ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASS IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASS IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between the low level of social capital and ethnic diversity in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Its aim is to understand the underlying reasons for the low level of social capital and its relation to the ethnic diversity, focusing on the problems of ethnic Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians in building and maintaining social connections with each other. According to the results of the World Values Survey (2014) and the Asian Barometer Survey (2016), distrust among Malaysians is common, while shared values and norms are rare, and they are not eager to actively participate in civic life. The research problem was investigated in three parts. In the first part, the dynamics of building social capital and meaningful contact between non-ethnics – namely, bridging social capital of the participants – were examined. The second part investigated inter-ethnic problems at the individual level causing a low level of social capital in Malaysia. In the last part, by focusing on the societal level, the impact of government implementations and state policies on non-ethnic relationships and building social capital was analysed. For this research, qualitative methodology was preferred, and 21 in-depth interviews were conducted. Each ethnic group was represented by seven participants. All participants belonged to the middle class, from the three main ethnic groups – Chinese, Indian and Malay – and were professionals living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The primary reason for choosing Kuala Lumpur as the research area was its multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature. In this regard, the city offers a unique sample characteristic across Malaysia. Key research findings point, firstly, to the fact that the Indian participants were the most willing to trust and make contact with other Malaysians compared with the Chinese and Malay participants, which demonstrates that if the ethnic group size is relatively smaller than out-groups, group members have more opportunity

to interact with out-group members. Meaningful contact is also crucial in the creation of trust relationships and bonds between non-ethnics. Secondly, even though meaningful intergroup contact can create positive feelings between non-ethnics, a lack of acceptance or tolerance, less exposure to other cultures, and misunderstandings or a lack of understanding between non-ethnics undermined the beneficial impacts of intergroup contacts, social trust and social capital. Lastly, it was found at the societal level that the feeling of discrimination, ethnicity-based political system, nationalist discourse promoting fear of other races, and the high in-group solidarity of the Chinese reinforced bonding social capital and eradicated intergroup trust while promoting the perceived threat of non-ethnics towards each other.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Social Capital, Urban Malaysia, Diversity, Inter-ethnic Relations.

ETNISITI DAN MODAL SOSIAL ANTARA KELAS PERTENGAHAN BANDAR DI KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat hubungan antara tahap modal sosial dan kepelbagaian etnik. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memahami sebab-sebab asas modal sosial yang rendah, dan hubungannya dengan kepelbagaian etnik dengan menumpukan kepada masalah dikalangan etnik Melayu, Cina dan India di Malaysia dalam membina dan mengekalkan hubungan sosial antara satu sama lain. Modal sosial telah lama dikaji dalam pelbagai disiplin di seluruh dunia. Walau bagaimanapun, kebelakangan ini, tahap modal sosial agregat telah digunakan sebagai instrumen yang berguna untuk membandingkan beberapa konteks negara yang berbeza. Perbandingan ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengapa sesetengah negara mempunyai tahap kepercayaan sosial yang tinggi, sistem rangkaian yang padat serta perpaduan sosial, sementara negara lain berusaha untuk mencari penyelesaian untuk ketegangan etnik atau konflik antara kumpulan sosial. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa kepelbagaian etnik adalah salah satu sebab utama bagi modal sosial yang rendah dalam masyarakat, lantaran ia merupakan rangsangan utama penyelidikan ini. Menurut Kajian Nilai Dunia (2014) dan Kajian Barometer Asia (2016), ketidakpercayaan di kalangan rakyat Malaysia adalah perkara normal, nilai dan norma yang dikongsi jarang berlaku, dan masyarakat tidak bersemangat untuk menjadi aktif di dalam kehidupan sivik. Kajian ini menyelidik perkara ini. Pertama, dinamika dalam membina modal sosial dan hubungan antara kaum bukan etnik, iaitu pembinaan modal sosial dikalangan kaum etnik. Kedua, jenis masalah inter-etnik di peringkat individu yang menyebabkan tahap modal sosial yang rendah di Malaysia. Ketiga, analisis dilakukan terhadap kesan pelaksanaan kerajaan dan dasar negara terhadap hubungan etnik dan modal sosial pen bangunan. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, 21 wawancara mendalam telah dijalankan. Setiap kumpulan etnik diwakili oleh

7 peserta. Semua peserta tergolong dalam kelas pertengahan, dan terdiri daripada tiga kumpulan etnik utama iaitu Cina, India dan Melayu. Mereka adalah pekerja profesional yang tinggal di Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Faktor utama Kuala Lumpur dipilih sebagai kawasan penyelidikan adalah kerana ciri-ciri etnik dan agama yang pelbagai. Penemuan utama kajian menunjukkan bahawa. Ini menunjukkan kaum yang saiznya kecil lebih mudah untuk berinteraksi dengan kaum yang lebih besar saiznya. Hubungan antara bukan etnik adalah penting bagi mewujudkan kepercayaan dan ikatan antara bukan etnik yang lain. Kedua, walaupun hubungan antara kumpulan dapat mewujudkan perasaan positif antara bukan kaum etnik yang lain, kurang toleransi, kurang pendedahan kepada budaya lain, dan kurang pemahaman atau salah faham antara kaum bukan etnik menjejaskan kesan baik hubungan antara kumpulan dan kepercayaan sosial, dan modal sosial. Akhir sekali, terdapat diskriminasi di peringkat masyarakat, sistem politik berasaskan etnik, wacana nasionalis yang meruntuhkan kepercayaan antara kaum serta mewujudkan ancaman terhadap kaum bukan etnik.

Kata kunci: Etnik, Modal Sosial, Urban Malaysia, Kepelbagaian, Perhubungan Interetnis.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	:	Asian Barometer Survey
BN		Barisan Nasional
HINDRAF	:	Hindu Rights Action Force
MPWIM	:	Majlis Perunding Wanita Islam Malaysia
NEP	:	New Economic Policy
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAS		Parti Islam Se Malaysia (Malaysia Islamic Party)
WVS	:	World Values Survey

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

... then I leave you to labour alone; You treat me in the same manner.
The seasons change; and both of us lose our harvests
for want of mutual confidence and security.[1]

Society is much more than a random people gathering; it provides a ground for cooperation, collaboration and solidarity through social interactions and relations. The relations taking place in different aspects of daily life, therefore, have a broader influence than simple human interactions. In this regard, the image of a needy receiving help from a random people in a community, or a group of students chatting in a café for entertainment, or neighbours celebrating a religious festival altogether provide fruitful insights about the social dynamics in a community. The nature of civic culture in a community can be understood through reviewing how easy the community members can come together when there is a necessity, celebration or simply for personal enjoyment. When the member of society become familiar with one another, trust each other and form a habit to come together for giving help, for entertainment or social interaction, this is also known as 'social capital' (Hanifan, 1916, cited in Putnam, 2004).

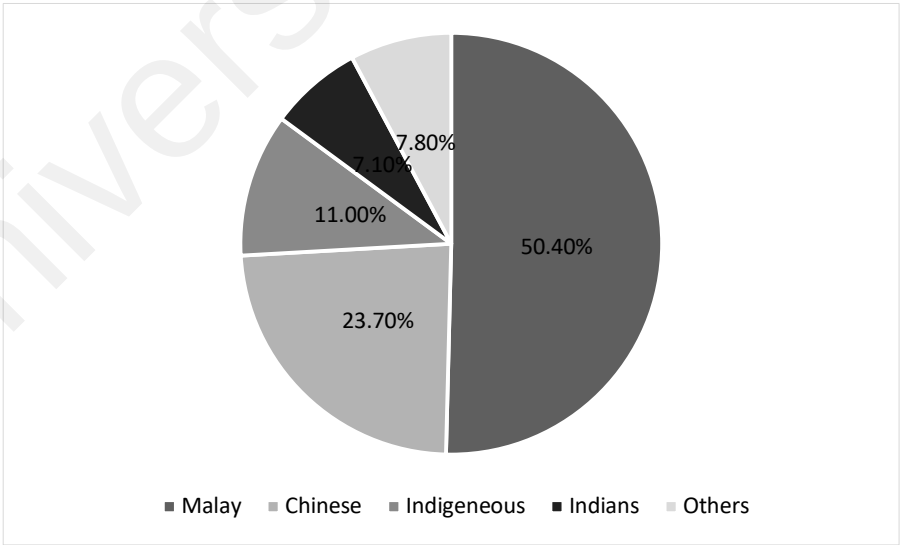
The concept of social capital is widely known and used in the literature on political science as well as other disciplines in the social sciences. There are substantial number of studies that examine how social capital is formed in different country contexts, and what are the consequences of its existence or absence in social, economic and political structures. Numerous empirical studies have shown that communities have different dynamics influencing their trust level or participation in civil life. Thus, some countries that gain more social capital with a high level of trust and dense network systems enjoy

[1] David Hume (1740), Book 3, Part 2, Section 5, as quoted in Robert Putnam *Making Democracy Work, Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 163.

social solidarity, tolerance and acceptance of otherness. Other countries, on the other hand, that have low levels of social capital are more likely to face social segregations or conflicts. Hooge and Stolle's (2003) question of "the conditions and influences that facilitate, maintain or even destroy those aspects of social capital that benefit society" (p.5) has been waiting for a careful researched response.

