their uniformly-planned surroundings but also to establish a sense of identity and to differentiate themselves from others. In shared spaces, residents' activities which reflect and affect ethnicity and ethnic interaction form a key dimension of public culture. At the same time, the state plays a central role in local life. Not only does it plan and manage the local through the HDB, it also directly moulds residents' behaviour through HDB rules and regulations and through events organised by its parapolitical

and other official bodies. Underpinning its management of ethnicity and ethnic relations in local and national life is its ideology of multiracialism.

The manifestations of multiethnic living in Marine Parade suggest two intertwining levels and senses of the local community: the multiethnic community itself and the ethnic communities within it. The multiethnic community is the local community whose basis and character is shaped by its historical origins and ethnically diverse population. The latter's effect on its meaning of "multiethnic" arise from the forms and processes of interaction between residents of different ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, the construction of this local community also involves forms and processes of interaction between residents of similar ethnic backgrounds - these are the ethnic communities, set within the larger multiethnic community. Both ethnic and multiethnic communities are at once part and parcel of each other - they set the context for and shape each other in a multitude of ways. Chapters 3 to 6 explore and discuss the diversity and the complexities of both communities in their simultaneous and mutual construction.

THE LOCAL SETTING

- 1-2 - high-rise homes
 3-6 - cultural and religious
 emblems at entrances

2

4

06-10

5

6

LOCAL LIFE

- 7 - hawker centre
- 8 - residents' committee
- 9 - national day celebrations
- 10 - chat group
- 11 - boys at play
- 12 - wall mural

7

MARINE PARADE NEIGHBOURHOOD RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE CENTRE
 马林巴里居民委员会活动中心
 PUSAT JAWATANKUASA PENDUDUK KEMAHAN D' MARINE PARADE

8

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11

12

CHAPTER 3

EVERYDAY LIFE

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I described the heterogeneity of local life and provided some initial ideas of its ethnic-related dimensions. I also noted two simultaneous processes of interaction - ethnic and interethnic - within the local community. This chapter examines these two processes in some major activities of the community's everyday life. In particular, it focuses on the 'interethnic' - where members of different ethnic backgrounds have to interact - and shows how ethnic background and identity structure interaction and how differences are manifested and managed.

While the community's everyday activities seem mundane and insignificant, much may be understood from them. A.P. Cohen points out that the mundane circumstances of everyday life provide the context for the "experience of culture" because it is based on pragmatic and appropriate evaluation. "Each commonplace event is a metaphorical statement of the culture in which it occurs" (1982:6). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), everyday life, among several realities, is reality par excellence in which tension and demand on consciousness is highest. As the commonsense reality of the ordinary members of society, it is a world that is original to them and maintained by their thoughts and actions. Furthermore, everyday life is an intersubjective world shared with others who have different perspectives. In the face-to-face encounters of everyday social interaction, each apprehends the other's subjectivity by

means of his/her own typificatory scheme and the two schemes enter into an ongoing negotiation (pp.33-8, 43-5). Heller (1984), sharing Berger and Luckmann's view on social interaction, elaborates on the "modalities of everyday contact" which range from the random to the organised. She also notes the occurrence of "collisions" in everyday contact, such as quarrels and clashes of opinions (pp.220-5, 247-248). Related to the ideas of Berger, Luckmann and Heller is Goffman's stress on the 'presentation of self' to others in the front-stage situations of everyday life (1969). In particular, the establishment of "territories of self" through markers is a key aspect of identity management in public encounters (Goffman 1971). In general, Suttles (1968) emphasises participation and mutual learning in street life and neighbouring and the rules and moral order located in everyday life which govern a place.

However, the significance of everyday life does not lie in micro phenomena alone. Everyday encounters take place within larger contexts, and how everyday life is connected to the wider society is therefore a pertinent issue. Gouldner (1975) relates everyday life specifically to the political arena in terms of their contrast. Everyday life emphasises the stable, recurrent and seemingly unchanging features of social life of ordinary individuals; political life is one of competition, struggle and conflicts between elites and organisations. However, the two arenas are mutually interactive because politics impinge upon and transform everyday life and the ordinary people in turn affect the political through everyday responses and resistances (Scott 1985). Gouldner similarly contrasts everyday life to history - the latter is "extra-

ordinary" and disrupts the flow of the former's "ordinary". But it may also be argued that history is also made by ordinary people through their activities and responses and the two are linked through specific elements and processes.

Bearing in mind the above aspects of everyday life, this chapter attempts to seek sense and significance in the mundane and ordinary processes of shopping, eating, chatting, playing and neighbouring in Marine Parade¹. All these activities play an important role in continually reproducing the multiethnic local community and local culture, and provides an understanding of their character and meaning. They also provide valuable insights into the links between the local and the wider society². As noted earlier, the emphasis in this chapter is on how members of different ethnic backgrounds interact and how differences are expressed and managed through everyday mechanisms. Given that interethnic residential living is historically unprecedented, these forms of daily interaction and negotiation may also be regarded as part of the process of "culture-building", "history-making" and, in the larger national context, of "nation-building".

¹ Dressing is another aspect of local public culture in which one significant aspect is ethnic minority representation. Ethnic dressing by minorities may be interpreted as a response to the forces of social change, and specifically as an assertion of their identity in the face of ethnic competition. Ethnic attire among Muslims also includes religious clothes (e.g. jubah, jilbab and purdah) - reflecting the influence of Islamic revival since the early 1970s and religion as part of ethnic identity and assertion among Malays.

² For an interesting account of the changes which have taken place within the everyday life of Singaporeans since the 1950s, see Chua (1989).

3.2 Shopping

The ethnic differentiation of trades in terms of ownership was noted in Chapter 2. However, this differentiation does not deny residents of any particular ethnic background the most basic goods and services in the local community. It is only because of the lack of variety and the non-availability of specific ethnic items that some residents shop in the historical Malay, Indian and Chinese places, especially for special occasions. Local shopping patterns are largely determined by practical considerations and only to a very limited extent by ethnic preferences. The purchase of dry goods is where an ethnic pattern does exist, in which Muslims tend to patronise Muslim-run shops while Chinese residents shop in those run by Chinese. This is because Muslim-run shops stock many kinds of Malay/Muslim halal foodstuffs not found in Chinese-run shops and vice-versa. Even so, this pattern is far from rigid as most residents buy from more than one source.

However, some residents claim ethnic discrimination:

The fishmonger say "ten dollars" so I bargain, bargain is alright what, eh? So long as reasonable price when you bargain. But he said "pigi lah, lu Kling" (go away, you Kling)... If don't want to sell, just say don't want to sell, don't have to say "Kling" (Deen).

In the market sometimes they treat their own kind first. Should be first come first served, eh? (Mrs Selvi).

Sometimes they are rude, they tell us to go away when we ask the price. Of course when we see something we want to buy, first of all we ask the price. I think sometimes they are rude to us because we are Indian (Mrs Mani).

This discrimination is a fusion of overlapping cultural, class and ethnic elements. Culturally, bargaining knows no ethnic boundaries, but it is those with tight budgets who tend to bargain while traders obviously prefer clients who do not.

Given that there are many more economically better-off Chinese customers (many of whom live in nearby private residential areas but market in Marine Parade) who rely on their regular traders for the choicest items without bargaining, some traders have developed the image of the rich non-bargaining Chinese customers and the poor bargaining Indian and, to a lesser extent, Malay clients. Uncertainty as to which standards apply - fixed or bargain prices - further adds complexity to the picture as they can vary from stall to stall. Nonetheless, the claim of discrimination appears most common among Indian residents, experienced through explicit name-calling in which the derogatory class- and race-based term ³ **Kling** is often used or implicitly through the trader's rude or unfair attitude.

However, those who feel discriminated against have their own strategies of coping. They boycott discriminating traders and establish familiar ties with other sellers in the belief that the latter will treat them well. Discrimination is also countered not only by meek avoidance but retort:

I don't care, I answer back. I tell him "You think I cannot afford it because I am Indian, is it?" You have to answer back or you get bullied ... Such people, I never buy from them again. I buy from the same people, then they know you and they won't cheat you (Karen).

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Kling is a class-based term that has long been in use, originating from the British colonial period when Indian convicts in clinking chains were brought to Malaya for public works. Another term used in addressing Indian Muslims, especially shopkeepers, is 'mamak'. Meaning "brother", it is variously viewed by some Indians as polite and others as rude and lacking in respect. Similarly, the use of the term **bhai** (meaning brother), used to refer to turbaned Sikhs, is variously viewed as polite or rude.

Retort as an active response enables individuals to regain control quickly and to assert themselves as equals in the relationship. Others who have experienced ethnic discrimination also make allowances for individual differences, such as the trader making a mistake:

I have ever experienced shopkeepers here who said "go away". But maybe it is because they mistake me for another lady who bargained and then don't buy. To some Chinese we Indians all look alike (Mrs Sundaram).

On the whole, both retort and avoidance, as immediate tactic and long-term strategy respectively, enable individuals to assert themselves and their power as local customers and as ethnic equals in business transactions. But as will be seen in Chapter 8, the claim of ethnic discrimination by Indians and minorities in general has its parallel in the wider economy.

3.3 Eating

In Chapter 2, I observed the following aspects of local food culture: high frequency of eating out, good public eating facilities and a huge variety of ethnic cooked foods. It may be added here that most people in Singapore will eat all kinds of ethnic foods. What is significant is that cross-cultural culinary exchange - a longstanding and dynamically evolving process - is now made all the more possible and accessible in the local multiethnic community. At the same time, religious criteria and cultural practices regarding food are nonetheless carefully observed. Foods still act as significant ethnic markers⁴, and Muslim and Chinese food markers are most dominant

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See Devasahayam (1988).

in public life. According to the Muslim halal/haram (permissible/forbidden) distinction, the consumption of pork is haram. However, pork is not taboo to most non-Muslims and for most Chinese it is in fact both a common everyday food item as well as a significant or sacred item on religious and special occasions. Chinese foods are therefore generally regarded by Muslims as not halal, including those without pork but which may be contaminated by utensils or the joint handling of pork and non-pork items. The juxtaposition of these two conflicting notions of pork turns it into the single most important ethnic boundary marker in public food culture between mainly Malays and Chinese residents, its significance especially emphasised by Muslims who are conscious of living in a Chinese-majority environment.

The public observance and enforcement of the Muslim pork taboo results in the separation of spaces into 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim' sections in public eating places such as the hawker-centre. Occasionally, foods may 'cross' or 'meet' at the same table, such as during peak periods. Such situations are usually regarded with a practical approach by both Muslims and non-Muslims. More seriously, this ethnic-religious differentiation means that Muslims and non-Muslims tend to eat separately. This often affects the maintenance of social ties among Muslims and non-Muslim friends and colleagues through commensality - a key feature of social interaction in Singapore. In the view of one Chinese resident:

We can eat their food but they cannot eat ours. We can always eat Malay food when we go out but it shouldn't be one way, so it is hard to go out together.

Some non-Muslims also said it is difficult to invite Muslims to their home for meals because the taboo is extended to utensils. However, the increasing availability of halal Chinese and other non-Malay foods in public eating places should help resolve this problem. The lack of interaction among Malays and non-Malays arising from separate eating spaces at the work place was also raised by several non-Muslim residents. They feel that mutual respect is sufficient and also consider a separate Muslim section with its own facilities an unfair privilege.

3.4 Chatting

For many residents chatting is the main activity through which they maintain relations with friends and neighbours in the community. Chat groups comprise mostly older working residents, the retired, homemakers and school youths. Their ethnic composition may be homogeneous or heterogeneous, but whatever their ethnic combination, of basic importance are the languages and dialects used for communication. Mixed dialect groups use common dialects or languages, such as Hokkien, Mandarin and English (for Chinese) and Tamil, English and Malay (for Indians). Ethnically mixed group members usually communicate in English and Malay. For the individual, the versatile switching of dialects and languages is normal practice⁵. It should also be noted here that language itself is an arena of cultural exchange, the most developed of which are Baba Malay (patois Malay), Singlish (patois English) and patois Hokkien.

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See Kuo (1980) and Platt (1980).

The situation of "chicken and duck talk", i.e. the inability to communicate because of a lack of common language, occurs mostly among the old who may not know more than one language or dialect. In recent years, the official promotion of Mandarin as the lingua franca among the Chinese has caused some unhappiness both among those Chinese who speak only English or dialect and among non-Chinese minorities. For minorities, this unhappiness arises mainly in work situations when Chinese colleagues speak in Mandarin rather than in English, the socially accepted language at work, and there have been charges of insensitivity towards minorities (see Chapter 7).

3.4.1 Ethnic Politics and Jokes

Heller singles out the conversation, which involves the exchange of ideas and clash of opinions, as a special "modality" of everyday life (1984:226). Commonly termed 'coffeeshop talk', this everyday conversation in the Singapore political context is regarded as a main measure of public opinion and public 'disquiet' over controversial political issues by both political elites and ordinary people⁶. As such, it also provides one of the most illuminating ways through which to understand the controversies and sensitivities of ethnic issues. But at the same time, political discussion can be highly charged with emotion and considered by some to be dangerous in a repressive political environment. It is there-

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At the time of fieldwork for example, a frequent topic of conversation was the arrests and rearrests of alleged Marxists conspiring to overthrow the state. The political environment has also spawned a plethora of 'underground' political jokes which spread rapidly by word of mouth.

fore not surprising that political discussion is characterised by its avoidance altogether in public or avoided with those those considered not on the same side. Said two residents:

Singapore nice city but city of fear. People don't dare to talk openly. Better not to talk politics, anything else can talk, can help, but not politics. Coffeeshop talk politics ok but not on record like you do. If involved in party politics then fine, see in the newspapers, how much involvement. But if not, what if say wrong thing? (Gan).

We do talk politics but if get angry, emotional when disagree, then better not or friendship also lost (Dzul).

In political discussions of ethnic issues, the avoidance approach is adopted towards those not of the same ethnic-politico background. Ethnic issues are considered sensitive and controversial by residents because they are usually viewed as benefiting one ethnic group at the expense of others or because they involve criticisms of other ethnic groups and powerful political forces. It is also a common assumption that members of a particular ethnic group will naturally side with his/her own group's interests. Raising such issues may therefore be costly to oneself and to valued relationships, as conflicting views and differences may cause misunderstanding, offense and tension. In the front-stage situations of everyday life, discussions of ethnic politics and issues are therefore handled with extreme care and considered safest when held with those who share the same political orientations and opinions. Fear of political consequences, such as charges of "inciting communalism", further adds to avoidance or caution. On the other hand, the discussion of political but non-ethnic issues does not divide along ethnic lines, for example the political leadership and styles of the ruling party. Other issues reveal differences within an ethnic

group, such as the role of Malay Members of Parliament (among Malays) and the promotion of Mandarin (among the Chinese).

A sensitive approach towards political issues is also applied when chatting about aspects of culture and identity. Residents like to ask, explain and clarify with each other elements and details of each other's cultures, and comparisons of similarities and differences may be made. However, care is taken not to make negative comments and judgements, such as about Chinese deities, or to suggest superiority and inferiority of races and religions. To do so risks offense and its consequences. For example, one chat group member was no longer on speaking terms with another because the latter criticized the Haj pilgrimage as a useless activity and a waste of money. Where one party feels the need to make comments and judgements, the risk of offense is circumvented with the preface "please don't mind", "frankly" or "please don't be angry". Such prefacing is also adopted in political discussions in anticipation of differences. Where differences seem irreconcilable, a swift switch to safer subjects is made.

A much safer topic of conversation than ethnic politics is the joke⁷. In the contexts of multiethnic living and sensitive ethnic politics, jokes and joking relationships assume an added significance: they provide a 'front-stage' avenue for residents

⁷ Life history forms the other safe topic of conversation. The intimate knowledge and personal disclosures involved in the relating of life histories among the old not only provide the basis of interethnic friendships between individuals. They also provide the oft occasion for the mutual learning and exchange about the commonalities and differences of social and historical experiences.

to maintain good relations by enabling them to keep a safe distance from seriously differing views. At the same time, they provide a safety valve through which to express different and potentially offensive, challenging or subversive views (Douglas 1975) in acceptable terms⁸. Joking relationships between residents of different ethnic backgrounds thus provide at once a measure of both the closeness and the distance between them. Honed to a fine skill, jokes may be even accompanied by witty repartee but they seldom exceed a limit that would turn a situation sour. The following illustrates the dynamics and subtlety of interethnic jokes and joking relationships:

Greg: ... You are from Boyan, you can carry flag with picture of a fish, and he can carry flag with pig head because he is Chinese. And the two of you can walk down the street together. Everyone will clap, ha! ha!

Ahmad: And you, a Baba, what flag can you carry?

Greg: ... You always play dum (Malay chess), can go dumb you know. Malay dum is dumb, can only move forwards, cannot go sideways or backwards. See lah, Chinese chess, can jump about all over the place, and Western chess, there are kings, queens and soldiers.

Ahmad: So you Chinese leap all about the place, really cunning, isn't it? (Turns to Rahman, pretends to be angry) See lah, he says Malays are dumb to play dum but he speaks Malay.

Greg: (Pretends to whisper to me but within earshot of the others). You know, Malay dum needs a lot of intelligence and sharpness to make the right move. Difficult because can only move forwards so have to think carefully first. Otherwise, get eaten up.

3.5 Playing

Play activities can be divided into two categories in so far as their ethnic identification and participation is

concerned. The first category (e.g.s. football, marbles, chess, biking, fishing, birdsinging and singing) is common to all and there are both ethnically mixed and homogeneous groups. Football is a particular favourite and is the main unifier across ethnic backgrounds. The rearing of birds is popular among both Chinese and Malay men and exchange involves friendly bird-singing sessions and discussions about birds and cage designs. Playing *dum* (Malay chess) is another favourite among Chinese and Malay men. Western pop music and singing is popular among the young and is one area where all mix well, although each ethnic group also has its own niches in popular music¹⁰. The second category of games is clearly identified as ethnic games whose participants are almost entirely of the same ethnic background, and include basketball, volleyball and *taichi* (Chinese) and *sepak takraw* (Malay). Organised teams in the first category (e.g. football) tend to have members of the same ethnic background, while mixed teams are usually formed on an adhoc basis for the duration of a game. In the second category ethnic boundaries are seldom crossed. Members of ethnically homogeneous teams are usually based on strong friendships. Both patterns of ethnic identification and

9

Males are more public in their leisure activities than females.

10

The composition and renditions of many pop bands show a multiethnic character. At the same time, the popularity of Malay rock music (with strong influence from Malaysia) and *dikir barat* (a form of choral singing) among Malay youths, *xinyao* (a form of ballad singing in Mandarin originating in Hongkong and Taiwan) among Chinese youths and disco *bhangra* (originating in London) among Punjabis are examples of recent trends in popular ethnic music.

participation in games are not new or limited to the local residential setting. School is a major arena for their occurrence and development but the locality is an additional arena which provides more opportunities for interethnic play itself and for negotiations over play. The latter leads us to a discussion of spatial relations.

3.5.1 Sharing Spaces

Suttles (1968) emphasises the territorial claims of different ethnic groups at play. In Marine Parade, everyone has a claim to public play areas but their limited facilities force youths to share and convert spaces for multiple use on the basis of certain principles.

On the whole, the sharing of spaces operates on a first-come-first-served basis. In impromptu games, those who come first are compelled to consider the others who also want to use the space - by either sharing grounds for simultaneous play (of same or different games), joining forces (if same game) or agreeing on the duration of a game. Those waiting are in turn expected to be patient for a game to be over. For organised teams which need space for regular practice, sharing tends to be negotiated, such as over day and time of play by each group. Such negotiations are facilitated by varying degrees of familiarity as friends, school-mates and co-residents. Mutual understanding of the nature of a game further adds to the tendency towards a give-and-take attitude and to negotiate. The following sum up these approaches to sharing and play:

Our Indian football team play at the basketball court on Tuesday and Thursday 7-10 pm while the Chinese basketball team play same days before 7 pm. What to do, no football field... we arrange like this because one time we were playing, they came and said they want the court, like want to fight, so we tell each other what we want (Raja).

We take turns to play, play against each other if got teams already or just join in if one or two people. So for example, another team wants to play and we are already there, then we play each game ten minutes, then the losing team gets out and the next team comes in. But we more or less know when who is playing. Like us, we play Friday night and Sunday morning ... I once fought with this guy at the court, he was damn inconsiderate. But what for want to fight? See who come first and wait. (Avtar).

Accommodation and negotiation thus allow groups to establish among themselves an overall order in the competing claims to limited space. They also result in a situation where there is no clearcut ethnic identification or monopolisation of spaces; any territorial claim is limited at most to the duration of the game and not as a permanent monopoly. Equally important, accommodation and negotiation overcome major tensions, including those which may be interpreted in ethnic terms. As one elderly resident observed: they may sit or play separately but they don't fight.

3.5.2 Ethnic Expletives

The absence of major tensions at play however, does not preclude arguments and verbal abuse during which ethnic expletives and derogatory language are frequently used¹¹. Common examples of ethnic swear words used by Malay youths on Chinese youths are Cina kui (Chinese devil), syaitan (Satan), Cina babi (Chinese pig), babi syaitan (pig devil) and anak jin (children of spirits); in return, Chinese boys heap abuse on Malay boys with babi Melayu (Malay pig), babi belacan (pig paste) as well

11

Other expletives are a) common expressions (e.g.s. idiot, bastard, bodoh (stupid), and goondu (dumbo); and b) those of a sexual nature (e.g.s. kan nin nia a chow cheebai (fuck your mother's rotten cunt), lan chiao (penis), puki tahi (fuck shit), butoh (male genitals). Many of these are local ethnic terms.

as huan ngah kui (aboriginal devils). The Eurasian is sometimes teased as chap cheng (mixed breed) or grago (shrimps; the term derives from Malaccan Portuguese fishermen) and the Indian is referred to as kling and orh pueh (black skin).

Ethnic expletives reveal the complexities of cross-cultural differences and exchanges. They derive from certain ethnic markers, perceptions and stereotypes, most significant among which relate to religion and food. Among them, the metaphor babi (pig) is the most potent and quintessential of ethnic insults. As noted in Section 3.2, pork is a forbidden consumption item in Islam but a favoured object of offering in Chinese folk belief. In teases, disputes and tensions during play, its powers are summoned and directed at a core dimension of the other's ethnic identity - religion - and is meant to hit where it hurts most. Used by Chinese on Malays, it implies the height of contamination and blasphemy by turning the latter's taboo onto themselves; used by Malays on Chinese, it represents the latter's religious infidelity and ultimate pollution. Ethnic insults also make implicit comparisons and judgements of religious practices. References to syaitan (Satan) and jin (spirits) by Malay youths juxtapose their worship of God with what is perceived as Chinese superstition and devotion to deities and devils. The same perception is also held of Hinduism with its various deities, and Indians are also sometimes referred to by Malays as anak jin. Some Chinese youths, unable to retaliate by insulting Allah, hurl abuse at Malays with babi belacan (pig paste; suggesting foulness, belacan being a pungent Malay food ingredient), and turning the favourite Chinese term kui (devil, ghosts) back against them.

The degree of sensitivity and seriousness with which ethnic insults are made and received depends on each situation and level of familiarity between parties. In the first place, they do not assume the seriousness of hate abuse. In most instances of friendly joking/bantering and exciting play, they are not meant to be taken so seriously that the situation turns sour; instead, they require an attitude of humour appropriate to the situation for mixed play to be possible. Indeed, in certain situations the free-flowing exchange of abuse and obscenities helps to dissipate tensions:

The Chinese call the Malays *babi* or *babi belacan* and the Malays also call the Chinese *babi* or *China babi*. And if they scold us, usually they call us *kling*, both Chinese and Malay boys. I don't answer back, what for answer back? But if can't stand, then call them back *babi* lah! In Singapore, *babi* is famous! (Ganeson).

Finally, youths gathering to chat or sing sometimes invite suspicion and stereotyping by others. The most common negative images of youths in Singapore are that Malay groups consist of drug addicts and Chinese groups consist of gangsters or foul-mouthed 'Ah Bengs' and 'Ah Sengs' (common Chinese male names) who easily start 'staring incidents' (fights by claiming that they are being stared at). However, this stereotyping is not strong in the local community because of familiarity and the knowledge that they are locals who are not likely to cause "trouble" within their own living environment. Any such cases are mostly blamed on outsiders. The youths themselves also tend to behave for fear of attracting the attention of family members and neighbours, preferring to go out of the home ground for disapproved activities.

3.6 Neighbouring

It has been pointed out in Chapter 1 that individual persons may maintain cordial or close relations with each other even though the groups to which they belong are socially apart. In the local multiethnic community, interethnic neighbouring is a major form of such relations. "Good" interethnic neighbouring is also a key front-stage arena of the presentation of self to others and of identity management.

In Marine Parade the nature and extent of neighbouring varies widely, depending on factors such as residents' statuses (e.g. schooling, working) and sense of privacy. Neighbouring may be best seen as a continuum of relationships which range from hostility or non-existence at one end to friendly and close relations at the other. Good or close neighbours may also be kin or friends. The most common forms of neighbouring are greeting and casual chatting in everyday life and the exchange of gifts on festive occasions¹². Neighbours seldom visit each other on a regular basis¹³.

12

Mann (1954-5), contrasts 'manifest' and 'latent' forms of neighbouring in which the former is characterised by 'overt' acts such as visiting and the latter by an abstinence from such acts in normal circumstances but there is willingness to help in times of crisis. Firth (1973) points to the reduction of uncertainty as a theme of greetings and exchange and stresses the establishment of relative status positions (pp.324, 327). Chang (1975) compares ethnic variations in neighbouring, i.e. by each ethnic group, and shows that it embodies different social meanings for different ethnic groups. Wee (1986) notes the contrast between 'manifest' neighbourliness valued by Malays and Indians and the more 'latent' behaviour of Chinese neighbours but whose potential for positive action in crises can be easily underestimated.

13

The HDB 1981 Sample Household Survey also shows casual conversation as the most common form of neighbouring, followed by social visits, exchange of food on festive occasions, joint activities, offer of help in personal or financial problems and

(Footnote Continued)

The above forms of neighbouring relationships apply both to residents in general and to interethnic neighbouring in particular. While it is true that the tendency for all ethnic groups is for intra-ethnic neighbouring (Wong et.al. 1985a, 1985b), it does not preclude interethnic neighbouring¹⁴. In fact, neighbours are often first identified by their ethnic background and whether they "get along". Some of the closest neighbouring ties (which are also friendships) between residents of different ethnic backgrounds are between school youths who attend the same schools or^{who} interact "downstairs"¹⁵. They chat, play, help each other with schoolwork and participate together in school and other social activities. Close friends may confide in and compare with each other culturally different problems (e.g. parental control) or compare social positions (e.g. the education and marriage of women). Among close friends, one may also be able to "violate" one's own

(Footnote Continued)

help in childcare. However, beyond casual conversation, the other more "intensive" forms of neighbouring decreases drastically (Wong, et.al. 1985b:495).

14

Wong's studies also show that Malays tend to have more interaction with neighbours than the Chinese and Indians but are mainly intra-ethnic based. A study by Riaz Hassan (1977) shows interethnic neighbouring as largely limited to exchange of greetings and chatting but favourable interethnic attitudes and increased interethnic contact compared to pre-resettlement (pp.102-3). The Report of the Committee on Community Living (1989) notes an overall rise in the level of interethnic neighbouring across all ethnic groups in public housing estates (p.41). A limited study by Choo (1977) shows overall little ethnocentricity for chats, exchange of gifts and marriage invitations but more for borrowing things and money, help during illness, confiding of problems and seeking of advice.

15

At the same time many school youths mention the existence of ethnic cliques in school and that their close friends are mostly of the same ethnic backgrounds as themselves although this is not due to deliberate choice.

ethnic norms, such as breaking the fasting rule or the pork food taboo or dating members of the opposite sex.

In general, residents of different ethnic backgrounds all share common expectations of 'good' neighbouring even as social distance is maintained. It minimally involves greetings, casual chatting, gift exchange on special occasions and help in times of emergency. Greeting is a minimum sign of recognition, face-giving and respect; a neighbour who fails to greet is considered 'unfriendly' or 'snobbish'. Even those who are unable to communicate in a common language are expected to smile, greet and even use sign language. Greeting is often accompanied by the casual chat which, however, should not infringe on privacy (e.g. by being a 'busybody' or through gossip about others). In fact, there is the belief that neighbours of a different ethnic background are less likely to gossip than co-ethnics. The expectation of help in times of emergency is implied in the common phrase 'neighbours are near, relatives are far away'. The following sum up the expectations of residents about good neighbouring:

It does not matter what race. The question is whether you can get along with them or not, whether they are sombong (proud) or not. Everybody is a human being, what is there to be sombong about? (Khalid).

Live in the same place, must smile and greet each other, say a few words, that should be. How to live as neighbours if don't even do that? But get involved in other people's business, no... Of course we should exchange food and greetings on big occasions, that is a culture we Chinese have developed for so long (Ah Sin).

For minorities, good neighbouring is understandably felt all the more to be necessary:

I was the only Malay on my floor when I first came, but I made sure I knew everybody on my floor. I felt good that way (Karim).

Good interethnic neighbouring minimally ensures a sense of familiarity and security. Greetings and casual chats, no matter how brief or mundane, regularly reaffirm and lubricate this mutual sense of well-being. The significance of casual chatting in facilitating cross-cultural exchange should also not be underestimated, as they frequently involve the exchange of information on matters such as childcare, cuisine, medicines and practical advice. However, it is gift exchange that is the single most significant symbolic expression and culmination of good neighbouring.

3.6.1 Gift Exchange

Gifts are exchanged between neighbouring families on the auspicious ethnic occasions of Hari Raya Puasa, Lunar New Year, Deepavali and Christmas and fall into two patterns of exchange: giving on one's own ethnic occasion and receiving on both one's own and others' occasions, and giving and receiving on others' occasions. Symbolic visits may also accompany gift exchange on these occasions. The gift itself varies in content but often derives from the giver's ethnic culture, and food is the most popular item. At the same time the receiver's religious sensitivities are carefully considered. Muslims usually give cooked food items such as curries and cakes. The non-Muslim gives the Muslim non-cooked and non-porkbased food items, such as fruit and nuts, or non-food gifts such as decorative items. Many Chinese neighbours may give the symbolic red packet or oranges. The following illustrates the intricacies of gift exchange:

We don't visit but we exchange gifts with this Malay family and this Chinese family. Like for Christmas this Malay family will give us something and we give them a present. Then Hari Raya the same thing. So like last

Christmas I gave them some glasses and the Christmas before I gave a floral arrangement. So when Hari Raya comes, I will have to think of something suitable. But not food because they don't eat our food. They are afraid of lard. Even if you assure them they may worry about the utensils used. They give us cooked food. And they know some Chinese don't eat beef so they usually give chicken curry (Mrs Li).

During Deepavali, we give our Malay neighbour thosai, chicken curry and sweets. For the chicken, I ask the Malay man to slaughter because I know they are quite particular about the food and I tell my neighbour how I bought the chicken so they can eat it. When Hari Raya, they give us their satay (Mrs Menon).

Here, Mauss' (1990) notion of the gift provides useful insights into how this intricate gift exchange serves to maintain good interethnic relations. According to Mauss, a gift is not free but compulsory. It obliges the giver to give, the recipient to receive and to reciprocate with another gift. This sets up a perpetual cycle of exchange in which the giver and recipient are engaged in a permanent commitment to each other to reciprocate. Each individual derives a value from it, and their interests combined make a system of exchange that is simultaneously social, interpersonal and symbolic. The gift exchange is therefore effectively a moral contract and a system of maintaining relations of solidarity, on pain of warfare. By manipulating gift-giving, good relations and alliance may be established, stabilised and lubricated.

In Marine Parade gift exchange among neighbours of different ethnic backgrounds appears widely practised. Although voluntary, it is considered by many to be compulsory for good

neighbouring relations, on pain of being seen as unfriendly and of help not forthcoming when needed. The exchange binds ethnically different but equal neighbours together in a moral contract to establish a sense of solidarity and to set up an alliance to prevent hostility or unfriendliness and for mutual help in times of need. The gift conveys messages of respect, goodwill, peace, tolerance and trust among neighbours and mutually obligates them to reciprocate and maintain them. That gift-exchange takes place on special ethnic occasions all the more symbolises and reinforces these meanings and intentions. Pak Bachok sums up the essence of gift exchange thus:

This Chinese family, we give them curry. And what they give us, even though we cannot eat, we accept. Like the melon seeds, too slippery to eat but we also accept. They respect us, that is why they give and we accept. We also respect them, that is why we give and they accept.

3.7 Prejudice and Stereotyping

Ethnic interaction inevitably raises the complex issues of prejudice and stereotyping. Although not limited to the local community, prejudice and stereotype nonetheless may inform its everyday activities and some are formed or affected by them.

Prejudice and stereotypes are expressed at both societal and interpersonal levels in which selective and exaggerated perceptions of group traits take place. Rooted in history, social structure, culture and psychology, stereotypes are, at the same time, subject to change (Allport 1958). In the Singapore context, the following are common ethnic stereotypes held of each major group by others, many of which are of long-standing: Chinese - aggressive, hardworking, competitive, materialistic, superstitious, conservative, individualistic, family-oriented, practical, foul-mouthed, uncivic-minded;

Malays - jealous, oversensitive, tolerant, extreme in religion, warm, friendly, gracious, gentle, easily contented, side own kind without question, cliquish, family-oriented, conservative; Indians - cliquish, conservative, cunning, verbose, family-oriented; and Eurasians - happy-go-lucky, laid back¹⁷. It is significant that both negative and positive stereotypes are held. It is also significant that some of these stereotypes are also held by members of the stereotyped groups. Some Chinese agree with the stereotypes of the Chinese as hard-working, competitive, materialistic, practical, foul-mouthed and superstitious. Some Malays consider Malays as a whole friendly, tolerant, gracious, easily contented and family-oriented; while some Indians agree that Indians are family-oriented and conservative.

While the aim here is not to explore the basis of each stereotype, it should be noted that the local multiethnic community and locally based activities appear to provide the grounds for the formation and confirmation of certain cultural and religious prejudices and stereotypes. 'Friendliness' and 'cliquishness' (of Malays) are examples of cultural behaviour largely derived from local residential living. Regarding religious prejudice, it has been shown earlier how it is often expressed through ethnic expletives by youths. The 'superstitious' Chinese is directly derived from their frequent local religious activities. In contrast, the Malays' 'religious

17

Also see Chiew & Tan's study (1990) on stereotypes. For an earlier study of stereotyping by Chinese university students, see Lind (1974).

extremism' is largely derived from external factors, such as from certain Islamic groups and practices in the Middle East and in neighbouring Malaysia, which are associated with the subjugation of women, the enforcement of archaic laws and practices, insensitivity to the rights of non-Muslims, blind affiliation with those of the same religious faith and inability to reason beyond Islamic religious criteria. On the other hand, intolerance and extremism is also associated with evangelical Christians (mainly Chinese) by members of various ethnic backgrounds (see Chapters 4 and 8).

Related to stereotyping is the phenomena of negative experiences based on prejudice and stereotype. Almost all ethnic minority informants claim to have had at least one such experience vis-a-vis a Chinese, such as being singled out, looked down upon or ignored in the local community, at school, work or in a public place on the basis of race or ethnicity. Discrimination experienced by Indian residents during shopping was discussed in Section 3.2. One Indian resident told me how some people would hold their noses or not enter the lift when he was in it. However, such experiences and incidents also occur between members of minority groups. Many Indian-Muslim informants, for example, claim that Malays despise them despite their common religion.

At the same time as informants listed many of the above stereotypes or said they have had 'bad' ethnic experiences, they claim to refrain from stereotyping themselves. Here it is significant that most stressed that they encountered "too many types" within the same ethnic category and the same trait in individuals "of all races", so that they could not and would

not "really" generalise. Many also made a distinction between the individual person and the group and claimed to prefer to see people as individuals rather than as members of groups. Those who recalled 'bad' experiences with others stressed and qualified with "not all, only some", "sometimes only" and "a few should not spoil the whole group". Some further recalled positive experiences to counterbalance the negative ones. Only in two cases (theft and spouse's infidelity) did the informants explicitly express prejudice. Finally, a reason for their ambivalence or even rejection of some of these stereotypes is that "things are changing so fast" especially in education and economic performance. Hence for example, the stereotype of Malays as easily contented appears to be no longer strongly believed; indeed, several informants, both non-Malays and Malays, view it as a matter of time before Malays "catch up".

The complex picture of stereotypes, including the refusal to stereotype or the ambivalence and changing views about stereotypes, may be attributed to the contrasts and challenges posed by the diversity of behavioural characteristics encountered both within the local environment as well as outside it. The result is that while some confirm, others contradict beliefs. This may be more true for younger than older residents as the former tend to be more directly exposed to the diversities of a rapidly changing society, such as at school and work. It also appears that the economy where competition most occurs, rather than the local community, is the dominant site of stereotyping, particularly those pertaining to economic culture (see Chapter 8).

3.8 Discussion

The everyday activities of shopping, eating, chatting, playing and neighbouring may be mundane but are significant in reproducing the local community and manifesting wider social relations. As significant arenas of interaction, they are characterised by a complex interplay of ethnic and interethnic dimensions. In shopping, practicality and affordability are the principal bases of purchasing patterns but ethnic discrimination in business transactions is perceived by some Indians. Eating is characterised not only by a dynamic cross-cultural culinary exchange but also by the separate social-spatial relations based on the Muslim food criteria. In chat groups, membership and language reflect the ethnic diversity and complex means of communication. While politics is a favourite subject, sensitive and controversial issues of an ethnic nature are best avoided with those not of the same ethnic-politico background. Among youths at play, the ethnic association of games and composition of teams, spatial relations and sociolinguistics are the main aspects of ethnic interaction. Tensions arising from competing claims to limited space are dissipated by accommodations and negotiations which regulate each group's time claim to the space, as well as by jokes and verbal abuse during play. Accommodation and negotiation also remove any clearcut ethnic monopoly of common spaces and permanent marking of territory as ethnically exclusive. Good interethnic neighbouring is expected and expressed by greeting, chatting, help in times of crisis and gift exchange. Stereotypes inform and are formed by everyday activities, especially those of a cultural-religious nature. But the picture is a

complex one. On the one hand, negative stereotypes are held by members of one group by others and claims are made of experiences of discrimination and prejudice; on the other hand, positive stereotypes are also held, positive experiences are recalled and claims are made of a personal refusal to stereotype. Residents also do not see stereotypes as fixed, especially in the rapidly changing context, or of their being limited to members of one particular group only. Together, these features point to two simultaneous patterns of everyday behaviour: ethnic boundary maintenance of different ethnic communities through material and symbolic markers, and interaction among members of these ethnic communities as co-residents in the local multiethnic environment.

Living in a multiethnic setting, cultural differences necessarily lead to the set up or emphasis of ethnic markers as a form of identity management. For minorities, such markings are all the more accentuated. Ethnic boundary maintenance and ethnic interaction in local everyday life also pose problems among which perceived economic discrimination against minorities, separate commensality, ethnic politics, religious prejudice and stereotyping are the most significant.

However, while the local shared setting may provide the grounds for ethnic separation and the occurrence of the above problems, it simultaneously requires residents' ethnic interaction. The sharing of facilities and living in proximity require that interethnic differences and tensions be managed or resolved. Local life, based on personal and small group interaction, also enables some degree of constant interethnic exposure, exchange and clarification. Sensitivity and

practicality (eating); equal treatment (shopping); avoidance and discretion (chatting); accommodation and negotiation (playing) and friendliness, equality and solidarity (neighbouring) - these are principal approaches and means by which ethnic differences and tensions are expected to be managed.

It is not suggested that some of these approaches, such as the avoidance of discussion of ethnic politics, are themselves free of problems or able to resolve the deep-seated problems of the wider society. Rather, they enable local multiethnic living to be at all possible; implicit in them is the realisation of the otherwise unsatisfactory, uncertain and unpleasant consequences of shared everyday living. The approaches enable residents to face and reduce areas of possible apprehension, misunderstanding and conflict arising from ethnic differences and problems. They also help nurture an overall sense of familiarity which provides assurance, security and friendliness and for overall order to be maintained. In short, these approaches form the etiquette, civilities and rules of a civic order for the local multiethnic community. As community culture, this civic order contains those shared and similar approaches, values and meanings necessary for everyday ethnic interaction. It may be added that cross-cultural exchanges, no matter how seemingly minute or limited to certain activities, also occur in the processes of interaction and are incremental towards a multiethnic culture. Language and cuisine are main arenas where such exchanges have long been taking place, but the local multiethnic community provides further conditions and possibilities for their development.

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In summary, everyday life in the local multiethnic community is characterised by two simultaneous processes: ethnic boundary maintenance and ethnic interaction. The former is necessitated by the need to maintain ethnic distinctiveness and identity in the midst of multiethnic living, and the latter by the need to maintain the viability of multiethnic living itself. While the 'ethnic' continues to be emphasised, the 'interethnic' needs to be constantly dealt with. The next chapter continues to examine this dialectic between 'ethnic' and 'interethnic' in the highly symbolic context of special ethnic occasions.

CHAPTER 4

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the ethnic and interethnic dimensions of selected special occasions which occur in Marine Parade. These occasions are "special" (in the residents' own terminology) in that they are, like rituals, highly patterned actions and performances which set them apart from the flow of everyday life. They are also "special" because of their "alerting quality" through rules which bind and mark them out as significant and therefore require attention and appropriate observance (Lewis 1980). Their repetitive occurrence within the local community's regular and annual lifecycles render them part of its "public" life in two senses: their social recognition and transmission, independent of the individuals who perform them, and their location and expression. They are therefore constituent parts of the community's public and cultural environment which residents must respond to in one way or another.