Nevertheless, the concept of social capital is by no means always positive. In some situations, ethnic or radical religious groups, for instance, can use the benefits of social capital to obtain high in-group solidarity. When closed-groups hold more social capital at their disposal, the interdependence of people leads these groups to reap the benefits of the high level of trust, solidarity and loyalty much more than when they stand alone in the social structure. Thus, social capital can be beneficial for social solidarity, high level of trust among its members, high democratic and economic performance and so on. However, it can also be harmful to society as in-group solidarity tends to exclude other members of the society, and provide opportunities exclusively for its members and, by extension blocking others from them. Accordingly, for Malaysia where multicultural and multi-religious features dominate its social, economic and political systems (Ahmad *et al*., 2016), social capital concept constitutes a useful instrument that can be used to analyse inter-ethnic relations from a different perspective. Studies demonstrate that there is evidence of polarisation between different ethnic groups in Malaysia which obstructs social interactions and knowledge sharing among citizens of the society due to negative perceptions towards other ethnic groups (*see* Lee and Muhammed, 2016; Wan Munira Wan Jaafar, 2014; David, 2010; Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin, 2010; Nobaya Ahmad, 2003). Similarly, Shamsul (2003) defines the ethnic relations in Malaysia as "in a state of stable tension… strike a balance between 'sharing and agreeing on certain things' and 'agreeing to disagree on other things' (p.130).

Malaysia, which has a very complex social structure, comprises of three major ethnic groups. According to 2014 estimations, as shown in Figure 1.1 below, the Malay constitutes 50.4% of the population, and with 11% indigenous ethnic groups, together they are called Bumiputera (i.e. sons of the soil) (cited in Syed H. Ali, 2015). The Chinese with 23.7% and the Indians with 7.1%, are both considered non-Bumiputera. There is no homogeneity between these ethnic groups both linguistically and religiously; the Malay speak *Bahasa Melayu* and are Muslims, while the other Bumiputera communities, especially in the island of Borneo, have their native languages and religions. On the other hand, the Indians speak Tamil predominantly and are mainly Hindus, while the Chinese have different local dialects and different religious practices, mostly Buddhism and Christianity. The subdivisions of the ethnic groups make it harder to define them as a single and homogeneous ethnic identity (Syed H. Ali, 2015). Thus, the fragmented character of the main ethnic groups, as well as the Malaysian society, creates significant obstacles in ensuring social cohesion.



Source: Syed H. Ali, 2015

Figure 1.1 Population of Malaysia

1.1.1 The Historical Background of Ethnic Relations in Malaysia

As Ariffin Omar (2009) notes, political and social factors have hindered the attempts of creating a united nation based on shared common values accepted by each ethnic group. These political and social factors that restrict Malaysian social structure with ethnic or racial barriers, and the configuration of ethnic identities had been generated during the colonial era (Omar, 2009; Tan, 2000). Therefore, the ethnoreligious problems in Malaysia should be put under scrutiny in the first place.

As Shamsul (2003) indicated the contemporary Malay and even Chinese identity is a colonial-orientalist construction. Firstly, in the 1891 Colonial Census, the three racial categories, Malay, Chinese and Tamils, were officialised. Although, in the pre-colonial area, "Chineseness" is a social category in the eyes of natives, the connotation of the term was quite different from the terms of "ethnicity" or "race". As Shamsul (2003) puts it, "the pre-colonial Chinese presence in the Malay world was relatively neutral politically and unproblematic socio-culturally. They were seen as not very different from the Arab, Indian and European traders.". After British' arrival in the 18th century, however, the competitive economic environment created the distinction between Malay, Chinese and European while generating ethnic categories (Shamsul, 2004).

When the British took over the country, they opened big mines and estates that created demand for labour for their operation. In order to satisfy the labour needs, the British applied open-door policy for immigration that allowed a large number of immigrant influxes into the Strait Settlements, and the tin mines and rubber estates of the Malaya Peninsula (Cheah B. Kheng, 2009, p.35). The cheap immigrant labour was mainly provided from South China and South India. While the Chinese workers concentrated on tin mines, the Indians worked in the rubber estates. Until 1970, the steady flow of

immigrants reached almost half of the whole population of Malaysia (Syed Husin, 2015, p.32).

According to Hirschman (1986), the plural society characteristics of Peninsular Malaysia after the late 19th century was as a result of the colonial expansion and the mass immigrant flows to the area. The British's made no effort to create an integrated society; even more, they distributed the Chinese and the Indian population to separate areas while encouraging Malays to remain in rural areas. As a result, the colonial power managed to inhibit a possible interaction between Malays, Chinese and Indians. As Hirschman (1986) indicated, "Even in towns where there was the potential for inter-ethnic contact, residential areas, market places, and recreational space were typically segregated along ethnic lines" (p. 353). The Malays were predominantly in states in which agriculture was the primary economic sector, and they were working in paddy and rubber plantations. However, the government and uniformed services were in the hands of the Malays. The Chinese mostly concentrated in the urban areas, in labouring, management, manufacturing, construction and commerce, while Indians were mainly in rural areas working as plantation workers in estates (Syed Husin, 2015, p.32). As a result, economic specialisation along ethnic lines hindered the direct contact with each other. The segregation prevented possible conflicts as well, as the interactions between ethnic groups were limited before urbanisation of Malaya. Nevertheless, as Cheah (2009) points out, British favouritism of Westerners over Asians in government contracts, loans, lands and protection of legal rights helped to develop ethnic consciousness within each ethnic group (p.35).

The British rulers had pledged that the immigrant workforce was welcomed temporarily to Malaysia. However, immigrant families, in time, were more reluctant to turn back to their countries of origin (Nair, 2009, p. 87). In the end, to become an

independent state, Malays had to find a way to build a country with people who are different from themselves in terms of culture, language, religion and origins. Therefore, the foundation of the new state brought about new problems into society in which the tension between the Malays and the Chinese seemed more evident due to their domination in different economic fields (Tan, 2000).

1.1.2 The Effects of the 1969 Riot and New Economic Policy

During the colonial era, the Malays took governmental positions while Chinese concentrated in cities and had soon became the most economically influential ethnic group among others. The economic power of the Chinese and the political power of the Malays were the primary reasons for the tension between them in Malaysia in the 1960s. As Syed Husin Ali (2015) states, the Malays accused the Chinese for their community's lack of economic welfare and that their economic backwardness is a result of the Chinese domination and exploitation in the market, the Chinese, on the other hand, see Malays' political power as responsible for their second-class citizenship in the country (p.100). In this regard, the 1969 riot were a milestone with respect to the hints showing the nonexistence of social cohesion and social solidarity in the Malaysian society. The competition between Malays and the Chinese led to bloody riot after the 1969 General Elections, and the riot revealed a severe problem threatening the social cohesion of Malaysian society.

The apparent causes of the riot were the widespread socio-economic disparities in the society against Malays and other Bumiputra. After the 1969 riot, to increase the economic status of the poor and support Malays in the competition between Chinese over economic resources (Tan, 2000) the government released a programme named the New Economic Policy (NEP). The specific aim of the programme was "the eradication of poverty and the

restructuring of the society and economy"[2]. The NEP and its implications are still highly controversial and this is well indicated in the literature for two reasons. First, the policy spotlighted ethnic groups in order to deal with socioeconomic inequalities which severely undermined the social cohesion by promoting ethnic identities, for Gomez (2013). Second, it provided overall poverty reduction and it, at the same time, has created a Malay-middle class with Malay businesspeople becoming strongly linked to the ruling party. This led to a new intra-Bumiputra inequities (Tan, 2000). Hence, the state leaders and political parties played an active role to form the society while at the same time mobilising support by using and abusing ethnic and religious differences (Gomez, 2009, p. 155-156).

1.1.3 Ethnic Relations at the Macro Level

Gomez (2009) questions the role of the middle-class in Malaysians political structure because, in the late 1980 and early 1990s, middle-class played an important role in the democratisation process in the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, and Thailand. However, in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, authoritarian leadership continued its grip on the states, without a significant middle-class to lead the democratisation process. For Gomez (2009), the reason for the ineffectiveness of middle-class in Malaysia, compared with Taiwan or South Korea, is ethnic division; "Ethnic differences divided middle-class, impeding their ability to coalesce and hindering them from forging a united front to insist [3]on political reforms." (p. 158-159). Syed Husin (2015) also supports Gomez's position stating that language, culture and religion create strong bonds for their ethnic unity, but increasing ethnic awareness also makes it difficult to build bonds

[2] Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975 (Kuala Lumpur, Governmental Press, 1973) Retrieved from http://onlineapps.epu.gov.my/flippage/mid-term-review/rmke2/

[3]

between non-ethnics in the same economic class against their political or economic elites (p. 97).

Ethnic identity based national politics, indeed, have some ramifications on the societal level. According to Noraini Noor (2009), the state-supported ethnic identities, namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, and political categories of Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra are different forms of political, economic and social powers. Ethnic and religious differences in power relations are emphasised in interactions, which is the most important reason for the fear of "other". Noor (2009), describes the fear as the following.

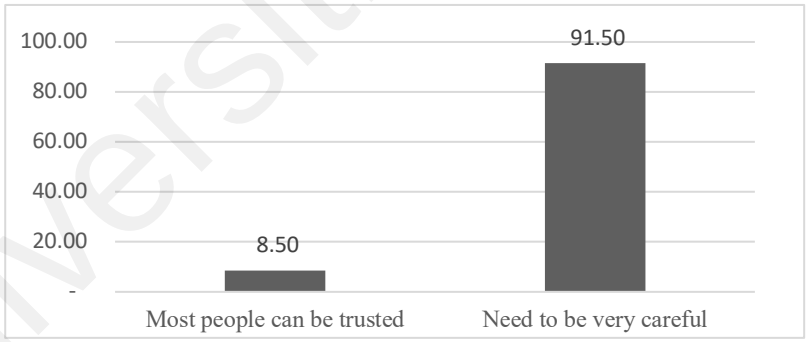
> The Malays fear that ". . . if it opened up too much to the non-Malay, non-Muslim communities, especially in matters pertaining to Islam – its most potent identity symbol – 'the others' would gain control over the land, given their perceived economic superiority". In contrast, the non-Malays ". . . are afraid that if they do not protect their identity, expressed through language more than religion, the Malay majority, which enjoys political pre-eminence, will emasculate them totally". (p. 166)

This fear is one of the most crucial factors that undermines the trust in others and their willingness to interact, which can be easily observed in daily life activities. Studies on students, for example, also reveal this segregation. Yusof's (2006) research on secondary school students demonstrates that the level of interaction is very low across ethnic groups. Most of them, do not prefer to study or discuss with students from different ethnic groups. For Yusof (2006), some precaution should be taken to enhance social interactions and enable better understanding among students. In the same vein, at the university level, the trend does not seem to change (*see* Tamam, 2013). Through my own observations as an international student, I have noted that international students frequently complain about the challenges in mingling with Malay or Chinese students at the university, because they mostly socialise with fellow students from the same ethnic groups which makes it difficult for others to be part of it.

1.1.4 Social Capital in Malaysia

Generally speaking, social capital is defined as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993b). Therefore, the trust of the members in each other, the level of participation in voluntary organisations, and the existence of common shared values are accepted as indicators for the social capital in a society. In this respect, World Values Survey and Asian Barometer Survey give some insights about social capital in Malaysia.

The data when examined in terms of general trust and organisational membership, reveals striking results. World Values Survey conducted between 2010 and 2014 (Wave 6) asked their participants whether most people can be trusted. According to these results (*see* Figure 1.2), the vast majority of the population agree that one should be careful in their relations with other people.

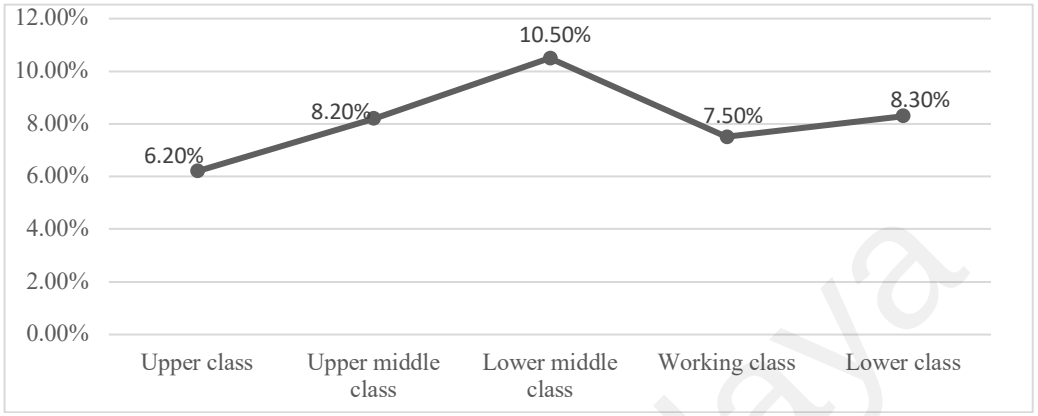


Source: World Values Survey, Wave 6, 2014

Figure 1.2 General Trust in Malaysia

Malaysia's general trust level compared to other Southeast Asian countries is one of the lowest in Southeast Asia along with Cambodia (Asian Barometer, 2014). Besides, according to literature, previous studies revealed that there is a positive correlation between socioeconomic classes and the trust level. Middle and upper classes have higher level of trust in comparison to lower-classes (*see* Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000; 2002; Letki, 2008). However contrary to expectation, as shown in Figure 1.3 lower class' trust

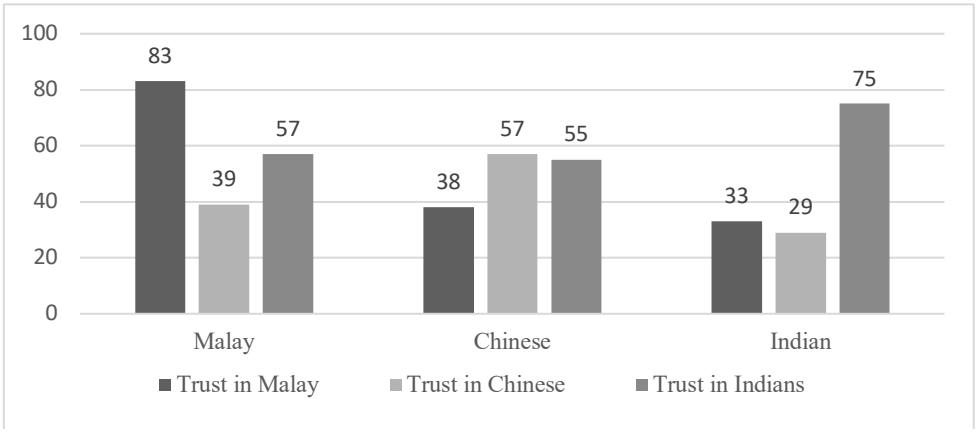
level (8.30%) is bigger than upper and upper-middle classes (6,20% and 8.20% respectively). In addition, in Malaysia, there is no meaningful relationship across all class between trusting respondents and their socioeconomic status.



Source: World Values Survey, Wave 6, 2014

Figure 1.3 Class and Trust Relation in Malaysia

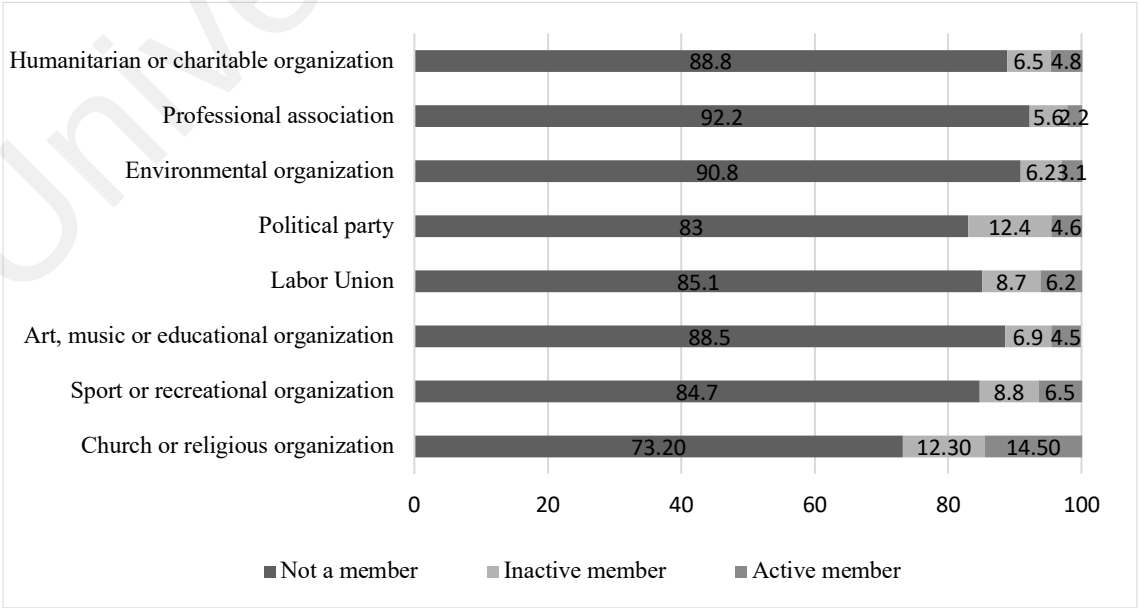
Trust level of each ethnic group towards non-ethnics provides compelling results in terms of social capital in Malaysian society. As Figure 1.4 displays, it is clear that Indians are the most trusting and trusted ethnic group by the Chinese and Malays. However, only 38% of the Malay respondents consider the Chinese as trustworthy while this figure is 83% for their co-ethnics. For the Chinese, the overall trust level is the lowest compared to Malays and Indians. Even the trust level to their co-ethnics is 57%. Besides, they are the least trusted group; only 39% of Malays and 29% of Indians found Chinese trustworthy. As a result, the critical difference between Malays, Chinese and Indians' trust to co-ethnics and non-ethnics gives insights about the underlying reasons for the low level of social capital in Malaysian society.



Source: Merdeka Center, 2006

Figure 1.4 Trust Level Across Ethnic Groups

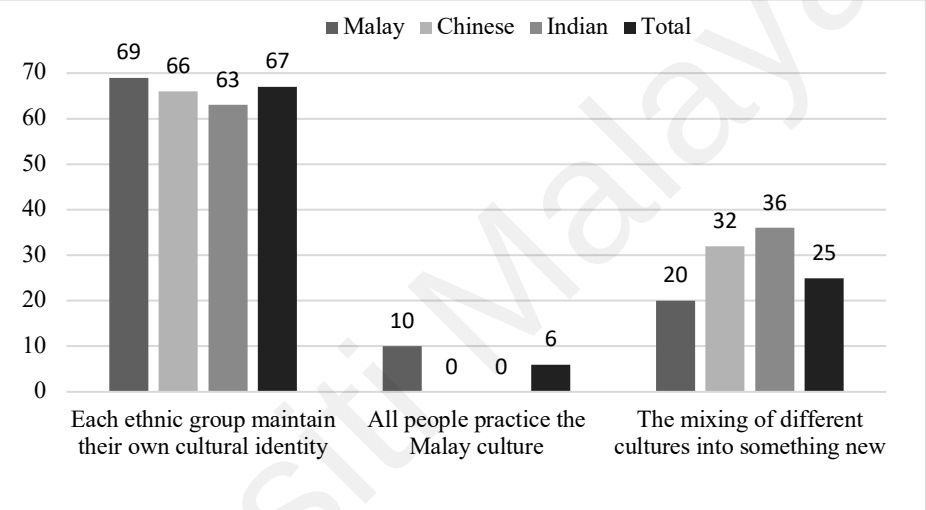
The data about the organisational membership in Malaysia is examined, as shown in Figure 1.5, only a small minority involves in civic life. Around 80% of the respondents indicated no organisational membership. On the other hand, 'Church or religious organisations' is distinguished from the rest as being the most preferred type of organisation by the Malaysians. However, religious organisations' impact on enabling multi-ethnic gatherings in order to create meaningful contacts between non-ethnics remain limited because Malays, Chinese and Indians have predominantly different religious affiliations.