The topic of ritual is subject to constant discussion and debate (Leach 1964, Durkheim 1971, Sperber 1975, Skorupski 1986) but there is little dispute over its symbolic nature: ritual is social action that is highly patterned and embellished to represent, express and communicate belief and meaning. Leach (1964), for example, in referring to rituals as the "aesthetic frill" element of an act, points out that they are "symbolic actions, representations" which "for the living individuals in a society... are part of the total system of

interpersonal communication within the group" (p.12). Turner, who regards a symbol as the smallest unit of ritual, spells out three properties of dominant ritual symbols: 1) condensation (of many things and actions represented in a single formation), 2) unification of disparate significata (through their common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact and thought) and 3) polarization of meaning into the ideological pole (the moral and social order of society) and the sensory pole (the natural and physiological phenomena), and emphasises the ideological meanings of ritual symbols (1967:28). At the societal level therefore, special occasions and their rituals express the essence and distinctiveness of a particular society, through explicit symbols and implicit meanings and the social relationships involved. They order collective thoughts and actions, stimulate thought and stir feelings and emotions, reflect traditions and values. Traditionally, most discussions of rituals assume a context of an isolated or culturally homogeneous society whose members share or are expected to share common knowledge of these rituals. Symbols in complex societies are also well studied. The relevant question here is: what is the significance of rituals in a multiethnic society?

In an ethnically heterogeneous context special occasions provide the opportunity for individuals and groups which are normally segregated to interact (Frankenberg 1978:145). All are drawn into them, whether as actors or spectators, "givers" or "receivers"; yet, their rituals and meanings are not necessarily shared by all. Thus, if rituals say something about the essence of a community, what do they say to non-

members, and what do these others in turn think of them and the community represented? Do people always understand the cultures of others in their own terms and interpretive constructs or do they attempt to cross boundaries? Do they judge on the basis of appearance or do they comprehend meanings behind the symbolic forms? What notions and stereotypes of each community emerge from interethnic contact at these rituals? What similarities and contrasts are confronted and comparisons made, and how are contrasts and conflicts of meanings dealt with? In short, what is the wider scope of rituals and the full weight of their significance in a multicultural setting? Asking these questions about ritual in such a context opens the way to another dimension of symbolic knowledge - the cross-cultural - and provides a broader understanding of their meanings and implications.

A.P. Cohen (1985) provides a useful approach to such an understanding of rituals through the concept of "symbolic boundary". This concept is based on Barth's (1964) view of social boundary and Leach's (1964) concept of symbolic ritual. Noting the significance of boundaries in demarcating a community and in heightening its members' awareness of and sensitivity to it, A.P. Cohen points out the efficacy of ritual in providing the capacity for the experience of communality, heightening of group consciousness and multivalence of community (1985:50-57). He writes:

... ritual occupy[ing] a prominent place in the repertoire of symbolic devices through which community boundaries are affirmed and reinforced... Both in its social and psychological consequences, ritual confirms and strengthens social identity and people's sense of social location: it is an important means through which people experience community (ibid:50).

Rituals thus possess two qualities because of their powerful emotional content: they allow the experience of community and act as symbolic markers of boundaries in relation to others. The efficacy of ritual in boundary maintenance lies in its creation of "a sense of belonging, of identity - and, by the same token, of difference from others (ibid:53). In other words rituals allow members to communicate with each other and at the same time communicate with outsiders. Cohen emphasises the oppositional character of the symbolic construction of community at its boundaries: "the boundaries are relational rather than absolute; that is, they mark the community in relation to other communities" (ibid:58). As a symbolic marker, ritual distinguishes the community from the surrounding society, sometimes all the more effectively because the symbolism is unintelligible to the others.

A.P. Cohen also argues that the symbolic expression of a community and its boundaries become salient as its actual geo-social boundaries are undermined, blurred or weakened in the context of profound social changes (a point also emphasised earlier by Epstein [1978]):

"The greater the pressure on communities to modify their structural forms ... the more are they inclined to reassert their boundaries symbolically [emphasis author's] by imbuing these modified forms with meaning and significance which belies their appearance. In other words, as the structural bases of boundary become blurred, so the symbolic bases are strengthened through 'flourishes and decorations', 'aesthetic frills' and so forth" (ibid:44).

Furthermore, depending on the context, such responses may take the form of symbolic reversals in symbolic competitions (ibid:58). Citing Schwimmer (1972), A. P. Cohen notes that in the area of ethnic relations, the symbolic reversals of ritual, in marking out boundaries, have generated

'symbolic competition' in which the apparently disadvantaged group rejects the symbolic code in which it is disadvantaged, and replaces it by its own in which it is relatively powerful or to which it has exclusive access (ibid:60).

Bearing in mind the above points about rituals in symbolising ethnic community and competition, the following discussion focuses on selected special ethnic occasions in Marine Parade. The selection (see Appendix 2 for a complete list) is mainly based on their frequency of mention by residents as significant events which represent a particular ethnic community or which occur within the community (although, as will be seen, many of them stretch far beyond the local context). They fall into two categories: rites of passage and calendrical occasions.

4.2 Malay Occasions (see Plates 13 - 22)

4.2.1 The Malay Wedding

Among all the special occasions which take place locally, the Malay wedding occurs most frequently. The following describes the weekend wedding of Ali and Zaleha ¹.

The *istiadat hantar belanja* (sending of dowry and gifts) and *upacara akad nikah* (solemnisation) ceremonies took place on Friday night at Zaleha's home where relatives from both sides were gathered as witnesses. Solemnisation by the *kadi*

1

I feel that this rite of passage is better captured through a personal account rather than general description. Ali and Zaleha first met two years ago. A year ago, Ali's mother had visited Zaleha's home for wedding negotiations on the wedding date, gifts and size of dowry. The wedding was held on one convenient weekend to "simplify matters, cut costs and accommodate friends and relatives who live faraway, unlike the old days".

(marriage official) was followed by the exchange of rings and gifts², reading of the Koran and a meal. Gifts consisted mainly of attire and accessories presented in intricate gubahan (cloth-folding) forms. The berinai (henna application) and tukar pakaian (costume changes) took place the following day at Zaleha's home. The latter³ has grown highly elaborate in recent years and forms part of a hired package which also includes the pelamin (dais), the Mak Andam (beautician and maid-in-waiting) and photo-taking or video filming. Throughout the afternoon, the couple posed in a variety of costumes on the pelamin. Javanese, Buginese and Malay costumes reflected the Nusantara origins of Singapore Malays, while the national and cosmopolitan outlooks were captured in the National/Miss Singapore, Chinese, Western, Japanese and Egyptian costumes. Meanwhile, separate rewang (wedding preparations) based on gotong royong (cooperation) took place throughout the evening in the rented void-deck spaces of Ahmad's and Zaleha's homes.

Guests streamed in and out at the kenduri (feast) at both void-decks throughout the next day. They included workmates, relatives, friends and neighbours many of whom were co-villagers before resettlement and the kenduri was an opportunity to meet again. Guests gave gifts and each received an egg as a gesture of thanks as well as of fertility. The atmosphere

² Solemnisation took place after both partners were asked separately if they wanted to marry each other. Gifts from the groom were checked to ensure that they were as promised and were then displayed in the bridal chamber.

³ Historically, textiles and clothes have a special place in Malay culture, with symbolic values and status.

was lively and informal, enhanced by the colourful ethnic costumes of most Malay guests and Malay music by a hired band. The arrival of the **hadrah** troupe, a popular item in recent years, made an impressive sight. Dressed in traditional Malay costumes, the troupe sang Koranic verses and well wishes to the loud sounds of **kompong** (hand drums) which echoed throughout the neighbourhood. The arrival of the **sireh dara** (sireh leaves, symbolising virginity) from Zaleha's heralded the time for Ali to fetch the bride. As **raja sehari** (king for the day), Ali was attired in a regal yellow Malay costume and was chaperoned by a bestman, friends bearing **bunga manggar** (palm blossoms) and a busload of relatives and friends. Both on departure from home and upon arrival at the bride's, he walked ceremoniously through the void-deck and carpark to the deafening drumming of the **hadrah**.

After Ali had cleared the symbolic "obstacles"⁴, the **bersanding** ceremony proceeded in which relatives sprinkled petals and rice (fertility symbols) on the couple seated on the "throne". As queen for the day, Zaleha was dressed in matching costume. After much phototaking, the couple proceeded to the void-deck where they were blessed by Zaleha's parents. The **kompong** drums again sounded upon their departure and arrival at Ali's. The couple was first welcomed by a performance of **silat** (Malay martial art form) before proceeding to Ali's flat for the **bertandang** ceremony (similar to the **bersanding**). Following a change of attire and more photo-taking, the couple returned

4

The Mak Andam prevented Ali from ascending the dais until he had replied to her witty teasing.

to Zaleha's home where they would live until they obtained their own flat. Friends and relatives helped to clean up the void-deck after the last guests had left.

4.2.2 Hari Raya Puasa⁵

Hari Raya Puasa celebrates the end of Ramadan, a month of forbearance, endurance and self-denial through fasting and abstinence from worldly pleasures. One outstanding feature during Ramadan is the conduct of *terawih* (evening prayers) in some void-decks, organised by a Muslim block or neighbourhood committee. The *gotong royong* (cooperation) and solidarity of *terawih* are expressed not only in group prayers but also in its organisation and the sharing of food at the *kenduri arawah* (feast) on the last evening. This community spirit is also expressed in the morning *sembahyang raya* (celebration prayers) in a huge marquee. Organised by the Marine Parade Branch Committee of the Singapore Islamic Missionary Society, this arrangement is to avoid overcrowded mosques and for those who wish to pray within their residential community. Without fail, every Muslim who attends the prayers is dressed in ethnic or religious attire. Wearing ethnic clothes is also virtually a "must", both on the first day when the rituals of giving blessings and asking for forgiveness are performed between

5

Hari Raya Haji and the sending off of pilgrims to Mecca are other events which draw the ethnic community together. Hari Raya Haji commemorates the event when the prophet Ibrahim displayed his willingness to sacrifice his son, Ismail, to fulfil Allah's wish and is marked by prayers and the slaughter of sheep at mosques. In Marine Parade, it is expressed by mass prayers and the wearing of ethnic or religious attire by young and old. In the latter event, pilgrims are given an official send-off by Marine Parade's community leaders.

family members and relatives, and on visits throughout the following two weeks.

Another outstanding feature of Hari Raya is the "light-up" in which thousands of colourful lights illuminate the entrances, windows and corridors of virtually every Muslim home, collectively turning the whole estate into a twinkling maze. It is said that from the lights one can tell how many Malays live in a community and which blocks they occupy. In recent years, the lights have grown more elaborate in their arrangements and are switched on for longer. The Raya night market and Eid-Fitri Night of Malay dances and silat (organised by the Marine Parade Community Centre's Malay Cultural Section) add even further atmosphere and flavour to the occasion.

The sense of Malay community on this special occasion is not limited to the local community; it extends to Geylang Serai⁶, the historical Malay "place". Here, Malays from all over Singapore come to shop for various items such as household goods, foods, decorations and clothes for Hari Raya (as well as on ordinary days). In recent years, Hari Raya also provides the occasion for the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) to promote Geylang as a tourist attraction. It sells Geylang as the representation of "Malayness" and the Malay component of Singapore's multiculturalism, through a light-up of the main street with Malay symbols such as mosques, kites, ketupat (rice in coconut leaf), keris (dagger), khat (Koranic inscriptions)

⁶ To a lesser extent, Malays and other Muslims also congregate in the Arab Street vicinity where the focus is the Sultan Mosque.

and bunga manggar (palm blossoms). In 1990, the atmosphere of both the occasion and the ethnic representation in Geylang was especially heightened with the overlap of Hari Raya Puasa, the Malay Cultural Month and the opening of the Malay Village. The Cultural Month⁷ was an impressive display of Malay culture through arts, crafts, cuisine, etc., held mainly in the Village which is modelled after village structures found in old Geylang before they were demolished for HDB developments. During this period, glittering Geylang thronged with huge crowds and throbbed with exciting activities.

Both the Malay wedding and Hari Raya Puasa voice several meanings about being Malay, both to Malays themselves and to others. This "Malayness" is directly related to two intertwining senses: local community and ethnic community.

Both occasions provide the most visual evidence of a sense of belonging to the local community. The holding of weddings within home grounds may be rooted in past village forms which no longer exist but the idea itself - that the home is the appropriate site for this rite - remains largely intact. "Home" in the form of the HDB flat, being unable to accommodate the occasion's activities, is conveniently extended to void-deck space. Thus, far from disappearing, the rewang, kenduri, silat, kompong and other public displays of a Malay wedding

7

In conjunction with the Singapore 25th Anniversary Celebrations, a Culture Night of Malay cultural items was also held in Marine Parade, organised by the Malay Cultural Groups of the four community centres in the Marine Parade Group Representative Council.

form an integral part of the home's auspicious activities. Similarly, dressing, lighting and mass prayers form an indispensable part of local celebration without which the sense of Hari Raya would be incomplete. Mass prayers under a marquee approximate the *surau* (village mosque), while lights provide a homely ambience of coziness and warmth. Indeed lighting has become more elaborate and is switched on for longer in recent years. Furthermore, underlying these occasions are local organisational and social structures. Local committees initiate prayers, gatherings or cultural shows while the kinship and friendship groups behind many a *rewang* are local-based or local in origin. Through their efforts, individuals and groups both inject meanings into and acquire meaning from their sense of local identity and belonging.

At the same time, these occasions, bearing much cultural and religious content, are also Malay events which involve members of the Malay ethnic community as kin, friends, neighbours, co-residents and co-religionists. For individuals, they provide opportunities to renew kinship and friendship ties, celebrate through cultural expressions or reiterate religious convictions. At the structural level, they bring together different levels of meanings - individual, family and community - and aspects - religious and cultural - of being Malay. Through them, the essence and sense of unity and belonging to the Malay community is regularly experienced, elaborated and revived. Cumulatively, these occasions represent and

express the content of Malay community and identity⁸. Beyond the local setting, Geylang, with its historical background and contemporary character, is the spatial, material and symbolic crystallisation of this "Malayness"⁹. Overall therefore, the resultant local and general picture of Malays is one of a highly visible and cohesive ethnic community bound by strong social, cultural and religious ties.

As symbols of ethnic community, these occasions "speak" not only to the community's members but also to non-members. Hence, apart from group celebration and solidarity, they take on an added dimension: the display of ethnicity to others. Resident Ros put it simply and succinctly: "we do all these things so that people know about us Malays".

The wedding in particular forms an outstanding representation of Malayness to non-Malays, and also shapes their perception of the community. The following captures the range of non-Malay responses to this event:

There is at least one most weekends, and it is usually on Sundays so we can hardly have any rest. They are very noisy. Like last week, they even had dancing at night, and the night before already the music started. For such a special occasion, they should hold it in the community hall or hotel, why in the void-deck? The void-deck is for residents to sit or walk past. What kind of wedding is it anyway, with people looking and walking past? (James).

I have been to a Malay wedding.... I tell you it is a waste of time and money. I told my husband our \$20 gift wasted. You know what they serve? About seven of us, they just put four simple dishes for us to share. I don't think they are even serious about their weddings. So we

8

See Nurliza Yusof (1985/86) for Malay perceptions and articulations of identity through religion, language and adat (culture).

9

See Devasahayam (1984/85).

have never gone for their weddings after that even though we were invited (Mrs Meyer).

I think they don't know how to eat well. They prefer to spend their money on display and jewellery. You look at the number of times they change their clothes and how they do up the bridal chamber... And they are not serious people. Their weddings are not like the Chinese or Indian wedding, there is no ceremony. The Chinese have tea ceremony and the Indian one is so elaborate it takes a whole day. The bride and groom are not there to greet you, they are somewhere else, the bride is just busy with her clothes. You can come and go they don't know (Karen).

When I see the Malay wedding, I think how nice and simple and how they do things together. Not like we Chinese, too complicated, want to have face, make it so grand. So wasteful! (Mrs Wong).

I notice that they really make it nice with atmosphere. Everybody comes to help do the preparation, cooking, people come in and out, play the drums. And the costumes that the bride and groom wear are really traditional and grand. I really like their wedding, it is full of tradition, not like us Chinese (Julie).

I have heard other people say it is so noisy but I don't hear it. I don't mind. Live in this type of place, must get used to it. The wedding lasts only for two days, our Chinese funeral also lasts for about two days, about the same. What for get angry? What for complain? (Ah Sin).

We have our way of doing ours, they have theirs. You can't compare, can't say ours is better or theirs is better. We are different from them, they are different from us (Ah Soh).

In the cross-cultural contact involved, comparisons are made which reveal different expectations of the formalities, rules and general conduct surrounding wedding rites, such as over food served, treatment of guests and venue. For example, the varied opinions over the appropriateness of venue (home, hall or hotel?) reflect different spatial and symbolic expressions of such an occasion (as well as notions of public and private). As Daud put it:

Chinese wedding in the house very simple but dinner at hotel very grand. For us, in the house very grand. It is a family occasion so we want people to come to our house. That is only a hotel, why make it so grand?

Behavioural awkwardness can also arise from these cultural differences, such as where guests can sit (men and women may sit in different sections). Boundaries are drawn as to which rituals guests can participate in (e.g. kenduri) or cannot (e.g. akad nikah), hence the seeming lack of formalities which some non-Malay guests expect should mark a wedding occasion. Judgements made in cultural comparisons become more contentious when they result in negative ethnic stereotyping. For example, aspects of the Malay wedding confirm and reinforce among some non-Malays the stereotype of Malays' strong display culture and lack of seriousness. Such superficial comparison and stereotyping reflect the ethnocentrism and cultural ignorance of some non-Malays.

However, it should be stressed that negative responses to Malay weddings are not widespread and are kept under wraps; tolerance and acceptance generally predominate. These attitudes are based on highly practical rationalisations as illustrated above: "lasts only a day", "live in this type of place, must accept" and "equal amounts of noise" between Chinese funeral and Malay wedding. Furthermore, as much as there is ethnocentrism among some individuals, there is appreciation among others, particularly of the wedding's gotong royong spirit, aesthetics and atmosphere. Tolerance and acceptance as the predominant mode of accommodating cultural differences can be further understood and better appreciated in the context of the other major set of special events which residents also encounter - Chinese ethnic occasions.

MALAY WEDDING

- 13 - rewang
- 14 - wedding procession
- 15 - blessing the bride
- 16 - hadrah
- 17 - the 'royal' couple

HARI RAYA PUASA

- 18 - food contribution for kenduri arawah
- 19 - lighting up homes
- 20 - after morning prayers
- 21 - shopping in Geylang Serai
- 22 - symbols of Malayness

22 - 27)

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HARI RAYA PUASA

- 18 - food contribution for kenduri arawab
- 19 - lighting up homes
- 20 - after morning prayers
- 21 - shopping in Geylang Serai
- 22 - symbols of Malayness

4.3 Chinese Ethnic Occasions (see Plates 22 - 27)

4.3.1 The Seventh Moon Festival

Just as big pots indicate a Malay wedding, huge joss-sticks signify Zhong Yuan Jie or the Seventh Moon Festival, also popularly known as the Ghost Festival. Its mythic charters are defined in orthodox Mahayana Buddhism and in folk, mainly Taoist, belief in which ancestors and ghosts released from Hell in the seventh lunar month need appeasement lest they bring misfortune. Folk interpretations also inject into it various social elements. The result is a festival of varying versions and details in different locations but all share the fundamental belief in the appeasement of gods, ghosts and ancestors and in the asking for the successful achievement of goals. In Marine Parade, at least four community celebrations are held by the Chinese business community and residents annually¹⁰. The following describes one such event¹¹.

Organised by a working committee¹², the event's expenses were covered by membership subscriptions and collections from

¹⁰

The other focus of celebration is the household, in which offerings are made to gods, ghosts and ancestors at home and in surrounding areas such as pavements.

¹¹

This is the tenth celebration since Marine Parade's inception. The first was organised four years after its Chinese residents first moved into the estate and was initiated by the local coffeeshop owner and some residents. Membership grew rapidly, numbering 230 in the mid-1980s and 190 in 1988 (the drop in membership is due to many members having moved out of Marine Parade). Members pay an annual subscription ranging from \$150-\$180. In general, the size of each year's celebration depends on membership size and economic conditions which affect donations and auction bids.

¹²

The Committee has both volunteer and elected members who hold office on an annual basis. It is headed by the lor chu (urn-keeper) who is usually a businessman.

the previous year's event. Celebrations took place in a huge tent set up in rented carpark space. Its entrance lined with banners, lanterns and deities, the tent accommodated the following arrangements by volunteers: three food- and incense-laden altars (one with an urn and symbolic food tray, another with an effigy of the Wealth God and a third with various deities); a table with two freshly slaughtered pigs and foods for distribution; a display stand for auction items; a table laid with a sumptuous meal for ten gods; a corner offering basic toiletries and some luxuries¹³ for the two Guardians of Hell; and namelists of members, donors and previous winners of important auction and ballot items.

Following the lighting of dozens of 2-metre tall joss-sticks, the celebration started with prayers by a Taoist priest to appease ghosts and to bring fortune. He "marked" the Wealth God and strewed coins and sweets, shouting "huat!" (luck!) which was eagerly echoed by devotees who rushed to pick the offerings. The Wealth God was then burnt together with huge piles of incense and "Bank of Hell" money to more shouts of "huat!". This was followed by puak (balloting) in which divination blocks were cast to decide the lucky keepers of the urn and tray of food - they would be blessed by deities and with plentiful food. The pigs were then chopped up and portions distributed to members, together with the other foods

The food tray consisted of a pig's head, two crabs, one roast duck, one roast chicken and one fish. Luxuries offered were wine, opium and mahjong set.

- reflecting the importance of food in Chinese culture¹⁴. Throughout the day many devotees also came to pray for health, wealth, educational performance, peace and "no bad incidents" and various other goals. Many also stayed around to socialise.

A dinner for 400 members and guests¹⁵, an auction (pio) and a getai (stageshow) made the evening atmospheric. The pio was the highlight. Two auctioneers, using microphones, shouted out bids which could be heard throughout the entire neighbourhood. The first items auctioned symbolised luck (oranges), survival (rice) and longevity (noodles). Two highly decorated items - a huat (prosper) character and or kim (black gold) which bring a year's luck and wealth to businesses fetched the highest bids. A set of survival foods (rice, salt, sugar and preserved vegetables) was a popular bid among the old who were once poor immigrants or had experienced economic hardships. The dinner was also an occasion to collect donations for Chinese-run organisations such as old folks' homes, hospitals and temples. Meanwhile the loud getai of popular hits drew a large young crowd, in contrast to previous years when puppet and opera shows were attended by only a small audience of old people¹⁶.

14

Pork is also a sacred food. Foods distributed were rice, noodles, sugar, salt, canned food, meats, sauces, fruits, nuts and biscuits.

15

Guests were local politicians and representatives of local organisations such as the PAP Marine Parade branch, Residents' Committees and HDB Area Office.

16

In some celebrations, both getai and opera or puppet shows are staged simultaneously at different ends of the celebration site. The former caters to popular demands while
(Footnote Continued)

4.3.2 Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year (Chun Jie) is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar, symbolising a fresh start to life. Homes are adorned with symbolic items such as red banners, couplets and auspicious plants, and offerings to ancestors and gods are made on certain days of the 15-day event. Its focus being the family, the most important event is the family reunion on the eve when kinship ties are reaffirmed through the family meal and gathering. Chinese Christians may also attend special church services, such as the Babas' Catholic Mass in nearby Katong which is deliberately conducted in Baba Malay and with a Baba flavour. The occasion is also marked by visits and gift-giving of *hongbao* (red packets with money), oranges (symbolising wealth) and food among relatives, friends and neighbours. In Marine Parade, the occasion is manifested by much incense-burning and offerings on pavements and in shrines, as well as sugarcane cuttings on the ninth day when Hokkiens celebrate. This is also a time for the lion dance. Amidst the loud clanging of cymbals and drum, the lion makes a round of all Chinese-run businesses, dancing, balancing on stools, peeling oranges and plucking cabbages as symbolic gestures of bringing new year luck to businesses in return for *hongbao*. The Marine Parade Merchants and Traders Association also holds a Lunar New Year Dinner.

(Footnote Continued)
the latter is meant for the gods and ghosts. The competition between *getai* and traditional forms of Chinese street theatre is extremely stiff with the latter on the demise - a reflection of the cultural changes experienced within the Chinese community.

Like Malays, Chinese from all over Singapore go beyond the local community to the historical ethnic place of Kreta Ayer (Chinatown) for the New Year. Here decorations, clothes, foods, symbolic items can all be bought. Shopping and eating reach a fever pitch on New Year's Eve, creating much atmosphere which many go to Kreta Ayer just to savour. In recent years, the STPB has seized the occasion to promote the place as the focus of Chinese history and culture and the representation of the Chinese component of Singapore's multiculturalism. On this occasion, its streets abound with cultural symbols such as banners, arches, lion dances and fire crackers. The Singapore River Hongbao Special in 1989 and the joint Singapore River Hongbao Special-Chinese Cultural Month in 1990 were also grand displays of Chinese cultural symbols and activities.

4.3.3 Deity Worship, Funerals and Pavement Prayers

The birthday celebration of Sunwukung (Monkey Deity), selected here for discussion, is one of many occasions of Chinese folk deity worship and has several variations. The following took place one weekend in a rented void-deck space with a temporary altar set up, and it involved four sets of rituals. Two rituals took place the first evening. The first involved ritual cleansing and blessing by Sunwukung whose descent from Heaven was realised through a medium in trance, accompanied by loud chants, gongs and cymbals. Sunwukung first gave devotees advice and blessings and exorcised a boy for disobedience. This was followed by the cracking of a whip to drive away evil spirits, and offerings of food and incense, accompanied by gong, cymbal and shouts of "huat!" all of which took place along a public pavement. After blessing devotees

again, the deity returned to heaven. The second ritual involved the deities Twa-Ya-Pek and Tze-Ya-Pek who ascended from Hell through two mediums in trance. They were first consulted on various problems by some devotees and then appeased with food and wine while they cackled and argued loudly before going back to Hell. The third and fourth rituals the following day focused on Sunwukung's cleansing and consultations followed by its ceremonious send-off back to Heaven on paper horses across a symbolic bridge.

Like the Malay wedding, the Chinese funeral is the most common individual event that is identified with Chinese culture. Also held in the void-deck, it is characterised by the high visibility and loud sounds of a wake which lasts 2-4 days. Wreaths and cloth blankets line the pavement while the rented space accommodates coffin, altar and seats for guests. Nightly prayers by priests accompanied by night-long music, chatting and sometimes opera and mahjong-playing form part of the wake. The final rites involve a priest's chants, mourning and a short procession, accompanied by a band (playing Chinese and Western anthems and sentimentals) to drive away evil spirits and for a grand send-off.

Pavement prayers occur on many other occasions both personal, such as to appease a spirit, and cultural-religious, such as Ching Ming (day of honouring ancestors and deceased family members) and Vesak (birth, enlightenment and nirvana of Buddha). Public areas such as pavements, grass patches and under trees are the main sites for prayers and offerings which range from the burning of incense to the setting up of temporary or permanent shrines for various deities.

CHINESE FESTIVALS

- 23, 24, 25 -
Seventh Moon
Festival:
joss-sticks,
offerings,
auction items
26 - Lunar New
Year: lion
dance
27 - pavement
shrine

24

26

27

by rich mythic charters
and complex strands of
(anist, animist) which
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CHINESE FESTIVALS

23, 24, 25

Seventh Moon

Festival:

joss-sticks,

offerings,

auction items

26 - Lunar New

Year: lion

dance

27 - pavement

shrine

The above practices are marked by rich mythic charters with highly esoteric, symbolic meanings and complex strands of belief (folk, Taoist, Buddhist, Confucianist, animist) which also characterise Chinese religion as a whole¹⁷. They also manifest a dynamic approach of manipulating symbols to create associations between ritual and pragmatic concerns. This complexity and flexibility notwithstanding, they bear the following common foci: links between the human and other worlds; the family (extended to ancestor veneration) and social ties; and social and economic wellbeing. These are most often expressed through commensality, symbolic offerings and elaborate rituals. Among all the events which share these features, the Seventh Moon Festival is the grandest and most collective. Indeed, it is the only major occasion that brings together individuals in an expression of solidarity and communality in the local residential setting as well as the workplace¹⁸. It is estimated that there are at least 2,000 Seventh Month Committees in Singapore and celebrations are growing bigger each year (ST 12.9.90).

The Seventh Moon Festival expresses a collective sense of belonging and identity to two communities - local and ethnic. The first is based on the event's initiation, organisation and participation by local residents. At the same time, it is an ethnic occasion that draws individuals together as a Chinese

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For an informative study on Chinese religion, see Wee (1977).

¹⁸

Trade-based celebrations also take place in workplaces such as factories, hawkercentres, markets, shopping complexes and hotels.

community. The event accommodates all types of people irrespective of individual motive and interest: businessmen who seek economic leadership and contacts as well as to connect themselves to political structures; the old who seek continuity with past ways of life; those who desire deities' blessings and spirits' propitiation; and others who seek the benefits of social ties¹⁹. It also reflects significant Chinese elements: economic culture (rituals and items involving *huat*), social sentiment (charity contributions to Chinese-run organisations), immigrant history (nature of offerings to the Guardians of Hell and items distributed and auctioned). These cumulatively lend the festival its Chinese character, cultural content and communality in their variety of meanings. Teacher Ho, a participant, sums up the significance of the occasion:

This is the only independent Chinese organised activity here. Others all under RC [Residents' Committee], PAP [People's Action Party] control. Other Chinese organisations are not based here.... The clan associations are also dying out. I am a member of my clan group but young people who join feel left out... Malays still have their *kampung* (village) style of *gotong royong*, if ask for help can still get free. Not for Chinese, everything is money. We Chinese have lost all that, only this festival we come together and share, not anything else.

The sense of Chinese community is also felt, although to a lesser extent, on Chinese New Year. However, its focus is not just local. As noted above, a visit to Kreta Ayer is a

Many of those who have moved away from Marine Parade return to participate in the event and to meet friends. In a comparative study of two Chinese settlements - one in a native village in China and one whose residents had been relocated to urban Hongkong for at least 20 years, Berkowitz (1975) found that the Ghost Festival for the latter had lost its original meaning but had evolved into an occasion for Swatow people to meet together and to reaffirm their ethnic identity.

"must" for many a Chinese individual to shop, socialise or simply sense the atmosphere during this period. Whatever their individual reasons, Kreta Ayer's significance on this occasion is its symbolic representation of "Chineseness" - its immigrant origins and history, culture and economic vibrancy.

While these occasions are significant to the Chinese community, they also affect relations between Chinese and non-Chinese. Their interethnic relevances arise from their occurrence in common spaces, in particular their material and symbolic expressions which residents unavoidably encounter. How residents regard and negotiate these reveal the complex means by which they resolve and accommodate cultural-religious differences. The following illustrate the wide range of responses from residents of different ethnic backgrounds:

At first astonished, felt angry. So much noise, cannot sleep. Next day got to work isn't it? Also, so much ash. But after a while, accept it. Just shut window and go to sleep. Must accept lah, Chinese got their own way. Living together, give and take. In Singapore, must accept each other's ways (Ali).

The Hokkien and Teochew, always tong tong chang! They also got lok tang (trance), we Malays say menurun. Actually, Chinese, Malays and Indians also have menurun but because I am Muslim, I cannot do that, that is syaitan [satanic]...It is not a problem when I have to clean up, just my work....Sometimes they put things under the tree but that is no problem. I just tell the datuk (spirit): datuk, I am cleaning the place for you, only removing the food that has gone bad, not removing you from here. I tell the datuk by thinking it in my head (cleaner).

I go and take a look, like the Monkey God one. Some of my Christian friends said I should not; I said "why not? Seeing is not believing, seeing is alright, it won't harm you". In fact, we should go and see what it is like, then we can understand what it is all about. From what I know, usually it is because something happened or someone is sick, so they ask the medium to do something to help them. It is alright, it is a form of praying. They have their own way of reaching God... (Mrs Roberts).

Those things they pray under the tree, a lot I see around here, cannot avoid them. Chinese believe there is

something in the tree, but we have our own religion to make us feel safe. Like at night when I am scared if I am walking home, I just think: I don't disturb it, it won't disturb me. I am in this world just to cari rezeki [earn a living], why would it want to disturb me? (Latipah).

I don't mind the burning. I just make sure I don't step where they burn, something can happen to the leg. It happened to my son once. He was young, he didn't know so he must have walked on it or kicked it or urinated at it. He got fever for many days. We took him to hospital but no use, he didn't get well. Then we took him to a sami (priest) in an Indian temple, the sami said he stepped on something. Then he prayed and gave my son something to drink and after that, he was ok. Even though I am Hindu, I don't share the same religion, I believe it, better to believe (Malar).

I eat the food my Chinese neighbour gives me after praying with them. It is alright, I believe in our Lord... I am not worried by other people's religions. That is your own belief, you can do what you want. We just have to respect it no matter how stupid or silly you think it is. Every person has their own way of praying. Actually, in the end, everybody pray to the same God, just different way of praying (Rita).

Initial encounters with Chinese cultural-religious practices range from shock and disbelief to curiosity but most eventually come to regard them as familiar and taken for granted aspects of their living environment. Underlying this attitude is a range of devices which they have developed to contend with the events' outspills of noise, ash and offerings.

Outspills are regarded at different levels as physical matter and as having symbolic meanings. As physical matter, outspills are dealt with simply by cleaning up or shutting out the noise or ash. Failing that, one simply bears with it. As symbolic meanings, outspills are regarded by many as embodiments of Chinese culture and religion for which respect is due and right of practice accorded. Within this view, Chinese religion may be seen either as different from or incompatible with or equal to one's own religion; all can be seen as sharing one God even if the means of reaching God are different. But

in any case, the credibility and sanctity of Chinese religion and the right to its practice are considered unquestionable and demand due respect. By extension, this view is also the basis for the overall approach of mutual "non-disturbance" and peaceful coexistence of different religions.

At the level of symbolic meanings, outspills and shrines are also regarded as polluting and dangerous (Douglas 1966), bringing sickness or even death. They therefore require complex management since they cannot be removed. Where possible, they are avoided: by shutting doors and windows and taking a detour. Even curiosity is conducted from a discrete distance and children are taught to do so from young and to abstain from touching or eating offerings. This is often combined with one or more of the following means, especially where avoidance is impossible: reverting from the level of symbolic pollution to that of physical matter and therefore overcoming what is otherwise ineradicable; believing in the superiority or strength of one's own religion; asserting the sameness of God; keeping the peace through mutual respect and non-disturbance; and allowing for the possible existence of spirits. Although there is tension between belief and disbelief in spirits, direct experience or knowledge about others being struck by misfortune leads to the common 'safety first' conviction that it is "better to believe" ²⁰.

20

In varying degrees the animistic belief of spirits persists and is blended with the different religions at the folk level of interpretation. This often finds expression in shrines. Where misfortune does strike, effective cure is sought through the power of one's own religion or traditional

(Footnote Continued)

4.4 Indian Ethnic Occasions (see Plates 28 - 31)

The cultural heterogeneity of Indians is manifested through various festivals such as Deepavali, Thaipusam, Ponggal²¹ and Vaisakhi²¹, with Deepavali being the most celebrated in common among Indians and also the most known to non-Indians.

4.4.1 Deepavali

According to Hindu mythology²² Deepavali concerns the spiritual significance of light over darkness and good over evil, hence its other name - the Festival of Lights. In the local community where Indians are a small minority, there are few public signs of Deepavali's celebration apart from ethnic dressing and the scattered flicker of lights. Activities such as praying, paying respects to parents and visiting friends and relatives are home-based. However, public celebrations take place on a grand scale in Serangoon Road or "Little India" - an area where things, people and activities have, over time, given it a distinct Indian flavour²³. Here, every necessary item (clothes, foods, decorations, utensils) may be purchased for

(Footnote Continued)

means, such as the Malay bomoh (shaman), Indian sami (priest), Christian prayers or the Chinese medium; Western medicine is considered to be totally ineffective.

²¹

Ponggal, originally a harvest festival in Tamil Nadu, India, has seen a recent effort to mark the occasion as Tamizhar Tirunaal (Tamil Festival). Vaisakhi, originally a harvest celebration and a religious occasion denoting the founding of the Khalsa (the pure ones), is celebrated by Punjabis.

²²

Legend goes that Lord Krishna rescued people from the sufferings inflicted by the demon Narakasura and they rejoiced by lighting lamps.

²³

Little India is now the second most popular tourist spot in Singapore (ST 22.10.88). For a study of Serangoon, see Siddique and Puru Shotam (1982).

the festival (as well as for everyday use). Here too are located the major temples and associations to which many Indians go for prayers and functions on this as well as other auspicious occasions. Deepavali also provides the STPB with the strategic opportunity to promote it as the hub of Indian life and representation of the Indian component of Singapore multiculturalism - through lights and decorations featuring Indian cultural and religious symbols (e.g.s. phornam [coconut frond decorations], banana trees, oil lamps, elephants, scenes and deities from myths and legends); fairs selling Indian artefacts and shows featuring Indian dances and ceremonies). It was no surprise that Little India was also the site selected for the 1990 Indian Cultural Month to display "Indianness" through similar cultural representations. It is also a key location for that other most public of "Indian" festivals - Thaipusam.

4.4.2 Thaipusam

In honour of Lord Muruga, Thaipusam's key feature is the carrying of kavadi (burden) as an act of thanksgiving or penance. Folk input has developed the original load-bearing pole kavadi into a wide range of forms: the carrying of shrines, pulling of chariots, and self-immolation through attaching milkpots, lime, ^{fruits,} chains, spikes and hooks to the bodies of kavadi-carriers. Kavadis are carried by young and old, male and female, singly or in family groups. Kavadi-carriers are accompanied by family members, relatives, friends and the general audience who offer support through the singing of devotional songs, cheers and the comfort of their presence. The 2-mile journey from the Perumal Temple in Little India to

the Thandayuthapani Temple in Tank Road is also relieved along the way by drinks pandals (stalls) run by volunteers. However, the playing of musical instruments (such as trumpets, drums, portable cassette players) is no longer permitted outside temple grounds by the police because of the excessive noise and the incitement to boisterous behaviour.

Deepavali and Thaipusam bring together the individual, family and ethnic community, their religious and cultural significance expressed both within home grounds and in the special community place of Little India. In the context of multiethnic Singapore their significance assumes a further dimension: the public assertion of the importance of the Indian community and its identity as a small ethnic minority. In their role as "Indian" occasions they serve to rally together the heterogenous Indian population and to highlight their collective presence. Thaipusam is especially illustrative of this.

Thaipusam is a highly public ethnic event that goes beyond the esoteric experiences and purposive acts of individuals²⁴. Indians turn up by the thousands to participate, dressed in religious or colourful ethnic clothes while many male youths match their exuberance with trendy wear. The sense of community is tremendous as they march, sing, cheer, follow and watch. It is as if that small minority that is normally so

Babb (1976) sees Thaipusam as a symbolic expression of the importance of ethnic identity for the Hindu community in Singapore. Babb (1978) discusses Thaipusam in terms of its religious individualism and the singular and collective modes of its expression within Hinduism and the Hindu community.

invisible in the residential setting and elsewhere suddenly presents itself through a striking public parade for others to see. For a whole day, it commands the streets through which kavadi-carriers pass, slowing traffic as devotees display and participants picnic in the heart of town. The assertion is all the more effective because the event, with its display of faith, endurance and togetherness, is so incomprehensible to others.

This assertion is in marked contrast to the 1930s and 1940s when there was concern among some Indian leaders that the carrying of kavadi gave the impression to non-Indians that Indians were superstitious and backward (Arasaratnam 1980). However, attempts at religious reform and the suppression of such ritualistic aspects were unsuccessful. Thaipusam in recent years has grown larger, with a 5% increase each year, and is more embellished (especially the kavadi form). The 1989 Thaipusam had a record high of nearly 6,000 kavadi carriers and had more young people participating (ST 23.1.89). It also involves other non-Tamil Hindus and Indians (as well as some Chinese). The current concern among Indians is not over a negative image but of cultural expression and assertion. Hence for example, the prohibition of musical instruments is seen as "unfair, Chinese can go around with the lion dance whenever, but we cannot play drums even just for Thaipusam".

28

INDIAN FESTIVALS

28 - Deepavali:
bhangra dance
29, 30, 31 -
Thaipusam:
kavadi-carriers
and supporters

29

30

31

4.5 Other Ethnic Occasions

Although not of the same scale as those discussed above, it is worthwhile to mention briefly two other occasions - *dondang sayang* and Christmas - to illustrate the diversity of cultural life that involves other ethnic minority categories so far not referred to.

4.5.1 Dondang Sayang

Chinese Babas celebrate some festivals in common with other Chinese but may do so in ways which set them apart²⁵. They also perform *dondang sayang* - a form of singing and repartee based on Malay *pantun* (quatrains) - which they share²⁶ in common with Malays. The Anniversary Celebrations in February 1988 of the Gunong Sayang Club near Marine Parade, attended by some Baba residents and those from elsewhere, came closest to a Baba *dondang sayang* event (the Club itself was originally set up for *dondang sayang*). The event was attended by about 100 middle-aged and older members and guests, the women dressed mainly in *sarong kebaya* and the men in batik shirts. Besides dinner, the evening's highlight was *dondang sayang* between veterans, as well as the singing of popular classics of the Malay Archipelago complete with *ronggeng* and *joget* dancing with Malay taxi-dancers and band - all of which

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See for example, Clammer (1980), Tan (1979; 1988), Chia (1983) and Cheo & Speeden (1988).

26

Some elderly Babas also participated in the Dondang Sayang Night organised by the Malay Cultural Committee of the community centre on 14.1.89. The event was an attempt to revive *dondang sayang* and *ronggeng* and *jogek* dancing. For a brief history of *dondang sayang*, see Thomas (1986).

revealed strong Malay roots and influence in poetry, prose, dance and music.

However, according to one member, the occasion was but a faint version of grander *dondang sayang* - involving fierce competitions, public performances during festivities and mutual exchanges between troupes from the three major Baba settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malacca - in the heydays of Baba culture before the 1960s. The sustaining conditions for Babas as a distinct group and for Baba culture, rooted in colonial political and social structures, have since passed away (Clammer 1979). This change is well captured by residents Khaw and Greg: "those days are over; now I just sing quietly to myself" (Khaw) and "my generation don't know how to *dondang sayang*; I just go to the Club to play mahjong" (Greg). However, in the current climate of cultural resurgence and assertion of ethnic identity, some Babas are concerned with reviving Baba cultural forms and their identities as Baba Chinese.