Source: Asian Barometer, 4th Wave, 2016

Figure 1.5 Organisational Membership in Malaysia

Lastly, the acceptance of other cultural values and identities seems to be limited in Malaysian society. The data conducted by the Merdeka Center asked their respondents "What kind of cultural interaction do you hope for the future in Malaysia?". The results (*see* Figure 1.6) show that more than two third of the respondents want to protect and maintain their own cultural identity without mixing with other cultures. It gives insights about each ethnic group preferring to maintain their respective cultural heritage in a multi-cultural, pluralist Malaysian society instead of integration with the cultures of others.



Source: Merdeka Center, 2006

Figure 1.6 The Percentage of Embracing Other's Culture in Malaysia

As a result, the social capital parameters demonstrate a low level of social capital in Malaysian society. Taking into consideration the ethnic divisions and fragmented social structure of Malaysian society, the underlying reasons for the low level of social capital will be further analysed in this present study.

1.2 Problem Statement

As the data and literature discussed previously revealed, to a large extent the Malay, Chinese and Indian have some problems with building and maintaining social connections. Malaysians are not eager to be an active part of a civic life; moreover, distrust is common, and shared values and norms are rare among them. In order to

understand the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Malaysian phenomena, Putnam's suggestion can be applicable. Putnam (2007) claims that ethnic diversity in the immediate residential setting causes people to be more prone to turn inwards and isolate socially, because, in diverse communities, people have fewer connections with and less trust in other ethnic group members and also their co-ethnics (Putnam, 2007).

Along with Putnam's statement, there are two main theoretical viewpoints, namely contact and conflict/ethnic competition theory, that explains the effects of ethnic diversity on social cohesion. Contact theory suggests that diversity has a positive effect on society while increasing solidarity and tolerance between groups, therefore mutual contact leads to a positive attitude towards others (Gijsberts *et al*., 2012). However, conflict theory argues that "the more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we stick to 'our own' and the less we trust the 'other'' (Putnam, 2007). Besides, the large size of the 'other' groups and their economic or political power create an actual or perceived threat that shapes the view of the dominant and also minority groups towards each other (Quillian, 1995).

Studies focusing on social capital and integration in Malaysia, have similar results as suggested by contact theory (Campbell and Hwa, 2007; Melasutra Dali and Nordin, 2010; Nobaya Ahmad, 2003; Rabushka, 1971). The ethnic segregation in Malaysian society is evident, but research reveals that with more interaction between different ethnic group members, more integration and trust is generated. Therefore, they suggest that "if heterogeneity is allowed within neighbourhoods, the variety of lifestyles in the housing units increase, and the opportunities for intercultural interaction are also increased" (Melasutra Dali and Nordin, 2010).

On the other hand, a critical explanation of the findings of inter-ethnic relations in the Malaysian context reveals several interesting outcomes. Firstly, Rabushka (1971) found

that non-mixers (i.e. people prefer socialising only with the members of their own ethnic group) living in homogeneous areas are more integrated than their mixed area counterparts. According to contact theory, however, it is expected that people living in heterogeneous areas tend to be more open to interaction and integration than those who are living in homogenous areas. As claimed by Rabushka (1971), the discrepancy between the presumption of contact theory and the result of her research can be explained as follows, "people who are living in mixed areas but do not interact across ethnic group lines" may develop a repulsion towards non-ethnics. Therefore, it does not mean that people living in mixed areas will interact with others or are integrated into the society. In addition, her analysis reveals that there is a strong relationship between education and interaction levels which is similar to the common trend in other countries.

In Nobaya Ahmad's (2003) study, the parameters are quite similar with the domain of social capital namely, network or social interaction level, trust, participation in organisations and neighbourhood relations. Her findings demonstrate clearly ethnic segregation in Malaysia; 78% of Malays and 71% of Chinese only prefer to socialise with members of the same ethnic groups. She compares the results from ethnically homogeneous areas to mixed areas. According to her results, in homogeneous residential areas, both Malays and Chinese have friends from different ethnic groups, unlike mixed areas in which especially Malays mostly socialise with the co-ethnics. Similar to social interactions, the trust level is also weak in both areas, and in both ethnic groups, all of the respondents' closest friends come from the same ethnic group (Nobaya, 2003, p.109-110).

Another illuminating research conducted by Munira Wan Jaafar (2014) among social network users revealed that socioeconomic inequalities, common language problem, cultural and religious differences affect users' interaction trends with each other.

Socioeconomic differences affect the users, and can be easily understood via the language usage, and common stereotypes (prosperous Chinese and impoverished Malays) (Munira Wan Jaafar, 2014). Besides, while the majority of Malay users choose to communicate in the Malay language and rarely in English, Chinese and Indians do not prefer Bahasa Melayu, but English. Even more, particularly Malay users who are active participants of mixed social networks were not willing to attend offline gatherings, most probably because of the religious restrictions, such as *halal food*, as Munira (2014) suggests.

When these results are evaluated, it can be seen that in-group solidarity and bonds connecting the members of the Chinese and Malays are quite strong (*cf.* Melasutra Dali & Nikmatul Nordin, 2010; Nobaya Ahmad, 2003). Therefore, contact and interactions between members of different ethnic groups are superficial relations most of the time. The ties are not strong enough to build bridges across the social structure.

In addition, a significant number of studies also underline the importance of economic prosperity and education level which is also effective to determine the level of social capital and civic engagement. According to Letki (2008), "solidarity is undermined by poverty, but the blame is placed on diversity, as a result of the fact that diversity and poverty are strongly associated". As conflict and ethnic competition theory suggest that poverty and education also affect actual and perceived threat among disadvantaged groups in society. While the level of poverty increase, people are more inclined to distrust others and turn inwards and segregate themselves from society. On the contrary, prosperous people have more trust in others who are not like them, this also supports their active participation in civic life and create bridging social capital. However, in the Malaysian context, there does not exist this kind of a linear relationship between prosperity and social capital, because, as Syed Husin (2015) and Gomez (2009) stated, in the social structure of Malaysia, ethnic lines are more evident than class stratification

which provides an environment to bring different class members together regardless of their ethnicity.

To this end, the study investigates the level of bonding and bridging social capital among the middle and upper-middle class of the three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) in Malaysian society. Bridging social capital comprises of the social interactions between members of the ethnic groups, the trust level of the members in other ethnic group members, and their participation in civic life, as well as political processes. Bonding social capital, on the other hand, reveals the in-group solidarity among the respective Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, their trust in other group members and their willingness to contact and communicate with others. Therefore, in this study, the focus is primarily on the reasons that hinder creating trust, active civic and political participation (bonding social capital) and ultimately the level of bridging social capital.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the main factors that hinder the level of generalised trust among individuals of the three ethnic groups in Kuala Lumpur?
2. What are the main problems in inter-ethnic relations affecting the social capital production of individuals from the three ethnic groups?
3. What are the main problems in the politics of Malaysia affecting the social capital production of individuals?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To understand the underlying reasons for the low level of trust in Malaysian society.
2. To identify the dynamics that facilitate and hinder inter-ethnic communications at the individual level in the urban Malaysia.

3. To analyse state politics and other considerations on the trust and inter-ethnic relations at the macro level in the urban Malaysia.

1.5 Limitations of Study

Qualitative method has some disadvantages while providing a better understanding of the research area. The first drawback is the representation problem. In this research, the number of respondents is limited to 21 which is insufficient to generalise the findings, but quite enough for latent factors that is hard to identify via quantitative methods. Secondly, the data consisted mainly of the voices of the participants who attended the interview as voluntarily that shows the findings can only give some insights but not the reality itself, because purposive sampling allows for in-depth examination rather than measuring a trend.

Besides, given the fact that ethnicity is the main concept in the study, three main ethnic groups were the attention of the research, namely, Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. The main reason for choosing these three ethnic groups is related to their size and place within the population of Malaysia. On the other hand, many other small ethnic groups were excluded from the scope, because of the limited time and language problem. The ethnic relations and social capital in East Malaysia could be analysed in a further research.

As an urban area, Kuala Lumpur is selected as the case of the research because of it is multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature that gives the opportunity to come across frequently with different ethnic groups, and thus have experiences about multi-ethnic society and its features. However, rural areas or other cities whose ethnic population is far more unequal were excluded from the scope of the research. Therefore, findings of the current research is only meaningful within the boundaries of Kuala Lumpur.

Another point that limits the scope of the study is the socioeconomic status of the respondents. Being an international student and one who cannot speak Bahasa Melayu fluently, academics working at the University of Malaya and the International Islamic University of Malaysia were chosen because, the respondents are from the middle and upper-middle class who can express themselves easily in English. So, lower-middle class and lower classes were not included in the current research, therefore, findings are valid only for middle and upper-middle class members of the society.

1.6 Structure of Study

The first chapter contains the introduction part of the research that gives insights about the background of the study, and historical bases of the research with the problem statement, research questions and objectives, research methodology and limitation of the study.

The second chapter assesses social capital theories and the literature of the study. In this chapter, the concept of social capital, theories about social capital, previous empirical studies and theoretical framework of the study evaluated.

The third chapter comprises the research methodology of the study. In this chapter, what kind of sampling method and informant selection criteria were chosen, what the characteristics of the informants are, and data analysis process were examined.

The fourth chapter discusses the findings of the factors that facilitate generalised trust and intergroup contact at the individual level in the urban Malaysian society.

The fifth chapter discusses the findings showing that factors are impeding social trust and intergroup contact at the individual level in the urban Malaysian society.

The sixth chapter examines the macro problems related to governance policies and other considerations at the macro level in the urban Malaysia.

The seventh and the last chapter is discussion and conclusion that evaluates findings and discuss the results in the lights of current literature.

CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORIES AND THE LITERATURE

2.1 The Theoretical Concept of Social Capital

The first contemporary analysis of the term 'social capital' was conducted by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman in the 1970s and early 1980s. Both of them used the term systematically in a theoretical context for the first time. Portes (1998) suggested that "Bourdieu's analysis is arguably the most theoretically refined among those that introduced the term in contemporary sociological discourse", nevertheless, because his writings were in French, their effect remained limited for a long time. Bourdieu and Coleman therefore introduced the term 'social capital' simultaneously but independently of each other (Häuberer, 2011).

Bourdieu used the social capital concept as an instrument in the process of receiving the benefits which arise when individuals participate in a social group (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu's (1986) definition can be decomposed into two elements; first, the relationships which enable actors to access associates' resources at their disposal and, second, the amount and quality of those resources (Portes, 1998). For Bourdieu, social capital is a resource which is beneficial for actors who are part of the network while at the same time reconstructing the social inequalities by enabling access to more opportunities for those who have a higher level of social capital (Tzanakis, 2013).

Bourdieu's treatment of the concept was instrumental and stressed the maximisation of the interests of individuals. It can be said that his concept of social capital emphasised the power function, and the theoretical roots of Bourdieu's concept are closer to the conflict and structuralist tradition in sociology, unlike that of Coleman (Siisiäinen, 2000).

Coleman's social capital concept had some similarities to that of Bourdieu, but the starting point was very different (Tzanakis, 2013). According to Coleman, an actor has

control over and an interest in specific resources and events, and social capital forms a particular kind of resource available to an actor (Coleman, 1988). His social capital theorisation was influenced very much by the ideas of the economist Glen Loury (1977), who examined black workers in the labour market and noticed that as a consequence of the limited material resources and lack of educational opportunities, poverty had transferred to the younger generation. Loury's (1977) idea that "unequal opportunities and resources have created an unfair competition against disadvantaged groups" pioneered Coleman's analysis of the role of social capital in the creation of human capital (Portes, 1998).

Coleman (1990) preferred a functionalist way, maximising the utility of actions and emphasising their function. His definition of the term is very similar to Bourdieu's social capital concept concerning individuals' motivation to access others' resources to achieve their own interests. Its productive nature helps actors who have achieved particular ends which would have been impossible without it (Coleman, 1988, p.20). In his theory, social capital is a resource of individuals, but it plays an integrative role in the social structure at the macro level, unlike Bourdieu's theory.

For Coleman, social capital had a public good interest, unlike physical and human capital. This feature underlies authority, trust and the social norms created by the social relationship as a result of various types of exchange and one-sided transfers of control (Coleman, 1990, p. 301). However, as a result of the public good character of social capital, social norms are not only for the group members but also for others. The maintenance of social capital depends on the closure and the density of connections because social norms cannot be implemented in sparse networks and the absence of closure.

Coleman's social capital theorisation has been criticised in many ways, but one of the most important criticisms is of its extremely vague social capital conceptualisation (Portes, 1998). This ambiguity of his work paved the way for various new definitions. Putnam, following Coleman, developed an even more expansive definition of social capital (Quibria, 2003).

Whereas Bourdieu and Coleman had analysed social capital as a relationship between actors (or an individual actor) and a group, in the hands of political scientists, the concept has been twisted to the equation of social capital with the level of "civicness" of communities (Portes, 1998). Putnam (1993b) defined social capital as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit. Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital". His stress on the 'stock of social capital' made it possible to compare different cities, countries or regions in order to question how and why some nations are blessed with a substantial stock of capital and others are not, and what the underlying reasons are which create or undermine the stock of capital in a community. Siisiäinen (2000) pointed out that the central thesis of Putnam's work is that a well-functioning economic system and high level of political integration depend highly on the region's successful social capital accumulation.

Putnam's concept of social capital can be summarised into three components: moral obligations and norms, social values and trust, and social networks (Putnam, 2000). In his formulation, social trust plays a central role in the theory. Social capital is ultimately the amount of trust available in modern societies, because trustworthiness lubricates social life and cooperation. The importance of cooperation underlies the connection created between actors or an actor with a group. These connections make it possible to participate in networks while at the same time providing more trust to its members (Putnam, 1993b).

Putnam also connected trust and the norms of reciprocity to civic engagement. Civic engagement, in Putnam's words is represented by "voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and literary circles, Lions Clubs, and soccer clubs", and provides citizens with an engagement in public issues rather than merely patronage. Putnam regarded civic virtue as an indicator showing the strength of civil society. If social and political networks are organised horizontally and not hierarchically, it means that these societies appraise solidarity, civic participation and integrity, and that democracy works there (Putnam, 1993a).

Putnam's inquiry into declining social capital deflected into increasing migration and ethnic diversity in the US. In his very famous article, he (2007) suggested that in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, the level of social capital is visibly lower; in other words, ethnic diversity causes declining solidarity, lower trust and mutual help, rarer cooperation and fewer close friends. He claimed that this low-level social capital arises from the diversity which induces people to be more inclined to turn inwards, in Putnam's words, "to hunker down" (Putnam, 2007).

His analysis revealed that immigration and ethnic diversity are negatively correlated with social solidarity and social capital. Because of reducing interpersonal trust, diversity produces anomie or social isolation. In contrast to expectations, Putnam's findings showed that people living in ethnically diverse areas have low-level trust not only in non-ethnics but also in their co-ethnics; it is therefore hard to say that ethnic diversity triggers in-group/out-group division. On the other hand, diversity does not generate "bad race relations" or ethnic hatred, but rather, as Putnam suggested, "inhabitants in diverse communities tend to be withdrawn from collective life, to distrust their neighbours, regardless of the colour of their skin, to be isolated even from their close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less" (Putnam, 2007).

The idea that "growing ethnic and cultural diversity poses a threat to the social connections in society" paved the way for many replicated studies within the US and many other countries (Gijsberts, 2012). After much empirical research, however, it is still hard to claim that ethnic diversity causes a low level of social capital, and there are still ongoing arguments in the literature about the effectiveness of the measures of social capital, discussions about Eurocentric perspectives, ignoring the effect of poverty and so on. However, both Putnam's thesis and these debates are crucial because they have helped to develop a better understanding in order to comprehend ethnic diversity and social solidarity relations.

2.1.1 Non-Western Approaches to the Social Capital Concept

The concept of social capital and empirical studies examining social capital mostly emerged in western countries. This has led to many criticisms of the comprehensive-ness of the social capital concept to other countries which have different cultures, civil and political practices, and mind-sets. Accordingly, social capital has been widely accused of having a profoundly Eurocentric perspective.

The first objection is about the indicators of social capital, which are generalised trust, shared norms and values, and civic engagement. For Putnam (2000), the number of voluntary associations and the level of memberships was accepted as evidence of the existence of social capital. For non-western countries, however, both the number of organisations and the memberships in them remain very limited because, as Fukuyama (1995) commented, especially for Asian countries, family bonds replace informal organisations because they have the same function. Therefore, considering the crucial differences between contexts, it would not be fair to measure Asian countries' social capital levels on the same scale as western countries. Fukuyama (1999) demonstrated well

the culture effect in comparison between the performance of industrialised Asian countries and the developed western countries during the 'Great Disruption';

> … [that] certain industrialized countries did not experience many aspects of the Great Disruption, or experienced them to a much lesser degree, suggests that the latter was not the inevitable product of economic and technological change, and that culture and public policy plan an important role in shaping norms. The high-income societies in Asia – Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong – constitute an interesting contrast to the rest of the developed world because they appear to have avoided many of the effects of the Great Disruption. (p. 129)

As he (1999) pointed out, families and other small-level group organisations may be problematic in regard to the creation of social solidarity and collaboration, but in cases of economic downturn, war or national crisis, organisations of that kind play a more active role than western-style civic organisations in the alleviation of the problematic conditions.

Furthermore, expecting that the same dynamics will produce social capital in each country is problematic because this model ignores the state's interventions and the economy-politics of countries (Leonard, 2002). Leonard (2002) stated that economic and Eurocentric approaches to culture, institutions or development rule out the causal processes in a country. He also suggested that these theories provide the "paradigm maintenance" which also has an ideological function and which forces other countries to follow the same path as developed western countries. Similarly, what Putnam referred to a vicious and virtuous cycle emphasises a path dependence on an increasing level of social capital.

Nevertheless, Levi (1996) argued that bottom-up or top-down individual and state relationships which create trust or distrust can be changed because, in some cases, it has been observed that government policies have contributed to building social trust rather than being created as a result of trust. This reveals that one-way causation of social capital creation from bottom to top, as argued by social capital theorists, is also controversial.