4.5.2 Christmas

Christmas is not an occasion associated with any one particular ethnic group only. In Singapore it is a highly commercialised affair with downtown Orchard Road being the focus of lights, decorations, shopping and revelling. However it is the major religious and social occasion of the vast majority of Eurasians in Marine Parade and elsewhere. For them Christmas is celebrated with church services and house parties and visits among relatives, friends and neighbours, the latter's atmosphere complete with gift exchanges, glitter of Christmas trees and enjoyment of distinct foods such as turkey

and pineapple tarts. Until 1974, some Eurasians also celebrated Christmas and New Year with a ball in town.

4.6 Discussion

Through the public nature of ethnic special occasions a cultural and symbolic map can be drawn of the local community which provides visual feasts of its ethnic diversity and gives meaning to its multiethnic character. Through them, residents build up a familiarity with and a cultural sense of their living environment. As expressive and symbolic discourses of the social relationships surrounding them, special occasions communicate on two levels simultaneously - between individuals within a community and at the intergroup level. For members within a group special occasions confirm and strengthen their ethnic community, giving it meaning and identity. They are also particularly efficacious in affirming and reinforcing ethnic community boundaries in the multiethnic environment. Acting as boundary markers themselves, their cultural and religious contents form a complex repertoire of devices which define and differentiate between Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and others.

At the same time, they provide the basis for others' ethnographic knowledge and socialisation about the ethnic community. As one resident put it:

I have always lived here, grew up here so I am quite familiar, like Chinese funeral, Malay wedding, the auction, the ghost festival. When I was young, I used to go and watch (Neeraj).

In doing so, ethnic occasions serve as a basis for interethnic communication and comparison. In this cross-cultural exchange, however, boundaries are crossed only on rare occasions. And of

course, different and incompatible religious beliefs generally constrain ethnic interaction. For example, few Malays attend Chinese funerals nor are they usually invited to Chinese weddings by neighbours because of the Muslim pork taboo. Ethnographic knowledge, where it exists, is usually superficial and a matter of form rather than meaning. Comparisons and judgements are made on the basis of such knowledge, some of which display ethnocentrism, cultural ignorance and deprecation. On the other hand, this is to be balanced against the tolerance, acceptance and appreciation by others.

Tolerance and acceptance of the outspills of each other's cultural-religious activities are highly developed because generally there is no escape. Expressions such as "live in this type of place" or "live in Singapore", may be variously taken to mean the inability to afford alternatives to public housing, a living environment shared with ethnic others and a Chinese-majority context in the case of minorities. The responses "cannot do anything", "give and take", "happens only once a while" and the 'equal balance' of occurrences and outspills of each other's occasions reflect a highly practical approach to such "no choice" situations. Inconveniences and irritations caused by outspills are kept to oneself even though tolerance may at times be stretched to the limit. An unmanageable situation is turned over to the HDB or official agency for mediation, as the consequences of direct negotiation may be too costly to bear; it may also turn into an unpleasant ethnic dispute.

Given the potential for religious conflict, the modes of interreligious accommodation are especially significant. In

Chapter 3 I showed how non-Muslim neighbours are careful to observe the Muslim pork taboo in gift exchange. Thus too, a Hindu might attend a Chinese neighbour's funeral but refrain from accepting drinks. Behind the religious peace are complex practical and cultural means of negotiating and coping with religious practices considered physically or ritually polluting and dangerous or potentially threatening: avoidance, tolerance, understanding, a "to each his own" attitude, faith in one's own religion and turning to official agencies when necessary. On the whole, residents of different faiths abstain from discussion and comparison of religious differences and, instead, stress their mutual tolerance and invoke "the same God" argument. In some residents' own words:

You have your own and I have my own, so long as don't disturb each other, respect each other's religion, there should be no problem (Rosita).

All want to live in harmony, why clash? Only religion different. In the end everyone also same God, only way of praying different (Daud).

This picture of tolerance and acceptance does not, however, imply the absence of tension. On the contrary, the potential for religious conflict is ever present and there have been two major experiences of religious tension in the community²⁷ (and several major ethnic conflicts in Singapore, see Chapter 6).

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Another possible source of interreligious tension is within the family, such as between Chinese religionist parents and children who have converted to Christianity. It is usually expressed by the refusal of the latter to handle joss-sticks and incense, eat food offerings or attend an event, while parents fear that their children will not make them offerings after their deaths and hence sever the family line. Among Malays, conversion from Islam to another religion, usually Christianity, usually means expulsion from home and ostracism (Footnote Continued)

The first local experience of ethnic tension involves official treatment of ethnic occasions. Some Malay residents perceive as unfair the HDB's differential treatment of Chinese and Malay occasions:

What I think is unfair is that when the Malays burn the turf when they do cooking, they get their deposit penalised but when the Chinese burn the grass when they pray, they don't get fined (Zul).

Under the terms of renting space from the HDB for special occasions, the user's deposit is penalised if there is any damage to property. Malay users are generally careful when cooking in the turf area but there have been cases of grass being burnt, resulting in the forfeiture of deposits. On the other hand, the individual Chinese who damages turf when burning incense in a quick disappearing act is hard to detect and large-scale burning during the Seventh Moon Festival is usually ignored by the HDB. Similarly, the effect from wedding band or funeral chants is also subject to ethnic interpretation. Quite apart from whether it is music or noise on a Sunday afternoon, it becomes an issue of Malay "versus" Chinese sounds with apparently differential treatment accorded them. Bands at Malay weddings are in fact not permitted by the HDB on grounds of their noise level (although this is ignored by both the HDB and those celebrating) while stageshows during the Seventh Moon Festival are included in the official permit. In the early years of the community the sense of discrimination

(Footnote Continued)

by the ethnic community. Among friends, discussion of religious differences is often avoided to prevent tension.

felt by Malay residents was considered so serious that the HDB had to take action, as Chapter 5 will show.

The second experience, noticeable since the early 1980's, concerns religious tension involving evangelical Christian proselytization by non-residents. The proselytizer makes door-to-door approaches, often using the religious emblems on doorways described in Chapter 2 as targets, be these Muslim, Hindu, Chinese religionist or Roman Catholic. Most informants disapprove of this method of spreading religion and turn away the proselytizer on grounds that they already have a religion. Some did initially allow them into their homes but found them ignorant, arrogant and dogmatic. By the late 1980s, proselytization had reached a high level and begun to target Malays, thereby generating considerable religious tension²⁸. As two residents put it:

Different people have different ways of reaching the same God. If I don't think their ways are right according to my religion, then I just leave them alone. They should do the same to me. But if forced to change my religion, then I will fight (Daud).

What I find so offensive about it is the idea [of converting Muslims to Christianity] itself, because Islam has always been the basis of our identity. And it is our strength, because that is what holds us together as a family and as a community. Conversion breaks us up (Zul).

By 1989, the effects of evangelical Christian proselytization on ethnic relations, particularly between Chinese Christians

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At the time of fieldwork, a controversial case was mentioned by several of my Malay informants (and according to one informant "Most Malays in Singapore know about it". It involved a tussle over the burial of a Malay woman who had secretly converted to Christianity. I was unable to ascertain the facts but all my informants confirmed that she was given a Christian burial.

and Malay Muslims, was considered serious enough for the state to intervene in the form of a Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill (see Chapter 8).

So far, I have argued as if each ethnic community is homogeneous when, on the contrary, each is highly heterogeneous. In fact, the festivals often reveal this heterogeneity of linguistic, cultural, religious, class and political differences some of which will be discussed in Part III; here, only brief examples can be given.

Among Malays the increasing institutionalisation of Islam has resulted in religion being a matter of contention in two areas: between Islamic and pre-Islamic elements, and between Islam and the demands of living in a competitive capitalist and cosmopolitan society (Tham 1984; Mohd Taib Osman 1989). Thus, henna application, costume changes and the egg-gift in weddings are seen by some Muslims as deviating from Islamic practice. Differences in political orientations also draw divisions. Malays' backward economic position and the main issues involved - education, government aid, self-help and the roles of elites and economic bodies - are subjects of intense internal debate. In the case of Indians, class and caste divisions are still dominant. Among the Chinese there is a heterogeneity of linguistic, educational, class, religious and other divisions some of which are revealed by the special occasions themselves. The Monkey God's birthday is celebrated mostly by poorer residents of 2- and 3-room flats, while the Seventh Moon celebration is largely confined to the lower economic strata,

the Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking, Chinese religionist and the business class.

Nonetheless, differences internal to each community tend to be subsumed under its major ethnic identification and an imagined homogeneous community with apparently rigid boundaries and markers. This is particularly so for minority group members who, in the face of perceived disadvantage, discrimination or threat, coalesce and combine resources around a homogeneous or united group identity. As we shall see in Part III this group identification and mobilisation is especially significant in the contexts of rapid social changes and intense ethnic competition.

It should be remembered that the above occasions and their social relationships occur within and are part of a dynamically evolving context of rapid economic, social and political changes since the early 1970s and especially since the early 1980s. The effects of these changes on ethnic rituals themselves are beyond the scope of this discussion²⁹. Of relevance here is that the occasions and culture in general form part of the baggage and ballast of each community in encountering the complexities of change.

In the local residential context, ethnic occasions form part of the adjustments of resettlement from past forms of village living to a highly planned setting. Many of these

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Tham (1984) analyses changes in Chinese, Malay and Indian rituals in the context of modernisation, specifically in terms of the changes from agrarian societies to an urban industrial and commercial setting and of reform from the ritualistic aspects towards more intellectual and spiritual substance.

festivities were quickly re-established soon after residents moved into their new homes, reflecting a quick reconstitution of each ethnic community through its distinct events and re-formation of the local community³⁰. We have also seen how cultural assertions are manifested through the enlarged, extended and embellished celebrations of ethnic events.

At the same time, in responding to social changes each community now has to take 'others' into account. It has been demonstrated how, in a residential setting that has changed from an ethnically homogeneous to a heterogeneous one, special events no longer have a single ethnic audience but bear inter-ethnic relevances, meanings and impact. Similarly, at the national level, ethnic occasions with their strong emotional contents and symbolic significance bear direct interethnic relevances. Indeed, they reflect not only a climate of ethnic resurgence and an assertion of ethnic identity by each group in the face of social change but also an intensification of ethnic competition. The enlargements, extensions and embellishments of ethnic occasions are part of this competition in the cultural realm. At the same time, they are reflections of ethnic competition in other social, economic and political spheres. Furthermore, in the context of majority-minority relations, majority responses to social changes generate reactions by minorities, resulting in further ethnic assertion

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The longitudinal study by Chua et. al. (1985) found that the Seventh Month Festival was one of the first events organised in revitalising community sentiments. Similarly, Suriani Suratman's study on resettled Malays (1986) documents their reestablishment of special occasions such as weddings.

and competition. State intervention and management of ethnic relations also contribute to these phenomena. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss in detail this ethnic assertion and competition in the various spheres.

Finally, it ought to be noted here that this discussion has focussed solely on ethnic occasions. However, non-ethnic or pan-ethnic occasions also exist within the same setting, and understanding their operational efficacy adds to the knowledge about rituals in a multiethnic scenario. These are the official or political rituals aimed at rallying and welding together ethnically diverse populations in a common and wider sense of national community and identity. They form part of the repertoire of rituals which require and often compete for the attention of ethnic constituents but which at the same time must take into account ethnic sentiments. Politically, they must also legitimise the goals and ideals of building a multiethnic nation-state. Chapter 9 discusses these political rituals and the underlying state ideology of multiracialism.

CHAPTER 5

ORGANISATIONS AND COMMITTEES

5.1 Introduction

In Chapters 3 and 4 I discussed the forms of ethnic interaction and the potential for ethnic tension among residents as well as the modes of accommodation developed to cope with differences. I noted that unmanageable situations are turned to the HDB Area Office for mediation. This leads me to a substantive discussion here of the official and organised forms of behaviour and activity affecting ethnicity and ethnic relations in Marine Parade.

There are several organisations in Marine Parade which either have expressed aims and activities pertaining to ethnicity and ethnic relations or which affect them indirectly. To illustrate both types of organisation and the range of behaviour, I focus on the following: 1) the HDB Area Office (the official management of ethnic disputes), 2) community organisations (the promotion of ethnic interaction), 3) the Muslims' block committee (serving the interests of Muslims) and 4) the Boys' Club and Merchants and Traders Association (indirect or unconscious ethnic orientations and interaction).

Most analyses of local organisations or movements, while usually assuming a dichotomy of interests between those of the state or elites on the one hand and the 'ordinary' people on the other, acknowledge the state's centrality. For example, Castells (1983) refers to the centrality of the state even though he omits analyses of state-planned societies and state intervention in his study of urban social movements. Midgley

et. al. (1986) point out that the separation between the state and the community in many new nation-states is an unrealistic one, given the state's centrality and its inevitable role in planned development. They further note that while 'community' offers a powerful populist mobilisation strategy against state domination and centralisation, grassroots organisations usually have to operate within a corporatist state structure which manipulates them for various motives (p.150). Robertson (1984), also analysing planned development, points to the contests and contradictions between people's plans and the state's plans in a context in which the latter is dominant. He argues that the state monopolises ideas and ideals about national development and assumes a compliant public even though it takes a populist stance about public participation and two-way communication. He further notes that "the more earnestly the state undertakes the task of planned development, the more it tends to close off the opportunities available to private individuals and groups in civil society to initiate social and economic changes, resulting in draconian and undemocratic state measures and structures". Through its bureaucracies and committees, it seeks to maintain civil order and arrange economic and social progress according to its own vision. But while the state insists on its vision of progress, the people may have other notions of it - and herein lies potential and actual conflict. Local organisations, being the institutional means by which the state seeks to organise people and resources and the medium by which people obtain the benefits of development, thus become prime sites of contest and

conflict between 'bureaucracy' and 'community' (Robertson, 1984:4-6, 128-138, 140-1).

The context in which local organisations are manipulated by the state or are sites of contest between "people" and "state" may be further understood in political terms. Althusser focuses on the importance of ideological state apparatuses such as political, religious, educational, legal, cultural, familial and communications institutions for the reproduction of the capitalist system (1984:16-19)¹. Arguing that the ruling ideology is ultimately realised in these apparatuses, they are therefore often the sites of class struggle (pp.20-21). Although Althusser's approach is problematic, his notion of ideological apparatuses is still useful for understanding the manipulation of local organisations by the ruling elite in a context of tight political control. Sartori (1976) similarly provides useful conceptual insights into such a political context. Writing on the party-state system which "denies the validity of dissent and impedes opposition" (p.47), he notes that there are several "apparats" in the apparatus-state and "how they are keyed into each other is an intricate matter which can range over a wide spectrum of possibilities and variations" (p.45). Closely related to this party-state system is the hegemonic party system in which the hegemonic party, subtyped into the ideological-hegemonic party and the pragmatic-hegemonic party

¹ Althusser distinguishes the ideological from the repressive state apparatuses (government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons) in which the former functions predominantly by ideology and the latter by violence (p.19).

(p.230-1), "neither allows for a formal nor a de facto competition for power by the peripheral parties". The first subtype, the ideological-hegemonic party (e.g. Poland), "simulates a party market not only...to placate opposition, but a means of providing the elite with a flow of information... [But] whatever the information, the hegemonic party can enforce its own will" (p.232). The second subtype, the pragmatic hegemonic party (e.g. Mexico), is the "sole protagonist of a party-centred arrangement surrounded by a periphery of secondary parties... And the rules of the game are very clear. [It] must win anyhow. If other groups were to be a threat [it is] fully prepared to repress them on grounds of internal security. In short, the pragmatic-hegemonic party permits second class parties so long as they remain as they are" (p.233-5).

This discussion does not attempt to theorise on the nature of the Singapore state. However, it recognises the state's centrality, through its intervention and social engineering of all major arenas of life including the local community and organisations, under the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). The Singapore political context approximates one in which the hegemonic party exercises control over local organisations as ideological apparatuses for communication and information within its planned development programme. At the same time however, I reject a crude 'people versus the state' approach as it tends towards a conspiracy notion of the state and its reification. The state, much as it supercedes the capacities of individuals to determine its actions, remains subject to human influence and control from both within and outside its

formal structures, and these ultimately affect its legitimacy. Thus, even as local organisations are influenced or controlled by the state, they are human communities and, as such, their functionings in local life should not be seen as impersonal replicas and substructures of a larger monolithic entity. Rather, as suggested by Robertson, they are "sites of contest between people and officials in which 'bureaucracy' and 'community' merge in complex patterns of idea and activity" (1984:4-6). In this contest, ideas and activities between the two sectors may converge and overlap or diverge and conflict, depending on the context and issue at hand. Furthermore, the contest is not just political but also epistemological, i.e. about the meanings of development and community. For example, who the community organisations 'belong' to can be deeply ambivalent, and the status of committees and their agents and activities may be fraught with political and legal ambiguities (Robertson 1984:140-151, 170-2). Thus, depending on the organisation, discussion will focus on how structures, state agents and residents operate, behave and interact in complex patterns of ideas and activity pertaining to ethnicity and ethnic relations.

5.2 The HDB Area Office

As pointed out in Chapter 2, everyday management of public housing estates is delegated to area offices, in this case the Marine Parade Area Office (AO)². Here, work is divided into

²

This was at the time of fieldwork. Since 1990,
(Footnote Continued)

sections headed by a senior officer (AO head) who is directly responsible to HDB Headquarters (see Appendix 3 for the organisation structure of an area office). Among the staff, the Housing and Maintenance Inspector (HMI) is in most direct contact with residents. He is responsible for 7-9 blocks of flats which he inspects daily. He also sees to applications, requests, problems, and complaints pertaining to maintenance and tenancies, making home visits or direct contact with residents if need be. Within the AO, he reports to his supervisor the Estate Officer (EO). The efficient and competent performance of day-to-day management functions being pivotal to the HDB's credibility and success, the HMI is expected to be the local "investigator", "problem-shooter" and "conveyor" of various matters. It is therefore through the AO in general and especially through the HMI (and to a lesser extent the EO) that the HDB's management of ethnic differences at the local level is best understood.

Given their symbolic significance, the outspills from ethnic occasions bear the greatest potential for ethnic antagonism. Such disputes, particularly in the early years of the community's formation, are handled by the AO and HMI. Overall, the AO's management of such disputes is characterised by a

(Footnote Continued)
management has been transferred to the newly formed Marine Parade Town Council, see Chapter 2 footnote 11. For a discussion on the meaningful political arena shifting to the bureaucracy in the Singapore "administrative" state, see Chan (1975).

3

This discussion uses the generic he/his/him because all HMIs interviewed were men. There are no women HMIs in the Marine Parade AO and until recently, the HDB employed few women HMIs and EOs.

complex combination of HDB provisions and rules, expectations about residents' behaviour and use of the HMI's personal knowledge and skills. Under HDB provisions, the AO allocates spaces for special occasions through a booking system on a first-come-first-served basis. For a fee a permit is given for the use of a space for the duration of the event. It also deals with incense ash and prayer offerings through two means: the provision of bins during major Chinese festivals and the imposition of a fine for indiscriminate burning under the Common Property and Open Spaces Rules. But beyond these provisions and rules, the AO expects residents to show mutual tolerance and respect for each other's practices. It is only in the event of a complaint or dispute that the HMI intervenes.

One key feature of the HMI's intervention is his situational manipulation of ethnicity, specifically in two senses: as a factor to be played down or as an exploitable resource. First and foremost and as an example of when ethnicity is played down, the HMI observes the rule not to divulge the identity of a complainant (in any case complainants request this). This confidentiality not only protects neighbourly relations but also avoids the complaint possibly turning into an ethnic issue. One HMI even makes it a practice not to meet one party immediately after the other when making home calls to investigate complaints, just in case he is being watched by either party. On the other hand, ethnicity as a positive resource is most commonly applied, usually in the form of cultural knowledge of residents' practices, when explaining and persuading complainants to be more tolerant. The following situation is illustrative:

Complaints about Malay weddings is usually about cooking smoke, heat, noise. They say, why cook in front of my home, even my bedroom or living room? Especially on Sundays and usually Malay wedding is on Sunday. Popular months, the wedding may be one a week, at same spot even! And they cook a lot. Malays like to cook their own food. Also, some people may not be able to afford to cater. So I explain all this to the complainant (HMI Ali).

In the use of ethnic-cultural knowledge as a resource, the HMI may even fall back on his own experiences and ethnic background, as illustrated by the above quote and below:

These people who pray at the roadside usually have problems, like a child fall sick after walking past that way, or somebody in the family has trouble... I know all this because when I was young my parents explained this to me. And once you understand, then you won't mind, you tolerate, even if you don't believe yourself (HMI Choo).

However, the manipulation of ethnicity can work both ways. While the HMI's intention is to defuse the potential for ethnic tension, he may in turn be seen as ethnically biased. Hence, depending on the situation, his ethnic background may have to be carefully considered and either put to positive use or played down, such as in the following situation:

People complain because someone use his residence as a temple. Then we may send a Chinese guy to deal with him. Not because we are racist, but because we are sensitive. If you send a Malay guy there may be misunderstanding, right? (HMI Azlan).

In general the following approach is taken to avoid the allegation of bias:

We are very careful when we go and see them. We make sure that we are acting as an officer from the HDB and we listen to them as HDB officers, not as a Chinese or Malay... Show that you don't take sides, show that you don't care whether the person is Chinese or Malay, you follow the rules. Even if they say you are ngiau [arrogant, inflexible] (HMI Choo).

But whether an action of the HMI or AO translates into ethnic bias in actuality is a complicated matter. In the course of fieldwork I did not come across any complaints by residents of

gross bias of AO staff. However both parties did raise two specific issues arising from ethnic occasions which, in the past, did give rise to the perception of HDB's ethnic bias: damage to property from burning and void-deck space allocation. A third basis for a similar perception is the policy of ethnic quotas for public housing which I will discuss in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 4 I mentioned how the AO's imposition of fines for damage to turf during Malay weddings and Chinese festivals is perceived by some Malay residents to be unfairly applied. But as pointed out, the AO has made some physical provisions to overcome the problems caused by pavement prayers - after complaints from both residents and HDB cleaners. Similarly, through complaints it has become aware of the charge of ethnic discrimination against Malays and has ceased imposing fines.

The AO's void-deck space allocation for Malay weddings and Chinese funerals was the other important test of its ethnic impartiality in the early years of the community. While the Malay wedding is prepared in advance with the booking for void-deck space usually made a month ahead, the Chinese funeral occurs suddenly and wake preparations, including that of placing the coffin, may be immediately made in the void-deck without first obtaining a permit. It has thus occurred several times that both Malay wedding and Chinese funeral took place in the same void-deck on the same weekend! EO Tay describes how this difficult situation was handled:

In the past, both sides just ignore each other even though in same void-deck, use different ends of it. HDB's part here depends. It can directly intervene or not intervene. If intervene, then may ask the Chinese to stay, the Malay to move to another location even though they booked in advance. Explain to the Malay that according to Chinese custom, once coffin is put there, cannot move it. But if don't intervene, then we tell the Chinese to go and speak

to the Malay themselves, HDB will give them permit if they can convince the Malays of the need to change place.

The AO tried both approaches in the past but both obviously still risked antagonising and discriminating against Malay residents - a matter of serious political consequence. It was thus decided that the first-come-first-served principle be strictly adhered to. This would reserve a resident's right of use of the area for the duration of the event, at the same time ensure that there is no charge of ethnic discrimination by the AO or ethnic quarrel between residents. In turn, residents would have to abide by this principle - a procedure they have come to accept and to expect. Today, the potential charge of HDB's bias and of ethnic tension between residents is largely checked by this principle and complaints about both bias and outspills are considerably fewer.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to reiterate that disputes of the kind discussed do not necessarily always assume an interethnic dimension. But given the residents' and the AO's own experiences, it is not surprising that AO staff should possess an acute sense of the potential for interethnic antagonism among residents. As the EO put it:

Both sides have their mentality. Majority mentality and minority mentality. That is why have to be careful how you handle a situation.

Thus, in a delicate situation the approach is to

... let the matter mellow first. We would rather pay the price for being overcautious than not cautious. Ultimately, the Board has the right to do anything, everything but better to handle things sensitively. If not there may be an explosion. The explosion may not show up now but may build up and something like this can be the last straw. So better to deal with each matter whenever it comes along. That is why you haven't seen a riot yet. Have to remove each straw, then we can have room to manoeuvre when other issues arise.

Being the pivotal figure in local official management, the HMI's behaviour deserves further examination and explanation. While he is the state's local agent he is not entirely a robot of the HDB state machinery or the stereotyped ngiau (arrogant, inflexible) official hidebound by political interests and rules. As Robertson points out, the public bureaucracy is a political arena in which the interests of senior and junior officials are never the same, the latter typically bearing the burden of seeking accommodation with people and 'playing games' with the higher-ups (1984:155). Nor do his actions arise merely from altruistic motives in peace-keeping. Instead, how he exercises his powers and abilities can be understood against his personal ethnic and residential backgrounds and his work place and position within the HDB structure.

The four HMIs and EO cited here are of Chinese and Malay ethnic origins and all the HMIs are residents of public housing communities. All have worked at the Marine Parade AO and other area offices previously for a considerable number of years⁴. In terms of job mobility within the HDB hierarchy, the HMI can attain the levels of Higher HMI and Senior HMI (see Appendix 3) but only after a long period of service. Therefore, rather than vertical career mobility, his position within the HDB structure is characterised by lateral physical mobility in

⁴ Figures on the ethnic distribution of HMIs in HDB were unavailable but my impression from my previous research job in the HDB is that it is not skewed. At the time of interview, EO Tay had worked in Marine Parade AO for nearly 3 years, HMI Ali for 8 years, HMI Choo for 7 years and HMI Azlan for 6 months. With the exception of HMI Ali, all had previous experiences (minimum 5 years) in other AOs.

which, from time to time, he is transferred from one AO to another and from one cluster of blocks to another. His workplace remains the same: the local community, towards which he tends to be oriented rather than HDB headquarters. The similarity between his workplace and his ethnic and residential background, and the influence of the latter, in large part explain his work behaviour. As a resident of a similar public housing community himself, he is therefore not only already familiar with many of the ethnic issues and problems in his workplace but also extends his expectations of how they should be handled, how residents should behave as good neighbours and co-residents, or even his own notion of the 'desirable' multi-ethnic community. It has also been shown how he falls back on his personal ethnic background as a resource to handle these issues. In short, his residential and ethnic backgrounds add to his knowledge, sensitivity and motivation in his handling of ethnic problems at work.

However, the HMI's orientation towards the community and residents does not imply that he is not critical of residents or has no problems with them. On the contrary, all HMIs interviewed were critical of residents as individuals, as categories and as organised groups. They complain of residents being selfish, unreasonable, demanding and arrogant. The following views about residents were common to all HMIs:

Actually, I think some people, the more education they have, the less tolerant they are. They want everything quickly, want everything for themselves and don't care about other people (HMI Choo).

RC [Residents' Committee] people... Mr _ is very nice but some others are quite arrogant, the way they make request. Don't have to say you are from RC also I will see to the problem, right? They see to things quickly but they complain quickly and directly to the MP [Member of

Parliament]. Then you know what, right? MP is DPM [Deputy Prime Minister], everything must be solved very quickly. And sometimes they even threaten, if you don't see to this by this week, I will go straight to the MP. Not only the RC or CCC people, even the residents are also like that (HMI Azlan).

The HMI's criticism of residents' demanding ways raises another point which explains his behaviour - the political and bureaucratic conditions and pressures under which he works.

As noted in Chapter 2, both political legitimacy and the goals of the PAP government rests heavily on HDB's efficient performance since it provides public housing for nearly 90% of the population. As the local HDB employee, the HMI is therefore expected to show prompt efficiency and high performance in his work. He comes under pressure from local elites to help them in their own performance⁵. The HMI, together with the EO, are expected to be the local agents for community development and, in political terms, for the continued legitimation of the PAP. However, the HMI's personal perceptions and his orientation towards the community may complicate his management. His role in fostering ethnic integration is indicative of this. As a state and HDB employee, his commitment to uphold it is expected, and as a community-based resident and employee he believes in it. But at the same time, local ground experience tells him that multiethnic living "takes time" and to "let a difficult situation mellow first" rather than take bureaucratic

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The HMI is assessed not only for routine functions but also for good performance and extra efforts under various HDB 'effective management' and 'quality control' schemes. Some EOs are "requested" to help PAP MPs in their constituency work, such as in meet-the-people sessions. As noted in Chapter 2, the AO works closely with local organisations.

action. Thus, although in agreement with the broad policy of ethnic integration, all the HMIs were ambivalent or disagreed with the imposition of ethnic quotas. A similar complexity is shown in one specific aspect of ethnic integration: the position of Malays. The HMI's concern with Malay residents' perception of being discriminated against overlaps with the state's concern over the political support of Malays. However, his concern is more in terms of how it might affect multiethnic community living rather than political costs. The relative congruence of HMI's and state views about community and ethnic integration does not, therefore, imply that he is always in agreement with HDB or state policies or politics. On the contrary, because of his personal background, community orientation or position within the HDB hierarchy, he can show divergence and disagreement with the "higher-ups" over policies and issues⁶.

In summary the AO plays a key role in keeping ethnic peace in the local community. However, this role has to be made credible so that residents can expect the exercise of impartiality. The AO's means of maintaining both peace and its image

⁶ All HMIs implicitly or explicitly express differences between themselves and higher-ups, attributing them to the latter's lack of contact with the residents. 'Perception gaps' are also officially acknowledged as existing among staff at different levels of HDB, particularly between Area Office and senior management at headquarters, see Chong (1985). At the time of fieldwork, the most current issue which raised HMIs' uncertainties and criticisms, both in terms of their own jobs and residents' interests, was the imminent change in local management from the AO to the Town Council in what they see is an obvious political move. (Under the Town Council Act, all wards have Town Councils chaired by MPs drawn from the ranks of PAP back-benchers.)

of impartiality - through a complex combination of rules, provisions and personal management skills - have been evolved through a process of trial and error. In the early years of the community, issues related to ethnic occasions, given their symbolic significance, most tested this dual ability. HDB's management of these issues in general demonstrates two important points in the construction of the multiethnic community: 1) that some degree of official or organisational intervention and mediation is necessary and useful to keep the peace and to ensure that minorities do not feel discriminated against; and 2) that some basic skills and sensitivities are necessary for such management: professionalism, caution and fairness combined with cultural awareness, discretion and flexibility. The latter conditions tend to manifest themselves in the person of the HMI whose intervention and management skills are primarily based on his knowledge of local community and ethnic cultures. At the same time, his behaviour is structured by the framework set by the state, HDB, residents and his own background. This explains why, in the reality of local management, he resorts to a combination of personal persuasion and punishment, but with a tendency towards the first. This is not to say that there are no ngiau or insensitive HMIs or those who treat their work as just a job to be done. Rather, the point is that because the HMI operates within such a framework, he is not to be seen simply as an altruistic community worker or a state-serving local official. His position is that of the community-based official who has to constantly negotiate with residents.

5.3 Community Centres, Citizens' Consultative Committee and Residents' Committees.

The main local organisations which share the common aim of promoting racial harmony and ethnic interaction within the larger objective of forging a common national identity are the Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs), Community Centres (CCs) and Residents' Committees (RCs). Without exception, these have been set up or coopted by the ruling PAP, and together they form an extensive network covering the entire city-state. Being the main institutionalised means by which the state intervenes and impinges on the local and one major means by which local people relate to the state, an understanding of these organisations cannot be separated from the PAP and political considerations. As such, I find it necessary in this section to discuss them in general, with insights from Marine Parade where relevant to illustrate or highlight points and problems involved. The discussion bears in mind two interrelated dimensions - the PAP's political interests and links with the community and the ethnic dimensions of its nation-building efforts, both via these organisations.

As has been well elaborated by Seah (1973) and Chan (1976), CCs, CCCs (and later RCs) have been institutionalised as mass-based organisations for the consolidation and maintenance of PAP power and goals. Throughout their existence they have been used to crush or preempt political opposition, mobilise political support and resources, and serve as bases for political recruitment, socialisation and communication between government and people. With its dominance firmly established, the PAP's political consolidation in the 1970s and

1980s has focussed on the effective delivery of political goods and on the building of a national identity through state bureaucracies and community organisations (Seah 1985:173-4). This has led to the latter becoming parapolitical organisations with strong webs of relationship with the PAP, while PAP leaders too believe that "grassroots" organisations should be distinctly pro-party (Seah *ibid*:190-1). Their significance to the PAP is based on its recognition that the construction of a national identity is only possible through a strong local identity, and that people's support and participation is crucial to its continued political legitimacy and hegemony. Hence its populist reference to them as grassroots organisations even as it maintains control and influence over them.

5.3.1 Backgrounds of Community Organisations

First formed by the colonial government, Community Centres (CCs) were taken over by the PAP when it assumed political power in 1959 and put under the centralised control of a newly formed People's Association (PA) in 1960 - a move essentially to stifle and preempt internal political competition. Between 1963 and 1965, they were also used for the propagation of national consciousness against the growing differences with the central government in Kuala Lumpur and confrontation with Indonesia. In facing both, the PAP was quick to notice that through participation in local activities, the CCs could be used to mobilise support for it and serve as a link between itself and the people (Seah, 1973:18) as well as encourage identification with the Singapore state (Chan 1976:155). Hence, their rapid expansion after 1965 when Singapore separated from Malaysia, reaching 189 by 1971. Since the mid-

1970s, many of them have been reconstituted because of urban renewal, resettlement and redrawing of constituency boundaries and they numbered 75 in 1990 with 10 more due by 1994.

The declared objectives of the CCs are to promote racial harmony and social cohesion, to act as a bridge between the people and government and to implement the latter's directives. Towards these objectives, CCs provide a wide range of activities which cover the recreational (e.g. sports), vocational (e.g. arts and crafts), cultural (e.g. dances), educational (e.g. kindergarten classes) and adhoc activities (e.g. talks). As focal points for nationalism, they serve as venues for the government to explain goals and clarify issues through ministers' speeches, and for national and other events such as National Day celebrations, the send-off of newly conscripted national servicemen and the implementation of national campaigns. Activities are drawn up by the PA which also appoints the CCs' regular staff and members of their Management Committees (CCMCs). The latter are appointed on the recommendations of the Members of Parliament (MPs) of the CC's constituencies while the PA's own Board of Management is chaired by the PM and consists mainly of government nominees.

Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs) were set up in every constituency from 1965 onwards and numbered 79 in 1990. Their background is similar to that of the CCs: their use by the PAP to fight political opposition and to establish its links with the people through addressing local issues⁷. There

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In the 1970s, CCCs were instrumental in helping the
(Footnote Continued)

was also a distinct ethnic factor to their set-up: ethnic riots in 1964 in which CCCs' goodwill committees were instrumental in restoring peace (Chan 1976:142). CCCs were under the control of the PM's Office (PMO) until 1985 when they came under the Ministry of Community Development. Like CCMC members, CCC members are usually appointed on the advice of a constituency's MP. CCCs' declared roles are: to transmit information and make recommendations on the needs of the people to the government, to keep people informed of government actions and policy, and to promote good citizenship amongst the people of Singapore. In the past, they handled mainly practical problems; today, their activities focus on the political and social. Politically CCCs act as channels for disseminating government policies and views to the residents and to transmit residents' views upwards. Socially they coordinate RC and CC activities, organise national events, promote national campaigns and organise projects such as fund-raising for facilities and welfare schemes. Individual CCCs may have their own specific projects. Many CCCs also handle some of the requests and grievances made at the local PAP branches' weekly "meet-the-people" sessions.

The takeover of CCs and CCCs and their cooptation of traditional leaders in the 1960s also applied to Residents' Committees (RCs) in the late 1970s. It is often claimed that the PAP initiated a pilot RC project in Marine Parade in 1977.

(Footnote Continued)

Government to persuade people who posed much resentment and resistance to its urban renewal and resettlement programmes to accept them.

However, according to one of its former members the basic idea was initiated by residents themselves in 1974. He recalls:

When we first came, there was nothing so we formed our own committee for get-togethers. Everybody was interested. Insecurity or is it security problem, ha ha! It was all very interesting, very lively, we had lots of fun... Then it became institutionalised. The MP came in, then what happened was this concept of RC came about and then we were roped in because we were already in this. The concept of the RC was actually derived from our estate... When we were a block committee, we were very informal and friendly. But when it became institutionalised, then it shifted, the outlook, the approach. Now they have a pyramid, from PMO, then CCC then the RC at the bottom.

RCs quickly became regarded by the PAP Government as the most relevant local organisation to construct new communities out of disparate peoples resettled into HDB estates - a process which, in its view, would take too long if left to itself. In a context where the vast majority of Singaporeans live in these estates, they are also viewed as crucial to its nation-building efforts, on par with CCMCs and CCCs, because their members are locals and therefore closest to grassroots opinion. Indeed, they are seen as today's counterparts of the village, street or community elders of the past, with roles likened to those of traditional mutual aid committees.⁸ To some extent they also replace intra- with inter-ethnic community networks.

RCs were officially institutionalised in 1978 after pilot schemes and by 1990 there were 393 RCs with 8,600 members. Each RC neighbourhood zone consists of 500-2,500 flats of various room-types and each RC comprises 10-30 members of mixed

PM Lee Kuan Yew, Speech at the opening ceremony of PA 20th Anniversary Exhibition, 1980, Speeches vol.4 no.6 1980. At the National RC Conference in 1983, there was a call to turn the RC movement into a national movement.

socio-economic backgrounds. Until 1989 RCs were appointed by the PMO and administered by its RC Central Secretariat through a network of group secretariats, but in 1989 the Secretariats of CCCs and RCs were merged under the Ministry of Community Development for better coordination. RCs have three objectives: to enhance public housing living and its quality of life and promote community, to encourage neighbourliness and social and ethnic integration, and to act as a two-way channel between government and residents. RC activities, mostly at neighbourhood and inter-RC levels, include social and recreational events (e.g. parties), educational activities (e.g. courses), community projects (e.g. tuition, fruit-tree planting), promotion of national campaigns (e.g. keep clean, save energy), and celebration of ethnic and national events.

The fact that these grassroots organisations have always been mobilised by the PAP attests to their important mediating role between it and the people. Chan is of the view that the PAP's style of operation, apart from the removal of opposition, is based on the calculated settlement of local issues through the use of CCC and CCMC leaders (1976:187). Furthermore, by concentrating on the spread of the legitimacy, influence and scope of these and other governmental institutions, the PAP leadership has arrived at a "winning formula for the swift entrenchment of their ruling position by contributing to the blurring of the distinction between party and Government" (p:226). Similarly, Seah (1985) argues that it is more expedient for the PAP to use organisations which are open to its influence and which are sufficiently flexible in their activities to attract a wide segment of the population. In

short, these organisations largely replace party roles as, through them, the PAP is able to exercise control and maintain its hegemony without being directly involved as a cadre party.⁹

The PAP's political control of community organisations is exercised through appointments, activities and funding. Appointed staff and members are PAP members or sympathisers and close links between the organisations and PAP's local branches are maintained even though formal role distinction is observed (Seah 1973:110-1). As one RC member in Marine Parade said: "You don't have to join the PAP but they will ask you to join anyway. I am not a member but obviously I am a sympathiser". There is also considerable overlapping membership among the organisations themselves. Many committee members serve in two or more organisations and may also serve in other local committees such as those of the Boys' Club and Seventh Moon celebration. As noted earlier, CCs' activities are drawn up by PA or require its approval, while those of RCs are coordinated by the CCC. Joint or coordinated activities include regular meetings to discuss and resolve local problems (this also usually involves the HDB AO officers), the celebration of official occasions and the promotion of national campaigns. In return for their activity and support, these committees receive funds while their members receive national awards.

9

Both Seah (1973) and Chan (1976) point out that PAP branch activities are mostly limited to meet-the-people sessions and kindergartens. The sessions keep the MP in touch with his constituency's problems while kindergarten classes provide an effective means of socialising young children into respecting national or political values and symbols.

The Marine Parade CCC was formed in 1977. Its overlap with the PAP local branch and the CCMC in membership and activities is so great that they are virtually identical. The Marine Parade CC opened in 1981. Besides its MC and the Youth, Women and Senior Citizens subcommittees, the CC also has various subcommittees catering for specific interests and needs, such as the Malay Cultural Committee, Cultural Dance and Qigong Groups and several clubs. Marine Parade has seven RCs.

Committee and subcommittee members of CCMC, CCC and RCs overlap tremendously. For example, one is simultaneously a member of the CCC, CCMC and its Senior Citizens' Club and RC as well as a member of the Merchants and Traders Association and Seventh Moon Festival committee. Another, a former member of the RC pilot project in 1977, is a member of the CCC, CCMC, Boys' Club Management Committee and Civil Defence Coordinating Committee. Yet another is a member of the CCC, RC, Senior Citizens' Club, Civil Defence Coordinating Committee, the Singapore Islamic Missionary Committee and Siglap Mosque Building Committee. Several members of the Women's and Youth subcommittees are also RC members. Besides their close liason through regular meetings, community organisations also hold joint activities and celebrations such as on National Day. In 1988 and 1989, two CCMC members and two patrons were awarded Public Service Medals in the National Day Honours for their long service and huge financial donations to Marine Parade's CC respectively. Marine Parade's MP said of them: They believe in the PAP and what the PAP is trying to do for Singaporeans (Marine Parade News vol.11 no.3 1988). Given that Marine Parade is politically and symbolically an important consti-

tuency (the Deputy PM's at the time of fieldwork), its grass-roots organisations must be seen to be performing well, hence their reputation as being highly active¹⁰ and solidly pro-PAP.

5.3.2 Minority Representation and Participation

The promotion of ethnic and social integration as part of nation-building by parapolitical organisations can be understood against the above background. In this regard, their ethnic identification with the Chinese and the low membership and participation of non-Chinese residents, particularly Malays whose support and participation is politically significant to the PAP, pose a major problem.

The 1970s' ethnic pattern of participation in CCCs and CCMCs, in which the bulk of leaders and participants were Chinese (Seah 1973:116, Chan 1976:146), persists to a large extent¹¹. While the backgrounds of Chinese participants and members (previously largely dialect-speaking, of relatively low literacy levels, Chinese-educated and engaged in trading or businesses)¹² has become more varied by the late 1980s, the

¹⁰

Not surprisingly, the Marine Parade CC won the "Best Community Centre" contest several times.

¹¹

Chan also points to Chinese political culture towards authority, power and social conflict as being central to understanding the PAP's becoming the main political institution in Singapore (1976:229-33).

¹²

In the 1960s over 80% of CCC members were businessmen whereas in 1987 they made up 30%; the others were civil servants (24%), administrators and managers (18%) and professionals (5.5%). Where membership used to be 90% Chinese-educated, it was 45% Chinese-educated, 51% English-educated and more bilingual in 1987. Educational levels of CCC members were also higher, the largest change occurring in the category of tertiary educated from 13% in 1979 to 28% in 1986, (CCC, 1986:8-9, 96).

participation of minorities and Malays in particular remains low. Malays comprise 8.7% of all CCMCs in 1988 compared with 6% in 1984, and some Malay groups in CCs did not last long while some CCs have no Malay representation at all. Malay representation in RCs actually fell from 12.9% in 1983 to 10.1% in 1987 although their absolute numbers rose (ST 14.10.1988). Other than numerically, common manifestations of Chinese dominance include the use of Mandarin in some courses and on special occasions. It was reported that the use of Chinese languages in many courses has kept some Malays away, while a language and culture gap exists between older Malay residents and younger non-Malay RC members (ST 14.10.1988). The timing of RC activities which coincides with evening prayers and the non-availability of halal food at RC functions were other reasons cited by my informants.

Mosque activities have also been identified as a source of competition faced by community organisations in attracting Malays, as well as resulting in a separation of social activities between Malays and others. In recent years mosques have become more than prayer places for Muslims; they organise a wide range of activities such as religious education, briefings on Islamic pilgrimage, counselling services and kindergarten, tuition, computer and vocational classes. This socio-religious feature of mosques, serving both religious and secular needs, is a new and significant dimension in their functioning as institutions for Muslims and their identity.

Similarly, other religious organisations also go beyond prayers to provide educational, social and recreational activities for members. Many of my informants of various religious faiths said that besides prayers, they took part in tuition, study, community service, counselling and social-recreational projects and activities organised by their churches or temples. Many in fact belong to specific groups (youths, singles, married) within their religious congregations and spend much of their free time in their activities. 'Competition' in secular activities is thus provided by all religious bodies to CCs, CCCs and RCs, but attention is focussed on mosques because of the political significance of Malays.

The image of Chinese dominance in CCs, CCCs and RCs ultimately affects PAP legitimacy in the eyes of non-Chinese. As such there have been various efforts since 1988 to attract non-Chinese members, particularly Malays. For example, a Malay Cultural Groups Coordinating Council was formed in 1988 to study why few Malays take part in CC activities and to attract more Malays to join¹⁴, including those who prefer mosque

(Footnote Continued)

All working Muslims contribute to a Mosque Building Fund through monthly deductions of \$1 from their Central Provident Fund compulsory savings. According to Sukaimi, this contribution and other regular contributions and volunteer spirit have enhance Muslims' sense of collective ownership of mosques and collective will to make them effective in meeting the needs and well-being of Muslims.

14

It proposed to 1) introduce activities of origin and special interest to Malays, 2) form Malay cultural groups in all CCs and coordinate their activities, 3) conduct Malay classes for CC staff, 4) develop one CC into a centre of excellence for Malay cultural activities; and 5) attract more Malays into the CCMCs with the aim of at least one Malay in each CCMC. In Aljunied constituency, a Malay affairs advisory committee has been set up (Straits Times 13.3.89).

activities (ST 14.11.1988). The Ministry of Community Development organised courses on cultures of different ethnic groups for RCs in 1988 and 1989, and RCs were urged to close language and culture gaps with language classes and forums on cultures, to celebrate ethnic festivals and to work closely with mosque and Muslim block committees. At the same time, mosques were advised by MUIS (the state Islamic Religious Council) against running vocational and computer courses or full-time religious schools on grounds that they stretched the mosques' resources and that such courses were available elsewhere such as in CCs. It was also announced that MUIS would have a bigger say in activities conducted by mosques and the use of mosque funds in its future mosque-management programme (ST 12.9.1989, 15.9.1989, 26.9.1989). Finally, Malays are often exhorted by MPs and Ministers to join CCs, CCCs and RCs so that their representation may better reflect the proportion of the Malay population in Singapore.

Exhortations to Malays to join community organisations, however, caused a minor furore over the meaning of 'national mainstream' in 1988. The First Deputy PM, after noting that he found the Malays' lack of enthusiasm in joining the activities of RCs, CCs and CCCs "puzzling", had called on the Malays to play a more active role in RCs, saying: "Whether Malays want to be part of mainstream activities or whether they prefer to have their own activities and join in national functions only occasionally is up to the Malay community". He subsequently identified the key issue of Malays as the following:

Does the Malay community want to merge with the mainstream of national life and influence the direction of this mainstream by being part of it? Or does it prefer to be a

branch on its own, setting its own direction independently of the rest of society? (ST 17.10.1988, 18.10.1988).

He also went on to say that Malays could express their support for the PAP in return for its policies of positive discrimination (waiver of school fees for Malays, building of mosques) through greater involvement in these organisations (ibid). This furore came close on the heels of an earlier claim by him that the PAP lost a significant proportion of Malay votes to the opposition in the 1988 general elections¹⁵, and his quick reassertion that the PAP wanted a new phase in Singapore's political development where Malays and other races showed "open and unambiguous" support for the PAP government. His remarks generated various responses in the press which questioned the meaning of 'mainstream' and the exchange of government help to improve the socio-economic position of the Malays in return for their political support. Even Malay MPs cautioned against using involvement in grassroots activities as the definition of being in the mainstream (ST 11.10.1988, 19.10.1988, 17.11.1988). One Malay resident's view sums up the overall Malay response well:

"If Malays don't go to the CC or join RC, that doesn't mean they are not integrated into the mainstream, they should be careful about saying that because it hurts the Malays. They say Malays only like to go to mosque but they don't know what happens there. Malays don't go there just to pray, there are all kinds of activities there... If want Malays to join the CC, then must organise relevant activities. Then Malays will move between CC and mosque, some days especially Friday at mosque, then Sunday at CC.

In the case of Marine Parade, its CCMC is associated with Chinese dominance and with Chinese businessmen - due no doubt to the fact that a Chinese local restaurant-owner and a housing developer both donated huge sums of money to the CC and are CC patrons. Its composition is overwhelmingly Chinese, although the mix is slightly better in the CCs' Youth and Women's committees. In the CCC, there are relatively few Malays while only 10% of RC membership is Malay in contrast to the 25% Malay population in Marine Parade. Some of the common signs of Chinese dominance mentioned by my Malay informants include the giving of speeches in Mandarin and the seating arrangements of Muslims "at the side or at the back" at National Day dinners and RC posters in Chinese and English only. "Either use English only or all four languages", said one resident. On the other hand, the CC has an active Malay Cultural Group with many activities such as cultural dance, sewing and bridal make-up classes, talks on marital issues and problems specific to Malays and adhoc activities. According to one young Malay resident who makes it a point to check the CC's activities regularly, "they are not bad. Most are not biased in favour of one group or another, and there is a balance of activities for Chinese and Malays". It is also significant that the send-off of Muslim pilgrims for the Haj also takes place in the CC and is officiated by the (non-Muslim) MP and representatives of community organisations. Marine Parade's CC and RCs also commemorate important ethnic occasions such as Hari Raya and Lunar New Year with decorative greetings. At the time of fieldwork, an Indian Activities Group was being formed.

5.3.3 The Politics of Non-Participation

Malays' lack of participation in CCs, CCCs and RCs has thus far been largely attributed to ethnic reasons. However, one other major reason why some Malays and for that matter others across all ethnic backgrounds do not participate in them lies in their political identification with the PAP. A view¹⁶ noted by Seah as early as 1973 (1973:112), it cropped up frequently among informants and was variously expressed:

These leaders are mainly party members and supporters, so how representative of residents are they? (Borhan).

The organisations here full of PAP people, all controlled by PAP. My son, he is with the RC, he is pro-PAP (James).

Every occasion always the officials and their families and you know they are PAP people or supporters. You go to the CC, 'our community in action' corner shows nothing but photos of MPs and officials receiving awards. You might think Marine Parade belongs to the officials! Marine Parade News is news about committees, officials and their functions, not about Marine Parade, it's all glossy news only. I am so stupid not to see through it (Yang).

I think it is too political for me to join community organisations (smiles). I would say the RC forms the outer circle of the PAP. You can join but if you want to occupy certain positions, they have to spot you, you can't just apply... For the lower or working class people, they can support an authoritarian government and its organisations but for the professionals the problem of alienation, political participation and control is very real. Money and material gains is not everything (Tee).

There is also a common view that members of these organisations are often self-serving while others are critical of the organisations' current role, activities and emphasis:

Actually, these fellas join the RC and CC for what? Just for the privileges, their own interests. Like free carparking in all HDB estates, priority for HDB housing,

16

This view is also corroborated by a recent official study group on problems faced by RCs. It noted that membership might be affected by the fact that all PAP MPs are RC advisers and that "some people perceive that the RCs are just another political arm of the ruling party" (cited in Straits Times 17.7.1990).

facilities at the CC. Like this fellow in the RC himself told me, out of ten people in his committee, only four want to work, the other six just want to get the name and privileges... Actually the DPM [Deputy PM] is not bad, it's some of these guys who advise him. And sometimes advise him the wrong thing because they themselves out of touch (Aziz).

I think these people join the RC just for themselves, they don't care for the poor and needy. All they care to organise are trips to Thailand. Of what use is that? That is not the role of the RC or CC. I feel better to join my church (Mrs Reutens).

I attended one RC meeting, wanted to join them because got experience in CCC in my kampung (village) days. But what they talk about? Socials, trip to Thailand, no use kind of activities so I gave up. Some more, these people act like lords, they act too officious, never come around to talk to people. Only when MP come they follow him around. So now I provide my own leadership, I talk to people in trouble, give advice, write letters of appeal for them, help them find jobs (Daud).

Nowadays they want people with paper qualifications, but this type of work, you have to spend time, meet people individually, this is the kind of qualifications you need, not just paper. You must go to the people, not ask them to come to you (ex-CCC member).

Residents' perceptions of the PAP government itself, because of its close links with these community organisations, is also a direct factor affecting their participation. It is a strong view among many that the PAP government is non-consultative, authoritarian, pays only lip service to participatory democracy and is unable to accept criticism¹⁷, and various policies, schemes, issues and remarks of individual

17

Hence, rather than understand why some people do not join grassroots organisations, one MP challenged critics of RCs to "contribute constructively by joining RCs rather than put their scarce talent to destructive criticism" (Straits Times 8.11.88). It was also reported that some Ministers were critical of MPs who gave critical feedback from grassroots leaders (Straits Times 3.3.89). According to Chan (1976:139), even those within the organisations sometimes doubted whether their feedback, views and suggestions were given sufficient consideration.

politicians are cited to back up their claims. "Too much control", "Just like a communist country", "See what they do to the opposition" and "They don't really want to listen" are frequently heard criticisms. There are also malicious plays on the acronym PAP such as 'pay and pay', 'press and press', 'papa-anak party' - the first alluding to the proliferation of fines and payments under the PAP regime, the second to the sense of being pressured and controlled by the PAP and the third to the then PM and his son both of whom are dominant figures in the PAP. It is significant that while most informants acknowledge that the PAP has done a lot of good they nonetheless feel the need for a political opposition in Parliament to check its authoritarianism. The following expressed by one resident sums up well the latter mood:

Before, only rich people had houses. The poor lived in wooden shacks and one time the flood was so bad that my food floated away! Now we all have our own homes, that is good, that is what they are good for. But still we can't let them *buat suka-suka* [do as they wish], otherwise they control too much. That is why we need an Opposition.

In summary, the use of community organisations by the PAP for its political consolidation and legitimacy since the 1960s was so effective that by the 1980s they had clearly become its parapolitical institutions. Their nation-building roles focus on "community engineering" and promoting ethnic interaction. In the latter they face problems of being identified as predominantly Chinese and of ignoring minority representation and participation. Efforts at attracting minorities and Malays to join them so far largely focus on the cultural and symbolic.

However, it is not only for ethnic-cultural reasons that minorities shy away from these committees. In Marine Parade, some of those who decline participation hold the strong view

that they are PAP-controlled and their leaders represent PAP or self-interests. Because of their close ties with the PAP, the organisations also provide an important gauge and reflection of attitudes towards the PAP. The image of the PAP government among its critics is that of being authoritarian and exercising too much control. Here, it is important to emphasise that the suggested split between those who support the PAP and its para-political organisations and those who do not or who find their close links unacceptable is not limited to minorities but exists amongst people of all ethnic backgrounds¹⁸. Ironically therefore, it is the PAP's own effectiveness in controlling the local organisations that undermines their credibility and acceptability and thereby its own legitimacy.

5.4 The Muslim Block Committee

There are many formal and informal religious groups among residents of different religious backgrounds in Marine Parade. Here, I discuss the Muslim Block Committee (MBC) as one example of local ethnic-religious identity. It also illustrates the organised nature and strength of Muslim identity among Malay residents who form the largest minority in the population¹⁹.

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Chiew and Tan's study (1990:16) shows that Malays and Indians are more politically alienated than Chinese.

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Other local Muslim organisations include the Marine Parade branches of the Islamic Missionary Committee and Singapore Islamic Council, which organise talks, mass prayers and Jawi (Arabic script) classes, and a joint Marine Parade-Siglap Mosque Building Committee. Another example of local ethnic-religious organisation is the Chinese Seventh Moon Festival committee, discussed in Chapter 4.

As its name suggests, the MBC serves Muslims living in one or a few blocks of flats. Throughout Singapore it is usually the first to be set up when Muslim residents move into a new block or neighbourhood or the first organisation to join when individuals move into the estate from elsewhere. In Marine Parade the first MBCs were set up when Malays were resettled there in the 1970s. As the majority of Malays live in 3-room blocks, MBCs are most common in such blocks and may also have members from other room-type blocks. The number of committee members varies from one MBC to another but typically ranges from five to ten men who tend to be older and possess religious standing such as hajis who have undergone the haj pilgrimage (women may be active ordinary members but are not found in the leadership). Ordinary membership varies in size, depending on the number of Muslim families in the block or vicinity, and is voluntary. In one 3-room type block for example, forty out of its sixty Muslim families are members of its MBC. Members may also consist of close networks of relatives and friends some of whom have known each other since pre-Marine Parade days.

Activities of MBCs may vary in scope but essentially focus on kematian (death), kenduri (feasts) and sembahyang (prayers) activities. Upon knowledge of a death, the committee quickly informs members and a habuan kematian (death collection) is made. The collection is then given to the bereaved family for funeral expenses. Members may also attend prayers at the home of the deceased as part of a Muslim's duty. Kenduri and prayers are usually held together at the start and end of Ramadan and on Hari Raya Haji. Some MBCs also collect food donations for poor Muslim families in the estate "so that they

can enjoy the Hari Raya atmosphere as well". More active MBCs may also hold regular joint prayers or Koran study sessions, usually in the form of smaller groups which meet in each other's homes. One MBC organises help for wedding functions.

The MBC and its activities may be regarded as a form of organised adaptation to new living surroundings and revitalisation of community for the resettled, its origins based on the **kampung** (village) tradition of organisation and **gotong-royong** (cooperation). Said one member: "In the kampung, more visible and easier to know what's happening; living in HDB it's harder to know so all the more we need to organise." In the context of an ethnically mixed environment, the MBC also provides a basis²⁰ for ethnic-religious community for the Malay minority.

5.6 Boys' Club

Boys' Clubs (BCs) were set up in 1982 after two pilot schemes and in 1989 there were 14 BCs in Singapore. Aimed at addressing the problems of juvenile crime and delinquency, they are for school boys, early school-leavers and referral cases²¹ within the age group 12-18. Their objectives are to promote

20

However, MBCs are not without problems. One MBC leader identifies two problems threatening their existence in the long run: the movement of Malay residents to other housing estates and the growing sense of privacy which has led some not to join the MBC.

21

During the colonial administration, boys' clubs were also set up to keep boys off the streets. According to official studies of crime and delinquency, boys in the age group 12 - 18 and especially those with family problems are most vulnerable to peer group pressure, bullying and crime. Referral cases are youths under 18 who are referred by the Central Narcotics Bureau and Criminal Investigation Department to the BC for daily supervision.

a sense of community, camaraderie and cooperation among youths, develop their sense of responsibility, promote healthy outdoor activities, make them good citizens and establish close rapport between police and boys. Although not explicitly ethnic-oriented in objectives, they inevitably have had to take into consideration ethnic interaction, and in fact its promotion among boys is a key feature. Activities organised include social and recreational activities, community service projects and participation in national activities such as performing at concerts and opening ceremonies. BCs are sponsored by the People's Association and the Ministry of Home Affairs, and have members from the local CCC, CCMC, RCs, schools and police force sitting on their management committees. The role of the police is particularly important. The image promoted of the policeman is that of a 'friend' of boys especially when in trouble, and police officers and national servicemen run the clubs on an everyday basis, they organise activities, counsell the boys on various problems and monitor the referral cases.

The Marine Parade BC was set up in 1985 and had 428 members in 1989. 75% of members are Malays and the remainder mostly Chinese, the bulk of whom are from 2- and 3-room flats²². Some boys find the BC's facilities attractive but refrain from joining because they do not want to be under police supervision. Among some non-Malay boys, it also has a reputation as having "too many" or "too cliquish" Malay boys,

22

Police on patrol usually approach those who appear 'at risk', i.e. those playing truant, smoking and grouping in gangs which get into 'staring' incidents, fights and bullying, to join. Others are persuaded by friends who are members.

an image derived from the BC's 75% Malay membership. But for those who join it is like a second home that provides space, company and activities. Members are deliberately organised into four ethnically mixed groups for activities while there are two similarly mixed teams of four policemen and national servicemen in charge.

In ethnic interaction among the boys, the use of ethnic expletives in arguments during play, discussed in Chapter 3, also occurs frequently. However, both officers and boys interviewed say that arguments are minor and they "never keep in the heart, usually forget after a while". The officers are also careful not to be seen as biased when boys argue, so that if need be a Chinese officer will deal with the Malay boy and a Malay officer the Chinese boy. In games, the same ethnic pattern applies as discussed in Chapter 3. While some sports such as football and swimming are not identified with any particular ethnic group, the 'Malay boys in sepak takraw and Chinese boys in basketball' picture persists. Interestingly, both sides claim that the other game is hard and requires a lot of skill²³. Similarly, in cultural activities the 'Malays in dikir barat and kompang and Chinese in lion dance' pattern exists. One 'incident' concerning Malay boys' participation in the Chinese lion dance troupe reflects the sensitivity and difficulty of crossing ethnic boundaries at play. Some Malay parents complained that their sons performed at Chinese temples

23

At the time of fieldwork, the police officers had adopted a strategy of ethnically mixed teams for two forthcoming basketball and sepak takraw competitions.

and religious functions and a rumour was also spread that the drum was made of dried pig skin. The Malay boys finally withdrew from the troupe.

Overall, there is also a fair degree of ethnic grouping and it is significant that the BC has quickly assumed a Malay majority membership - a feature derived from the fact that socio-economic problems among Malays manifest themselves among the youths²⁴. Breaking the strong ethnic associations in games is difficult and understandably takes time because of the strong ethnic-based friendship networks on the basis of which boys normally play. Any similar attempt in cultural activities would be even more difficult because of their strong ethnic identification, reinforced by religious boundaries. However, the issue of police control aside, the BC does provide one important local meeting place for boys, particularly those who have little resources to go beyond it for their daily social and recreational needs. In doing so, they also provide grounds for breeding familiarity and interaction among boys of different ethnic backgrounds growing up in the same community.

5.6 Merchants and Traders Association

Chapter 2 showed a clearcut ethnic pattern of economic ownership and management dominated by Chinese traders. Here I discuss briefly how traders' ethnic backgrounds and orientations unconsciously affect economic organisation.

24

School drop-out rates and drug addiction and relapse cases in Singapore are the highest among Malays.

For traders stiff competition both from within and outside the locality, coupled with high rents, are the main problems.²⁵ Besides individual responses to cope with this competition the Marine Parade Merchants and Traders Association (MTA) was formed in 1988 to "improve shopping in Marine Parade, making it more friendly and attractive". Not surprisingly, its committee is wholly Chinese (headed by a local restaurant-owner and patron of the CCMC, while some MTA committee members are also members of the CCMC and CCC) and almost all Chinese traders in Marine Parade are its ordinary members. Most Chinese traders also collectively participate in Lunar New Year and Seventh Moon celebrations as an economic community, the events' organisation by some also enabling them to maintain economic leadership and social standing.

In contrast, membership of the relatively few non-Chinese traders in the MTA is limited to those managing shops. One such member said: "Join just in case got problems, to help business better. But don't go for the dinner function, they serve Chinese food we cannot eat". Among non-members, one is already a member of an organisation for Muslim traders elsewhere while several did not because they associate the MTA with the Seventh Moon Festival market committee "that is for Chinese

25

The individual trader competes by improving service and variety of goods to customers. Some Chinese traders retail specific items used by Malays/Muslims and to compete with supermarkets, some have joined corporations to buy goods in bulk to resell at low prices. On the other hand, ethnic minority traders have thus far not sufficiently tapped the Chinese market and none have joined corporations.

to pray". Another did not join because "pay and pay [subscriptions], what do you get in return?".

Although a new organisation, the MTA's beginnings so far show a Chinese orientation in leadership, membership and activities. Thus it is not surprising that while it is not explicitly ethnic-oriented like traditional economic organisations, such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but is place-based, it still assumes a Chinese image.

5.7 Discussion

Local organisations raise two central issues: state-party control and intervention, and ethnic interaction. Community organisations serve as the major arena through which the hegemonic ruling party impinges upon the local community. With the exception of the socio-religious (MBCs, Seventh Moon Committees) and economic (MTA) organisations, most of them are local setups of centralised parastatal bureaucracies (HDB AO) or parapolitical institutions (CC, CCC, RCs) serving social-ideological functions and which are themselves closely linked to each other. The ethnic and interethnic aspects of community organisations therefore need to be appreciated both in themselves and in the context of strong state-community links and ruling party interests. Their aims of fostering ethnic interaction fall broadly within the party's nation-building goal of ethnic integration through public housing community development and their activities towards this aim form a crucial part of the ongoing process of the PAP's legitimisation.

The HDB's local management of ethnic differences is highly effective, which no doubt earns the PAP much legitimacy. This

effectiveness is achieved through a combination of persuasion, provision and punishment to forestall major problems, the HMI playing a central role. However, the HMI's complex position also shows that official management cannot be viewed in monolithic terms but is to be differentiated at different levels of the HDB hierarchy. The HMI's actions and negotiations over ethnic differences reflect the 'bottom-up' processes of official management in which direct contact and accommodation with residents are most made and sought. In Chapter 6 I will examine the policy of ethnic quotas for public housing both as an instance of the 'top-down' level of management of ethnic relations and of 'state-bureaucracy' and 'community' perceptions of each other.

Community organisations bring into question their political-ideological status because of their close links with the PAP government. The latter is popularly considered as authoritarian and intent on the expeditious implementation of its policies, but is at the same time efficient, uncorrupt and not without community interests at heart. It has cleverly incorporated people's interests within its programmes and does indeed provide the material goods, thus dissipating some of the potential for opposition against it. Members of CCCs, CCs and RCs see little objection in working closely with such a regime to obtain resources for the community (and, no doubt, for their own interests as well), accepting its strong role in community development as welcome, necessary or inevitable. For others however, the PAP government's control over community organisations and its authoritarianism affect their acceptability and credibility, its good performance in delivering the goods

notwithstanding. Here, it is not necessarily the case that their views and the government's about peaceful and interactive social and ethnic relations diverge. Rather, it is the sense of being controlled by the government that discourages them from joining its parapolitical organisations. Their criticisms implicitly or explicitly question the extent of its current monopoly in defining what community activities and values should be. They also imply a desire for a separation between civic and political institutions and express a sense of right to their autonomous determination of community life without state-imposed notions or as a direct exchange for political support. In short, the present political status of community organisations and who they 'belong' to remain contested. They also raise the question of how and to what extent state intervention and, concomitantly, what citizen participation in local life, should be.

While the status of community organisations is of general concern, their ethnic and interethnic dimensions involve and affect minorities in specific ways. This discussion reveals the social and political importance of Malays in the local community on the one hand and the dominance of the Chinese on the other. Why Malays do not participate as much in CCs, CCCs and RCs as in mosque activities is a complex question. For Malays, it is in part a reflection of social, cultural and religious factors which are, in turn, emphasised because of their minority status; on the part of the community organisations it is often due to their Chinese features. Part III discusses Malays' socio-economic position. Suffice to note here that PAP legitimacy suffers from not having sufficiently

delivered the goods to Malays, and so long as Malays feel disadvantaged and perceive that the government is not doing enough to help, they will be reluctant to join in the activities of organisations associated with it. In the final analysis, whether more Malays will join these organisations will depend both on the organisations' ability to change their Chinese-dominated image and on larger efforts to ensure that Malays are not left behind in Singapore's economic development.

The issue of participation in 'mainstream' activities is also pertinent for minorities. It is officially suggested that CC, CCC and RC activities are mainstream ones and those of other organisations somewhat not so, or less so. Also, given the former's "grassroots" and "national" image, those who do not participate in their activities appear as somewhat lacking in national identity and not belonging. The importance of religious institutions in meeting the spiritual, social and recreational needs of people in general has long been established and continues to thrive²⁶. They form part of Singapore's dynamic cultural landscape and in this sense arguably form part of the national mainstream. The perception that parapolitical organisations are more mainstream than others is therefore at best misinformed and at worst ethnically and politically biased as the "mainstream" is also Chinese-dominated and PAP-sanctioned. For minorities, the perception that their religious setups and activities are out of the mainstream can also lead to their feeling alienated. On the

26

Indeed, the apparent rise in religious-based activities may be interpreted as part reflection of political alienation.

other hand, these other organisations do tend to coincide with ethnic cleavages and it is therefore objectively possible for ethnic groups to be largely involved in separate secular or social activities. The main challenge appears to be that people do not turn to them for the fulfilment of their needs with an inward-looking, exclusivist or reactive approach, and that they are not disinclined to turn to other arrangements and institutions such as the community organisations for their needs. For the latter to be possible, RCs and CCs need to shed their dominant PAP and Chinese images which have so far kept some people away.

The above general dissenting views and concerns, including those of minorities, over the political status of community organisations and PAP control pose great challenges to both the organisations and the PAP government. They reflect the high expectations arising from the liberalising forces of education, industrialisation and internationalisation and, ironically, from the successes of PAP rule (Chan 1985:169). Whether the PAP has fully realised the heightened expectations of a more complex political culture ²⁷ remains to be seen. However, it is clear that the "winning formula" for its legitimacy in the 1960s and 1970s, i.e. mass mobilisation through community organisations, is no longer working as well or as simply. In

27

After the 1988 elections in which the percentage votes for the PAP dropped, the then PM threatened to modify the 'one man one vote' system. In the 1991 elections in which 4 opposition candidates won seats, the ex-PM said that young voters should be taught a lesson, while the PM admitted that he had considered dissolving Parliament and calling for new elections if the Opposition had won more seats.

other words, these ideological state apparatuses have not been able to produce a complete dominant ideology; while they might have worked well in the past, they are now significantly contested.

In recent years attempts to maintain the relevance of community organisations have concentrated on the regeneration of their leadership and membership and on maintaining their effectiveness as channels of political participation and feedback²⁸. The first involves attracting professionals, those with higher educational qualifications and minorities to join without alienating the traditional Chinese leaders²⁹. The second involves emphasising the organisations' discussion role and in educating members to keep abreast of issues and events. At the same time, there is continual stress on their role in creating a sense of local community and belonging. Whether this legitimisation exercise is sufficient and effective remains to be seen. Chan points out that a hegemonic party by definition possesses the will to dominate and seeks to dominate, and predicts a trend towards containment politics (Chan 1985:169). But ultimately, whether and how it will

28

Other moves include providing a more "upmarket class" image in keeping with rising expectations, such as changing the names of the CC from 'centre' to 'club' and of its 'subcommittees' to 'executive committees', expanding the range of activities and facilities to rival those of private clubs and offering more courses and programmes for youths and women.

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See footnote 12. In a speech, the PM characterised older Chinese businessmen members as contributing in terms of "finance, belief in personal sacrifice and mutual help and links with other organisations", the younger group as "articulate, full of ideas, with the emphasis on efficiency and cost effectiveness" and RC members as having a sense of "fair play and pragmatism" (CCC, 1986:8-9, 96)).

devolve power in community organisations will determine their relevance in the future.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATIONS OF MULTIETHNIC LIVING

6.1 Introduction

So far the discussion on the processes of local multi-ethnic community construction has focused on its historical formation, everyday life, special occasions and organisations. This chapter concludes the discussion with residents' overall evaluations of multiethnic living.

Residents' evaluations of living in multiethnic public housing are highly complex and both non-ethnic and ethnic factors are involved. From these evaluations emerge two key dimensions which I will elaborate: 1) a clear preference for multiethnic living but with qualifications by minorities and 2) the HDB's policy of ethnic quotas for public housing. Given that the latter is also a significant instance of the interplay between state policy and local relevances, I will discuss it in some detail.

6.2 Preferences for Multiethnic Living

Prior to the discussion of residents' preferences for multiethnic living, it is important to point out that non-ethnic criteria play a critical part in housing preferences. Based on their experiences living in Marine Parade (and elsewhere), important non-ethnic criteria for a preferred public housing estate include its size, population density,

availability of facilities and convenience of its location¹ in relation to workplace, school and selected relatives and friends. For many, proximity to their previous settlement also provides a psychological link to the past and a sense of familiarity with the present. The following illustrates the significance of these non-ethnic criteria for the many residents who prefer Marine Parade:

I love Marine Parade. And all my friends are here and everything is convenient. Convenient is the word. I will never leave this place. My children can go if they want to but I will always stay here (Mrs. Reutens).

I really like Marine Parade. I feel homely when I come back from school or town. Not like other estates - so big, crowded and intense, you feel surrounded by thousands of people and hundreds of buildings, too many people sharing facilities. Here it is like a village (Pauline).

I hope to buy a resale flat here although I am not sure if I can afford it. I cannot imagine living elsewhere. All my life I have lived in the East coast. My father also lived here most of his life, since he came from Malacca (Chris).

As we shall see, these non-ethnic criteria figure prominently in residents' evaluations of the ethnic quota for housing policy.

Additionally, it should be noted that the media and official perception of Marine Parade as a "Malay enclave" is not held by residents themselves. Among my non-Malay informants I did not come across anyone who saw it as such; at most, some did notice that there are "many" or "more" Malays (than in some other estates) or that they are concentrated in

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The conveniences of facilities and location were cited among the list of what residents liked best about HDB living (HDB Sample Household Survey 1987, cited in HDB Annual Report 1987/88 p.27).

3-room flats. Most residents, both Malay and non-Malay, described Marine Parade's ethnic mix as "normal", "quite mixed" or "a good mix". Some did not even notice the mix and asked me "what about it?". The very young also professed no knowledge of other forms of living other than multiethnic living which they take for granted:

I have always lived in this type of area. I don't know what it is like to live in an area with only one group (Jane).

The above responses indicate at the least an indifference² towards multiethnic living. However, the most significant response of residents irrespective of ethnic background or age is their overwhelming preference for living in a mixed community. With the exception of four persons, almost all remaining 96 informants indicated such a preference. Central to this preference is the wish for privacy from relatives and co-ethnics.³ Living in a larger mixed setting rather than that of a close-knit, ethnic-based community, such as in their former villages, individuals feel they are able to avoid some of the latter's internal dynamics, particularly gossip, and to enjoy some degree of privacy and anonymity. They state this preference explicitly:

Malays are better to live with than Chinese because they treat you good, don't gossip about you like we Chinese do (Ah Soh).

I like it here. I like the freedom to mix and I like to mix with people, I don't like to stick to my own kind even

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Yeung & Yeh (1975) also note that tenants are indifferent to the ethnic status of their neighbours.

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A preference for multiethnic living and for living at a distance from kin is also noted by Ong (1974) in an early study of resettled Malays in Geylang Serai.

though the Gujerati community is very tight. I prefer to live in an area like this than with a Gujerati community, I will die! At least I got my friends [Azian and Chin] to talk to. I can't talk about my problems to a Gujerati, everybody will know and it will sure to get back to my mother. Anyway, the girls don't feel the way I do, most of them are so obedient. I envy Chinese women, look at my friend Chin. I think Chinese girls are so free compared to us... Living here, at least I can breathe (Leela).

I think an area like Marine Parade is the most ideal - there are enough Malays to make me feel at home, at the same time I have my privacy, I can keep a certain distance from them. I value my privacy. Not like in the kampung, everybody wants to know what is going on with you. I would prefer to live in a mixed place than a place like Geylang (Zul).

Some residents additionally appreciate multiethnic living as "more interesting" and socially more satisfying:

This is quite a mixed area, got Chinese, Malays, some Indians and Eurasians. That is what is nice about it, about Marine Parade and about the east coast, different food, different people, I can't live in an Eurasian kampung like I did before! (Gary).

I think it makes the place more interesting than if only one ethnic group lived in it. In the past I just took it for granted but I have just returned from three years abroad so I really noticed it this time (Charles).

It's hard to say exactly what it is but I learn here and there about other cultures, their practices and habits. Sometimes I may not even like or agree with what I see but at least I get to understand a bit. Not like this Chinese friend of mine. She is so ignorant of others (Jane).

Among the four exceptions are two women who, on the basis of a few "bad" experiences with some ethnic others (one a theft and the other her spouse's infidelity), group-stereotype and prefer not to live in the same locality with members of these ethnic backgrounds. The other two exceptions are old persons who for a larger part of their lives have lived within ethnically homogeneous communities and find adjustments to mixed living, such as language problems, difficult. But as shown in Chapters 3 and 4, ethnic orbits of activity are still obtainable within the multiethnic setting.

The overwhelming preference for multiethnic living also suggests that residents on the whole have adapted well to it. Chapter 4 showed in detail some modes of adaptation in the context of different cultural-religious practices. The strong sense of pragmatism about these differences is extended to multiethnic living in general:

Living in this type of housing, you must be willing to live with all sorts of people, get along with all sorts of people. If cannot, you should go and buy your own private house and live by yourself. Wherever we live, we must adjust to the conditions there. The Chinese have a saying "入乡随俗", it means that wherever you make your home, you must get used to the place (Ah Sin).

Indeed, not only the pragmatism but the principles of avoidance of conflict, tolerance, accommodation and respect with which to deal with cultural-religious differences as shown in Chapter 4 have been generalised to overall multiethnic living:

The way I see it, we all have our own ways, different customs, different faiths, so long as we tolerate each other, be friendly, helpful, assist, don't interfere and don't criticize each other's ways, then we can live peacefully, there will be no trouble (Mr Paul).

These general principles of coexistence reflect and reinforce at the interpersonal level the mutual obligation to trust each other to be good neighbours and co-residents as shown in Chapter 3. Moreover older residents' care to maintain ethnic peace is also based on their past experience of two ethnic riots in 1950 and 1964. In fact I met several informants who either participated in the riots or were members of committees set up to promote peace and goodwill immediately after the 1964 riots. These riots and the possibility of riots recurring are discussed in a later section. Here it is important to recognise, against the background of these events, the signifi-

cance of several old residents' proud comment that Marine Parade is "peaceful, no [ethnic] incident ever".

At the same time however, the preference for multiethnic living is a qualified one for minorities⁴. Minorities remain conscious of their minority status within a context in which the Chinese are the majority. Their responses that Marine Parade has an "acceptable" or "a good mix" of people is indicative of this consciousness. Many Malay residents also noted that many Malays have moved out to larger flats in other estates and that Malays in Marine Parade are concentrated in 3-room flats with few found in 5-room flats. Similarly, Eurasian residents noted that Marine Parade previously had a significant number of Eurasians because of its proximity to Katong but that many have moved to other estates or emigrated, while Indian residents pointed out that there are few Indians in Marine Parade. In other words, minorities are conscious of their numbers and their ethnic-based needs and interests even as they prefer multiethnic living. Indeed, minorities make two qualifications to multiethnic living: the preservation of minorities' 'special ethnic community places' in Singapore and a minimum pool of co-ethnics within the local community.

6.2.1 Special Ethnic Community Place

Earlier I noted that Geylang, Serangoon Road, Kreta Ayer and Katong are historically evolved ethnic places identified with Malays, Indians, Chinese and Eurasians respectively.

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This is also noted in Ong's study (1974) in which Malay informants who prefer mixed living qualify that each of the ethnic proportions in the community's population should not be too large.

Chapter 4 showed how the sense of community of each major ethnic group is extended to its own special historical place on auspicious occasions, and how this in turn heightens and reinforces its sense of ethnic-cultural identity. In the multiethnic but Chinese-majority Singapore context, the importance of a special ethnic place is felt by each minority all the more for its symbolic value. Not only does it serve as a focal point for the group's cultural identity vis-a-vis others; it is also a symbolic assertion and constant reminder for recognition and belonging. Two residents express their feelings about such a place well:

One thing good is that they decorate Chinatown, Serangoon Road, Orchard Road and Geylang during the festive occasions. I think that is important. It makes the different people feel recognised. Who doesn't want to be recognised, to feel they have a place and they belong? (Gary).

I give English [language] tuition in Chinatown, so one day I was looking out the window, I could see the houses, the roofs and the people. And I thought to myself: so this is their area, a place they call their own. And I decided that every community should have its own place to congregate, it is just like a religion, you need to congregate. Not for everything and not necessarily to live in, but to have a sense of belonging. It may be just a few hours but when I go there, I get this feeling I can be myself, I have an identity and I have some space of my own. I feel secure and comfortable (Zul).

Given their significance as territorial centres of ethnic identity in the symbolic competition between the major ethnic groups, the preservation and development of each ethnic place is an important issue, in particular for minorities. In Chapter 4, it was pointed out that official sponsorship of their decoration and the staging of cultural items in them on major ethnic occasions express the state's guarantee of the separate but equal status of each ethnic group within the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) "multiracial" national

framework. The government has also recently pledged financial and professional help for museums to be set up to display their respective groups' cultures and histories as part of Singapore's cultural heritage (ST 17.11.1990). In recent years, they have been actively promoted for tourism and their conservation undertaken mainly through restoration projects in Serangoon and Kreta Ayer. This augurs well for their dynamic development although the long-term impact on their character is yet to be seen.

However, the Malay Village in Geylang Serai, which has come to be seen by Malays as a symbol of Malay culture as well as the government's commitment to the Malay community, was the focus of controversy at the time of writing. Based on a proposal by Malay Members of Parliament and designed and built by the HDB, it was opened temporarily for the Malay Cultural Month in 1990 but has since remained closed pending the decision over its lease. The HDB's view is that the Village should be a tourist attraction and commercial centre and was considering leasing it to a Hongkong businessman. Pemaju Management, a Malay company, was disqualified from the tender for failing to meet HDB's payment conditions although its \$4 million bid was \$1 million higher than the Hongkong businessman's⁵. According to a report (ST 28.12.1990), the businessman will be advised by leading members of the Malay business community, a mostly Malay management team will be appointed

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An earlier offer by the HDB to any Malay/Muslim organisation to manage the Village for 15 years was subsequently withdrawn.

while shop tenders will be open only to Malay-run businesses (a condition set by the HDB). However some Malay informants felt that the lease of the Village should not be seen mainly in terms of market economics if the government was serious about Malay cultural identity and economic improvement⁶. Others were upset that a non-Malay (and a Chinese at that) who is also a foreigner should be given the tender. Some also viewed the delay over the opening of the Village, in contrast to the active restoration projects in Kreta Ayer and Serangoon, as a sign of official insensitivity and lack of concern towards the Malay minority.

6.2.2 Local Ethnic Community

The second qualification to minorities' preference for multiethnic living - a minimum pool of co-ethnics within the larger multiethnic community - is directly related to their ethnic-based needs and interests. This minimum pool is necessary for the formation of a local ethnic community whose significance for identity and solidarity we have already discussed in previous chapters. The necessity of this community is simply and succinctly summarised by one Malay resident:

I prefer to live in a mixed setting. But there must be a minimum number of Malays in each place so that we can do some things together as Malays, like celebrate Hari Raya or when somebody dies and we have to help.

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It was also argued that some of the trades to be promoted as part of Malay culture are vanishing trades whose small-scale proprietors would not be able to keep up with high rentals resulting from a high bid.

The minimum pool of co-ethnics is equally important in terms of the networks which meet various social and psychological needs and obligations in everyday life. As noted in Chapter 2, enbloc resettlement and individual efforts to resettle in the same estate made adjustments easier as it meant the continuation of links between ex-neighbours and ex-villagers. Ethnic-based friendships form one important basis of these links. However, the most significant networks which are predominantly between co-ethnics, although not viewed as such, are kin-based. At this point, it is pertinent to clarify that the need for contact with kin does not necessarily conflict with that for privacy. For many newly married couples, privacy is obtained by living separately from parents and in-laws⁷. At the same time, contact is maintained with them and other selected kin. Thus, living in separate homes yet being sufficiently near to each other for regular interaction reconciles both the need for contact and privacy. The fear of gossip is usually by other relatives and co-ethnics whom they try to keep at a distance or reduce the chances of encountering.

The activities of kin-based networks usually focus around childcare, meals and social visits. Such activities are mutually beneficial - childcare and meals' provision lend much needed practical support for working parents with young children while parents and married children are able to keep in

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Indeed, the nuclear household is the dominant family form in Singapore, comprising 80.6% of total households in 1980 and increasing to 85.1% in 1990 (Census of Population 1990:i).

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contact . A typical pattern is that of a young working couple leaving their children in the care of parents or in-laws and returning at the end of the work day to fetch the children and at the same time have a ready prepared meal. For those in shift-work, such support is often critical. Another common pattern is for married children to visit their parents on weekends and in this way siblings too are also able to maintain contact. The distance between such households, travelling time and transportation modes, costs and convenience involved are therefore vital determinants in deciding where to live. Hence, it is not surprising that many of my informants and their relatives chose to live in proximity to each other, either within Marine Parade or in nearby estates (e.g.s. Bedok, Eunos) and have intricate arrangements for childcare, meals, shopping, visiting and other social activities. The movements of populations within and in and out of Marine Parade since the early 1980s (noted in Chapter 2) in part reflect this choice.