Creating awareness about social capital accumulation and production according to the culture or specific features of a country is also important in order to determine social groups which have dissimilar social capital production styles in the same country. For Chinese Malaysians, for example, 'family' plays a vital role in creating social capital and its maintenance, whereas on the other hand, Indian Malaysians compared to other ethnic groups can contact or communicate with out-group members at ease. So, it is necessary to be aware that each ethnic group can have different social capital dynamics when examining the Malaysian context.

2.1.2 Criticisms of Social Capital Concepts

Social capital is one of the areas which has caused heated debates over the last thirty years in the literature. Although it is not novel or unique, it had never been perceived as an overarching concept before Putnam defined it as an individual resource providing private benefits, but at the same time a public resource promoting economic developments, democratic performance, trust among citizens and social solidarity. The handy usage of social capital, therefore, has faced many inquisitions.

One of the common criticisms of social capital is whether social capital is a form of capital (Quibria, 2003, Solow, 2000, Bowles & Gintis 2002). Most economists have questioned its characteristics as capital because, as Solow (2000) observed, there is no unique social capital story behind the East Asian miracle economies' success, for example.

The unsettled definition of social capital causes different understandings and different measurements from one theorist to another. In general, Putnam has been particularly criticised for his measurement tools for social capital and economic development relations. On this same point, Portes (1998) accused Putnam of being tautological,

because for Putnam economic development and the social capital relation is straightforward; if cities have a high level of social capital, they are well-governed and move ahead economically, but more impoverished cities are the reverse. In other words, "if your town is civic, it does civic things; if it is uncivic, it does not" (Portes, 1998). All in all, in the literature on social capital, there is no consensus on either its definition or its measurements; researchers should also be aware of Eurocentric approaches when analysing and understanding social capital outside western countries.

Second, the definition of social capital has been blamed for exaggerating its beneficial aspects (*see* Quibria, 2003; Portes, 1998; Häuberer, 2011). Portes (1998), for example, argued that "social capital has evolved into something of a cure for all the maladies affecting society at home and abroad". It is fair to say that theorists have widely ignored the negative external costs of social capital or the consequences of social capital accumulation on socio-economic classes in the social structure. When Coleman claimed that dense and closed networks are highly effective at creating social capital, he disregarded the possible ramifications of closed groups which are likely to cause clientelism, nepotism and the free-riding problem (Portes, 1998).

2.2 Analysing the Social Capital Concept

The social capital concept has a much broader meaning than being only a form of capital. Therefore, social capital should be analysed through its components which constitute the whole concept. The domains of social capital vary in the literature due to the fact that its definition also differs from one scholar to another. Putnam's definition is preferred in this present study, which is that "social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, p. 16).

Figure 2.2 shows that social capital is divided into two categories at the ground level; bonding and bridging social capital each represent different social capital accumulation styles in dense or open networks. In addition, both types of social capital have four components; organisational membership (in other words, civic and political engagement), networks, shared norms, and values and trust, which is further distinguished into two categories in order to separate in-group (particularised) and out-group (generalised) trust patterns in this study.

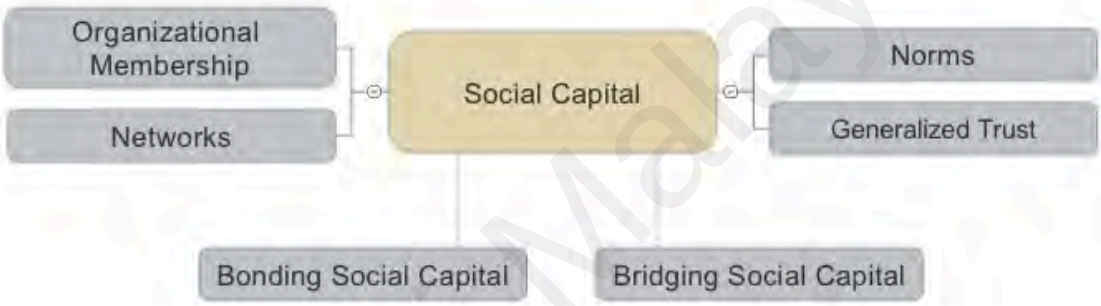


Figure 2.1: The Domains of Social Capital

2.2.1 Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Theoretically, a high level of social capital at the community level provides trust among the members, dense network systems and a high level of voluntary activities. Nevertheless, in such a group in which members have strong bonds, social capital can lead to in-group cooperation, loyalty and solidarity inside the network at the same time as creating strong out-group antagonisms and restricting outsiders. The external effects of in-group social capital, as a result, can be directed toward malevolent, anti-social purposes (Putnam, 2000 p.19). It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the forms of social capital which have different levels of positive and negative consequences.

Organisations differ in terms of bonding and bridging social capital. They can be intensive, multi-stranded or single-stranded, anonymous, or formally organised networks with incorporation papers, or informal associations (Putnam, 2000). Each network can be organised formally or informally, and be inward- or outward-looking. Bonding social capital is, by choice or necessity, inward-looking and more inclined to strengthen homogeneous groups and exclusive identities, such as ethnic fraternal organisations, whereas bridging social capital is directed to the outside of a group and encompasses diverse social cleavages, such as civil rights movements and youth service groups (Putnam, 2000, p. 20).

Bonding social capital, in Putnam's words, "constitutes a kind of sociological super-glue", because it can be helpful in mobilising reciprocity and solidarity. Dense networks play an essential role in providing social and psychological support to their members who are disadvantaged in the social structure. While offering help to its members, bonding social capital requires strong loyalty inside the group to reinforce its existence. However, by creating strong in-group solidarity, it might also lead to out-group antagonism as a result. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, forms multi-faceted identities and is better for linking external assets and for information diffusion (Putnam, 2000 p. 20). For Putnam (2000), bonding and bridging were not certain (either/or) categories into which each network or group can be neatly divided; rather, they can be accepted as a scale for evaluating networks' characteristics.

The importance of the bonding and bridging social capital division stems from the role of social networks in the social structure. Considering that the scope of this present study is ethnic relations in Malaysian society, the dynamics of ethnic enclaves and niches which take the shape of social networks must be understood adequately. Portes (1998) argued that ethnic niches in the business market create privileged access to new job openings for

their members while restricting outsiders. In-group solidarity makes it easier to find jobs, learning the necessary skills from experienced members and getting supervision for their performance and commonly, as Sassen (1995) pointed out, such network chains serve to fill entry-level job positions by contacting kin and friends in remote foreign locations rather than other available local workers.

Consequently, bonding and bridging capital give insights into the forms of social networks which shape other social capital components and eventually social structure. Furthermore, for studying countries which are fragmented by ethnic niches, the bonding and bridging social capital division forms a crucial analysis instrument.

2.2.2 Trust

Most theorists accept trust as the main component of social capital. For Fukuyama (1995), for example, trust was equal to social capital and its role was to reduce the transaction costs, in other words, a kind of a tax which society suffers when distrust is widespread has to be paid. Fukuyama focused on the economic benefits of trust whilst Putnam considered trust at the macro and meso levels of social strata. For Putnam (2000), trust lubricated social life while enabling cooperation. The greater the level of trust within a community, the greater the cooperation which is produced, which is a necessity for voluntary associations or democratic activities (Putnam, 1993). At the individual level, however, Hardin (1998) defined trust as "encapsulated interest" by emphasising its impact on producing mutual gain; "I will benefit because your gain includes the continuity of our trust" (p.12). Consequently, trust enables peaceful and stable social relations which are fundamental for collective behaviour and productive cooperation, as Newton (2001) put it.

Trust relations also play an important role at the macro level. This depends heavily on individuals' experiences. Putnam (1993) stated that trust and cooperation form a virtuous cycle in which each supports and fosters the other. For example, voluntary activities, as an indicator of cooperation, create trust because they provide an environment in which people find opportunities to interact with each other.

However, the positive correlation between active civic life and trust is widely debated. Uslaner (2002) argued that trust is not fragile and easily broken when people let others down. Instead, trust is an enduring value comprising people's collective experiences and so it does not change easily. Personal disappointments in our trust do not affect our trust in others, but once it does change, it affects the society's "collective experiences" (p. 37).

The simple proposition of "people learn how to trust one another by interacting with them in civic groups" is also controversial in the literature. Uslaner and Conley (2003) argued that this argument ignores an important dynamic of social interaction; the significance of social interaction lies in those with whom we associate, rather than in their existence. When people only socialise with and trust others who are like them, it is not possible to develop faith in others who are unlike them. Similarly, in-group interactions also cause social isolation, and this can reinforce prejudice against strangers (Uslaner & Conley 2003). Levi (1996) referred to this situation as "unsocial capital".

The division between interacting with similar and dissimilar people leads to another conceptualisation; generalised and particularised trust. The difference between generalised and particularised trust is very similar to Putnam's distinction between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. The main factor distinguishing generalised trust from particularised trust is the inclusiveness of a person's "moral community". The term 'moral community' was explained by Uslaner (2002) as follows:

> Strangers may look different from us, they may have different ideologies or religions. But we believe that there is an underlying commonality of values. So, it is not quite so risky to place faith in others. (p. 1)

In this regard, individuals living in complex societies create a common ground on which to agree and thus can build trust even though they have major differences in their culture, religion or even lifestyle. However, if they cannot manage to get together around a common value system, they tend to stay in their own comfort areas, thus losing the opportunity to build general trust, because generalised trust is to look outward, beyond the group, whereas particularised trust is more inclined to look inward (Uslaner & Conley, 2003).