Strictly speaking, the minimum pool of coethnics in the local community is not limited to minorities. Most residents irrespective of their ethnic background feel and understand the "need to be among one's own kind for some things". But the outcome in the case of minorities is their apparent concentration within an estate or areas with several adjacent estates. Malays, being the largest minority, form obvious concentrations such as in Marine Parade itself and in the nearby estates of

Geylang, Eunos, Bedok and Kembangan in the East coast, Woodlands in the North and Clementi and Teban Gardens in the West, while large numbers of Indians are found in Yishun and Kampong Jawa. On the other hand, the Chinese majority form the bulk of the population in every housing estate.

Many of these ethnic concentrations have seen expansion in recent years - a development that has not gone unnoticed by the government. In January 1989 the Minister for National Development noted "two disturbing trends in public housing, which, if left unchecked, would undermine our efforts to foster social and racial integration": certain estates attracting residents of a particular race and this racial regrouping gathering momentum. Treating the HDB neighbourhood (averaging 50 blocks with 5,000 flats) as "the modern day community enclave", the Minister cited examples in Bedok/Tampines and Ang Mo Kio and Hougang where Malay and Chinese households have exceeded 30% and 90% respectively⁹. He went on to warn that

"if the movement towards separate community enclaves continues for another 10 or 20 years, we would be back to where we started before independence. Communal enclaves would be re-created. Living in separate enclaves, the different races would find fewer opportunities to intermingle and understand each other. MPs and community leaders will develop narrow views of society's interests. The enclaves will become the seedbeds of communal agitation. We will witness the unravelling of what we have so carefully knit since independence.... It is therefore, important to recognise the dangers early and nip the problem in the bud before it becomes serious..." (S. Dhanabalan, Minister for National Development, Speeches vol.12 no.1 1989).

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Figures were also given of applications for new and resale HDB flats which showed a similar pattern of Malay and Chinese applicants' preferences for both areas respectively as well as projections of owner-occupied flats in three "off-balance" estates and of estates where regrouping had occurred through the resale market (see Appendix 4).

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In March 1989, the HDB adopted an ethnic quota for public housing policy to check the formation of "racial enclaves", replacing the previous one of encouraging integration in general and which allowed a greater degree of choice of location.

6.3 The HDB Policy of Ethnic Quotas for Public Housing

The policy sets a maximum limit¹⁰ on the proportion of Chinese, Malays and Indians and Others in each neighbourhood¹¹ and block in every public housing estate in Singapore, as follows:

Ethnic Category	Neighbourhood	Block*	National Population**
Chinese	84%	87%	76.0%
Malays	22%	25%	15.1%
Indians & Others	10%	13%	8.9%***

* The limits for blocks are set 3% higher than for neighbourhoods to allow some variation between blocks. Block limits take precedence over neighbourhood limits.

** June 1988 estimates by Dept. of Statistics, cited in ST 17.2.1989.

*** Of which Indians form 6.5% and Others form 2.4%.

Its objective is to foster racial tolerance and harmony "by giving Singaporeans the opportunity to live in a multiracial

10

The limits set are based on the racial composition of the population, the rate at which new households were being formed by each race and the racial composition of flat applicants. Malay households tend to be the biggest, Chinese households the smallest and Indian households in between the two. Thus, in the view of the government, the racial congregations in real numbers are greater than reflected by the number of flats [each flat approximates one household] occupied by any race (ST 17.2.1989).

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At the time of the policy's announcement on 17.2.1989, 35 neighbourhoods and 18% of blocks outside these neighbourhoods in Singapore were identified as having exceeded the limits. Monthly updates for every block and neighbourhood in every estate would be made.

environment in each housing block, neighbourhood, estate and new town" and to bring about a "balanced racial mix". How it works appears complicated but the simple rule is that any owner can resell his flat to someone of his own ethnic group. Thus for example, Malays in a Malay 'enclave' can still sell to Malays but a Chinese or Indian in a Malay 'enclave' cannot sell to a Malay. The rationale is that the former transaction does not worsen the 'racial' imbalance but the latter will - a rationale that is consistent with the policy's intention not to force the proportions down but to contain the problem.

The policy is applicable to both the allocation of new flats by the HDB and the purchase and resale of flats in the open market. The latter is crucial as it is necessary to plug the loophole in the resale market which has technically made possible the "racial enclaves". Through this market run by private housing agents, buyers, so long as they fulfil HDB's eligibility criteria to own HDB flats, are able to purchase resale flats in locations of their choice. A large section of the potential buyers in this market consists of those who already have flats but who wish to upgrade to larger units, such as from 2-room rental units to 3- or 4-room purchase units (first category) and from 3- to 4- or 5-room purchase units (second category). The sellers can also be buyers of larger HDB units or those wishing to move to private properties (third category). Figures are unavailable but it is a general fact that Malays make up a significant proportion of those in the first category while Chinese form the majority in the second and third categories - a pattern also true for the Marine Parade resale market. At the time of the policy's announcement

in early 1989, the following number of blocks in Marine Parade had reached or exceeded the limits set: 14 (mostly 3-room) for Malays, 5 (1 3-room, 1 4-room and 3 5-room) for Chinese and 2 (5-room) for Indians and Others (WeekendEast 3.3.1989).

Presented to the public as "necessary for the long-term stability of the nation" and "a small price to pay in order to ensure that we do build a cohesive, better integrated society in Singapore", together with the assurance that it would be applied "fairly across the board to all races", the policy's rationale and assumptions were spelt out explicitly. First, the government was of the view that to depend on the provision of social and other amenities alone to attract certain ethnic groups to an area is "risky and uncertain to achieve the desired result and it will also take a long time to show results"¹². Second, the idea of a "balanced mix" is specific - it should be a microcosm of Singapore's ethnic mix. As stated by the Minister of National Development (ST 12.2.1989):

Mixing the various communities in proportions that approximate the general population has given us racial tolerance and harmony for more than 20 years. To allow the races to regroup now would be to go back to the pre-1965 period when there were racial enclaves and racial riots.

In other words public housing at every level must, as far as possible, demographically conform to and represent the CMIO multiracial complex as a sign of ethnic integration. The alternative is disaster: enclaves as the seedbeds of communal

agitation and riots. Hence too the need to "nip the problem in the bud".

The policy was raised and assessed by my informants themselves in the context of evaluating multiethnic living. Few among them approved of the policy. Those who did felt that the policy was excessive in imposing a limit as far as the block level. Some felt ambivalent about it on grounds that "it is true that people might not mix" but "it is wrong not to let people live where they want to". The vast majority of informants rejected the policy on the following grounds: 1) the importance of non-ethnic criteria and kin in choice of location, 2) it reinforces negative thinking along racial lines, 3) it discriminates against minorities and 4) it violates the individual's constitutional and personal right of choice in residence. Many also questioned the possibility of a riot. I will elaborate on these arguments.

Most informants who reject the policy's "choice by race" argument stressed the importance of non-ethnic criteria and the nature of ethnic community they desire in their choice of location. The importance of the first, especially facilities, has already been shown. On the other hand, ethnic community, as also shown earlier, is an important criterion not because of any aversion to living with others; rather, it arises from needs which only it, particularly kin, can largely satisfy. Here it is important to note that kin are seen in non-ethnic terms. As two residents put it:

Most people don't think of race when they move, they think of convenience and facilities. Especially young people, the more facilities, the better. Like Yishun, why people don't want to go there, they prefer to wait? Because it is not so developed, far away from workplace, facilities

not so good. Only those who cannot wait will take the offer (Ali).

Don't think of race, think of convenience for me because of my work and my children. What is wrong with wanting to be near relatives for help, take care of children? It is also important for us to have our relatives nearby for social functions (Ros).

In the view of many residents, the imposition of limits at every level of estate, neighbourhood and block places a constraint on the benefits of being with their kin and ethnic community. Several individuals personally felt that their plans to live near their kin had been thwarted by the policy because the limits for the blocks they hoped to buy flats in had been reached. This further led some to claim that the policy contradicts the government's frequent calls for self-, family- and community support, filial piety and the maintenance of traditional culture and values, such as the following comment:

They are always talking about family being most important in our Asian culture. Yet, the policy makes it difficult for us to be near our family (Khalid).

Not only is the policy's 'choice by race' argument rejected, its 'sell by race' criterion is considered unacceptable:

I think the policy is ridiculous, it is ridiculous to buy and sell by race. We are Singaporeans, we don't think like that and now they think like that (Mrs Nair).

According to such critics, the introduction of the criteria of 'race' into the housing market where it did not exist before portends a negative and dangerous trend of race consciousness set by the state. In fact the policy has led to the claim of

official discrimination against minorities in housing¹³. Rejecting the government's argument that no one is discriminated against because the policy applies to all races, various minority informants made this charge in general and in at least three specific scenarios.

Given that the Chinese form the majority in every housing estate, these informants were of the opinion that "racial enclaves" refers in fact to those of minorities and that the policy is really intended to prevent their concentration. Minorities feel discriminated in this general sense. The first specific scenario where it is felt discrimination can occur is in Chinese "enclaves" i.e. where Chinese residents have reached or exceeded their quota limit. In such cases, Chinese residents can resell their flats to other Chinese and non-Chinese buyers but minorities cannot sell to Chinese who obviously comprise the largest group of buyers. The second scenario involves those who fall under the category "Others". The policy's joint grouping of "Indians" and "Others" means that both not only compete for a limited number of places but the "Others", being a very small minority, are obviously at a disadvantage as several Eurasian informants claimed. They further argued that the joint grouping fails to recognise the tremendous ethnic differences between Eurasians and Indians - a point they were also quick to note that contradicts the government's own argument about encouraging ethnic mix. Third,

the policy creates a sense of grievance among those who can only afford to move from 1- or 2- to 3-room or from 3- to 4-room flats but are unable to do so because the quota by block¹⁴ (which is by room-type) has already been reached. By the same argument, their inability to reach the limit set for them in 5-room blocks because of limited economic resources enhances their sense of discrimination. This has been seen unavoidably as working against Malays who, as noted earlier, form the largest proportion of buyers of 3- and 4-room flats.

The sense of disadvantage and discrimination among Malays is particularly significant. As we shall see later, the history of Malay housing and settlement has always been a sensitive social and political issue. Suffice to note at this juncture that in the 1970s and 1980s, it concerned their resettlement from villages (some of which were gazetted Malay resettlements) to public housing and their adjustments to the new environment; now, the policy, in the view of many Malays, focussed on their "regrouping" and is really aimed at preventing their congregation. Even prior to the policy, it was widely believed among Malays that there were unwritten quotas for Malay applicants for flats in certain areas such as Woodlands, for the same reason. Hence, the following was a common reaction to the policy among Malay informants:

When Chinese are a majority, they don't warn of its negative consequences but when Malays exceed their proportion it is a problem (Faridah).

14

This is made worse by the fact that since 1983, the HDB had stopped accepting applications for new 3-room flats, thus leaving those who can afford only such flats with a smaller pool to choose from.

The policy is also seen in directly political terms by Malays. Many believed that its aim is to ensure Malay numerical minority in every electoral constituency and to undercut that section of the Malay electorate that has always voted against the PAP. They believed that the narrow wins of the PAP in constituencies with large Malay populations in the 1988¹⁵ general elections prompted the passing of the policy:

The Chinese are a majority everywhere, even in Geylang, so what are they talking about? The real reason is political, they fear the votes of the Malays (Zul).

Overall however, it should be stressed that the bulk of Malay informants, like others, stressed their need for community the nature and strength of which has been elaborated earlier on:

Malays want to be near mosque, near relatives, near previous place where they live because of friends and activities they are familiar with. Also more easy to get Malay people to participate in social functions... Want to be near relatives for childcare, help (Faridah).

The spectre of ethnic riots raised by the government was also doubted by many residents. For the government, the perception of ethnic riots as the worst possible outcome of ethnic non-integration is derived from three such events which occurred in Singapore in the past (their backgrounds are provided in the next section). The government has since regularly used the ethnic riot as a symbol of communalism's consequences and stressed the need for a common national identity symbolised, among other representations, by the multiethnic community. Its use to justify the policy is no

In the 1988 general elections, the PAP won only 50.9% of total votes in Eunos and 54.9% in Bedok, both areas with large Malay concentrations.

doubt intended to invoke bad memories among the population and to remind it of the importance of "multiracialism". However, some informants rejected its use of such imagery, attributing it, to quote one resident, to "the imagination of a paranoid regime". Several others doubted the possibility of riots as "the days of extremism are over, people are educated now" - referring no doubt to the changed social conditions since the 1960s. Significantly, many doubted that ethnic riots can take place on the practical grounds that changed settlement patterns¹⁶ make them impossible. Where in the past attacks occurred between separate ethnic settlements, they are viewed as impossible between ethnically mixed estates or, for that matter, within them. Relatives, friends and co-ethnics would be put at great risk both within and in other estates. Within the same estate, familiarity and friendship between neighbours and co-residents would also make ethnic violence difficult if not impossible. But perhaps the most important factor is that each has a stake in the community in which he/she lives and is therefore protective of it. The following sums up this view aptly:

How are people going to fight each other when they live in the same place and know each other? How can we fight in our own territory? Not only your house and your family but my house and my family will also be destroyed. Even if people go somewhere else to fight, they won't be safe when they come back to their own place. People won't fight because they have too much to lose (Daud).

Older residents' experiences of past ethnic riots also reinforce these arguments. Three patterns emerge from their

16

They also think that the government would be quick to crack down on rioters.

accounts: 1) it is outsiders who attack the target group, not those living within the same settlement, 2) the protection of targets from outsiders' attack by neighbours and friends¹⁷ and 3) the set up of peace pacts and mutual protection patrols in shared or adjacent settings¹⁸. In other words, those who live in the same community tend not to attack but to protect each other. Also rejecting the policy's "ethnic enclaves leads to riots" argument as simplistic, some residents went further to make the reverse argument: that the process of integration is not automatically achieved through a numerical ethnic mix:

Integration is something you cannot force, it must come naturally and it will take time. If people see something good and they want it, then it will happen. People will know how and when they want to integrate. Integration is not like making rojak [a local mixed fruit dish], add a bit here and mix a bit there. You don't get integration just by putting people together (Ramli).

They also argued that those who do not want to interact with ethnic others would still be able to do so even within the mixed setting, so the policy will not ensure their interaction.

Several major issues are raised by the policy and its critics. The first pertains to the trend towards regrouping and formation of ethnic enclaves. The policy's implication

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Various residents cited their own or others' experiences of protection by individual neighbours and friends from attack. One example is a Malay family that took into its home the local Chinese grocer's family for protection during the 1964 riots. Another is that of an Eurasian who was protected by two Malay football friends - they hid him in a mosque and later accompanied him home during the "Hertogh" riots.

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One example was the adjacent villages of Kampung Chai Chee (Chinese inhabitants) and Kampung Siglap (Malay villagers) each of which sent three elders to talk peace and join forces for the protection of both villages from attack by outsiders.

that people prefer ethnically homogeneous living over other criteria and considerations in the choice of where to live needs to be well established. However, residents' responses show the bases for their decisions to be more complex: a preference for multiethnic living at the same time a need for ethnic community, combined with the importance of non-ethnic criteria. For minorities, a minimum ethnic concentration is essential for their needs and sense of well-being within the larger Chinese-majority environment. This need for ethnic community inevitably results in some degree of ethnic grouping but its necessary and positive features, while ethnic-based, do not necessarily reflect an unwillingness to live among or interact with others; the preference for multi-ethnic living proves otherwise. In other words, residents are not drawn by the pull of ethnic community alone; the attraction and benefits of mixed living and facilities are new competing pulls.

Furthermore, present ethnic grouping and regrouping and past "racial enclaves" need to be seen in historical and social contexts. Ethnic ghettos, enclaves and settlements exist in various societies, each a distinct phenomenon arising from complex historical and social forces such as immigrant needs and adaptations to new environments, discrimination, and state policy. In the Singapore context, the ethnic settlements preceding the governments' public housing programme are tied to the complex histories of Singapore's diverse ethnic populations over the past 150-odd years of its development. Broadly, their simultaneous but separate growth may be seen as the complex

outcomes of settlement and niche-building by immigrants and
 19
 settlers and of colonial policies .

In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that many of the original Marine Parade residents came from ethnic settlements in the East coast. The special community places of Geylang Serai, Kreta Ayer and Serangoon all had ethnic origins. Geylang Serai, for e.g., was originally part of the Arab Alsagoff family's Perserverence Estate run by English managers who leased out individual tracts of land to immigrant Chinese some of whom in turn hired Malays to work the crops. Over the years, more Malays and Chinese settled in the area but Malays became a majority in the 1950s when many better-off Chinese moved out while many more Malays moved in. Even so, its population continued to change in ethnic composition and in 1980 its population was only 22.35% Malay. Other areas where immigrants from what is now Malaysia and Indonesia settled earlier in the 19th Century were Teluk Blangah, Kampung Glam, Kampung Melaka, Kampung Bugis, Kampung Jawa, Kampung Sumbawa and Kampung Bencoolen, many of these named after their places of origin (Roff 1967:33, 178-9). Besides these villages, four settlements (Jalan Eunus or Kampong Melayu, Ayer Gemuroh, West Coast and Sembawang) were officially established as Malay settlements in 1927, 1948, 1957 and 1960 respectively. Each settlement accommodated Malays displaced from other parts of

Singapore and migrants from various parts of Malaysia and
 20
 Indonesia . Kreta Ayer (Chinatown) and the adjacent streets
 of Tai Por ('Big Town') and Sai Por ('Small Town') grew out of
 Chinese immigrant settlement and economic activity, while
 Chinese immigrant farmers settled in rural areas such as Nee
 Soon, Lim Chu Kang and Chua Chu Kang. Similarly, Indian
 immigrants focussed their economic and social activities in the
 Serangoon area. In general, these ethnic settlements were
 where immigrants and settlers set up their economic and social
 niches, networks and support systems within the context of a
 rapidly growing colonial city. Colonial policy too played a
 direct part in demarcating the ethnic quarters in town and the
 set up of official Malay settlements (Turnbull 1989:20-1,
 46-7).

However, with reclamation and resettlement by the HDB and
 the Urban Development Authority in the 1960s and 1970s, some of
 these ceased to exist altogether while others became the sites
 of public housing estates. Their original populations were
 either resettled into these or other estates elsewhere. On the
 part of residents, resettlement choice based on the "nearest
 locality" principle was only logical, based on a psychological
 bond with the past and the familiarity that the sites of the
 new estates still offered. Thus, ethnic concentrations in the
 areas identified by the government as "racial enclaves" such
 Bedok, Tampines, Ayer Rajah and Teban Gardens (Malays), Ang Mo

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The Jalan Eunos settlement, for example, was established
 in 1929 for displaced Malays the majority of whom were evicted
 from Kallang for the Kallang Airport project.

Singapore and migrants from various parts of Malaysia and Indonesia²⁰. Kreta Ayer (Chinatown) and the adjacent streets of Tai Por ('Big Town') and Sai Por ('Small Town') grew out of Chinese immigrant settlement and economic activity, while Chinese immigrant farmers settled in rural areas such as Nee Soon, Lim Chu Kang and Chua Chu Kang. Similarly, Indian immigrants focussed their economic and social activities in the Serangoon area. In general, these ethnic settlements were where immigrants and settlers set up their economic and social niches, networks and support systems within the context of a rapidly growing colonial city. Colonial policy too played a direct part in demarcating the ethnic quarters in town and the set up of official Malay settlements (Turnbull 1989:20-1, 46-7).

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The Jalan Eunus settlement, for example, was established in 1929 for displaced Malays the majority of whom were evicted from Kallang for the Kallang Airport project.

Kio and Hougang (Chinese) and Yishun (Indians) can in part be explained historically - they comprise those resettled from previous settlements on which the present estates are sited. That some ethnic regrouping does take place and that these estates should still retain some ethnic characteristics is therefore hardly surprising and should be seen in historical perspective. Kin and ethnic ties were not simply severed with resettlement; they were reestablished, and all the more so with families resettled into separate households. Furthermore, as noted earlier, with new family formation through marriage, the setup of separate households entails maintaining contact - through promixity of residence. On the part of the government, the same principle of nearest locality was also largely adopted for resettlement cases especially at the height of its building and resettlement programme in the 1970s²¹.

Clearly, there are important historical and social continuities between the pre-1970s ethnic settlements and ethnic concentrations in present-day public housing estates. But there are also crucial historical and social differences between them. The former were largely separate ethnic settlements within a colonial setting, with little or no ethnic interaction except in the market place in the Furnivallian sense (Furnivall 1967). Relations, associations and orientations were kin-, clan- or communal-based, and these expressed themselves spatially within the same or adjacent villages,

21

However, it has denied that its resettlement and other priority schemes such as that to encourage multitier family living were in part responsible for the trends towards racial enclaves. Also see Chapter 2 footnote 5.

streets and settlements. On the other hand, the latter exist within larger mixed public housing estates with some forms of ethnic interaction. Undeniably, ethnic interaction is not without problems while relations are still primarily kin- and ethnic-based (and understandably so as shown). Nonetheless it is a significant historical development and social achievement that, within a short span of 15-20 years, multiethnic living, with all its problems and positive points, is accepted and even preferred. To liken present ethnic concentrations in public housing estates to, or becoming like, past ethnic settlements thus fails to take into account some of the subtle but significant changes that have taken place at the local community level in the last two decades.

That there are historical and social continuities between the pre-1970s ethnic settlements and ethnic concentrations in present day public housing estates applies to all major ethnic communities. However, as pointed out earlier, minority ethnic concentrations 'stick out' in a Chinese-majority context and minority informants believe that the policy is really aimed at preventing their regrouping. The state's assurance that no one is discriminated against because the policy applies to all is of little comfort to the individual whose plans are thwarted by it. For those who already perceive themselves disadvantaged and discriminated against in various arenas of social life in the Chinese-majority context, the policy provides ready fuel for fanning such feelings. It appears that the policy, while meant to apply to all, has the unintended consequence of putting minorities at a disadvantage by the simple fact that they are numerically smaller than the Chinese population. And

certainly the arguments of those "Others" - that they should not be grouped jointly with "Indians" on grounds that they are culturally different - appears valid. Malay claims that the policy is aimed at preventing their congregation or a political ploy to undercut the Malay anti-PAP electorate is difficult to either prove or disprove. However, what they do manifest is the depth of Malay feelings of being discriminated against, disadvantaged and a target of the policy. This raises the second central issue - the historical and social contexts of Malay housing settlement and their implications.

It is a common feature in various societies that minorities that are economically and socially disadvantaged live in distinct areas. In Singapore, the history of Malay settlements since the turn of the century shows that Malays set themselves apart in numerous ethnically homogeneous kampung (villages) and gazetted Malay settlements as a means of adjusting to the complexities and competitive pressures of urbanisation and a Chinese-dominated context (Bedlington 1974:328; Hanna 1966; Roff 1967). The official gazetting of the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement by the colonial government in 1927²² gave Malays an added sense of sanction and protection and set the precedent for the other three Malay settlements to be set up later. Inhabited by Malays with little or no education most of whom worked in the poorest paid jobs as transport, service, clerical and crafts workers (Report on Census of Malay Settlement Areas, 1970), these urban villages

22

For a study of this settlement, see Julita Mohd Hussein (1981/82).

nonetheless provided them with social and psychological support as well as cultural identity (ibid). As mentioned earlier, these and other villages were all demolished under the government's resettlement schemes in the 1960s and 1970s and replaced by public housing estates.

Under HDB policy, no HDB estate can become highly concentrated with one socio-economic class or ethnic group because planning is aimed at "a mix of social classes and races". The former means that each estate and neighbourhood is designed to consist of most room-type blocks. But to the extent that room-type indicates economic status, the concentration of Malays in 1- and 2-room flats (6.4%) and 3-room flats (49.1%) (Census of Population 1990:29) may be seen as a reflection of their low economic position. Furthermore, as already elaborated, the need for a local ethnic community is also a response and adaptation of their minority status within the larger Chinese-dominated setting. In general therefore it may be said that the tendency of Malays to congregate residentially in smaller room-type flats and in certain locations is, apart from being the logical consequences of resettlement from villages, also an expression of their socio-economic and minority position. Indeed, these concentrations may be viewed as the present-day manifestations of the long-standing socio-economic problems of the Malay minority community throughout the history of Singapore's modern development.

Malay feelings of being disadvantaged and targetted as a group by the policy may therefore be understood against their history of settlement and socio-economic background. In the first place, many Malays felt forced to move from their village

'havens' which provided a cushion amidst rapid urbanisation and intense competition²³. Following resettlement, many went through a period of financial anxiety with paying rent or instalments for their flats and of adjusting to a Chinese-majority environment. Many feel that they have just emerged from this difficult period only to be posed with yet another policy that limits not only their chances of buying flats which are within their means but also the very development of their local kin and ethnic community. Malay perception of the policy thus further enhances the sense of economic and ethnic disadvantage already rooted in their history of settlement and resettlement. Overall it may be said that these aspects of Malay settlement history contribute to Malays' sense of being an indigeneous but disadvantaged minority beset with socio-economic problems. Some of these problems are examined in Part III. Suffice to observe here that in the long run, any negative consequences of such socio-economic concentrations can be dispelled only when their underlying socio-economic problems themselves are largely eradicated.

The third issue related to "racial enclaves" is their alleged riot-prone nature. Here it first ought to be pointed out that residents' arguments that riots are impossible in

23

For an account of Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement villagers' reactions to impending resettlement, see Julita Mohd Hussein (1981/82). To add insult to injury, it was proposed that the name of the new estate that would replace the settlement be changed to a Chinese one of Hon Qing. It was finally named Kaki Bukit. Among some older Malays who have been resettled several times in their life time, there is still a sense of resentment over the takeover or purchase of what they consider inalienable Malay land by the government and the "rich Chinese".

mixed settings do not refute this assumption. In fact they reinforce, in a practical sense, the policy's implicit reverse assumption that mixed living deters riots. It would certainly be risky if not suicidal for residents to fight each other, whether within an estate or between estates. But more significantly, their argument shows that the policy's aim, i.e. multiethnic living, is already in place - without ethnic quotas. Even more pertinent here is the policy's simplistic argument that ethnic settlements inherently breed communal agitation and result in riots. No doubt they may physically facilitate riots but they do not cause them. The official view fails to recognise the social and historically specific conditions underlying the occurrence of riots. Here, a brief background of the riots which occurred in 1950, 1964 and 1969 is relevant.

In 1950, 18 people died and 173 others were injured in attacks by Muslims on Eurasians (who are mainly Roman Catholics) and Europeans. The clashes were sparked off by the legal battle over Dutch teenager Maria Hertogh (baptised a Roman Catholic but raised as a Muslim) between her Christian Eurasian natural mother and her Muslim adopted mother and husband. The event occurred against a backdrop of post-World War II anti-colonialism and manifested itself in the form of a racial and religious clash²⁴. The 1964 riots between Chinese

24

For historical accounts of the "Hertogh" riots, see Hughes (1980) and Nordin Hussin (1988). Hughes' account cites the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into the riots, among which were that rioters were mainly Malays but Muslim Indians and Pakistanis were prominent in turning it into a religious (Footnote Continued)

and Malays, the worst and most prolonged, in which 36 people died and 563 were injured, occurred against heightened communal tensions between Malays and Chinese during Singapore's brief period as part of Malaysia. These tensions were essentially fuelled by politicians who played on the disadvantaged socio-economic position of the Malay minority and mutual Chinese and Malay fears of domination by each other²⁵. The casualty toll of four persons killed and 80 injured in 1969 was the result of the spill-over of the 'May 13th' riots which occurred in neighbouring Malaysia. The clashes in Malaysia, again between Malays and Chinese, occurred in similar conditions of mutual Malay and Chinese insecurity²⁶. Malay-Chinese conflicts in fact go further back into history to the immediate post-Japanese occupation period of September 1945 to March 1946. During this period, Chinese-led Communist vendettas against suspected Malay collaborators led to violent clashes in which hundreds were killed in various parts of Malaya. Malays responded through the religious/mystical Sabilillah (Holy War)

(Footnote Continued)

issue. Another finding cited was that Indonesians (who came to work in Singapore) were also involved in attacks on Europeans as they were anti-Dutch and transferred their anti-Dutch feelings to the British.

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For a discussion of the 1964 riots, see Leifer (1964) and Foo (1980).

²⁶

There are many accounts of the 'May 13th 1969' riots in Malaysia. See for example, Gagliano (1970), Goh (1971), National Operations Council (1969) Tunku Abdul Rahman (1969), Reid (1969) and Slimming (1969).

Movement which combined Islamic religious fervour and Malay
²⁷
 martial arts .

Against such a background of ethnic clashes, official fear and imagery of ethnic riots is perhaps understandable. But it may be added here that this imagery, while derived from events which did occur, is at the same time an ideological construct used for the political legitimization of the PAP and its policies. Time and again, it has referred to its successful fights against "the twin enemies of communism and communalism" in the 1950s and 1960s. The policy's aim to "fight" communalism's violent consequence, i.e. the ethnic riot, by nipping it in the bud not only feeds on the fears of those who have experienced riots but also rides on this claim of successful struggle for its legitimization. On the part of the population, the fear of "extremist Malays" rioting no doubt lingers in the minds of some non-Malays (it is generally considered that Malays started all three riots) as does the fear of Chinese attacks in the minds of some Malays (as has
²⁸
 been their experience in the riots) . Indeed, as one Malay

²⁷

See Clutterbuck (1985) for an overview of all the above events. For details of post-war conflicts, see Cheah (1981). Also see Cheah (1987) for the impact of the occupation on Sino-Malay relations which led to the post-war clashes and Khoo (1981) for a historical account of the build-up of Malay-Chinese antagonisms prior to the outbreak of violence.

²⁸

In 1987, four Malays were detained under the Internal Security Act for spreading rumours of impending racial clashes on the 18th anniversary of the 1969 riots and for actively preparing for racial clashed through silat martial arts training (Straits Times 4.6.1987). In 1990 it was reported that Maria Hertogh or Nadra might return from the Netherlands to visit Malaysia. Several Eurasian informants felt that she should not as it might stir up ill-feelings and suggested that her Muslim relatives visit her instead.

resident pointed out, if ethnic riots did occur, Malays would have more reason to fear harm, being the numerical minority in every estate. On the other hand, against such a background of ethnic clashes and bloodletting in the history of ethnic relations in Singapore and Malaysia, the appreciation and preference for multiethnic living and the principles of peaceful coexistence evolved over the past 15-20 years is an all the more significant development.

It cannot be guaranteed that ethnic riots will never occur, but the past two decades of tremendous changes in political and social conditions have seen ethnic peace. Whether this peace can be sustained depends on how the state and the different ethnic groups tackle major social issues and problems, particularly those affecting Malay-Chinese relations and the Malay minority. Part III will discuss some of the socio-economic problems of the Malays and examine some issues affecting Malay-Chinese relations which have surfaced in recent years. Here, it suffices to note that fixing residential limits may at best only curb the size of ethnic concentrations; it does not necessarily increase integration nor will it prevent any outbreak of ethnic violence that may result from the non-resolution of these problems. The latter is particularly significant to the extent that Malay insecurity and grievances form breeding grounds for ethnic conflict as previous historical experience has shown.

The fourth issue pertains to the policy's "balanced ethnic mix" approach. Such an approach reflects the state's rigid and pervasive implementation of CMIO multiracialism. As Clammer (1982) points out, CMIO multiracialism fixes and rigidifies

categories to the points of non-ambiguity and myth, and results in the puritanical and ideological perception that local proportions must always approximate those at the national level. Thus local demographic distribution must approximate national population proportions - this, in some way, is supposed to attain the ideal of ethnic integration and CMIO multiracialism. But, as rightly pointed out by residents, the imposition of limits to achieve such a "balanced mix" does not guarantee that residents will mix. It is at best a mechanical approach to ethnic interaction.

Fixing limits for a balanced mix also appears to have overstepped the boundaries of acceptable state intervention. This brings us to the final issue raised - the policy's violation of constitutional and personal right as claimed by several informants. This claim of 'right' is a significant development in the Singapore context which warrants a separate study and discussion but which is beyond the scope here. Nonetheless it is my observation that a consciousness of 'right' has been growing in the last decade and is in part a response to the PAP's authoritarianism and excessive intervention in citizens' public and private lives. In the view of my informants, the policy in question is yet another of several policies²⁹ whose imposition reflects this authoritarianism and

One such policy named by residents themselves was that of giving priority to graduate mothers to register their children in primary schools of their choice. Underlying this belief is that the offspring of graduate women, who tend to marry men of their equal or higher educational qualification, are more intelligent than children of non-graduate parents. The policy was so unpopular that it was scrapped soon after it was passed in 1984.

excessive intervention. The 'right to live where one chooses' argument against the policy may be viewed as a specific expression of this larger and growing sense of personal right. The appeal to constitutional right is particularly significant in relation to minorities. The Singapore Constitution guarantees that every citizen, regardless of race, language, religion and creed, is equal before the law. Made by minority informants, this appeal obviously refers to their sense of being discriminated against by the policy as discussed earlier.

6.4 Discussion

Indifference to and preference for multiethnic living indicates that its idea is accepted and in place. Multiethnic living offers a diversity and vibrancy which, once experienced, is appreciated as more attractive than living only among co-ethnics. It also offers residents the most compatible and desirable residential arrangement: privacy from co-ethnics yet sufficient ethnic community. Although still fragile and fledgling in form, it may well become the dominant trend in the future if allowed to develop and properly nurtured.

For minorities the existence of their ethnic communities in the midst of the Chinese majority provides a sense of security, belonging and general well-being. Parallel to this, within the larger Singapore context, a special ethnic community place with its symbolic meanings is important for a minority's identity, sense of belonging and assertion for equal recognition. For the Malay minority, a special ethnic community place is all the more significant against the background of their settlement history in which all gazetted Malay settlements -

symbolising the guarantee of havens for indigenous Malays disadvantaged by the complexities of urbanisation and competition - have been permanently erased from Singapore's landscape. In one sense, Geylang Serai, despite its drastically changed character and the fact that its Malay residents actually form a minority, stands as much a reminder of the past as it does the present Malay community. In doing so, it symbolises Malay history and Malay responses in the face of changes throughout Singapore's modern history.

Given the significance of both local ethnic community and special community place for minorities, the development of each is of critical concern to them. In this regard, the HDB's policy of ethnic quotas for public housing is of particular concern to minorities as it directly affects their kin and ethnic community. It is also of concern to residents in general, being a significant case of the interaction between state policy and local relevances about where to live and whom to live with.

In evaluating the policy, it is important to remember that much of the phenomena upon which this study's findings are based occurred prior to its introduction. The findings show that multiethnic living evolved so far over a 15-year period in Marine Parade is, as noted above, acceptable and even preferable to the ethnically homogeneous setting. They also show that the processes of ethnic interaction and of managing differences are already well established, even if not without problems. They reveal that residents have arrived at some major modes of accommodation of ethnic differences by themselves and with official intervention in specific areas. Of course interethnic

accommodation is in part premised upon a no-choice situation in which shared residential living simply has to "work"; still, this does not detract from the study's main findings but on the contrary reinforces them. Indeed, Marine Parade shows that there is space for two sets of interaction - within and between ethnic communities to take place simultaneously and to coexist peacefully. It is a living example of how both "ethnic" and "interethnic" are not mutually exclusive but are intrinsic to the development of the local community and vital for residents' senses of well-being, security and belonging.

It is significant that residents' rejection of the policy are mostly based on changed housing and social conditions brought about in large part through the very housing programme of the government itself. That the policy fails to recognise these changes is therefore somewhat ironical. In particular it fails to recognise positive local developments arising from the preceding policy of encouraging multiethnic living but without quotas imposed. Official imagery of ethnic concentrations as being only negative, inward-looking, riot-prone and non-integrative seems to stem from lack of historical and social perspectives about the formation of ethnic concentrations and about the causes of ethnic riots. The rigid and mechanical use of national population proportions as a basis for ethnic integration appears to have become an ideological trap. I have shown that there are historical and social continuities and changes between the pre-1970s ethnic settlements and ethnic concentrations in public housing estates, and that ethnic riots are rooted in social and historical conditions. I have also argued that Malay minority socio-economic problems - expressed

in their ethnic concentrations in public housing estates - need to be addressed as they are a potential source of ethnic conflict.

It is true that some degree of interaction by way of tolerance and accommodation will be obtained through the policy. However, the same can and has been achieved without it and its implications of coercion and discrimination, through everyday processes over time and through non-ethnic incentives such as facilities. Free choice through the resale market will no doubt lead to some ethnic congregation but for legitimate and fair reasons. The diversity of criteria will also ensure that an estate will not become the exclusive enclave envisaged by the state. Marine Parade, whose ethnic composition is currently about 30% minority and 70% majority and seen as a good mix by most, serves as a good case to go by. It also shows that a general policy of encouraging multiethnic living is necessary and sufficient. Furthermore, a policy that imposes limits will not make integration any easier if the lack of it is because of a clique mentality arising from a sense of insecurity and socio-economic disadvantage - these have to be addressed elsewhere. On the contrary, it may backfire, as minorities' reactions show, with negative consequences on minority-majority relations, minority-government relations and minorities' own sense of well-being. In short, there is more social good and goodwill to be gained from the gradual processes of ethnic interaction within a broad policy of encouraging multiethnic living and within a sense of respect for citizens' right to live where they choose, than from a

policy that generates a sense of coercion, control and discrimination by an authoritarian state.

In the context of nation-building, social engineering of ethnic integration by the state requires careful and sensitive management - too little and it has no effect, too much and it might backfire. The policy of ethnic quotas for public housing policy seems "too much" and, like other unpopular policies, it may well cost the PAP government credibility and legitimacy³⁰. Its nip in the bud approach of preempting problems in this case also appears miscalculated and premature. After all, multiethnic public housing is only 15-20 years old.

30

This seems to have been borne out by the results of the 1991 general elections. Post-mortems by individuals - claim that the rejection of the PAP's authoritarianism and unpopular policies, within the larger processes of democratisation sweeping the world, led to drop of its votes to 61% from 63.2% in the 1988 elections and a loss of 4 seats to opposition parties. In the light of the policy's rejection by the majority of my informants, it seems plausible that it is one of several issues and factors contributing to the PAP's loss of votes.

PART II SUMMARY

Part II explored the meanings of multiethnicity at the local level of the public housing community. It shows the local community to be at one and the same time multiethnic and divided into various ethnic communities. The local picture is a complex one of ethnic diversity, distinctiveness and differentiation from which two seemingly contradictory trends emerge: 1) positive ethnic interaction, growing appreciation for heterogeneity and preference for multiethnic living, and 2) strong ethnic boundary maintenance and ethnic assertion and competition.

Residents of different ethnic backgrounds necessarily have to interact in some basic arenas of local life which require the accommodation of ethnic diversity and differences. The everyday public activities such as eating, shopping, chatting, playing and neighbouring, while commonplace and mundane, are where some forms of ethnic interaction are most developed. Similarly, interaction is also most developed in the arena of special ethnic occasions because of their highly symbolic meaning and significance. Depending on the activity, issue and context, the modes of interaction are based on the principles of avoidance, mutual tolerance and respect, friendliness and helpfulness, give-and-take and first-come-first-served, and together they form the civic culture necessary for the viability of the multiethnic community.

Multiethnic living is also marked by intercultural curiosity, such as about cultural beliefs and practices, and exchange, such as in language and cuisine. There also appears to be a growing appreciation and preference for multiethnic

living as it combines well the richness of ethnic diversity and the needs of ethnic community. Together, these reflect the gradual processes of accommodation and acculturation taking place within the local community. Arguably, some of these phenomena have been taking place long before the public housing programme to promote multiethnic living; however, the latter as historically new grounds directly provides new conditions and possibilities for appreciation and exchange.

Yet, peaceful coexistence and the preference for multiethnic living do not mean the absence of differentiation, tensions and problems. From the community's very beginning, residents drew clearcut ethnic boundaries, mainly through cultural and religious insignia, to distinguish themselves from each other. This clear boundary maintenance takes place in their immediate living spaces, everyday life and especially on special ethnic occasions because of their symbolic value. The preference for multiethnic living is qualified with the need for a minimum pool of co-ethnics. By doing so, residents are able to maintain their distinct ethnic communities and identities in the midst of a multiethnic setting. At the same time, social separation and differentiation, stereotyping, discrimination and overall competition along ethnic lines reflect the ethnic differentiation and tensions at the local and national levels. Their manifestations are multifarious, outstanding being the dominance of the Chinese in economic activity and local organisations, discrimination of minorities in economic transactions and their limited participation in local organisations, and social and religious prejudice and stereotyping by all. While most of these aspects are already

in existence prior to multiethnic public housing, they have persisted and it is suggested that ethnic assertion and competition have intensified in recent years. For minorities, especially Malays who form the largest minority group and who face serious socio-economic problems, the growth of ethnic consciousness and assertion is particularly significant in the face of perceived disadvantage and discrimination.

At the same time, the local community is subject to the policies of a hegemonic state which defines and imposes its notions of 'community'. While its general policy of ethnic integration through public housing and its everyday management of the local community through the HDB bureaucracy are not contested, the interplay between official policy and residents over the role of community organisations is fraught with ambiguity and conflict. Residents object to their parapolitical status, this in turn also reflecting their rejection of the hegemonic ruling party's authoritarianism. But the central case of state-people conflict pertaining to the residential community is perhaps the ethnic quota for public housing policy. The policy and residents' rejection of it is a prime example of the state's management of ethnic relations carried too far.

So far, Part II has focused on the local community, the interactions within it and the impingements of the wider society upon it. It portrays a picture of ethnic peace, tolerance, order and growing appreciation on the one hand, and interethnic problems and ethnic competition on the other. Part III provides the national framework within which these two patterns occur, focussing on the latter in particular.

PART III

BEYOND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

PART III INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 noted that ethnic identity is subject to ongoing construction of its contents, meanings and boundaries in changing contexts. It also pointed out that competition and conflict tend to characterise ethnic relations. Competition is often over economic and political resources but may be manifested through the cultural medium. The cultural realm is also a specific arena of ethnic relations and competition in its own right, its significance rooted in its affective, emotive and symbolic contents. For example, language is often the bone of contention in ethnic relations (Giles 1977) because, as the "recorder of paternity, the expressor of patrimony and the carrier of phenomenology" (Fishman 1977:25), it is a quintessential symbol of ethnic identity. Other major arenas of ethnic boundary maintenance and competition, often between majority and minority groups, include political representation, education and employment and economic rights (Fried 1983:3-5). As also pointed out in Chapter 1, the state plays a central role in the cultural and economic management of ethnicity and ethnic relations in the context of nation-building, and state policies in turn raise questions of equality and rights affecting both the majority (C. Cohen 1983) and minorities (Walzer 1983, Akerman & Lee 1988, Wu 1988).

Various chapters in Part II indicated strong cultural and economic aspects of ethnic differentiation at local and national levels of Singapore society. They also showed ethnic assertion and competition through cultural and symbolic forms. In general, ethnicity in Singapore is a medium for the expression of very diverse interests. Its articulation taking

various forms of identity assertion and competition within a highly fluid context of rapid social change in the 1980s, it simultaneously involves identity change within ethnic groups; relations between ethnic groups, in particular between the Chinese majority and the minority groups; and relations between the state and specific ethnic groups. Relations are further complicated by several factors: the heterogeneity within the Chinese majority group, the position of the Malay minority, and active state management.

Part III provides an overall picture of this complexity of ethnic relations in contemporary Singapore. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the major and mutually reinforcing cultural, economic and social arenas of ethnic assertion, tension and competition. In doing so, they also highlight identity issues within the Chinese majority and Malay minority groups; relations between ethnic groups, in particular between the Chinese and minorities; and relations between the state and specific ethnic groups. Chapter 9 examines the state's ideology of multiracialism in its management of ethnicity and ethnic relations.

CHAPTER 7

ETHNIC ASSERTION AND COMPETITION: CULTURAL

7.1 Introduction

Singapore is currently awash with the symbolism of its multiethnic cultures. For example, Malays stress their identities through religious and cultural activities; the Chinese emphasise their traditions; Chinese Babas, Indians and Eurasians have revived or formed their respective ethnic organisations; and exhibitions are held about the histories of various ethnic groups. As shown in Chapter 4, this symbolism takes place within the local community as well as in the wider society, such as in the historical ethnic territories, and culminate in the Chinese, Malay and Indian Cultural Months. Elaborate image-making involving individuals, groups and the state results in an intensely active cultural arena in which the scope, content and contours of ethnic identities are being constantly worked and reworked.

This ethnic awareness and assertiveness may be attributed to three factors: rapid social change, state policies, and responses by ethnic groups to each other's actions and to state policies. In general, rapid social change has resulted in the disintegration of ethnic-based structures and institutions which have traditionally given support and meaning to the various ethnic populations, as well as brought about stressful and displacing consequences. A 'return to roots' appears to be a common response to social change among members of all ethnic groups. However, the effects of these responses are not confined within each group; they bear interethnic consequences.

In particular the response of the Chinese majority has generated reactions from minorities which in turn have set off further responses, resulting in an intensely assertive and competitive atmosphere. State policies of ethnic management also trigger off responses which contribute to this active scene. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the promotion of Chinese language and culture as an illustration of all three sets of factors at work. In doing so, I also show how it affects identity within the Chinese community; at the same time, although it is intended to address Chinese cultural problems, it inevitably affects relations between the Chinese majority and minorities.

7.2 The Promotion of Mandarin and Chinese Culture

Since the early 1980s, the government and Chinese cultural elites have actively promoted the Mandarin language and Chinese culture among the Chinese. The annual Speak Mandarin Campaign began in 1979 with slogans like 'Speak less Dialect, more Mandarin', 'Make Mandarin a Way of Life' and 'Mandarin is Chinese'. Mandarin was enforced in public places and media programmes on Chinese channels; the use of hanyu pinyin¹ (Romanised Chinese) for personal names and public places was strongly encouraged; the bilingual were favoured for scholarships; and a Mandarin proficiency test for university admission was applied. In the education curriculum, Chinese students in

¹ However, resistance and unhappiness over the different spellings of the child's and father's surnames in English led to a reversal of this policy in early 1992.

SAP (Special Assistance Plan) schools could, besides English, take Mandarin as a first language to develop their Chinese language proficiency and to acquire Chinese cultural values. (The SAP schools system itself was set up in 1979 to preserve the ethos and traditions of the old Chinese schools which existed before the introduction of the integrated schools system²). Confucian ethics became one of the subjects taught in Religious Knowledge classes in secondary schools (until these classes were stopped in 1990). At the same time, the importance of Confucian traditions and values began to be regularly reiterated by political elites and imported Confucian scholars from Taiwan and American universities, and a strongly Confucian-oriented Institute of East Asian Philosophy was set up. The proliferation of things Chinese gained momentum from the mid-1980s. In 1986, the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations was formed to revitalise dialect and clan associations and to attract young members³. Chinese theme parks (Qing Emperor and Haw Par Villa) were developed. Lunar New Year shows became extravagant displays of Chinese culture, with troupes from China and Taiwan participating.

There are several reasons for the promotion of Mandarin and Chinese-Confucian culture. The first and official reason

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There are currently nine secondary and ten primary SAP schools. Only the top 10% of pupils in the Primary School Leaving Examination are eligible for SAP secondary schools.

3

One of its first projects was the publication of a handbook (Chinese Customs and Festivals) which reinterpreted selected Chinese customs and festivals to make them more relevant to the contemporary context, and another (Chinese Heritage) to promote the appreciation of the Chinese heritage among the young.

for the promotion of Mandarin as the mother-tongue of the Chinese is to unite them linguistically as they speak a variety of regional dialects. It was also felt that learning both English and Mandarin at school and speaking dialects at home was an overload on students, and the obvious choice between English-Mandarin or English-dialects was the former.

The second reason for their promotion lies in their values as providing a conducive framework for economic development, specifically to expand business opportunities with the world's fastest growing region (East Asia, especially China). Culturally, East Asian society in general and Confucianism in particular (the two being increasingly equated) are regarded as espousing the values of thrift, hard~~w~~ork, discipline and communitarianism - values viewed by the government as forming the critical ideological motor responsible for the economic successes of the 'Little Dragons' (Singapore, Taiwan, HongKong and Korea) and, of course, Japan⁴.

Thirdly, Confucianism is seen as providing a basis for cultural identity and ballast against Westernism, and the Mandarin 'mother tongue' serves as the major vehicle for the transmission and preservation of Chinese values. Chinese elites have historically been highly conscious of how to retain

⁴ This view is reinforced by academics such as Lodge and Vogel (1987) who argue that part of the reason for the industrial successes of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan is that they are communitarian rather than individualistic in their value system. Since the linkage between the economic development of the 'Little Dragons' and Confucianism was first imputed by Hermann Kahn and Edwin Reischauer, Confucianism has become a new emblem of Chinese identity that is both locally and internationally recognised.

Chinese cultural identity in the face of internationalisation and Westernisation (anti-Westernism was a dominant theme among the Chinese-educated in the anti-colonial context). In the post-colonial context, particularly since the early 1980s, this concern has resurfaced after two decades of rapid social changes, with Singapore seen as being in danger of rapidly becoming a "pseudo-Western" society. The 'problem' is increasingly posed in terms of the extreme opposites of 'Easternism' and 'Westernism'. Eastern values are viewed as being epitomised by communitarianism, respect for family and authority, hardwork, sacrifice and discipline. On the other hand, Westernism is seen as a form of social pollution (Benjamin 1976, Clammer 1985a) symbolised by breakdown of the family and community, materialism, individualism, moral decadence (promiscuity, permissiveness and hedonism) and debilitating welfarism. Western political ideas of Euro-communism (in the 1970s) and liberal democracy and human rights (in the 1980s) are considered threatening or unsuitable for Singapore's fledgling nationhood and inconsistent with Asian political culture and the search for an indigenous form of democracy. Yet, Western society is associated with scientific and technological knowledge which Singapore needs for its economic development. As a compromise, the current approach is: Western science and technology for economic development but Asian culture for identity. The latter is aimed mainly at the English-educated Chinese who are considered most prone to Westernisation.

The fourth reason for the promotion of Mandarin and Confucianism is political: to placate the Chinese-educated and

other Chinese disaffected by the decline of Chinese language and culture and the ascendancy of the English-educated. Here, a brief background to the differences between the English- and Chinese- educated Chinese is relevant.⁵

Historically, the differences in education, culture and political orientations of the Chinese-educated and English-educated Chinese run very deep. The former category are products of the Chinese-medium school system;⁶ the latter of English-medium government or Christian missionary schools. Until the mid-1960s, the Chinese-educated were politically mass-based, leftwing-oriented and opposed to the English-educated leadership, while the backgrounds of the elitist

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As with any generalisation, the English-educated and Chinese-educated dichotomy should only be taken broadly. Members of the same family may be educated in different language streams.

6

According to Ow Chin Hock (STWOE 12.10.91), the Chinese-educated are subdivided into three groups: 1) graduates of the now defunct Chinese-medium Nanyang University; 2) older Singaporeans who were educated in the numerous Chinese secondary schools before the 1980s; and 3) present-day students who take CL1 and who make up 8%-10% of the student cohort each year. They span a wide spectrum of varying economic and educational levels, including businessmen, bankers, managers, community leaders, professionals, academics, teachers, journalists who form the elite and who are distinct from the bulk of middle- and lower-income group of Mandarin- or dialect-speaking. Politically and socially, a section of the Chinese-educated are influenced by the May 4th Movement in China and Western thinking; yet they adhere to Chinese culture and language and are therefore "caught between two forces - modernisation and tradition" (Lau Wai Har, STOWE 9.9.91). Also see Borthwick (1981) on Chinese education and identity, and Wu (1975) on Chinese response to Western culture. There are also distinctions among the English-educated. Those whose generations are culturally different from those who go to English-medium schools (usually first generation) but are Chinese in home culture. Those educated locally may be ranked lower in status than those foreign-educated, while there is also differentiation among local elite school products.

English-educated ranged from apolitical to pro-British or anti-colonial and pro-Malayan. As pointed out by Willmott, the power struggles within the PAP between 1959 and 1965 were not only over ideology between the radical and moderate left but also between the Chinese-educated leaders who were trying to retain power in Singapore, and the emerging English-educated professional class, who were trying to capture it (1989:585). Culturally, the division was a tendency towards aspects of Western culture for the English-educated and towards Chinese culture for the other group. Many of the English-educated were also Christians. Economic and class differences were more complex. There were rich and poor alike in both categories, but the English-educated who dominated the government services and the professions were more mobile through their command of the English language and their English-based education. On the other hand, the Chinese-educated faced fewer job prospects beyond their traditional teaching, trade and business niches. In short, the two lived in separate worlds.

Today, the main demarcations between the English- and Chinese-educated are based on language, education and culture. Among professionals for example, the corresponding distinction is "yuppie" for the English-educated and "chuppie" for the Chinese-educated. One also hears members of the former refer to the latter or the dialect-speaking in a derogatory manner as "Cheena" (exaggerated pronunciation of "Chinese") or as "Ah Beng", "Ah Seng" and "Ah Lan" (common working-class names). Depending on the context, these mean 'square', poor in taste and aesthetics, poor command of the English language, uncouth, materialistic, uncultured and conservative. Politically, the

Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking are stereotyped by the English-educated as conservative and willing to be governed by a benevolent dictatorship, while the English-educated consider themselves more liberal and critical-minded besides being of higher cultural status. On the other hand, the English-educated are seen by the Chinese-educated as Western-oriented and lacking in cultural roots. Religious differences also remain to some extent - it is commonly perceived that the English-educated and Christianised give up their Chinese cultural practices more than the Chinese-educated Christians. On average, English-speaking households also earn higher incomes than Mandarin and dialect-speaking households (Chua 1982:332).

The political struggles between the Chinese-educated and English-educated for leadership in the early 1960s resulted in the ascendancy of the latter. Since then, its social position has been further strengthened by the strategic importance of the English language as the lingua franca for economic and social reasons⁷. In schools, English became the main medium of instruction in the national integrated education system set up in the late 1960s, despite the protests of Chinese, Malay and Indian cultural elites. (Prior to this integrated system, separate language-medium schools [English, Chinese, Malay and

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For detailed discussions of Singapore's language policy and the politics of language between the English- and Chinese-educated, see Wilson (1978) and Chan (1984). See Gopinathan (1979, 1980) for an overview of Singapore's language policies, Afendras (1980) for patterns of bilingualism, and Kuo & Jernudd (1988c) and Puru Shotam (1989) for discussions of the complexity of linguistic policies in Singapore.

Tamil] existed. Parents too preferred to send their children to English-medium schools as they realised English offered more opportunities for economic and educational advancement, and enrolment in vernacular language medium schools dropped drastically.) Under this integrated system, a bilingual policy of English as the first language (EL1) and mother tongue as second language (Chinese [CL2], Malay [ML2] and Tamil [TL2]) is observed. The main change from the previous language policy is in the second language (L2) requirement. Under the new policy, a student's L2 must be his/her mother tongue, i.e. Mandarin for Chinese, Malay for Malays, Tamil for Indians. This conforms to the state model of CMIO multiracialism (see Chapter 9) and the belief that the mother tongue is the vehicle for preserving cultural identity. At the university level, the Chinese-based Nanyang University and the English-based University of Singapore were amalgamated into the English-medium National University of Singapore, thus completing the dominance of the English language. In general therefore, the English-educated enjoy a socially dominant position largely through their English-based education and the opportunities it offers for economic and social mobility. However, politically there remains the need to placate the majority Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking population who are disaffected by the decline of Chinese education, dialects and culture and by their poorer prospects for economic and social mobility.

Historically, the Chinese-educated elite saw the English language as the language of the colonial oppressor, and the issue of the protection of the Chinese language and education against the ascendancy of English rallied the Chinese-educated

masses against colonialism in the 1950s. In the 1970s, the PAP's elevation of the English language and the decline of Chinese schools led the PAP to be viewed by this elite as the oppressor of Chinese language, education and culture. By the 1980s, the language-culture conflict between the Chinese-educated and the English-educated had resurfaced, with the Chinese-educated elite becoming openly vocal about the decline of the Chinese language and culture. Through organisations such as the Singapore Chinese Middle School Teachers' Union, the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chinese cultural elite expressed the fear that English was becoming the mother tongue of the Chinese, citing not only the growing use⁸ of English among the Chinese in everyday life but also the low status of Mandarin and low standards of CL2 in schools. To remedy the situation, they made numerous suggestions: expand the Speak Mandarin campaign into a Chinese Language and Culture Month; increase the number of SAP schools; teach core values in the mother tongue and more subjects in Mandarin; raise the standard of CL2; set up Chinese-medium kindergartens; raise the social status of Mandarin beyond its use in public places to business and intellectual circles; and draw up a comprehensive⁹ report on the future direction of the Chinese in Singapore.

8

English is becoming a dominant language among Chinese households, with its use increasing from 10% in 1980 to 21% in 1990 (1990 Census, p.18).

9

In late 1991, a Chinese Language Review Committee was set up to look into the teaching of the Chinese language in schools. The Singapore Chinese Teachers' Union supported a

(Footnote Continued)

In the face of the ascendancy of English and the English-educated and their perceived Westernism, this response may also be viewed as a return to Chinese roots in which language (the ability to speak, read and write Mandarin) and culture are traditionally considered the hallmarks of Chinese identity and the "great Chinese culture". According to the chairman of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, "ultimately, you have to ask yourself whether you are Chinese, Malay or Indian, Singaporean notwithstanding" (quoted in the ST 3.10.1989)¹⁰. The promotion of Mandarin and Confucianism to give them some social value may thus be seen against this complex background. Here, the PAP's fear of losing the political support of the Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking is obviously^{also} a factor¹¹.

Many issues raised in the discourse on Chinese language and culture are beyond the scope of this discussion, such as the invention of tradition, language as the vehicle of cultural preservation and transmission, and the phenomenon of Westerni-

(Footnote Continued)

government proposal to allow Chinese clans to run 6-12 Chinese primary schools but the Chinese clans themselves rejected it, preferring to help government primary schools promote the language (STWOE 19.10.91, 26.10.91).

¹⁰

Clammer (1985a, 1985b) asserts that the Chinese are a very race-conscious people. For a 'place and space' contextual understanding of the assertion of Chineseness, see Wee (1988) and Tan (1989). Tan also focuses on the 'racial Chinese' who stress the 'great Chinese race and culture' as a response to Chinese minority problems in Malaysia.

¹¹

The drop in percentage votes for the PAP in the general elections to 61% in 1991 from 63.2% in 1988 was in large part attributed by the PAP to the Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking Chinese population.

sation (see Seah [1977] and Clammer [1985a])¹². Here, I confine the discussion to its effects on the Chinese and on majority-minority relations.

7.3 Effects on Chinese Identity

The promotion of Mandarin and Confucianism in effect means a definition and perception of the Chinese as a homogeneous entity. As will be shown in Chapter 9, this view on the part of the government is guided by its ideology of CMIO multi-racialism in which Chinese race = Mandarin language = Confucian culture. However, as has been shown, the Chinese are extremely heterogeneous along the lines of class, language, culture, education-medium, religion and politics. The imposition of what is Chineseness confronts and contradicts this heterogeneity, and creates various tensions among the Chinese.

The imposition of Mandarin has meant the decline of dialects and dialect-based cultures, and a tendency towards the homogenisation of Chinese culture¹³. Prior to the Mandarin policy the Chinese communicated through several languages and

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Suffice to note here that Westernisation as one dimension of the drastic changes occurring in Singapore need not be conceived of in the extreme terms of its "badness" versus "good" Easternism. An example of a negative tendency that is distinctly Singaporean is the phenomenon of being *kiasu* (fear of losing out). Local popular theory also explains the behaviour of mass consumption, living beyond one's means, materialism and status display as being due to the *nouveau riche* mentality of an immigrant society that "got rich too quickly". Similarly, demands for political democracy are arguably developed out of local experience rather than purely from Western political influences.

13

Mandarin is gaining ground in public places and 87% of Chinese could speak Mandarin in 1988 compared with 70% in 1981 (ST 3.10.1989, 5.10.89).

dialects (Hokkien, Mandarin, English and Malay) without displacing non-Mandarin dialects and cultures and, depending on the situation, they effectively switched languages and dialects. The imposition of Mandarin for Chinese pupils in schools may have placated the Chinese-educated but has resulted in others being unhappy, such as those who cannot cope with learning Mandarin (especially the English-educated) and those who prefer to learn a non-Chinese language such as Malay (especially the Chinese Babas who speak patois Malay).

The imposition of a particular conception of Chinese and Confucian culture similarly creates tension and confusion, and may also be a step backwards in certain aspects of cultural development and exchange. As has been shown, historically some Chinese have long absorbed some elements of non-Chinese, mainly English and Malay, cultures. Whether it is desirable or possible to reverse this trend is debatable, since there is bound to be conflict concerning which aspects of Chinese culture to readopt. There is also debate about the desirability of some aspects of Confucian culture. It has been pointed out that some Confucianist teachings are associated with feudalism, obedience to authority, acceptance of hierarchy and the subordination of women¹⁴. It also appears that the state and some cultural elites confuse some Confucianist values with

14

Forum on Confucian Humanism & Democracy held at the Regional Language Centre, Singapore on 30.8.1988. Some critics have also pointed out that those aspects of Confucian culture stressed officially, such as filial piety and consensus, serve the PAP's purpose of political control well, as filial piety may be extended to loyalty and obedience to political authority.

those immigrant values (hardwork, thrift, discipline, self-reliance, pragmatism, mutual help, family solidarity, value of education, upward mobility and entrepreneurial initiative) which have contributed to Singapore's economic development and dynamism. At best, Confucianism is but one of several features of Singaporean Chineseness and, even so, is a folk-based rather than an elite-based version. More seriously, the stress on Confucianism and East Asian culture may shift the Chinese's orientation towards the "great Chinese culture" and away from the local immigrant Chinese cultures and an already existent even if fledgling Chinese Singaporean identity based on a variety of local cultures (dialect, Malay, English).

The Chinese = Mandarin language = Confucian culture approach also restricts the Chinese' ability to have contact and access to other cultures as part of ethnic interaction in Singapore and Southeast Asia. This is especially true in the realm of language as Chinese students no longer have the option of studying Malay as a second language, in contrast to the previous situation in which some Chinese studied Malay or knew enough Malay for social interaction with Malays and other non-Chinese. (The most developed form of language absorption is of course the patois Malay spoken by Chinese Babas). The reorientation towards East Asia and things Chinese and away from Southeast Asia in turn has implications for Singapore's position in the region. This reorientation might enhance its Third China rather than Southeast Asian image, as well as reinforces the existing stereotype of the Chinese in Southeast Asia as economic opportunists and sojourners rather than as settlers with a sense of place identity and loyalty. Re-

Sinification no doubt increases cultural and business contacts with Chinese in Taiwan or China but may also increase cultural and other barriers between Chinese and non-Chinese, especially Malays with whom the lingua franca historically has been Malay or English.

The responses of the English-educated Chinese to the promotion of Mandarin and Confucianism have been varied. Put on the defensive but unorganised, the English-educated has responded on an individual basis mostly through writing to the English press. Some question the 'East is good, West is bad' dichotomy and assert the uniqueness of being Chinese Singaporean with its blend of East and West. Others raise the practical difficulties of children learning Mandarin within an already highly pressurising educational system. Yet others admit to being embarrassed by their 'lack of cultural roots'. The situation is still in flux but in general, it appears that the English-educated increasingly recognises the usefulness of knowing the Mandarin language and the advantage of the English-Mandarin language combination, and therefore accept the English-Mandarin bilingual policy.

7.4 Effects on Minorities and Majority-Minority Relations

The promotion of Mandarin and Chinese culture has inter-ethnic implications because of the majority status of the Chinese. In general minorities have responded with anxiety and suspicion, seeing the promotion as a process of Sinification of the entire Singapore society rather than of the Chinese only. Their fear of the imposition of a dominant Chinese culture is

further fuelled by a sense of being neglected or discriminated against in matters of language and culture.

Minorities' fears are most directly felt over language issues. In the education system, SAP schools offer Chinese but not Malay or Tamil as a first language. Minorities see this as unfair both in principle and in the use of state resources for education on two grounds: 1) the availability of Mandarin only in SAP schools dissuades many bright non-Chinese students from applying to such schools and 2) SAP schools are given good facilities not available to ordinary schools¹⁵. They also charge that SAP schools are not conducive to ethnic interaction as they attract almost entirely Chinese students only. Some even argue that the rationale for SAP schools - the preservation of the ethos of the old Chinese schools - undermines multiracialism because they are effectively racially segregated schools. Another cause for minorities' concern about Sinification in schools arises from the policy that non-Chinese students may elect to take CL2 but their Chinese counterparts cannot elect to take ML2 or TL2. Many Malays, who already feel aggrieved at the decline and neglect of the Malay national language, are of the opinion that Malay should be made optional if not compulsory for non-Malay pupils to facilitate social communication. Non-Tamil Indians have also asserted that classes for non-Tamil languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu should be available.

15

These include better teacher-pupil ratios, two bonus points for admission to Pre-University, special consideration for Pre-University scholarships and a preparatory year programme for admission to primary SAP schools.

However, it is at the everyday level, through the Speak Mandarin campaign, that the language issue has aroused the greatest resentment among minorities. Aimed at encouraging the Chinese to speak Mandarin instead of dialects, the annual campaign has different targets each year (e.g. parents and children, public transport workers). Minorities have been uncomfortable with the campaign since its inception because of the official promotion of a language that is not an interethnic lingua franca, all the more so in public places. The 1990 campaign slogan 'If You're Chinese, Make a Statement in Mandarin' (translated from hua ren hua yu [literally 'Chinese people speak Mandarin']) brought minorities' unhappiness to the fore. Aimed specifically at Chinese professionals to communicate in Mandarin at the work-place, it was condemned as encouraging rudeness, insensitivity and discrimination against minorities who also saw it as asking the Chinese to assert their Chineseness. They also feared that this would eventually pave the way for displacing English as the accepted lingua franca at work and in public places, as well as for making the knowledge of Mandarin a criterion for employment. Minorities also charge that the absence of a similar Speak Malay or Speak Tamil campaign is unfair, and feel that a 'Speak your Mother Tongue' campaign would be more appropriate in the face of the decline of all ethnic languages and cultures.

The realm of culture is no less contentious. Minorities do not dispute that Asian culture should be promoted as the basis of identity, especially in the face of rapid social changes. What they do object to is the dominant emphasis on Confucianism and its equation with universal and Asian

¹⁶ culture , with little importance attached to their cultures or sense of urgency shown about their cultural problems. The emphasis on Chinese culture and its equation with Asian culture also implies its superiority over the cultures of minorities. In the view of minorities, this not only smacks of ethnocentrism but, more seriously, diminishes their contributions to Singapore's development. In 1988-9, minorities' fear of the imposition of dominant Chinese values on them were further fuelled by the official search for a formal national ideology with "core values" as a basis for multiracial nation-building. Given the emphasis on Chinese culture, minorities inevitably became suspicious and anxious about Chinese values being adopted as national core values, and asserted their share of values to be included ¹⁷. However, the search appears to have waned as quickly as it was proposed.

Minorities' questioning of the Sinification process in language and cultural issues has inevitably spread to other matters, such as the large amount of media time allocated to Chinese programmes, the precedence of economic criteria

¹⁶ For example, at a talk on Chinese values which was restricted to reading the Confucian Analects as "Chinese culture is Confucian culture", the speaker claimed that "Confucian culture is applicable to all societies for all time". (Talk on Asian Values - Chinese Values and Cultures, given by Dr Kow Mei Kao at Marine Parade Community Centre, 10.3.1989, for Community Week 1988).

¹⁷ Various values were suggested, with the government finally proposing the following: putting community and society above self, upholding the family as the basic unit of society, regard and community support for the individual, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious harmony (ST 6.1.91). See Quah (1990) for discussions on the search for national values.

(tourism) over social considerations (multiracialism) in the building of Chinese theme parks, and the use of bilingual as opposed to multilingual signs in public places (minorities fear a preponderance of English and Chinese signs in the former).

Understandably, historiography, particularly over the roles and contributions of the different ethnic groups, has also been subject to scrutiny by minorities. Minorities do not dispute the contributions of the immigrant Chinese; what they object to is the peripheral place given to their contributions in Singapore's development¹⁸, such as reflected in the movie 'Homeland' (which was specially commissioned for the 25th Anniversary celebrations in 1990). For some Malays who see Singapore as part of Nusantara (the Malay Archipelago) and their status as indigenous people, the description of Singapore's origins as an immigrant society is offensive¹⁹. The most recent controversial issue pertaining to Singapore's history which has upset Malays was the proposal by a non-Malay to make "adjustments" to the 32-year old national anthem (in Malay), on grounds that non-Malays did not understand the language and thus did not have strong feelings when the anthem was sung.

18

Even where the contributions of immigrant Chinese are acknowledged, the 'rags to riches' Chinese immigrant entrepreneur narrative is dominant. Warren (1986) argues that the history of the Chinese population in Singapore is overwhelmingly 'coolie' history.

19

Earlier on in 1970, Malay cultural elites objected to the omission of the Malays' contribution to the pioneering years of Singapore's development in a school history text (see Tan, 1970). The book also described the founding of Singapura as a legend.

In general, minorities feel alienated by the emphasis on things Chinese and fear the imposition of a dominant Chinese culture, and emphasise their own ethnicities in response. The elaborateness and embellishments of ethnic events described in Chapter 4 may be understood in this context, i.e. of symbolic assertion and competition. And as one informant observed:

Once this starts, you don't know where it will end. How far do we want to go back to our traditions? Where is this going to lead us? Both sides should think of the effect on racial harmony. But the Chinese are the majority, they should be sensitive about minorities' rights and feelings. As the majority, they have that responsibility.

The reactions of minorities have in turn generated further responses from the Chinese-educated. Both Chinese political and cultural elites have argued that the promotion of Mandarin and Chinese culture is aimed at only the Chinese and meant to preserve Chinese values, and that minorities should be more understanding of Chinese cultural problems and not be over-sensitive. They also denied that SAP students do not mix well with students of other races. The PM continued to urge the Chinese to aim to be "one people with Mandarin as its common language and sharing a distinct culture, a shared common past and common destiny for the future", but assured minorities that English will be the common language interethnically and mother tongues for intraethnic communication (STOWE 5.10.91). However, he reminded the Chinese community that while it strives to keep their language and to promote their heritage, it should bear in mind the goal of a multiracial Singapore. On the other hand, he also reminded minorities not to impose their views on the Chinese community but to regard issues of Chinese language and culture as a matter internal to the Chinese

community (STWOE 27.7.91). He further cited examples where the Chinese have been "very understanding and accommodating" to minorities, e.g. accepting that land at concessionary prices for mosques are set aside in housing estates while they themselves are "discriminated" against in having to compete in the open market for space to build their temples, and was of the opinion that

Whilst the majority should be tolerant of and understand the sensibilities of the minority communities, there are times when the minorities must also understand the sensibilities of the majority... For the minorities to ask for the [Speak Mandarin] campaign to be withdrawn could prove troublesome because the Chinese could react in a way which could be harmful to the minority community... tolerance must be mutual... multiracialism must cover both sides. (quoted in STWOE 17.7.91).

Where history is concerned, the official approach is a practical one of being future- rather than past- oriented (see Chapter 9). The year of Singapore's "founding" (1819) by Raffles has been officially chosen as the starting point of Singapore's modern history despite his being an imperialist. However, this and the view that history before 1819 is that of "ancestral ghosts" (according to one Minister) has upset both Malay and Chinese cultural elites alike.

This chapter has broadly examined ethnic assertion, tension and competition in the cultural arena. The next chapter continues to look at the same phenomena in the economic and social arenas, and concludes with an overall discussion of its ramifications.

CHAPTER 8

ETHNIC ASSERTION AND COMPETITION: ECONOMIC

8.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, the different ethnic groups historically settled into separate economic niches - a pattern which structured the opportunities of later generations within and between ethnic groups. The manipulation of ethnicity as a resource to carve out niches, together with colonial policies of divide and rule, resulted in a clear ethnic division of labour characterised by occupational and income disparities between ethnic groups, and strong economic stereotypes of each group and subgroups within them. The Chinese as a group became the most dominant numerically and economically; on the other hand, the Malays became a disadvantaged minority group. Historically, these economic and social disparities, especially between the Chinese and Malays, have structured ethnic relations in Singapore and form a major source of tension, intra-group differences notwithstanding.

Post-independence rapid economic growth, particularly since the late 1970s, has brought the issues of economic and social disparities between ethnic groups to the fore. Pang (1983a) argues that rapid industrial growth (even) without a policy of ethnic redistribution has been accompanied by a substantial narrowing of income differentials between ethnic groups in Singapore. However, Chiew (1991) points out that the Chinese remain at the top of the socio-economic ladder and Malays are at the bottom. Minorities question their relative share of the vastly expanded economic cake in the belief that

the gap has widened, even though Singaporeans of all income levels and ethnic backgrounds have benefitted as a whole¹. In the context of rapid development and a strong ethos of competition, achievement and meritocracy, minorities have also expressed concern about how to 'catch up' with the successful Chinese as a group. This in turn has raised issues pertaining to employment, education, community self-help and state aid².

8.2 Economic and Educational Differentiation

Malay and Indian minorities have been especially vocal about their economic positions which have remained stagnant or even deteriorated relative to the Chinese (see Tables 8.1a and 8.1b)³. Although the proportion of the higher income professional, technical, administrative and managerial occupations within the Malay working population increased over the years 1970-1990, their share in these occupations actually decreased. The same applies to Indians in these occupations over the same

¹ Average real household income has increased from \$1,200 in 1973 to \$2,213 in 1988 but the wide range in income levels suggests that income differentials have increased. According to the Report on the Labour Force Survey 1988, gross monthly income was \$764, with 34% earning under \$600, 31% earning \$600-\$999, 22% earning \$1000-\$1999, 6% earning \$2000-\$2999, and 6% earning \$3000 or more.

² For various discussions of the Malays' socio-economic problems, see Sharom Ahmat & Wong (1971), Bedlington (1974), Betts (1975), Hashim Ali (1976), Tham (1977), Yang Razali Kassim (1979), Sharifah Aljunied (1980), Majlis Pusat (seminar papers 1984), Rohayati Rahim (1984), Li (1989) and National Convention of Singapore Malay/Muslim Professionals (1990).

³ The small category of 'Others' who outperform the Chinese, Malays and Indians in the economic and educational fields (see Tables 8.1a, 8.1b, 8.6) includes non-citizens and expatriates working and residing in Singapore and who are generally more highly qualified than locals.

period⁴. The Indian share of professional and technical occupations fell from 7.4% in 1970 to 7.1% in 1980 and 6% in 1990 while that in the administrative and managerial sector remained stagnant at around 5.3%, even though the proportion of these occupations increased within the Indian working population. In contrast, the Chinese share of these occupations increased from 76.9% in 1970 to 82.7% in 1990. For the same period, the proportions of lower income production workers within the Malay and Indian working populations increased dramatically, while that within the Chinese working population dropped slightly. On the whole, statistics show Malay over-representation at the bottom levels and under-representation at the higher levels of employment. In the key business sector, a random survey revealed a heavy concentration of Malays in small-scale, mostly family-based businesses, and a dearth of Malays in the manufacturing sector and high-tech consultancy and professional services due to lack of capital, technical know-how and knowledge of international marketing (KEMAS 1985).

In terms of education, the gap widens between Chinese and Malay and Indian pupils as they go up the educational ladder although there are general improvements all round. For example, for the years 1978, 1980, 1985 and 1988, the percentage passes for Malay students in the Primary School Leaving Examination improved only marginally and were consistently below those of the Chinese and Indians (see Table 8.2). Similarly, for the same years Malay percentage passes for the

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For a discussion on the economic characteristics of Indians in Singapore between 1947 and 1980, see Nair (1983).

TABLE 8.1a OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION WITHIN WORKING POPULATION
BY ETHNICITY, 1970, 1980 & 1990 (%)

Occupation	Total	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others
1970:					
Professional & Technical	8.6	5.7	8.4	7.8	33.2
Administrative & Managerial	1.7	0.3	1.7	1.1	14.1
Clerical	12.9	13.4	12.7	13.3	18.4
Sales	16.2	4.2	17.7	21.5	6.0
Services	13.6	23.6	11.6	19.9	10.2
Agricultural & Fishing	4.1	5.3	4.3	2.2	0.4
Production & related	39.2	43.4	40.1	31.6	10.2
Not classifiable	3.6	4.1	3.4	2.5	7.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1980:					
Professional & Technical	8.8	4.9	9.1	8.8	26.0
Administrative & Managerial	4.8	0.6	5.2	3.7	24.6
Clerical	15.5	14.5	16.0	13.8	10.5
Sales	12.2	3.5	14.1	12.4	4.3
Services	10.4	17.3	8.6	16.2	9.4
Agricultural & Fishing	1.9	2.3	1.9	1.4	0.2
Production & related	40.2	54.2	38.8	36.1	20.3
Not classifiable	5.8	2.6	6.2	7.5	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1990:					
Professional & Technical	15.7	10.1	17.6	12.1	9.2
Administrative & Managerial	8.2	0.8	9.6	5.5	8.6
Clerical	13.3	15.8	14.0	11.9	2.3
Sales & Services	13.2	14.1	14.0	12.9	7.8
Agricultural & Fishing	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	-
Production & related	43.8	55.3	38.4	51.3	75.3
Not classifiable	5.4	3.5	6.0	6.1	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 8.1b ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION WITHIN OCCUPATIONS,
1970, 1980 & 1990 (%)

Occupation	Total	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others
1970:					
Professional & Technical	100.0	7.5	76.9	7.4	8.2
Administrative & Managerial	100.0	1.8	75.6	5.3	17.2
Clerical	100.0	11.7	76.8	8.4	3.0
Sales	100.0	2.9	85.4	10.8	0.8
Services	100.0	19.6	66.8	12.0	1.6
Agricultural & Fishing	100.0	14.6	80.8	4.4	0.2
Production & related	100.0	12.5	80.3	6.6	0.5
Not classifiable	100.0	13.3	76.5	5.8	4.4
Total	100.0	11.3	78.3	8.2	2.1
1980:					
Professional & Technical	100.0	7.8	78.8	7.1	6.2
Administrative & Managerial	100.0	1.8	82.0	5.4	10.7
Clerical	100.0	13.3	79.0	6.3	1.4
Sales	100.0	4.2	88.0	7.1	0.7
Services	100.0	23.7	63.3	11.0	1.9
Agricultural & Fishing	100.0	17.2	77.3	5.2	0.2
Production & related	100.0	19.2	73.5	6.3	1.0
Not classifiable	100.0	6.3	82.7	9.2	1.7
Total	100.0	14.3	76.5	7.0	2.1
1990:					
Professional & Technical	100.0	7.3	82.7	6.0	3.4
Administrative & Managerial	100.0	1.2	86.6	5.2	6.9
Clerical	100.0	13.6	78.1	7.1	1.2
Sales & Services	100.0	12.2	78.6	7.7	1.4
Agricultural & Fishing	100.0	10.4	89.6	-	-
Production & related	100.0	14.4	64.9	9.2	11.4
Not classifiable	100.0	7.3	81.5	8.9	2.2
Total	100.0	11.4	74.0	7.8	6.6

Sources: Derived from Census of Population 1970 (Vol.II Table 72 p.90); Census of Population 1980 (Release no.4 Table 34 p.66); Census of Population 1990 (Advance Data Release Table 15 p.54).

Notes: For 1970 & 1980, working persons are aged 10 years and above; for 1990, working persons are aged 15 years & above. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 8.2 PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATION:
% PASSED BY ETHNICITY**

Race	Year	English	Maths	Science	Overall
Malay	1978	-	-	-	70
	1980	75	28	66	72
	1985	83	39	70	70
	1988	82	40	75	71
Chinese	1978	-	-	-	78
	1980	88	72	85	86
	1985	92	83	90	89
	1988	92	81	92	89
Indian	1978	-	-	-	70
	1980	86	44	82	81
	1985	93	53	80	80
	1988	91	52	83	79

Source: Straits Times 20.5.89; Kongres Pembangunan Masyarakat Melayu-Islam Singapura, 1989:38.

TABLE 8.3 'O' LEVEL EXAMINATION: % PASSED BY ETHNICITY

Race	Year	At least 3 'O' Levels	At least 5 'O' Levels	Maths
Malays	1978	43	15	-
	1980	48	16	29
	1985	75	36	49
	1988	78	42	50
Chinese	1978	66	41	-
	1980	72	44	66
	1985	91	67	90
	1988	91	73	89
Indian	1978	54	27	-
	1980	62	34	43
	1985	84	51	64
	1988	81	56	60

Source: Straits Times 20.5.89; Kongres Pembangunan Masyarakat Melayu-Islam Singapura, 1989:40-41

**TABLE 8.4 GCE 'A' LEVEL EXAMINATION: % PASSED WITH AT LEAST
2'A' & 2'AO' BY ETHNICITY**

Year	Chinese	Malay	Indian
1978	71	50	63
1980	76	62	70
1985	79	65	74
1987	85	64	75

Source: Kongres Pembangunan Masyarakat Melayu-Islam Singapura, 1989:44.

TABLE 8.5 % OF PRIMARY 3 COHORT STREAMED TO PRIMARY 4
NORMAL (P4N)/EXTENDED (P4E)/MONOLINGUAL (P4M) COURSE
BY ETHNICITY

Year	Race	P4N	P4E	P4M
1984	Chinese	92	4	3
	Malay	82	7	10
	Indian	85	7	7
1985	Chinese	93	4	3
	Malay	83	7	9
	Indian	84	7	7
1986	Chinese	93	4	2
	Malay	82	8	9
	Indian	85	6	7
1987	Chinese	92	5	2
	Malay	81	10	8
	Indian	84	9	6

Source: Kongres Pembangunan Masyarakat Melayu-Islam Singapura, 1989:30

Table 8.6 HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED BY ETHNIC GROUP,
1980 and 1990 (%)

Highest Qualification	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Others	Total
1980:					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below secondary	79.1	85.7	76.7	52.1	79.5
Secondary	12.5	11.7	14.8	26.6	12.7
Upper secondary	6.0	2.4	6.0	12.3	5.6
University	2.4	0.2	2.5	9.0	2.2
1990:					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below secondary	59.5	69.7	62.7	41.8	60.9
Secondary	24.5	25.4	25.2	33.7	24.8
Upper secondary	11.0	4.3	8.3	14.3	10.0
University	5.0	0.6	3.8	10.2	4.3

Source: Census of Population 1990:14.

GCE 'O' and 'A' level examinations were also below those of the Chinese and Indians (see Tables 8.3 and 8.4). Malay students are also weak in the key subjects of English, Science and Mathematics, and more of them are in extended and monolingual

than normal streams⁵ (see Tables 8.2, 8.3 and 8.5). Among Indians, one out of five primary school students failed to enter secondary school between 1982-85; for the same period, the number of Indian students streamed into the monolingual stream was nearly twice the national average, while for the period 1973-1985, the percentage of Primary 1 Indians who entered local university was below the average, sometimes by half (ST 8.4.90). Tables 8.2 - 8.5 also show that the educational performance of Indian students at every level is below that of the Chinese. Overall, although highest educational qualifications attained by all ethnic groups have improved between 1980 and 1990, those of Malays fall behind those of Chinese and Indians (see Table 8.6).

The Malay and Indian communities also face a host of problems such as drug addiction and high divorce rates (among Malays) and suicide and alcoholism (among Indians). Malays make up about half of drug addicts in Singapore, 68% of new heroin addicts arrested in 1987 and 1988, and more than half of repeat offenders in 1988 (ST 19.3.89, 20.7.89, 14.9.89).