Generalised trusters have no deep ties with others but are more open to meeting new people and becoming friends with strangers. Their ties with others are therefore described as "weak" (Granovetter, 1973) or "thin" (Williams, 1988; Uslaner & Conley 2003). Accepting that they are sharing common values and having the perception that most people are part of their moral community, they have a positive view of human nature and they believe that communicating with people beyond the group can be both personally and socially fruitful (Uslaner, 2002; Uslaner & Conley 2003). Furthermore, generalised trusters are more eager to participate in civic life, such as taking part in voluntary activities or becoming members of organisations.

Particularised trusters, however, trust other people who have the same group identity; they therefore distinguish the actors as members of in-groups or out-groups (Uslaner, 2002; Uslaner & Conley 2003). Unlike generalised trusters, they are suspicious about sharing common values with others outside the group, so they have positive views about their fellows but are likely to have negative attitudes toward out-group members (Uslaner, 2002; Uslaner & Conley 2003). Particularised trusters avoid strangers and stick to their own kind; they feel more comfortable, for example, in their family, with close friends,

and in ethnic or religious groups; in Uslaner and Conley's words (2003), they are likely to see the world in terms of 'us' and 'them'. Their civic engagement activities are therefore limited to their own community, which means that their contributions to civic life do not build bridges across different parts of the society. For this reason, particularised trust strengthens bonding social capital, but generalised trust facilitates building bridging social capital. Social groups have a strong sense of belonging to their group, such as ethnic or religious communities, which can lead people to withdraw themselves from civic life or, at least, to show less willingness to interact and communicate with members of other social groups. As a result, for analysing ethnic fragmentations in a social structure, generalised and particularised trust are essential concepts.

2.2.3 Norms and Shared Values

Social norms, sanctions and mutual obligations play an essential role in acquiring social capital and encouraging collaboration between friends and strangers (Coleman, 1990). Fukuyama (1995) stated the importance of norms for social capital by comparing it with human capital development;

> … an individual can decide to 'invest' in conventional human capital like a college education, or training to become a machinist or computer programmer, simply by going to the appropriate school. Acquisition of social capital, by contrast, requires habituation to the moral norms of a community and, in its context, the acquisition of virtues like loyalty, honesty, and dependability. The group, moreover, has to adopt common norms as a whole before trust become generalized among its members. In other words, social capital cannot be acquired simply by individuals acting on their own. (p. 27)

Social norms are seen explicitly crucial for forming trust and protecting it from a small number of people who are seeking to undermine or exploit the group through fraud or mischievousness, or from people who are willing to benefit from membership of the group while contributing as little as possible to it (Fukuyama, 1995, p.26). In this regard, there is a strong connection between generalised trust and social norms because, as

Uslaner (2002) pointed out, social norms and common values are shared with 'strangers' which enables accepting other members of society into the "moral community" (p.1). Strangers may look different, may have different ideologies or religions, but if a member of a society share social norms and common values no matter which religion they believe in or which ethnic identity they have, it is unlikely that these strangers will try to exploit positive attitudes, and this belief facilitates cooperation with strangers (Uslaner, 2002).

The norms of reciprocity had particular significance for Putnam (1993) in social norms; he defined them as "a highly productive component of social capital". Putnam (1993, 2000) used the money and barter dichotomy as a metaphor to show that generalised reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society because the norms of reciprocity provide flexibility for balancing mutual benefit. He (1993) also stated that "Social trust in a complex modern environment can grow from two closely tied sources: norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement" (p.171). The functionality of norms of reciprocity is closely related with networks and civic engagement because, for him, networks in a community foster norms of reciprocity. They also create "the favour bank" (Wolfe, quoted in Putnam, 2000), which means "I will do this for you now, in the expectation that you (or perhaps someone else) will return the favour" (Putnam, 2000, p. 18). Civic engagement activities are, in return, perpetuated by inter-personal exchanges and reciprocal obligations; as a result, the other component of social capital closely associates social norms with shared values, in general.

2.2.4 Civic and Political Engagement

Civil and political participation and voluntary activities are more concrete, easy-to-measure indicators of social capital compared with trust and social norms. Civil society or, in Putnam's term, networks of civic engagement, constitute formal and informal associations, but when it is considered that formal organisations are mostly an inseparable

part of work life, informal and voluntary associations are accepted as real indicators of social capital. The very first reason why voluntary organisations are seen as special social institutions is that membership of them depends entirely on actors who are willing to cooperate with other people to achieve mutual goals, unlike family, work or indispensable state memberships (Newton, 2001).

Theoretically, networks in civil society have various functions such as teaching trust and social understanding, the acquisition of social norms, and consequently improving cooperation and coordination with numerous kinds of members who have different religions, ethnic identities or values.

Social networks in society can be both vertical and horizontal. Vertical networks represent asymmetric relations of hierarchy, such as a patron/client relationship. In vertical networks, social trust and cooperation cannot be produced because members of a hierarchy do not necessarily share norms and values with one another beyond their form of relation (Fukuyama, 1999); interpersonal exchanges and reciprocal obligations are vertical and asymmetrical structures which hinder the creation of social bonds between members (Häuberer, 2011; Putnam, 1993). Horizontal networks, however, bring together people who are like-minded, and have the same status and power. Horizontal networks enable bridges to be built between different social groups and facilitate communication and cooperation. For Newton (2001), horizontal networks played an intermediary role between citizens and elites because the organising of ordinary people creates "pressure groups" which can help to protect themselves from elites' manipulative and exploitative behaviour. Thus, networks generate the basis of democratic culture and communication between different social groups and eventually create the bonds of social solidarity which is necessary for civil society and democracy (Newton, 2001).

Social capital theories and evidence from empirical studies have shown that social capital supports the effective functioning of democratic institutions in a community (Kahne *et al*., 2006). Political participation and democratic performance, such as high voter turnout, political party membership, attendance at a public demonstration or cooperating with fellow citizens on community affairs, are actually a by-product of a high level of social capital. Knack (2002) stated well that when communication and cooperation are low between members, and informal civil associations are rare in a community, politics is more likely to driven by the elites who dominate policy-making processes. So, when distrust and the lack of any sense of civic obligation turn politics into polarisation and division, it is going to be more challenging to agree on the adoption or application of policies (Knack, 2002). Some empirical studies which have investigated the impact of macro-level inter-personal trust and political effectiveness have shown that social capital is strongly related to the efficiency and responsiveness of democratic institutions, and that higher-trust societies are more likely to have a better-performing government (*see* Putnam, 1993; Knack & Keefer, 1997). In contrast, Hardin (1995) argued that the higher the group attachment level, the more the mobilisation of these groups will undermine democracy rather than reinforce it. This means that participation in civic or political life does not necessarily boost democratic performance as long as different kinds of group cannot come together for the sake of common goals (Hardin, 1995).

2.3 The 'Dark Side' of Social Capital

The possible drawbacks or negative sides of social capital have not been found very attractive by social capital theorists. Portes (1998) stated that, because of praising human interactions and sociability as a result of sociological bias, the empirical research literature has focused extensively on the positive consequences of social capital.

However, as noted above, some forms of social capital, such as bonding social capital and particularised trust, can produce social exclusion, inequality, nepotism and favouritism. In this regard, social capital does have a "dark side" (Ostrom, 2000).

The strong ties bringing people together can produce a distinctive organisational culture and a high degree of internal solidarity (Fukuyama, 1999). Networks, shared norms and values, and the high level of particularised trust among members of the Mafia, the Ku Klux Klan and the Mormon Church make it possible for them to reach their goal easily; nevertheless, as Fukuyama noted, "the impermeability of communal walls around such groups can often make them intolerant, inbred, slow to adapt and oblivious to new ideas" (pp. 201-202). Consequently, when bridging mechanisms become disabled among social networks, strong collective identities can pave the way for 'uncivicness' or intolerance of outsiders (Van Deth & Zmerli, 2010).

Another factor to be noted is the inequality problem. Häuberer (2011) argued that social capital can be helpful for consolidating social hierarchies and in this way social inequalities can be produced or reproduced. In this regard, social inequalities are recreated by social capital, which was discussed in Bourdieu's social capital theory that elites or the dominant class of a community have more capital at their disposal (cited in Häuberer, 2011). At the micro level, however, as Lin (2004) pointed out, different investments or opportunities create an asymmetrical social capital production which designates individuals' social position in a community. Families, for example, can determine their children's social capital level by investing in them or giving opportunities to them by discriminating between them according to their gender (Lin, 2004). Similarly, the same attempts to generate social capital may have resulted in a differential return or outcome for members of different social groups. Also known as the glass-ceiling phenomenon, females in the business sector suffer from unfair wages, status or position gains in

organisations regardless of how much they invest in or strive for the company, and that reproduces unequal social capital production in the society (Lin, 2004).

Although investment in and norms of reciprocity are highly crucial for the maintenance of networks, there could be some people called free-riders who are the less diligent members of the networks who claim resources but contribute as little as possible in return (Portes, 1998; Häuberer, 2011). Fukuyama (1999), along with free-riders, regarded patronage networks based on kinship, social class, friendship or other factors as a natural feature of the human organisation;

> Networks, understood as informal ethical relationships, are therefore associated with phenomena like nepotism, favouritism, intolerance, inbreeding and nontransparent, personalistic arrangements. Networks in this sense are as old as human communities themselves. (p. 202)

He suggested that in order to protect networks from the patronage system, the modern world has created the rule of law, contracts and constitutions for more transparent and accountable institutional organisations. Without this, informal networks might result in the exploitation of resources invested by their members.

These consequences of social capital and the network system reveal that the existence of networks, trust or civic engagement does not always produce positive outcomes; instead the function of their mechanisms can give insights into the community's social capital and societal structure.