⁵
Pupils in the various streams undergo the following number of years of primary school education and take the following language subjects, on the basis of streaming at the end of the Primary 3 year: normal stream - six years, first and second languages; extended stream - 6-8 years, first and second languages; monolingual stream - 8 years, first language only. On the basis of streaming at Primary 3 level, pupils are assumed to have different aptitudes and abilities in educational performance. At the end of their primary school course, all pupils take the primary school leaving examination in order to qualify for secondary school education or vocational training. Most monolingual stream students qualify for the latter. However, in 1992, it was decided that pupils would be streamed only in Primary 4 and that all students would undergo four years of secondary school education.

Although Muslim divorce rates have fallen compared to the 1950s and 1960s, they are nearly twice that for non-Muslims (17.8 divorces for every 100 Muslim marriages compared with ten divorces per 100 non-Muslim marriages) and have risen since 1976 (ST 12.3.89). It was also found that one in four Malay pupils from large, low-income families does badly in school and is placed in the monolingual stream (ST 25.8.85).

Minorities attribute their economic position partly to discrimination in both the public and private sectors.⁶ Commonly referring to it as the 'colour bar', they claim discrimination in recruitment and promotion on the basis of colour (especially for Indians), ethnicity and language (preference for knowledge of Mandarin). Discrimination is also blamed on stereotyping since Malays are perceived to be easily contented and lazy and Indians to be untrustworthy. These stereotypes are made worse by their being juxtaposed against the stereotype of the Chinese as hardworking and resourceful.⁷

Minorities also blame the rigid adherence to meritocracy for the economic disparities. Critics point out that meritocracy assumes that every community and individual can compete at the same level and from the same starting point, which simply is not true of Malays or the socio-economically disadvantaged in general. Malay critics in particular argue that it is the unrelenting way in which the meritocratic

⁶ See Thamayanthi (1979) for a discussion of discrimination by race (and sex) in the labour market.

⁷ For a critical examination of Malay stereotypes, see Alatas (1977). See Tham (1980) and Li (1989) for comparisons of Malay and Chinese economic culture.

principle has been implemented over the past two decades of rapid economic growth and intense competition that has meant that the Malays as a group have been left behind.

8.3 State and Ethnic Group Responses to Economic and Educational Problems

The government is only too well aware that unresolved socio-economic woes often manifest themselves in ethnic issues and conflicts, and of the political significance of addressing economic disparities in general and Malays' socio-economic problems in particular. Constitutionally, Article 152 of the Singapore Constitution states that

"the Government shall exercise its functions in such a manner as to recognise the special position of the Malays who are the indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.

Historically, government assistance to Malays has taken the form of free education from primary school to university level, support for MENDAKI (Council for the Development of the Muslim Community), funding for MUIS (Muslim Religious Council), and land for building mosques at concessionary prices. However, against growing Malay dissatisfaction, it has been forced to address the socio-economic problems of the community and reexamine its role since the late 1980s.

Government attitude towards economic performance and redress is strongly guided by the principle of meritocracy. It also believes that this accords equal treatment to all groups and individuals, and has therefore consistently refused to accord privileges or impose quotas in favour of the Malays

despite its constitutional commitment to the Malay community and criticisms of the rigidities of meritocracy. Tampering with meritocracy would, it believes, result in a subsidy mentality as well as adversely affect ethnic relations. At the same time, it realises that relying on self-help alone is just as ineffective as government help only, that some degree of the latter is necessary and that some workable and acceptable combination is the only alternative. In relation to the Malays, its position is especially difficult politically. If it does not help, it would be perceived as not living up to its constitutional commitment; if it does, it fears encouraging a subsidy mentality among Malays and a political backlash from non-Malays.

After much debate and deliberation between 1989 and 1991, the Government opted for an ethnic community-based approach of self-help towards resolving socio-economic problems, while at the same time agreeing to match this self-help with government aid. In its view, the former makes sense because it is within the communities that "the sentiments and the linkages go" (Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong, quoted in STWOE 15.6.91). It also promised to ensure that all groups, not just minorities⁸, are catered for (STWOE 26.10.91). According to this approach, meritocracy would be kept intact but would be one "with a heart" through a combination of self- and government- help. The approach would also avoid the inter-ethnic tensions generated if help was given only to the Malays:

⁸ According to post-election analysis, the Chinese poor had signalled their discontentment through the ballot box.

When poorer Chinese families feel that the government is paying attention to their problems, then the government's parallel efforts to help the needy among the minority communities become politically more viable and sustainable (BG Lee 16.11.91, STWOE).

Self- and government-help specifically take the form of ethnic-based organisations: MENDAKI (Council for the Development of the Muslim community), SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Assistance Council) and CDAC (Chinese Development Assistance Council), formed in 1989, 1990 and 1992 respectively. MENDAKI replaces the 'old' MENDAKI and expands its educational role to tackle economic, social and cultural problems of the Malays as well. The SINDA and CDAC, initiated by Indian and Chinese elites respectively, are similar to MENDAKI in concept and all three organisations adopt the government-approved method of raising funds, i.e. through the Central Provident Fund (CPF) check-off system in which a certain sum is deducted monthly from the CPF account of each working adult as his/her contribution to his/her community fund (50 cents-\$1 for CDAC, \$1-\$6 for SINDA and \$1 for MENDAKI, as well as a further \$1 (from Muslims) for the mosque-building fund). Government help to MENDAKI takes the form of matching dollar for dollar up to \$2 million for the next five years as from 1991.

It is in the same context of evaluating self- and government- help that the issue of educational subsidies for Malays

⁹ Other ethnic-based self-help groups include the Association of Muslim Professionals, Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, Tamils Representative Council, Hindu Endowments Board, Sikh Advisory Board and the Chinese, Malay and Indian Chambers of Commerce. It was reported that six Indian-Muslim groups aim to set up a federation to help improve educational, economic and cultural position of Indian Muslims (ST 9.8.90).

is to be seen. Also, given that education is a key means of economic and social mobility, it is hardly surprising that it is a major source of ethnic tension. While some Malays see free education as their constitutional right and a form of help for disadvantaged Malays, non-Malays tend to see it as an unfair privilege which violates the principles of equality and meritocracy. Thus, at the same time as the formation of MENDAKI in 1989, the government proposed to let MENDAKI manage the annual government subsidy (\$1.7 million) for free tertiary education. It also suggested that better-off Malays pay for their tertiary education so that resources would be freed for needy Malays and for other efforts, the idea being to strengthen the Malay sense of self-help through a more equitable sharing of resources and responsibility while still maintaining government help.

Political leaders have also asked each community not to measure their positions relative to other communities, but to assess their own progress in absolute terms as a more practical and productive approach and to draw up its own priorities. Speaking to Malays, the Prime Minister said:

Our Malays should get out of this psychological trap. It is over-simple to measure progress simply by comparing Malay progress against Chinese or Indian progress as groups. It is better and more realistic to measure our Malays' progress and performance against their performance five and ten years ago. This is a more objective measure of progress. Group comparisons are a misleading measure of the real progress made by Malay students. Within each group there is an imbalance between talented and less talented individuals. Malay leaders should concentrate on raising the educational performance for individual Malays, talented and not so talented, even though within the group the gap between the high and low educational achievers cannot be closed (quoted in ST 7.7.87).

Where discrimination is concerned, the government has denied that it is a problem. One Indian minister described discrimi-

nation as a "bogey"; instead, he blamed Indians' lack of will for their problems and argued that minority communities would have to work harder and not expect sympathy and special consideration (ST 3.9.90). At the same time however, non-Malay businesses such as Chinese-owned banks and clan-based organisations were encouraged to employ Malays on the basis of merit (ST 6.5.90).

The government's approach towards resolving the Malay community's socio-economic problems was not unanimously agreed to by Malays. Internal differences within the community were especially marked over the issue of educational subsidy and the political implications of government help. Some feared that the government's proposal on the educational subsidy was the first step in the erosion of Malay indigenous rights and the government's rescinding of its constitutional responsibility to the Malays, and thus rejected it. Other doubts concerned whether there were that many well-to-do Malays who could forgo their subsidy, and whether MENDAKI had the experience to manage the funds. Reservations were also expressed about the strings attached to government help, since MENDAKI would come under the leadership and influence of Malay PAP MPs. Underlying this reservation is the issue of whether Malay leaders should work within the system and within the ruling party or outside them. However, others saw the proposal as encouraging self-reliance and endorsed it. One writer to the local newspaper put it this way:

If there is one thing we want our future generation to remember and be grateful for, it is not the knowledge that we have fought for our dignity by demanding the retention of free tuition fees but in the knowledge that we have bought it with our own sweat and tears (ST 22.6.89).

As for making comparisons of economic progress between ethnic groups, the response of many Malays is that there should be both kinds of comparisons - within and between communities. They argued that focussing on the former only would lead to complacency, and that the problems of Malays be seen as national rather than as Malay ones.

The government was quick to respond that its proposal neither eroded the position of Malays nor diminished its responsibilities to the community, arguing that the tertiary educational subsidy was not a constitutional right but a long standing PAP policy that could be changed and that the subsidy would still go to the community through MENDAKI. It also raised the spectre of ethnic tension, arguing that free education for well-off Malays was unfair to poor non-Malays.

How do we justify forever giving their [well-to-do] Malay children free university education and the [Chinese] taxi-driver has got to take a loan or draw out his CPF to pay?... I think justice and fair play require that we must have that equalisation even between races (PM Lee, quoted in STWOE 28.10.89).

It was also pointed out that if Malays showed themselves to be self-reliant and did not ask for special privileges, then non-Malays would more readily back other Government actions to help MENDAKI; otherwise, non-Malays might pressure the government to remove free education for Malays. The PAP leadership further noted that the government's present policies of positive discrimination towards Malays carried a political cost for the PAP with the Chinese and Indians which it was able to

carry only because of its electoral majority. However, it warned that if the Malay community still did not support the PAP despite these policies and the PAP's majority is eroded, then it might reconsider withdrawing the policies of positive discrimination. Overall, both Malay and Chinese PAP MPs constantly harped on the need for Malays to free themselves of a 'crutch mentality'. "It [fees proposal] gives an opportunity to strengthen our sense of self-worth. We do not want to be looked upon always as takers", said one Malay PAP MP. The DPM put it this way:

A critical factor in the success of any community is the sense of being masters of their own destiny. This is far more important than any amount of money poured into solving its social problems. Any permanent protective privilege and subsidy that develops a crutch mentality destroys this dignity and self-worth. It harms the community, not helps it. If the fee proposal was accepted, it would show that the Malays wanted "temporary assistance", not permanent privileges" (STWOE 4.11.89).

It was only after much debate within the Malay community and between its leaders and the government that MENDAKI was finally formed and the educational subsidy proposal agreed upon.¹¹

The controversy about government help does not mean the absence of self-help. Self-help comes mainly through a host of old and newly formed Malay/Muslim organisations, the newest

10

Any unhappiness among non-Malays has not been voiced openly by their representatives. However, I came across several non-Malay informants (both Chinese and non-Chinese) who, to quote one of them, said that "Malays already have it so good, they should not make noise so readily".

11

The new financing scheme for Malay students in tertiary education was finalised by MENDAKI as follows: full fees subsidy where monthly family income is below \$2,000; graduated fees subsidy up to 70% where monthly family income is from \$2,000 to \$3,000; and no subsidies where monthly family income is above \$3,000.

being the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) set up in 1990 to carry out economic, educational and social projects, based on an "independent, non-political" leadership¹². The economic realm is understandably a major focus of self-help. In 1985 a Singapore Malay-Muslim Congress (Kongres Ekonomi Masyarakat Melayu-Islam Singapura [KEMAS]) was held to chart the course for rapid economic growth in the Muslim community, and resulted in the set up of DANAMIS, a Muslim Trust Fund to act as the community's savings and investment arm and to encourage businesses in certain Malay niches such as halal foods. Role models of the economically successful were promoted for other Malays to emulate and to change the stereotypes of Malays by non-Malays. In 1988, the Sino-Malay Investment Holdings company, the first joint-venture between the Malay and Chinese Chambers of Commerce, was formed to promote social and business interests, such as halal Chinese food restaurants, the travel business and trading ventures in China and the Middle East. The extent of mutual benefit is yet to be seen but the rationale for the joint-venture is for Malays to obtain capital and learn expertise.

8.4 Other Arenas of Ethnic Tension

¹² For a background and overview of Malay/Muslim organisations, see Wan Hussin Zuhri (1990). The AMP leadership criticised MENDAKI as being too politicised with the presence of Malay PAP MPs. Its proposed formation generated an approving response from the government which suggested it take the form of a MENDAKI II to compete with MENDAKI, and would receive government funding. However, many Malays generally reacted negatively to this idea and to AMP's formation itself, on grounds that it would only divide the community and stretch already limited resources.

Other arenas of ethnic tension and competition pertain to religion, population policies and the regional context, and are briefly discussed below.

8.4.1 Religion¹³

Singapore has not been excepted from the worldwide trends of religious revival and missionary activity since the 1970s. Religious revival in Singapore has been explained as a response to modernisation (Tham 1984) and specifically to the conservatism of established religions (Kuo & Quah 1988a). In particular, since 1950 there has been a substantial growth in the number of Christians, mostly of the charismatic churches, and those professing no religion among the Chinese, while the position of Islam and Hinduism remain stable. Religious revival has resulted in a changing religious composition of the population (see Table 8.7) in which the traditionally accepted boundaries of religions have shifted and become ambiguous (Kuo et.al 1988b). This has had the effect of generating tension¹⁴ within and between ethnic communities, the latter caused

¹³ See Ling (1989) for an overall discussion of religion in Singapore, Wee (1989) on religion and authority in Singapore, and Tamney & Riaz Hassan (1987) on religious switching. See Ackerman & Lee (undated) and Lee (1986) on religious movements and competition in the context of Malaysian ethnic relations.

¹⁴ Religious conflict within ethnic communities is especially true among the Chinese because of religious switching from traditional (mainly Taoism) to no religion, Buddhism or Christianity (Kuo et.al 1988b), and instances of religious conflict within the family abound (see Chapter 4 footnote 27). Kuo et.al. (1988b) also attributes charismatic Christianity's attractiveness to the English-educated and younger Chinese over other religions to its ethnically neutral status (unlike Islam and Hinduism), association with modernity, rationality and the English language, and its fellowship and activities. Tong (1989) further attributes dissatisfaction (Footnote Continued)

mainly by aggressive and insensitive Christian proselytization (Kuo et.al. 1988b:31).

TABLE 8.7 ETHNIC POPULATION OF SINGAPORE BY RELIGION, 1980 and 1990 (%)

Religion	1980	1990
Chinese	100.0	100.0
Christianity	10.7	14.1
Buddhism/Taoism	72.6	68.0
Other religions	0.4	0.3
No religion	16.3	17.6
Malays	100.0	100.0
Islam	99.6	99.7
Other religions	0.3	0.2
No religion	0.1	0.1
Indians	100.0	100.0
Christianity	12.5	12.8
Islam	21.8	26.3
Hinduism	56.5	53.2
Other religions	8.2	6.9
No religion	1.0	0.8

Source: Census of Population 1990:12.

In the Christian revival since the 1970s, some 300 groups have been established (ST 3.5.89)¹⁵, many of which have evangelism as their main mission. For example, the Singapore

(Footnote Continued)
with traditional Chinese religion and the conservatism of established churches as reasons for conversion to charismatic Christianity or professing no religion among the Chinese. The growth of Protestant Buddhism (see Kuah, 1988) especially of the Nichiren Soshu Sect, attracts young Chinese and may compete with Christianity for converts.

¹⁵
There is little documented research about Christian missionary activity and interreligious relations in Singapore during the colonial days. Christian mission churches and schools, which came hand in hand with colonialism, existed but were not allowed to proselytize among Muslims; those Christianised were largely Chinese and Indians. Examples of contemporary evangelical churches are the Calvary Charismatic Centre, World Assembly of God, Bethel Assembly, Harvester Assembly of God, Luis Palau Singapore Mission and the Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Missions. See Clammer (1985, Chapter 7) for a basic sociological profile of the non-Catholic Christian community in Singapore, and Goh (1980) for a study of Christian activities among university students.

Centre for Evangelism and Missions is "dedicated to the vision of the Singapore Church becoming a vital missionary-sending base and centre for world evangelisation", while others see Singapore as a "beacon" from which to "beam" Christianity specifically to the "heathen" and Muslim native populations in Southeast Asia. Kuo et.al. (1988b) note that the "hard core" Christians are fervent about missionary activities and exhibit evangelistic zeal, a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and a non-compromising and confrontational stance towards other religions¹⁶. In general, Christians in Singapore are mostly converts, young, English-educated and better-educated Chinese (Kuo & Quah 1988), and their higher socio-economic status exerts a social influence far greater than their numbers in the population might suggest (Kuo et.al. 1988b). Kuo et.al. (1988b) conclude that the overlap between religious, ethnic (see Table 8.7) and social class affiliations portends the danger of religious conflict augmenting ethnic and class conflict. Specifically, ethnic-religious tension is mainly between Chinese Christians and Malay Muslims, and therefore is also likely to assume a Chinese majority-Malay minority dimension. Local manifestations of this tension were described in Chapter 4. In general Malays, for whom Islam is central to their identity, feel extremely threatened by Christian proselytization even though the number of converts is small. Muslim leaders have openly expressed their unhappiness about Christian

¹⁶ According to one Minister, there have been individual cases of preachers exhorting their congregations to convert Malays to Christianity even if this means bloodshed and martyrdom (ST 1.5.89).

proselytization and by 1989, interethnic religious tensions had become so strong that the government felt it necessary to intervene ¹⁷.

Government intervention in the religious arena is based on two distinct issues. The first is political: it is suspicious of interest-based religious groups which pose potential opposition to the government over various issues (for example, neglect of the poor, and its political authoritarianism). The second, which is of relevance here, is ethnic-religious: it fears the disruption of ethnic harmony. Aware of the implications of (Chinese) Christian proselytization among (Malay) Muslims, it constantly called for religious tolerance and personal choice and interpretation of religion. "The more relaxed we are about these matters, the easier it will be for all of us to get along", said one minister (ST 1.5.89). In 1990, the government passed the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill ¹⁸ aimed at preventing interreligious tensions and ^{ensuring} the separation of politics from religion. The Bill empowers

¹⁷ Against this background of religious revivalism, the teaching of religions in schools has also come under scrutiny. Religious Knowledge (RK) (Islam, Buddhist Studies, Bible Knowledge, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies and Sikh Studies) was a compulsory subject in upper secondary school since 1984, its aim being to provide interreligious understanding and a moral anchor. However, in 1989, the government replaced it with a Civics/Moral Education programme and made it optional outside school hours, on grounds that RK classes ran the risk of religious exclusivity and proselytisation, and were not consistent with the secular basis of the state.

¹⁸ The Government White Paper preceding the Bill cited various cases of interreligious tensions, such as between Christians and Muslims over proselytization by the former among the latter, and between Hindus and Sikhs as a result of events in India; intra-religious tensions; and subversion of the state by religious groups.

the government to serve prohibition orders on anyone who threatens religious harmony through preaching, failure to comply resulting in a fine and/or jail sentence. It also calls for a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony which would act as a forum among representatives of different religions, and as an arbitrator and advisor to the government. However, critics of the Bill question whether the threat to religious harmony is enforceable by law. They also question the credibility of the proposed Council (which might replace the existing Interreligious Organisation) and its composition, specifically whether those churches responsible for over-zealous evangelising would be represented.

8.4.2 Population

Policies and trends in population growth, immigration and emigration have also assumed an ethnic dimension.

Historically, the growth and distribution of Singapore's population has been such that its Chinese population has been numerically dominant since 1836 (see Table 1.1, Chapter 1). The present overall policy of maintaining the ethnic balance of the population is seen by some minorities as maintaining the numerical and social dominance of the Chinese. The change in family planning policy from 'stop at two' to 'have three or more if you can afford it' also has direct ethnic and class implications, given the different ethnic fertility rates which are highest for Malays and lowest for Chinese, and their socio-economic differences.

Recent emigration trends also reveal certain ethnic characteristics. Indians, many highly-educated, are leaving Singapore at two or three times the average emigration rate (ST 3.9.90). The emigration of Malays to Malaysia is a well-known fact although no figures are available, while Eurasian emigration has been taking place since the late 1960s. The study by Chiew and Tan (1990) show Indians to have the highest emigration potential, followed by Malays and Chinese. For some minority members, discrimination and 'second-class' citizenship status are reasons for emigration (other main reasons being the excessively competitive educational and economic environments).

Government immigration policies aimed at overcoming labour and talent shortages have also generated much controversy and unhappiness, especially among minorities. It is a common perception that immigration policies favour foreigners of Chinese ethnic origin for citizenship, permanent residence and employment. This perception is reinforced by the treatment of Malaysia, Hongkong and Taiwan as "traditional" sources of labour whereas Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are considered "non-traditional" (contrary to historical trends of migration and settlement from these areas to Singapore). Under the 1989 relaxed immigration policy, in-principle 5-year approval for permanent residence has been selectively offered

Singapore leads in emigration from the Southeast Asian region to Australia (Sullivan & Gunasekaran 1989). Other destinations are Canada, the USA and Europe. Chiew & Tan's study on emigration (1990) shows those who ever considered emigration to be with high incomes, tertiary or post-secondary education, young, single, English-educated and politically alienated.

to Hongkongers without their first having to reside in Singapore, the aim being to attract up to 25,000 Hongkong families (100,000 individuals) with business talents or skills. To the official mind, Chinese immigrants from Hongkong would not only meet labour shortages but also improve the labour pool with their Confucian work ethic at the same time have less problems of cultural adjustment in Singapore. On the part of potential Chinese immigrants, many tend to view Singapore as a Chinese place.

Minorities see the economic need for immigrants but feel that they should be from different ethnic backgrounds. Malays are especially unhappy over incentives given to Hongkongers. One Malay informant told me: "Why not look after your own children, look after someone else's? [meaning help to improve the skills of Malay citizens rather than absorb those non-citizen Hongkongers who wish to leave the colony by 1997]. And Hongkong people have no experience living with non-Chinese". Some Indians, who want to marry along ethnic and caste lines but find the local pool of eligibles limited, cite difficulties in obtaining permanent residence or citizenship for their foreign spouses, in contrast to the ease with which Hongkongers are allowed to immigrate. To minorities, the special encouragement of Hongkong immigrants confirms that the government is attempting to turn Singapore into a Chinese place. The common claim that many non-Chinese expatriates are not given permanent residence even though they are married to locals or have worked for a long time in Singapore further reinforces the popular perception of an official bias towards Chinese immigrants.

Aware of minorities' unhappiness, the government has replied that the encouragement of HongKong immigrants is to tap the talent pool, increase investments and create jobs and to boost the competitive spirit. It also announced a task force to woo back Malay/Muslim emigrants as well as attract Malay/Muslim talent from abroad, especially the Minang from Sumatra who are reputed for their entrepreneurial spirit, on grounds that Malay/Muslim businessmen would have a significant role to play in the Batam-Johor-Singapore Growth Triangle projects and as business opportunities in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Middle East increase. Similarly, it announced moves to encourage immigration of talented Indians to make up for Indian emigration (ST 22.4.90, 24.4.90, 15.3.91).

8.4.3 The Regional Context

Finally, ethnic geopolitics in the Southeast Asian region is important because of historical and contemporary developments which shape ethnic perceptions in Singapore.

Historically, Malays and Chinese are considered indigenous to the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago) and immigrant to the Nanyang (South Seas) respectively. Migrations and developments since colonialism have resulted in Malays being the minority and Chinese being the majority in Singapore within the larger region in which the Malays are the majority (in Malaysia and Indonesia) and Chinese are minorities. How individual Malays and Chinese Singaporeans view and compare positions of Malays and Chinese in the region, especially 'across the causeway' in Malaysia with which Singapore has close historical and contemporary links, affects local Malay and Chinese perceptions of each other. (As pointed out in Chapter 1, mutual Chinese-

Malay insecurity was a major factor for Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia in 1965.)

Singapore is often viewed as a Chinese city-state both by Chinese Singaporeans themselves and by others. For some Chinese Singaporeans Singapore is the only relatively "safe" place in Southeast Asia, it being the only nation-state in the region with a Chinese majority. Nonetheless, they may still manifest a sense of insecurity because the Chinese remain a minority in the region²⁰. Among non-Chinese, Southeast Asian Chinese are viewed at various times as the Jews of the East, or as a fifth column working to pave the way for Chinese domination, and Singapore is specifically seen as a Third China in a 'Malay sea'. These images are derived historically from the stereotypes of Chinese immigrants and businesses as aggressive, exploitative and culturally crude. Singapore's contemporary economic success has not endeared it to its neighbours; at best there is respect, at worst there is envy and resentment. Its recruitment policy which appears to be in favour of Chinese immigrants also serves to reinforce the view of Singapore as a Chinese city-state. On the part of some Malay Singaporeans, the sense of insecurity which stems from being a disadvantaged indigenous minority is enhanced by the fact that Malays are the

The Chinese in Southeast Asia show a wide range of adaptation in Southeast Asia, from being politically and culturally very Chinese to intermediate identities of acculturation to assimilation, forced or otherwise (Gosling 1983c, Raybeck 1983, Suryadinata 1989). For studies on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, see Freedman (1969), Gosling & Lim (1983a & 1983b), Journal of Southeast Asian Studies vol.XII no.1 (1981), Purcell (1965), Wang (undated & 1988), Lee (1982) and Tan (1989 & undated).

indigenous majority in the region. Some Malays in Malaysia remain watchful of how 'oppressed' Malays in Singapore are. On the other hand, the effects of Malay 'bumiputtraism' ('sons of the soil' ideology) and special privileges²¹ under the New Economic Policy in Malaysia on the Chinese and other minorities in Malaysia is viewed with criticism by some Chinese Singaporeans.

To some extent, Singapore and Malaysia also serve as employment, education and emigration outlets for each other's Malay and Chinese minorities. For some Malay Singaporeans who feel discriminated^{against}, Malaysia, with its Constitutional guarantee of Malays' bumiputra status and special privileges, is an attractive alternative. Similarly, some Chinese Malaysians who are unable to find jobs or obtain promotion in Malaysia because of the implementation of the pro-bumiputra New Economic Policy turn to Singapore. To some extent therefore, the 'across the causeway' syndrome reinforces the ethnic insecurities and stereotyped preceptions of their Malay and Chinese populations about each other.

8.5 Discussion

The overall picture of ethnic relations in contemporary Singapore is a highly complex one in which all major social arenas provide contexts for ethnic assertion, tension and competition, and tend to be mutually reinforcing. Several

21

Special privileges for bumiputras include reservation of land, quotas for admission to the public service, issuing of licences or permits for trade and businesses and quotas for scholarships and educational purposes.

factors further complicate matters: rapid social change affecting all ethnic communities; the heterogeneous majority Chinese whose responses to change affect and generate responses from minorities; the position of the Malay minority; and the active role of the state.

In general, the revival of ethnic cultures as a response to rapid social change may be a good thing. Without sharing the official and predominant notions of Westernism and anti-Western stances, it may be argued that ethnic cultures act as cultural ballast in that they are sources of confidence, dignity and identity. However, it is one thing to search for one's roots voluntarily and another to have them defined and imposed, whether by the state or by others. For the Chinese for example, the search for roots, largely dictated by cultural and language policies imposed from above, attempts to define the highly heterogeneous Chinese into a culturally homogenous group and results in tensions, confusion and contradictions within the community. For the socially dominant English-educated Chinese, it is easy and convenient to argue that the use of the English language is simply practical and not ideological, or that values such as filial piety are not exclusive to Chinese culture. But for the Chinese-educated, maintaining Chinese language and culture in the face of rapid social change is a very real problem. Yet their assumptions about the race-language-culture relationship and the opposition between Eastern and Western values are simplistic. They also fail to recognise and allow for cultural heterogeneity among the Chinese or for choice of cultural preferences. In addition, the promotion of Chinese language and culture can be

a step backwards for the position of Chinese Singaporeans in Southeast Asia if it means looking away from the region towards East Asia.

At the interethnic level, the revival of ethnic cultures has a positive side as ^{each} group learns about each other. This knowledge is particularly useful as a basis for nation-building, given the ignorance and superficial knowledge each has of others' histories and cultures, as Part II has shown. However, if ethnic revival is pursued as an end in itself and if the larger national context is ignored, then it can tend towards divisiveness and chauvinism. Ethnic culture also easily becomes a medium and resource in bargaining and competition in the multiethnic context. Thus, when the Chinese majority asserts itself in the process of seeking its own roots, it has reverberations on the minorities. Minorities feel threatened, seeing the Chinese phenomenon as an assertion of majority group dominance which undermines multiracialism and increases their alienation, and assert their own identities in response. For minorities, cultural phenomena are of particular significance - the importance accorded to minority cultures by the state and the Chinese majority is symbolic of their equality, rights and belonging to the nation. Minorities' symbolic displays of their distinctiveness and cultural responses to what is perceived as bias towards the Chinese are thus both a show of force and a demand for equal recognition and right of place in Singapore society.

In the economic realm, the basic problems pertaining to ethnic relations are economic inequalities between groups and the socio-economic position of the Malays. How to resolve

these problems in turn raises the issues of indigenous rights 'versus' meritocracy and government aid 'versus' self-effort. The limitations and ineffectiveness of each on their own as well as their effects on ethnic relations are well recognised. Rather than tamper with the meritocratic principle or rely solely on either government aid or ethnic community efforts, the approach thus far appears to strike a balance between self- and government- help and right and effort.

Ethnic-based self-help appears to be double-edged. On the one hand, ethnic sentiments may be fruitfully tapped; on the other, such an approach may contribute to further ethnic competition and socio-economic differences. This is especially so in the field of education which is a national issue. Instead of separate ethnic organisations, it is possible to conceive of a single, possibly umbrella, organisation to handle problems of differential educational performance; otherwise, multiracialism may only be paid lip service. The CDAC is also more likely to be able to command more resources than MENDAKI or SINDA, given the larger pool of Chinese and well-off Singaporeans, and the Chinese are therefore more likely to be ahead even in remedial action.

Discrimination is a common source of ethnic tension but is difficult to prove or disprove. The real distinction is between individual discrimination and institutionalised discrimination. In the former, an individual fails because of an act of bias or prejudice; in the latter, a group experiences failure because of large scale structuring of opportunities and constraints. Statistics which show over-representation at the bottom levels and under-representation at higher levels suggest

institutionalised discrimination, but such a distribution is also tied to historical-economic factors and to qualifications. The extent of institutionalised discrimination is beyond the scope of my study; here, what is important is the subjective perception of the problem. Where discrimination does occur, merit may be used to disguise it. On the other hand, it is easy to allege discrimination if one does not meet the standards or criteria required, such as language skills. It is probably true that discrimination exists and most minority members have personal experience of it, but the perception that it exists is just as significant. In the context of inequality and strong competition between majority and minorities, failure by the minority in any arena is likely to be ascribed to adverse discrimination no matter what the actual reasons for lack of success are. The same applies to negative stereotyping. However, Li (1989) has given a convincing explanation of the Malays' economic position and culture in terms of Malay family practices and Singapore's historical and social contexts, as opposed to the common ideology of inherited traits. And as pointed out in Chapter 3, the picture of stereotypes is complex, with contradictory and changing stereotypes which are attributable to the diversity of behavioural characteristics within a rapidly changing environment. For example, the stereotype of Malays as being poor in educational performance and business acumen is changing. In general, a range of negative and positive images exist so that the former is not necessarily always dominant.

In religious matters, the implications of aggressive proselytization on ethnic relations, and particularly on the

religious tolerance which has taken time to build up, are very adverse. The main question is: how far can threats to religious harmony be legislated against. Part II showed that religious peace in the residential setting can be maintained through attitudes and values of mutual tolerance and coexistence. At the societal level, while the Constitution guarantees freedom to profess, practise and propagate religion, the question remains of how this can be achieved in a multi-religious and multiethnic context, especially where the significant identities of religion and ethnicity overlap, without generating ethnic conflict. The interpretation of religious teachings in a literal, exclusive and comprehensive manner also poses a problem.

Finally, in the regional context, historical and contemporary developments have contributed to mutual Chinese and Malay insecurities. But the region is undergoing rapid changes. The older concept of the Malay Archipelago is being eroded by the newer concepts of the nation-state such as Singapore, regional formations such as the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN), and economic arrangements such as the Singapore-Batam-Johor Growth Triangle. Diversity and complexity in the rapidly changing regional context question the traditional verities of Malay solidarity and require new approaches to facing ethnic differences. By the same token, whether or not Singapore can shed its Chinese image will depend on how it conducts itself as a major economic power in the region and how its Chinese population identifies with the region.

The Malays, being the 'crucial' minority, warrant special mention. In general, Malays' economic, cultural, religious and political responses and orientations stem basically from their position as, and their perception of being, a disadvantaged and discriminated indigenous minority. Historically, separation from Malaysia has had an effect on the Malay psyche in terms of adjustment, sense of alienation and sensitivity to their becoming a minority in a region where Malays are the majority. This is especially true for older Malays who have always conceived of themselves as being part of Malaysia. Apart from local issues discussed in Part II, other national issues and events since the mid-1980s have generated many responses from them as well drawn them much attention. Besides the cultural and socio-economic problems already discussed, a series of events occurred which have heightened their sense of alienation and sensitivity to their situation. As one Malay MP put it: Malays feel singled out for "unmeritorious mention" (ST 17.1.89) or, in the words of one informant, "Malays are always seen as the 'problem people'".

Specifically, Malays feel their loyalty to Singapore unfairly questioned because of these events. The first event occurred when Malays criticised the government's decision to invite the President of Israel to visit Singapore in 1986, on grounds of the Israeli government's acts of aggression against Palestinians. This objection was interpreted by the PM as showing that in certain circumstances, Singapore Malays would react more as Muslims than as Singaporeans. The second event was a minister's hint about the strength of Malay loyalty to religion, as opposed to the nation, as the reason for the

government's policy towards Malays in national service and employment in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) - until 1985, not all Malays eligible for national service were called up and postings with the SAF were at the lower ranks and in non-strategic sectors. The third issue pertains to Malay political support for the PAP. In the 1988 post-election analysis, the First DPM claimed that the PAP lost a significant proportion of Malay votes to the opposition. He also hinted that the government was uncertain if it should proceed with the proposed new MENDAKI in the light of this, and asked Malays to send a clear signal whether PAP best served them. This sparked an outcry among Malays who questioned the basis of his remarks and reacted that help should not be tied to political support (ST 11.10.88). (This in turn led to questioning of the roles and credibility of Malay PAP MPs)²². The fourth 'incident' concerned the allied forces attack on Iraq in 1991. In a poll by the Sunday Times newspapers, six out of ten Malays, compared with three out of ten Singaporeans, disapproved of the attack on Iraq (ST 27.1.91) - this was interpreted as Malays responding as Muslims even though they agreed that it was not a religious war.

Like the Chinese, the identities and orientations of Malays are diverse and complex, and evolving rapidly. In the regional context, some continue to look across the causeway to

22

For a discussion on the variables affecting the ability of Malay leaders to cooperate with leaders of the majority community, see Ismail Kassim (1974).

Malaysia as the land of the Malay bumiputra and of opportunity, so long as Malays' socio-economic problems remain unresolved. But for others, Malaysian bumiputraism is, to quote one young informant, "an embarrassment to the Malay race", and to their pride of self-help. This category of Malays is proud to be Singaporean even though they believe that they have to try harder as a disadvantaged and discriminated minority, and make a distinction between state help and privileges. As the same informant told me:

I don't say "what lah you!" [meaning condemn] to those of my friends who have gone to Malaysia. It is true that there are many more opportunities there... But the Malays there make such a mess even though they have so much. Here, we are discriminated and have to be twice as good. But even though it is so much harder here, I stay. I stay to prove that we Malays can do it.

For this category of Malays, Malaysia and Indonesia are, at best, Malay cultural centres (where Singapore has declined in this role), where economic opportunities are obtainable, and where historical and social ties with relatives are maintained. On the whole, the community realises that it needs to face up to the realities of living in a cosmopolitan, multiethnic society in which they are a disadvantaged minority after 25 years of Singapore's nationhood and rapid economic growth. There is a strong sense of urgency to improve the socio-economic status of the community, and at the same time to evolve a distinct Singaporean-Malay-Muslim identity compatible with the community's needs.

So far the discussion has shown the dominance of ethnic perspectives. Some issues are justifiably posed in ethnic terms. Even so, they have to be carefully managed. In the

search for ethnic roots, for example, the line between cultural distinctiveness and cultural chauvinism is a thin one. The search may also emphasise ethnic identity over national identity and, in the case of the Chinese majority, may unintentionally threaten and alienate the minorities. Other issues which cut across ethnic backgrounds, such as those of social inequality and education, appear to be double-edged when posed in ethnic terms and attempts are made to resolve them through ethnic-based approaches. As already pointed out, ethnic links and sentiments may be fruitfully tapped. On the other hand, ethnic approaches to resolving national problems may contribute to ethnic competition and socio-economic differences, and mean a step backwards for multiracialism. Yet, so long as ethnicity overlaps with other social characteristics, the ethnic approach and perspective will remain and even predominate. Thus, for example, so long as the socio-economic position of Malays are not satisfactorily resolved, the Chinese-Malay dichotomy will remain, Singapore will remain perceived as Chinese dominated despite its claim of multiracialism, and Malays remain alienated and perceived to be ambiguous in their loyalty. In the final analysis, whether ethnicity will unite or divide people will depend on when and how judiciously it is managed by all sectors.

CHAPTER 9

MULTIRACIALISM AND NATION-BUILDING

9.1 Introduction

Nation-building in post-colonial multiethnic states is characterised by the state taking an active role in decisions of nationhood and state management of ethnic issues (see Chapter 1). In the Singapore context, the state's management of ethnicity and ethnic relations in nation-building is informed by its ideology of multiracialism. Part II referred to the impact of this ideology on local community formation and housing policy. Chapters 7 and 8 indicated its operation as the principle guiding the state's management of ethnic identity, relations and issues. This chapter rounds off my discussion on ethnicity and ethnic relations in Singapore by examining the state ideology of multiracialism as a major decision of nationhood.

9.2 Nation-building and CMIO Multiracialism

It has been argued that the Singapore case of nation-building is unique in Southeast Asia in two senses: the existence of the state before national identity (Willmott 1989) and its ability to hold a multiethnic but predominantly Chinese population together (Chan 1971a, Chan & Evers 1973) without civil war and large-scale conflict as has occurred elsewhere.

Prior to Singapore's sovereignty, there was no Singaporean nationalism but a plethora of competing anti-colonial ethnic (Chinese, Malay, Indian) and national (Malayan) sentiments. Nation-building was thrust upon Singapore after its sudden

separation from Malaysia of which it had been a part between 1963 and 1965. This sudden sovereignty produced in its PAP political leadership an obsession with Singapore's nation-building in which national survival is the key theme (Chan 1971b). Writing in the early 1970s, Chan and Evers argued that neither of the two major alternatives of nation-building for Southeast Asian societies - a regressive identity based on the revival of proud cultural and political traditions of a golden past, or a progressive identity based on communism and socialism - were viable for Singapore (1973:303). They pointed out that its relatively short and colonial history ruled out the first option and rummaging through the past might emphasise past conflicts and differences. More importantly, with its 76% Chinese population of immigrant backgrounds, there was the danger of Singapore being seen as a Third China by its neighbours and by its own non-Chinese ethnic populations. The second option also was not viable given the anti-communist stances of Singapore's neighbours and the PAP itself, and because of Singapore's dependence on foreign investments for its economic development. A third alternative was thus created: an "ideology of pragmatism" - consistent with the obsession of survival as a small nation with limited resources and taking into account Singapore's geopolitical context and ethnic composition (Chan & Evers 1973:304-7).

Since Singapore's independence this ideology of pragmatism has developed into a highly structured and integrated system of ideas with tremendous structural and symbolic power (Clammer 1982-3, 1985a). Informing state intervention in all major domains of Singapore society, it has three main components: 1)

an economic ideology of meritocracy, efficiency and excellence; 2) a political ideology of Singapore-style democracy, and politics based on consensus rather than conflict; and 3) a cultural ideology of CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) multiracialism with regard to its multiethnic population. Furthermore, consistent with its pragmatic and future-oriented approach, this ideology is constantly refined and developed to face new challenges¹. Conceived in the above context, CMIO multiracialism may be regarded as one of Singapore's founding myths (Benjamin 1976:116) and a major decision of nationhood which, as part of an overarching national culture, also acts as the implicit national cultural policy.

CMIO multiracialism consists of four components: multiracialism, multiculturalism, multilingualism and multireligiosity. Basically, it acknowledges and accords separate but equal right of place to the diversity of races, cultures, languages and religions in Singapore. Its critical feature is that these diversities are fitted within the CMIO framework in which each "race" is attributed one culture, one language and, to a lesser extent, one religion in a one-to-one correspondence. In other words, Chinese race = Chinese culture = Mandarin language = Chinese religion; Malay race = Malay culture = Malay language = Islam; and Indian race = Indian culture = Tamil language = Hinduism. By according separate but

¹ Clammer (1982-3) stresses the promotion of political culture, in particularly towards the identification of political interests with popular interests, and of promoting the ideology of survival and pragmatism as non-ideological. Also see Chua (1985a) for a discussion on the ideology of pragmatism.

equal status to each component, harmonious integration rather than assimilation is considered the best solution. It also means mutual acceptance and tolerance of cultural differences, equality before the law and equal opportunity for advancement of each ethnic community. Furthermore, there is the constitutional guarantee against discrimination on grounds of race, descent, place of origin or religion; of minority rights; and specifically of the rights of the Malays as Singapore's indigenous people. A Presidential Commission on Minorities also acts as a kind of Ombudsman for minority grievances.

According to Marriott, there are several issues of cultural policy in nation-building: 1) choosing an appropriate level of culture, 2) dealing with the cultural variety within the state, 3) finding a suitable orientation in time, and 4) relating internal to external culture (1963:55). The social and political factors noted earlier - Singapore's short colonial history, its multiethnic population and geopolitical considerations - not only account for the evolution of Singapore's ideology of pragmatism, but are especially significant in the deliberate choice of multiracialism as the most viable way to minimise internal and external tension. Multiracialism would recognise the equal status of all groups, the Chinese majority or the indigenous position of the Malays notwithstanding. This basic tenet is also specifically conditioned by the ethnic causes behind Singapore's separation² from Malaysia, i.e. Malay and Chinese mutual insecurities.

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For various accounts of the Singapore's separation from
(Footnote Continued)

Multiracialism would be the antithesis of communalism, one of the twin enemies of the new Singapore state (the other being communism). Where language is concerned, it was felt that, for the same political reasons, Chinese could not be the main official language despite the Chinese being the majority; at the same time, none of the ethnic languages can enable Singapore's people to compete successfully in the international economic arena. The practical way out was for the establishment of English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil to be the four official languages, and for bilingualism to be emphasised. However, this bilingualism is not a combination of any two of the four languages but of English and one's own "mother tongue". English would facilitate social and interethnic communication and international contact, while the mother tongue would enable intra-ethnic communication and the retention of cultural values. For historical reasons, Malay would remain the national language. In the cultural realm, a dominant or "neutral" national culture could not be imposed; each race would retain its own distinct culture. Similarly, multireligiosity (including atheism and agnosticism) would be consistent with the multireligious population, while the state would remain secular (not in the sense of the discouragement of religion but in that there would be no official or dominant religion).

9.2.1 Rituals of Multiracialism

(Footnote Continued)

Malaysia, see Hanna (1965), Lee (1965), Milne (1966), Fletcher (1969) and Tilman (1969). For an interesting comparison with the Malaysian cultural policy's effects on Malay-minority relations, see Tan (1982) and Saad (1983).

According to Lane, a regime legitimises itself, exerts social control and attempts to achieve people's identification with the state through several means: 1) changing social conditions, 2) influence through coercion and/or remuneration and 3) cultural management (1981:1, 27-8). She observes that cultural management - of both formal ideological constructs and of people's perceptions of social conditions - is more pronounced in newly formed societies with a one-party system in which a single ruling elite pursues clearly defined goals (p.1). Marriott points out that "no state, not even an infant one, is willing to appear before the world as a bare political frame. Each would be clothed in a cultural garb symbolic of its aims and ideal being" (1963:27). The construction and display of national identity symbols is an active, ongoing process and usually takes place through national events. The latter are public rituals par excellence which represent the nation and symbolise its culture, identity, history, traditions and ideals (Firth 1973:334-5). Their official symbols and meanings are presented as sacred and as unquestionable political ideologies (Moore & Myerhoff 1973:3), and thus serve as important means for political legitimation.

The PAP regime, in power since Singapore's self-government in 1959, resorts to all three means of legitimation and control pointed out by Lane (Quah and Quah 1989). The first two means involve various institutions and the third is achieved through national symbols and mass rituals of nation-building (Chen 1978, Willmott 1989). In the quest for legitimacy of its vision for the nation and itself, the PAP regime extensively creates and manipulates national symbols in mass-participation

rituals of nation-building. Through symbols, campaigns, special events and songs, group emotions are aroused and mobilised to build up a strong sense of nationalism and to prove to its citizens and to the world Singapore's ability to survive and to excel. These rituals of nation-building, as a tool and manifestation of state legitimation and the cultural management of multiracialism, warrant a brief discussion.

The symbols of the Singapore state (anthem, flag, pledge of allegiance) were developed early in 1959, after self-government from Britain, to gell together the different ethnic groups. Whether by design or coincidence is difficult to establish but the four heads of state so far have been a Malay, an Eurasian, an Indian and a Chinese - symbolising racial equality. Special community songs (e.g. We are Singapore, Count on Me Singapore, Stand Up for Singapore and One People, One Nation, One Singapore [see Appendix 5]) extol the virtues and responsibilities of being Singaporean in the midst of a search for a national ideology with "core values". Understandably, a dominant theme in the repertoire of symbols is Singapore's economic achievements and ideals - these are symbolised by murals and pictures of factories, high-technology, Singapore's 'World's Number One' airport and seaport, mass-rapid transport and favourable annual BERI report (BERI is the Washington-based Business Environment Risk Intelligence consultancy); the ideal of a Swiss standard of living by the year 2000 and American levels of income by 2030. Social achievements are no less symbolically acclaimed, such as those of public housing and a green and clean environment, while army parades, sophisticated weaponry displays and civil

defence exercises stress the importance of national defence. National campaigns (e.g. Use your Hands, Anti-drug Abuse, Be Courteous) each have their own rituals and symbols (some of which were encountered in the local community, see Chapter 2). As the most pervasive form of government intervention to change the attitudes and behaviour of Singaporeans and as instruments of policy implementation in nation-building (Tham 1983:7,17), campaigns rely on mass-mobilisation by grassroot organisations and public sector bodies to implement them. Official events (National Day celebrations being the most important) most vividly express the symbols and rituals of nation-building. National Day themes (A Nation for All [1987]; Together, Excellence for Singapore [1988]; Excellence Together, Singapore Forever [1989] and One People, One Nation, One Singapore [1990]) embody the essential elements and the grand goals of nation-building. Pledge-taking and flag-raising ceremonies, national day dinners, parades, "Swing Singapore" parties and shows aim to inculcate a sense of belonging and commitment to the Singapore nation. All citizens are strongly urged to fly the national flag in their homes as a sign of patriotism.

The theme of multiracialism occupies a central place in nation-building rituals. Its symbols are plentiful, e.g. ethnic costumes, cultural shows, CMIO dance and community songs, and are best encountered through local and national official events. The HDB and Residents' Day celebrated in most HDB housing estates (subsequently Town Council Day) features many ethnic items such as ethnic dances and the singing of community songs about multiracial Singapore. Meant to promote among residents a sense of belonging to the local community,

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its themes (such as Together, A Cohesive Community [1987] and A Community in Celebration [1988]) bear in mind the residents multiethnic backgrounds. Community Week, initiated by the Ministry of Community Development in 1988, is to "strengthen the harmonious relationship that exists in our multiracial, multicultural and multireligious society" - hence its themes "Many Races One Nation" (1988); "Racial Harmony" (1989) and "One People, One Nation, One Singapore" (1990). Observed largely at the national level with pledge-taking and the staging of cultural items, its posters appear in strategic locations locally. In the 1988 and 1989 events, posters depicted children of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian backgrounds in their respective ethnic attire, representing CMIO multiracialism and symbolising ethnic harmony. In National Day celebrations, not only each year's themes but the many show items extol multiculturalism through the cultural symbols of each ethnic group. There are also attempts to blend different ethnic elements into a "true Singaporean culture" in acts, dance and music. Similarly, the Chinese, Malay and Indian Cultural Months described in Chapter 4 are extravagant displays of ethnic cultures to symbolise ethnic diversity and harmony. Some ethnic occasions are also turned into semi-national or official occasions to which politicians are invited for openings, attendance and send-offs, such as Lunar New Year shows, Seventh Moon dinners and Muslim pilgrims' send-offs. Politicians' speeches at such functions inevitably refer to the importance of preserving ethnic cultures and multiracialism.

Official events implicitly acknowledge the complexities of ethnic relations in nation-building, and are organised to

legitimise, in celebratory form, the official solution of CMIO multiracialism. In so doing they also simultaneously act as unifying symbols between ethnic groups and between the different groups and the ruling authority. The use of ethnic symbols and events as national symbols to promote CMIO multiracialism is significant. Even as official occasions are supra-ethnic in appeal, they must nonetheless take into account ethnic sentiments. The use of ethnic symbols reflects not only official tolerance of ethnic diversity but also state recognition of the equality of ethnic groups. Failure to represent them sufficiently implies exclusion or insensitivity which can lead to a sense of alienation and ultimately affects their sense of belonging to the nation-state³.

9.3 CMIO Multiracialism and the Management of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations

CMIO multiracialism underlies and informs state management of ethnic identity, relations and issues.

In the realm of culture and identity, CMIO multiracialism sees no conflict between ethnic and national identity - one can have an ethnic identity and a Singaporean identity at the same time so long as the former is politically non-threatening to the latter and is subsumed under it. At the empirical level,

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As already pointed out in Chapters 7 & 8, the assertiveness of minorities through cultural and other means may be seen as responses to this. Another significant example is the appearance of the "Eurasians for Singapore" group at the Community Week 1989 event to assert the "Eurasian" identity, as opposed to their official categorisation under "Others" and against their oft-exclusion in official representation. Soon after this, a Eurasian Society was formed.

both identities appear to be strong. Most of my informants define themselves as Singaporean-Chinese, Malay, Indian or Eurasian⁴. This dual identity combines both the national and ethnic, with the 'Singaporean' identity preceding that of the ethnic being indicative of its primary status. However, it has been pointed out that the CMIO multiracial model, while neat, does have contradictions and problems (Benjamin 1976, Clammer 1985a, Siddique 1989). This arises from the basic fact that it imposes an ethnic identity onto each and every group and individual and defines that identity as fixed and invariable.

At the individual level, CMIO multiracialism poses the most difficulty for the offspring of interethnic marriages as they are unable to fit into any of the prescribed categories (Hassan 1974:61-62). While such children follow their father's ethnicity as officially required, they often consider themselves "mixed". This self-created category of "mixed" is also confirmed by Siddique's (1990) case study of the negotiation of CMIO categories in a three-generation family of mixed marriages. Among my informants, Eurasians especially consider themselves highly mixed, while offspring of mixed marriages claim dual ethnic identity such as Indian-Chinese, Malay-Arab, Malay-Chinese, Malay Eurasian and Indian-Malay⁵. There is also

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Chiew (1971) and Chiew & Tan (1990) point to a strong sense of Singaporean identity. Some informants also qualified their sub-ethnic identities and origins e.g. Hainanese (Chinese), Portuguese (Eurasians), Gujarati (Indian) but others no longer find it relevant.

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In a survey of ethnic identity among children in London, Wallman points out that the claim of several identities is not a state of being in crisis for lacking a single identity but is
(Footnote Continued)

a minority that refuses to accept the ethnic identity imposed by the state or others, and a few who claim that "most people are mixed if you go back far enough". Thus, not only CMIO but other heterogeneous identities exist in reality. Furthermore, since individuals as active agents not only reproduce ethnic identity but also negotiate it, the actual situation is much more complicated. It is only because of the strong state and social pressure to conform to the CMIO framework that groups and especially individuals find it difficult to choose^{their own identity} or opt out of the CMIO ethnic identity.

At the group level, the situation is similarly more complicated than the CMIO model of categorisation. Siddique (1989:571) argues that the CMIO model causes certain internal tensions and contradictions for each of the constituent ethnic groups through its homogenizing effects, and is particularly inappropriate for the heterogenous Chinese and Indians. Chapter 7 showed in detail how the CMIO ideology's rigid equation and implementation of Chinese race = Mandarin language = Confucian culture cause tensions, confusion and contradictions within the highly heterogeneous Chinese population; while in intergroup relations, the promotion of the Chinese majority's language and culture arouses the suspicion of minorities and increases their alienation. It also showed that

(Footnote Continued)

a healthy choice. She also argues that minority children are of two systems, not between two systems, and therefore have access to, and participate in, and have different degrees of identification with both systems. Although officially they profess one identity, individuals in such families have clearcut notions and behaviour about when to do what (1983:74-5).

the ideology's rigid race = language = culture approach reduces opportunities for intercultural exchange and, instead, encourages ethnic assertion of identity and competition.

At the same time, CMIO multiracialism promises an equality which in practice requires a fine balancing in the management of ethnic issues. Chapters 7 and 8 showed the difficulties of striking this balance over various issues in the face of competing claims and sensitivities by both minorities and the majority. They also raise issues about the domains and degrees of state intervention. Politically, Brown (1989) sums up well the Singapore state and its management of ethnicity and ethnic relations. He depicts the Singapore state as bureau-⁶cratic-authoritarian and belonging to the corporatist state model in its influence on ethnicity and ethnic relations. This influence is exercised in several ways: i) no competing loyalties, such as ethnic loyalties, can be tolerated; ethnic distinctiveness may be tolerated or even fostered for cathartic purposes so long as it takes a depoliticised form, at the symbolic and cultural level; and ii) the state regards ethnicity as a 'fifth column' threatening the nation, and thus allows only official participatory channels for the controlled articulation of ethnic issues. (pp. 57-8). Thus, he points out, the Singapore state stresses nationhood over ethnic

6

The bureaucratic-authoritarian state structure is such that i) the state has high degree of autonomy from the various social and economic groups and is controlled by a technocratic elite committed to the goal of economic development, ii) nation demands absolute loyalty from its citizens, and iii) the state provides official channels through which the various interest associations must articulate their demands (Brown 1989:56-7).

loyalty and consistently invokes the spectre of ethnic unrest; officially designates racial categories as cultural groups; pursues policies on language, culture, religion, etc.; and encourages the various ethnic communities to function as corporatist interest groups. Brown's view is consistent with the hegemonic nature of the Singapore state as shown in Chapters 5-8, in which it allows for ethnicity as legitimate socio-economic and cultural interests but controls its manifestations politically.

9.4 Discussion

The Singapore state was born suddenly. Unable to fall back on a long history or political traditions and mindful of the ethnic complexities of its own population and in the region, it has evolved a national identity and culture based on an ideology of pragmatism that is consistent with its concern for survival and success. At the same time, it also stresses Asian values as cultural resources to face rapid social change and internationalisation. CMIO multiracialism as a major component of the ideology of pragmatism is, like the ideology itself, derived from historical, political, social and geopolitical considerations, and is highly institutionalised to inform public policy at every level of social life.

Because of Singapore's sudden sovereignty, symbolisation of its pragmatic ideology in state-managed nation-building rituals is perhaps understandable. But not only does the ideology need constant reiteration, it requires that the population be constantly socialised and mobilised to face new challenges and problems in the fierce competition to survive -

hence the regular and extensive staging of nation-building rituals by the state. In doing so, not only is the ideology itself legitimised but also the political power behind it. The constant legitimisation of CMIO multiracialism as antidote to communalism and as social cement in the multiethnic society is given much symbolic power through the use of ethnic symbols and events in nation-building rituals.

CMIO multiracialism stresses tolerance of ethnic diversity and accords equality of status to the different ethnic groups. But it also classifies and fixes ethnic categories to the point of non-ambiguity and myth (Clammer 1982) through the equation of race, ethnicity and culture with each other. Although the categories 'race' and 'ethnicity' are distinct theoretically, this equation sorts out and simplifies the heterogeneous population for political and administrative expediency. It officially fixes an individual's primary identity outside of the national identity as an ethnic identity and defines his/her culture as an ethnic culture. In doing so, the CMIO model also reinforces the dominant folk classification along ethnic lines and officially institutionalises ethnicity as a primary model of social classification and identification (Clammer 1985a, 1985b). In practice, rigid policies based on this equation and the puritanical consistency of its application have been responsible for the strong stereotypes and boundary maintenance between ethnic groups. They have also resulted in tensions and problems at the individual, intra- and inter- group levels.

Fundamentally, CMIO's conception of race = ethnicity fails to recognise cross-cultural processes, such as cultural borrowing and exchange or the development of new cultures which

may be neither Chinese, Indian, Malay nor some other culture. It imposes a homogeneity which contradicts the reality in Singapore characterised by heterogeneity and rapid changes in culture and identity. It has also been pointed out that CMIO multiracialism's definition of ethnic culture in a fixed and puritanical sense leads each group to look backwards to its past 'golden age' for inspiration, and this results in cultural involution in which each culture turns in on itself to bring out its distinctiveness (Benjamin 1976:120, 124). For the Chinese, it channels their cultural response to social changes back to past Confucian traditions thus reinventing them for present consumption. It also leads Chinese Singaporeans to seek their roots and cultural orientations in their land of origin and East Asia rather than Singapore and the region - a step backwards in terms of interethnic exchange and Chinese image and identity in the region. In interethnic relations, it has already been emphasised that CIMO multiracialism's contextualisation in language and culture policies pertaining to the Chinese majority enhances separation and suspicion, as minorities feel threatened and alienated by what they perceive to be Sinification. These policies also have the consequences of encouraging the assertion of ethnic identity and ethnic competition.

Yet, despite the tensions and contradictions, it has been argued that CMIO multiracialism is the most practical and viable ideology for Singapore's long term stability and harmonious ethnic relations. Benjamin (1976) acknowledges that CMIO multiracialism acts as a powerful force against ethnic discrimination. Siddique (1989) argues that the Singapore

government has chosen the best possible alternative by showing hypothetically that other alternatives (in which the Chinese are officially dominant) are unacceptable, given the complexity of Singaporean society and geopolitical considerations. Similarly, Clammer (1988) is of the opinion that not to adopt the CMIO multiracial model would be administratively and politically difficult. More importantly, he argues that, given the pressures to preserve and enhance both a national unity and ethnic distinctiveness at the same time, CIMO multiracialism is the most ideal because it allows for the simultaneous development of a public Singaporean identity and a private ethnic identity (p.107). This is because CMIO multiracialism allows for a public/private distinction in which all groups interact on a common basis as Singaporeans in the public sphere, while individuals can remain members of a particular ethnic community in the private domain. Furthermore, culturally it assures equality and rights for minorities (Clammer 1988:108). Despite the continual strains of managing complex ethnic relations therefore, CMIO multiracialism, through its recognition and integration of the different components into a holistic framework enables "an unparalleled level of cultural richness, diversity and variation to be maintained within a single national/political framework (Clammer 1985b:154).

Paradoxically therefore, CMIO multiracialism, despite the contradictions and the tensions it generates, is still the most practical and viable ideology, given the circumstances. At one level, it promises equality and harmony; at another it encourages ethnic differences and tensions but in general, through its sheer ideological force, it helps contain and limit

the possibility of overt ethnic conflict. The current phenomena of ethnic assertion and competition that it in part generated also puts it to the test of delicately balancing and resolving the conflicting demands and expectations of the different ethnic components.

PART 3 SUMMARY

The overall picture of ethnicity and ethnic relations in contemporary Singapore society is a highly complex one in which all major social arenas are mutually reinforcing grounds for ethnic assertion, tension and competition. Several factors further complicate matters: rapid social change affecting all ethnic communities; the heterogeneous Chinese majority whose response to change affect and generate responses from minorities; the socio-economic and indigenous position of the Malay minority; and the active role of the state.

In general the revival of ethnic cultures as a response to social change and to each ethnic group's actions has both positive and negative consequences. As a response to social change, it is positive in that it gives identity, confidence and dignity for the community. However, it may be insufficient and negative if it encourages an inward-looking approach or is intolerant of diversity and heterogeneity within the group, such as appears to be the case of the Chinese. In interethnic relations, the revival of ethnic cultures is positive for interethnic cultural knowledge, but is regressive and divisive when it tends towards cultural involution or insensitivity to the wider multiethnic context and leads to reactive ethnic assertion and competition. The latter is especially possible in the case of ethnic revival by the Chinese majority because it is easily seen by minorities as the imposition of a dominant culture onto them.

Underlying the processes of assertion and competition are also issues of representation, rights and equality which are of

particular concern to minorities. For the indigenous Malays who form the largest disadvantaged socio-economic group, this concern is especially marked in the face of rapid economic and social change and a highly competitive environment. Processes of ethnic assertion and competition also highlight the difficulty of resolving and reconciling competing claims of different groups and different principles. In particular those of indigenous rights versus meritocracy and government aid versus self-effort require delicate balancing as they directly affect ethnic relations between groups and individual groups' sense of belonging to the nation. Ethnic-based help appears double-edged - on the one hand it enhances community solidarity; on the other it may further encourage ethnic competition and work as a step backwards for multiracialism. Overall, ethnic consciousness and approaches appear to be dominant despite the fact that some issues cut across ethnic boundaries and warrant a non-ethnic national outlook.

Both the majority Chinese and minority Malays have their particular problems of identity and socio-economic status within the rapidly changing national and regional contexts in which, especially in the latter case, they are considered 'immigrant' and 'indigenous' respectively. Looking towards their countries of origins or past is one approach towards resolving these problems but it generates its own problems. For the Chinese, looking exclusively towards East Asia and Confucianism risks undermining their Southeast Asian identity and reinforcing negative stereotypes about the Chinese. For the Malays, the main challenges are that of improving their socio-economic status as a disadvantaged indigenous minority

and evolving a distinct Singaporean-Malay-Muslim identity.

Overall, state intervention in issues of ethnic identity and relations is informed by CMIO multiracialism - an ideology evolved out of historical and practical considerations as the most viable way out to minimise national and regional ethnic tensions, and which is highly ritualised to rally the multiethnic population to the tasks of nation-building. It accords equal status to each ethnic group and treats ethnicity as a primary mode of classification and identification, so long as ethnic interests and identity are politically non-threatening to national interests and identity. But at the same time, it imposes a homogeneity, based on a simplistic race = culture = language equation, onto what are in reality highly heterogeneous groupings, thus generating much tension and contradiction within them. The imposition of such a rigid formula also reduces interethnic exchange and may, in fact, result in cultural involution and ethnic assertion and competition. Also, because of its promise of equality, CMIO multiracialism has^{been} shown to be difficult in practice because of competing claims and sensitivities by various ethnic groups. Yet, largely for political reasons - of reconciling ethnic and national identities, ensuring harmonious interethnic relations and minority rights, and for geopolitical considerations - CMIO multiracialism is considered the most ideal for Singapore's long-term stability and viability.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the meanings of multiethnicity in Singapore. By focusing on selected arenas and processes at local and national levels, it has examined the central question of how the 'ethnic' and the 'interethnic' interact and are reconciled in the construction of community and identity in the context of nation-building. The analysis has ranged from detailed ethnography to discussion of broad features and issues, and has linked micro and macro data by juxtaposing them to each other as well as by showing how they interact. Although by no means exhaustive or conclusive, this study hopes to make some theoretical and empirical contributions.

Theoretically the study confirms and elaborates several dimensions of ethnic identity, ethnic interaction and nation-building in the multiethnic context.

First, it confirms the symbolic-affective and organisational power of ethnicity in providing a sense of identity and community when encountering 'others' and change. It also reveals ethnicity's significance as an arena, resource and medium of interaction in which the links between its cultural, political and economic aspects can only be fruitfully understood within a particular historical and social context. At the same time, ethnicity is variable and subject to continuous construction of meanings. Nor is ethnic identity shared evenly among members but depends on change, choice and constraint.

Second, this study shows that two seemingly contradictory trends can simultaneously take place in ethnic interaction: a

tendency towards appreciation of heterogeneity and peaceful interaction on the one hand, and an intensification of ethnic boundary maintenance and competition on the other. There is both peace and problem, tolerance and tension, and appreciation and apprehension. But the two trends need not be contradictory. It is possible and even necessary to have tolerance and peace, especially in the shared residential community, in the face of differentiation and competition in the larger society.

This study also shows that in a context of rapid social change, ethnic interaction may take the forms of ethnic assertion and competition in the major realms of social life. Often underlying these phenomena furthermore are the issues of 'right' and 'equality'.

In the economic realm, right, equality and meritocracy as well as government-help and self-help are contending principles and the bases of competing claims. The study shows that not sole reliance on one or the other but a careful combination of all these principles is a more realistic and workable approach towards resolving economic disparities in a context of stiff competition. On their own, rigid meritocracy reproduces inequality; claims based on right or government subsidy may create a crutch mentality; while ethnic-based self-help is double-edged as it may work against multiracialism even as it taps ethnic-based resources readily.

In the cultural realm, issues of language, customary behaviour and religion are often drawn into conflict because of their significance as powerful ethnic markers. A common language among ethnic groups is deemed necessary for unity in nation-building, but the choice of national and official

languages as well as their statuses in education and social communication can often become points of contention. This conflict may be further complicated by the cultural assertions of an ethnic group in the face of social change, in particular that of a majority group. In such a situation, the issues of right to and equality of recognition, representation and practice of language and culture may be asserted in response by minorities. Ethnic conflict is thus not only about competition over material resources but also about the desirability of equality (Bell & Freeman 1976:13).

In the processes of ethnic assertion and competition, a major pitfall of both majority and minority mentalities is the fact that everything is perceived in ethnic and dichotomised terms. Such a perception tends to be self-perpetuating, and does not allow for other views, recognition of complexity or importance of individual circumstances. It also appears that the ethnic scenario is not always necessarily the classic 'majority-might minority-plight' one, since both the majority and minorities have their own biases and interests. Self-criticism by all sectors and recognition of the rights and responsibilities of each by all are necessary for overcoming differences. That said, the protection of and equal rights for minorities remains a responsibility to be recognised by all.

Third, this study reveals the state as playing both a causal and mediating factor in the development of ethnic relations in the context of nation-building. State management may be through a highly ritualised central ideology and policies informed by it, such as in the Singapore case. Multiracialism, as Singapore's founding myth and a major

decision of nationhood, serves as the state's central ideology for dealing with ethnic diversity. Multiracialism's appeal lies in its promise of equal status for every ethnic group and rights of minorities, although this has proved to be difficult to implement in practice. Also, under multiracialism, national and ethnic identities are considered non-conflicting as ethnicity is viewed largely in cultural terms and politically controlled so as to be non-threatening to the state.

Multiracialism, however, poses its own problems. Theoretically, race and ethnicity are distinct even though they may strongly overlap. The Singapore state makes the error of equating race with ethnicity, such that race = culture = language, etc., and rigid policies built on this misconception result in rigid boundary maintenance, contradictions and tensions at the individual, intra-group and intergroup levels.

This study further emphasises that the realm of culture, because of its significance as an identity marker, needs to be carefully considered in nation-building in the multiethnic context. Issues of choice and emphasis, and interpretation and representation, of history, tradition, culture and language easily arise. Where there are few traditions to draw from, the problems are less; but where the traditions and cultures of ethnic groups are distinct and deep-rooted, selection and decision become complex and contentious, particularly when perceived to be in favour of the dominant group. However, it is possible not to fall back on tradition, history and ethnic cultures only; civic and universalistic values may also be incorporated into the national culture. It may even be argued that it is on the basis of such values that a solution may be

found to the problems of choice and decision. In other words, nation-building in the multiethnic context appears to require a universal ideology besides drawing from ethnic-based sources.

This study also raises issues about the need for and limits of state intervention in ethnicity and ethnic relations. Concerning state intervention, it raises the questions of when to resort to legislation or bureaucratic management, and when to lay only the broad grounds and allow for spontaneous and gradual processes. On the whole, it appears that state intervention cannot be avoided altogether; however its 'vices' and 'virtues' need to be carefully considered, since too little produces no effect but too much is counterproductive.

Empirically, this study documents, as a contribution to the anthropology of the nation-state, the Singapore case of the multiethnic dimensions of nation-building. In particular it focuses on the local residential community, and in doing so confirms it as an active culture-building world which, as a primary component for nation-building, mediates national identity and forms a basis for the emotional legitimacy of nationhood. The focus on the local also shows the structuring impact of the larger context within which it is situated, yet reveals its partial autonomy and distinctiveness.

The local community is at once a parade of ethnic cultures and forms of ethnic interaction and the problems these give rise to. A central issue in local life is how to maintain community cohesion between neighbours and co-residents despite cultural differences and structural disparities. This study shows that mutual tolerance and respect, friendliness and helpfulness, accommodation and equality are the basic

principles of a civic culture necessary for viable living in the same community. In general, local life shows the importance of both everyday social interaction and special mechanisms for controlling this interaction in order to maintain ethnic peace. This is especially instructive for the management of ethnic differences in the wider context. The study also shows that it is necessary to study both the peaceful management of differences as well as the conflict such differences often engender.

This study also confirms the local residential community as a basis for interethnic appreciation and exchange in the Singapore context. Multiethnic living and the preference for it appears to be well in place and could become a dominant trend in the future. Yet, local notions of multiethnic living are not simplistic; it is not the case that there must be interethnic mixing and participation in all major aspects of community life. Ethnic interaction is selective, especially for minorities who feel the need to maintain group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness. Interethnic mixing is not always necessary, and separate activities are not necessarily always detrimental to multiethnic living. What appears important therefore is to allow multiethnic living to develop gradually and spontaneously, for the construction of a viable multiethnic community is a continuous, everyday, mundane task that allows both ethnic interaction and distinctiveness to occur. The role of state intervention is, at best, in laying the broad grounds for multiethnic living.

At the national level, ethnic assertion and competition are dominant and mutually reinforcing trends in all major

realms of social life. The assertion of language and culture by the Chinese majority as a response to social change is, however, perceived by minorities as the imposition of a dominant culture and who then react by asserting their own cultural distinctiveness and demanding their rights. The culture and language issue also creates tensions within the highly heterogeneous Chinese population itself. Minorities, in particular the indigenous Malays who form a disadvantaged socio-economic group, also demand their rights to equal opportunities and benefits in Singapore's economic development.

State intervention has both contributed to the high level of ethnic consciousness as well as tried to dissipate it. Its ideology of CIMO multiracialism which accords equality to all is most ideal, given Singapore's historical and social context. But in practice, policies informed by it generate tensions and problems at the individual, intra-group and intergroup levels because of competing ethnic claims and the ideology's own rigid equation of race with ethnicity. The state's future-oriented approach to nation-building also avoids serious conflicts over issues of tradition, history and culture between ethnic groups. However, other state policies, such as those pertaining to Chinese language and culture, are perceived by minorities as being in favour of the Chinese majority or as attempts at the Sinification of Singapore.

At the general level, the hegemonic context in which the ruling PAP government tends to define and control community values and institutions has, not surprisingly, posed questions about the necessity and extent of state intervention. Government ideology and action are increasingly subjected to

greater scrutiny, and contradictions and inconsistencies increasingly apparent and questioned. The need to roll back the machines of the state in the light of liberalising tendencies and growing sophistication of the population is increasingly expressed in various quarters. In general, there appears to be a need for a balance of participation between the people and political elites in the imagination, definition and processes of nation-building at both local and national levels.

In the context of rapid economic growth, both the state and different ethnic sectors recognise the urgent need to reduce the socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups and the good chances of doing so. To achieve this requires delicate balancing, and the reconciliation of competing interests and the principles of right versus meritocracy and government aid versus self-help. To reiterate, the Singapore case shows that not sole reliance on one or the other but a careful combination of these principles is a more realistic and workable approach. However, ethnic-based self-help, such as the Chinese, Malay and Indian organisations set up for the socio-economic uplifting of members of each group, is double-edged as it may tap resources easily but yet may work against multiracialism. Even as there is reliance on such help, non-ethnic and interethnic sources should be identified and built up to reduce heavy reliance on ethnic-based resources and approaches to resolving national problems, and to increase the range of opportunities for mutual cooperation. Otherwise, multiracialism may be paid only lip service.

Cultural assertion in the face of rapid social change is understandable. However, whether the response is voluntary or

imposed and inward- or outward- looking is important. Singapore has to be cosmopolitan to survive, and combining the best of various cultures best ensures this. The imposition of a rigid race = culture = language approach thus appears to be a step backwards both in terms of dealing with change and for interethnic relations and individual identity. Culture is not limited to one ethnic source. Nor is it fixed and integrated or even necessarily ethnic. Rather than a rigid approach, the free choice and evolution of cultures can be permitted more leeway to suit Singapore's multiethnic and cosmopolitan setting. Thus for example, a Chinese should be able to choose to study the Malay language on similar grounds for studying Mandarin, i.e. increasing economic potential in Southeast Asia (whose economies are some of the fastest growing in the world), as well as the social and geopolitical advantages of being oriented towards the region.

The Chinese in particular need to be aware of interethnic implications when asserting their culture because of their majority status. Furthermore, the importance of Singapore's ethnic image in the geopolitical context is just as significant today as it was historically. Rapid economic growth in the region and Singapore's own economic power provides Singapore with a historical chance either to reinforce stereotypes of the 'exploitative' Chinese and its Chinese image or break out of it and develop its own distinct identity. Chinese Singaporeans do have a choice of whether to be seen as *hua qiao* (sojourners), *hua ren* (people of Chinese descent) or *sin hua* (Chinese Singaporeans). Here, the question of where the Chinese can look to for cultural inspiration also arises. The historical

and social experiences of the Chinese within Singapore and in the Southeast Asian region, even if relatively short compared to those of the country of origin, provides a rich source of inspiration and cultural orientation. Immigrant values of hard work and mutual aid are examples which are also values common to others.

The Malays similarly face various challenges of coming to terms with their minority status in a regional context in which they are the indigenous majority; of socio-economic advancement in a context of rapid change and intensive competition; and of evolving a distinct Singaporean-Malay-Muslim identity.

On the whole, the process of nation-building in the multi-ethnic context needs to be carefully regulated with regards to its content. Too little substance and the reason and basis for it disappear; too much and the political context becomes too complicated and difficult. Ethnicity as a force in nation-building is to be treated with extreme care, as it can be community-building in moderation but community-destroying in excess (Horowitz 1985). Which turns out to be the case depends on where and how judiciously it is managed by all sectors. This thesis has examined the Singapore case and shows the path to becoming a nation as being extremely exciting yet fraught with problems. It shows that some harsh realities need to be faced and difficult choices and decisions made by all ethnic groups if a shared community is to be possible and viable.

APPENDIX 1 OWNERSHIP/MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESSES in MARINE
PARADE BY ETHNICITY (as at end Oct 1988)

Shops and Stalls		Ethnicity
Shops in Block 56		
1	Darlin Medical Hall	Chinese
2	Choon Hin Dept Store	"
3	Elahiyah Provision Store	Indian Muslim
4	City Photo Store	Chinese
5	Hamara Provision Store	Indian Muslim
6	King's Confectionery	Chinese
7	Majid Family Provision Store	Malay
Shops in Block 57		
1	New Marina Provisions	Indian
2	SH Enterprises & Clock Shop (2 half units)	Chinese
3	Helena Hairdressing	"
4	Hiap Ann Minimart	"
5	United Overseas Finance Marine Parade Branch	"
6	Look Clinic	"
7	Goodview Video	"
8	Lion City Bird/Pet Trading Co	"
9	Ho Ban San Medical Hall & Ho Dental Surgery	"
10	Kim Lang Dept Store	"
11	Khai Teck Wine Merchant & Minimart	"
12	Hollywood Photo Studio	"
13	Tunas Hairdressing (Ladies' Section)	"
14	Tunas Hairdressing (Men's section)	Malay
15	Tai Chong Kok (bread shop)	Chinese
Shops in Block 58		
1	Bengawan Solo Cake Shop	Chinese Baba
2	Jothi Book Store	Indian Muslim
3	21st Century Ladies & Gents Tailor	Chinese
4	New New Garment Dept	"
5	Marine Cake Shop	"
6	Beauty Point Hairdressing	"
7	Bata Shoes	"
8	Golden Million Beauty Saloon	"
9	Columbia Photo Studio	"
10	Marine Hawaii Photo	"
11	Southeast Tyre Co	"
12	Omer Farook Provision Store	Indian Muslim
13	Neptune Minimart	" "
14	Yasin General Minimart	" "
Shops and Stalls in Block 59		
1	Chip Heng Restaurant/Stalls	Chinese
1	Keng Kee Cooked Food	"
2	Marine Satay	"
3	Goreng Pisang	Chinese Baba
4	Rice (day)/Goreng Mee (night)	Indian Muslim
5	Kong Chew Huat Chicken & Duck Rice	Chinese
6	Fried Mee	"
7	Nasi Padang Asli Jauhari	Malay
8	Sin Sin Rice & Noodles	Chinese
2	Thong Seng Lee Econ Minimart	"
3	Sin Hup Seng Lee Kee Provision Shop	"

4	The Medical and Dental Associates	"
5	Systematic Cleaners	"
6	Marine Provision Shop	Indian Muslim
7	Yong Her Sin Medical Hall	Chinese
8	Nellie Beauty Saloon	"
9	Marine Book Store	"
10	Marine Parade Clinic (5 doctors)	"
11	Heng Lee Fruits Trading	"
12	Mini Coffee House/Stalls	"
1	Kong Chew Huat Kee Duck & Chicken Rice	"
2	Marine Parade Indonesian Food	"
3	Hokkien Mee	"
4	May Flower Pow & Tim Sum	"
5	Special Ipoh Kwee Teow/noodles	"
6	Lucky Chicken Rice	"
7	Papa's Muslim Food	Malay
8	Marine Dosai	Indian

Hawker centre

Muslim Section

1	Roti Prata & Goreng Mee Stall	Indian Muslim
2	Roti John, satay, mee rebus stall	Malay
3	Mee siam and lontong stall	Malay
4	Drinks Stall	Indian Muslim
5	Nasi and lontong stall	Malay
6	Roti Prata	Indian Muslim

Chinese Food Section

18	stalls selling Chinese food and drinks	Chinese
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Market

7 fruitstalls

Chinese

Small Groceries Stalls:

2	stalls selling dry goods	Indian Muslim
2	stalls selling cloth and clothes	Chinese
16	stalls selling eggs, taufoo, etc	Chinese
1	stall selling dry goods	Malay
1	stall selling curry pastes and powders	Malay
20	vegetable stalls	Chinese
3	flower stalls	"
5	poultry stalls (one employing a Malay)	Chinese
1	poultry stall	Malay
12	stalls selling fresh and barbecued pork	Chinese
2	stalls selling beef and mutton	Indian Muslim
9	fish stalls	Chinese

Small Provisions Stores/Kiosks

6	stores in voiddecks	Indian Muslim
1	store	Chinese

APPENDIX 2 MAJOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN MARINE PARADE*

Calendrical/Group Occasions:

+HDB & Residents' Day (2 Oct 1988)
 Deepavali (8 Nov 1988)
 Christmas (25 Dec 1988)
 New Year's Day (1 Jan 1989)
 Ponggal (14-18 Jan 1989)
 Malam Dondang Sayang (14 Jan 1989)
 Chinese New Year (6-7 Febr 1989)
 Gunong Sayang Club 71st Anniversary Celebrations (11 Feb 89)
 Thaipusam (Feb 1989)
 Good Friday (24 Mar 1989)
 Ching Ming (5 Apr 1989)
 Tamil New Year (Pramodhuta) (14 Apr 1989)
 Hari Raya Puasa (7-8 May 1989)
 Vesak Day (19 May 1989)
 +Community Week (22-28 May 1989; also 20-26 May 1990)
 +Family Day (4 June 1989)
 +Civil Defence Week (mid-June 1989)
 Hari Raya Haji (13 Jul 1989)
 +National Day (9 Aug 1989; also 9 Aug 1990)
 Seventh Month Ghost Festival (Aug-Sept 1988 and Aug-Sept 1989)
 Mooncake Festival (14 Sept 1989)
 Monkey God's Birthday (24-25 Sept 1989)

Individual Occasions/Rites of Passages:

Malay Weddings
 Chinese Funerals

Other Events:

Chinese Cultural Month (Jan 1990)
 Malay Cultural Month (Feb 1990)
 Indian Cultural Month (Mar 1990).

*Observed during fieldwork 1 September 1988 - 30 September 1989, also some occasions in 1990. Some public holidays and days of worship of Chinese deities' are not listed.

+Official occasions, discussed in Chapter 9 .

APPENDIX 3 ORGANISATION STRUCTURE OF AN AREA OFFICE

Key:

- 1 = Maintenance/tenancy and lease administration; HMI = housing and maintenance inspectors; RO = rescue operators
- 2 = Hawkers management; HLO = hawkers liason officers
- 3 = Horticulture; HO = horticultural officer
- 4 = Conservancy; WS = works supervisor, Wm = workmen
- 5 = Car parks management; PS = parking supervisors; PW = parking wardens
- 6 = Office Administration (clerks, typists & telephone operator).
- 7 = Finance (supervisor & asst., cashiers, clerks, attendant).

Source: Wong & Yeh (eds.), *Housing a Nation*, 1985:267.

APPENDIX 4 HDB STATISTICS ON RACIAL REGROUPING

TABLE A APPLICATIONS FOR HDB FLATS (Sept '87 - Sept '88)

	New Flats	Resale Flats
TOTAL (all applications)	32,525	8,071
Chinese	79%	48%
Malays	15%	43%
Indians & Others	6%	9%
ANG MO KIO/HOUGANG		
Total	6,375	2,457
Chinese	90%	51%
Malays	5%	37%
Indians & Others	5%	12%
BEDOK/TAMPINES		
Total	9,526	2,308
Chinese	76%	40%
Malays	20%	55%
Indians & Others	4%	5%

Source: ST 7.1.1989, p.1.

TABLE B PERCENTAGE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED FLATS

Year	1988	2000*
BUKIT MERAH		
Chinese	88.4%	93.1%
Indians & Others	6.1%	5.6%
Malays	5.5%	1.3%
BEDOK		
Malays	24.5%	43.0%
Chinese	69.8%	52.0%
Indians & Others	5.7%	5.0%
KAMPONG JAVA		
Indians & Others	15.2%	29.8%
Chinese	78.8%	65.0%
Malays	6.0%	5.2%

*These projections by the HDB assume that the trend for regrouping continue and no measures are introduced to change the racial mix. They are based on resale figures of the past few years.

Source: ST 31.1.1989, p.20.

TABLE C ESTATES SHOWING RACIAL REGROUPING THROUGH RESALE

Estate	Race with Relatively High Proportion*	Breakdown of Purchasers:		
		Malay	Chinese	Indians & Others
Bedok	Malay	1,297	833	75
	23%	59%	38%	3%
Eunos	Malay	59	55	1
	23%	51%	48%	1%
Teban Gardens	Malay	80	52	11
	26%	56%	36%	8%
Taman Jurong	Malay	79	32	5
	21%	68%	28%	4%
Hougang	Chinese	42	159	7
	85%	20%	76%	4%
Bukit Merah	Chinese	11	110	6
	83%	9%	87%	4%
Redhill	Chinese	-	11	2
	88%	-	85%	15%
Henderson	Chinese	2	57	-
	87%	3%	97%	-
Yishun	Indian & Others	44	10	17
	9%	62%	14%	24%
Kampung Jawa	Indian & Others	5	28	23
	15%	9%	50%	41%

*Expressed as a %tage of total no. of households in the estate.

Source: ST 17.2.1989, p.14.

APPENDIX 5 ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION, ONE SINGAPORE

We've built a nation with our hands
The toil of people from a dozen lands
Strangers when we first began
Now we're Singaporean;
Let's reach out for Singapore
Join hands forever more.
One people, one nation, one Singapore.
That's the way we will be forever more.
Every creed and every race
has its role and has its place
One people, one nation, one Singapore.
And when the time comes for the test
Our vigilance will never rest.
We'll be united hand in hand,
We'll show the world just where we stand,
and reach out for Singapore,
join our hands forever more
One Singapore
One Singapore
One people, one nation, one Singapore.

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