2.4 Previous Empirical Studies

There have been various empirical studies which have examined the concept of social capital for over thirty years. In addition to political science and sociology, social capital and trust have been widely investigated in business and management disciplines. In this

present study, however, only the empirical studies conducted in the areas of sociology and political science have been taken into account.

Putnam (1993; 2000) popularised the idea that "people learn civic virtues such as trust, reciprocity, and cooperation in voluntary associations and through other forms of participation in civic interactions and civic society". Nevertheless, empirical studies have produced mixed results in terms of establishing a direct relationship between trust and civic engagement. In the US, Brehm and Rahn (1997) examined the relationship between trust, confidence in the government and civic engagement at the individual level. Their findings confirmed that there is a reciprocal relationship between civic engagement and interpersonal trust although the connection is quite asymmetrical. The direction is from participation in civic life to interpersonal trust, but not the reverse. This means that "the more that citizens participate in their communities, the more that they learn to trust others" (*see also* Stolle 1998a and 1998b).

However, that study failed to find convincing evidence to show that trust increases the level of civic engagement (Brehm & Rahn, 1997). Achbari *et al*. (2018) scrutinised the question of whether voluntary organisations affect the level of trust or do more trusting individuals become members of voluntary associations. In Holland, they investigated the generalised trust levels of active participants who were members of ethnically diverse voluntary associations. They compared the level of trust of recent joiners and long-term members and found that active participation in voluntary organisations did not breed trust regardless of the level of an organisations' ethnic diversity (Achbari *et al*., 2018).

There have also been some empirical studies which have shown that voluntary organisations or civic engagement activities do not produce trust. Delhey and Newton (2005) compared 55 countries and found that voluntary organisations had no significant influence on generating trust. Their findings were also consistent with Uslaner's (2002)

claims that social networks are dead ends which are not capable of either producing or consuming trust (p. 116).

Another perspective was offered by Paxton (2007), who distinguished voluntary organisations by their level of connectedness and suggested that voluntary organisations which are connected with each other are more beneficial for the creation of trust than isolated associations. The results showed that at the individual level, membership of connected associations created more trust than isolated ones, but more importantly, at the national level, the presence of association networks was crucial because the lack of connections across associations can decrease the opportunity to build generalised trust. Paxton (2007) commented that "a large number of unconnected associations in a country would suggest a lack of common norms and/or common feeling across society". Accordingly, the connectedness of associations was also found crucial for promoting democracy by Paxton (2002). Her findings showed that connected associations have a strong positive influence on democracy, whilst isolated organisations have a strong negative influence. This raises the question "Can a high level of social capital in a community promote democratic activities?"

Paxton (2002) suggested that social capital can help to create democracy where it does not exist and can also help to maintain or improve present democracies by utilising associations which teach tolerance, promote compromise, stimulate political participation and train leaders. Accordingly, social capital and democracy have a reciprocal relationship in that because social capital fosters democracy, it promotes and helps in the creation of social capital. In the same vein, Brehm and Rahn (1997) confirmed that democratic government promotes generalised trust and, in return, interpersonal trust breeds confidence in government.

There is nevertheless an opposition group which is sceptical about whether social capital can create or reinforce democracy through civic associations. Newton (1999) claimed that the features of associational life which form and protect democratic life have not been supported by empirical evidence. Civic associations might breed social capital but do not necessarily produce an environment of political trust which can foster democracy. The primary reason for that, as Newton (1999) and Uslaner (2002) argued, is that most types of social connection do not bring different kinds of people together, and people do not spend enough time in civic groups to change their values.

As a third way, Levi (1996) and Hall (1999) accepted the connection between social capital and democracy and suggested a one-way causation; states or governments can build trust among people through, for example, educational policies, expanding rights, providing safety nets for the disadvantaged, or eliminating social injustice (Hall 1999; Levi, 1996). Governments can therefore have a strong influence on levels of social capital in a community. On the other hand, from this point of view, dysfunction of the state can cause a decrease in the level of social capital in that society.

Many empirical studies have found a strong connection between generalised trust and macro-social factors, such as income inequality, corruption and public expenditure (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Delhey & Newton, 2005; Häuberer, 2011; Rothstein & Stolle, 2003). Delhey and Newton (2005) argued that prosperous and economically egalitarian societies are more trusting because wealth has a stronger effect than equality. Also, the absence of corruption and a well-functioning government help to create an environment in which people can act in more trustworthy ways. Furthermore, corruption changes the level of social capital in communities (Bjørnskov & Paldam, 2002). For Bjørnskov (2003b), the existence of corruption regardless of economic development has a catalysing role in demolishing the trust environment in a society.

There has been an upsurge in the number of studies of the correlation between ethnic diversity and social capital – particularly trust – primarily in western countries. The principal reason for this interest is the increasing level of ethnic heterogeneity on the grounds of the growing migration flows to western countries (Nannestad, 2008). A number of studies have demonstrated the negative correlation between ethnic diversity and social capital (*see* Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; 2002; Costa & Kahn, 2003, Delhey & Newton, 2005; Paxton, 2007; Putnam, 2007). The preliminary studies of ethnic diversity in the US conducted by Alesina and La Ferrara (2000; 2002) showed that ethnic diversity and income inequality negatively influenced trust and civic participation in social activities. Similarly, Costa and Kahn (2003) suggested that the decline in volunteering activities in the US was due to rising ethnic diversity and inequality. In diverse communities, people are less willing to share their time or their money, or to take risks to help others. As well as civic participation, Costa and Kahn (2003) argued that more homogeneous communities produce more social capital, whilst in diverse communities, social trust tends to stay at lower levels. Because diversity has costs, individuals eliminate these costs when they interact with people who are like them and who share the same values and cultural norms.

Subsequently, this relationship was analysed again in the US context by Putnam (2007). He argued that ethnic diversity in the immediate residential setting leads to declining social solidarity and reduced levels of trust, which creates social isolation (for the Russian case, *see* Bahry *et al*., 2005; for the Danish case, *see* Nannestad *et al*., 2008). Putnam's work encouraged numerous new empirical studies conducted in different countries, or cross-country analyses to test the relationship between ethnic diversity and social capital. The majority of the findings showed that a high degree of homogeneity is required for social capital, but it still might not be adequate because the countries which have the highest level of social capital, namely Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and

Canada, have an ethnically homogeneous population, and also very low levels of income inequality (Delhey & Newton, 20005; Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000). So, given the coexistence of economic disparities and ethnic diversity discerned in developed countries, it is hard to differentiate income inequality from the impact of ethnic diversity on the production of social capital. In the UK, Letki (2008) explored whether the main problem is ethnic diversity or whether it is poverty that undermines social solidarity and trust. The findings demonstrated that ethnic diversity has a direct negative effect on trust and informal help, but she interpreted this as a pseudo-effect, and suggested that the vital issue is poverty. In this regard, the income inequality among ethnic minorities in developed countries influences their willingness to participate in civic life, and they tend to be more isolated. Studies in the US (Li *et al*., 2005; Ross *et al*., 2001) have also emphasised the importance of economic inequality on reducing social trust, rather than ethnic issues, whilst Putnam (2007) argued that ethnic diversity is equally as important as income inequality. On the other hand, analysing the Dutch case, Gijsberts *et al*.'s (2012) findings did not support Letki's claim. They found that ethnic minorities had less trust, did less voluntary work and had fewer contacts in the neighbourhood; however, surprisingly, they found a positive relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and the contact level, which they explained as a consequence of "the cosy working-class neighbourhoods" (Gijsberts *et al*., 2012).

Uslaner (2011) demonstrated a link between residential segregation and trust rather than between diversity and trust. He suggested that the main problem reducing trust in ethnically diverse communities is not the diversity itself, but the level of segregation between groups. Although it is hard to say that diversity does not affect it at all, it does have a somewhat moderate impact which cannot drive trust down alone. Segregation, on the other hand, hinders the development of generalised trust. In diverse but integrated communities in the US, he showed that there were lower economic disparities between

majority and minority ethnic groups. In this regard, Uslaner's findings (2011) support Letki's claim, but he emphasised the willingness of the members of minority groups to integrate and communicate with others for trust to flourish. Nannestad (2008) compared fifteen European countries and found that the integration problem of minority groups was very close to the type of a country's welfare state, economic wealth, growth, politics and good governance; in other words, the more minority and/or immigrant groups are engaged in the local labour market, the more they are integrated in the society. States' policies therefore play a crucial role in solving their problems in the labour market.

In conclusion, it is very striking that although there has been a wide range of studies conducted across the world, the findings are far from offering robust results in terms of social capital theory. Nevertheless, the results do give some insights into the fact that macro dynamics is more important than was thought; therefore, the political and economic performance of a country should be taken more into consideration. Also, as the reported findings suggest, at the individual level, socio-economic inequalities and education change people's way of interacting with others. Poverty and ethnic diversity promote ethnic exclusion, and they also reduce the level of generalised trust and participation in civil life. These people feel segregated and withdraw themselves from social life; instead, they turn to their comfort circles which foster in-group solidarity and bonding social capital. On the other hand, high-income and well-educated people are more eager and open to making contact with others from different ethnic groups; their communication increases their levels of trust and civic engagement and that eventually generates bridging social capital as well as bonding social capital.

2.4.1 Plural Society and Inter-Ethnic Interactions in Colonial Malaysia

The multi-ethnic characteristic of Malaysia has a long history; the presence of non-Malays in Malaysia can be traced back to the pre-colonial era. The traders, sailors, and

suppliers from the different part of the world, such as India, Arabian Peninsula, China and the other countries in the archipelago. The development of this complex trading network system was originated because of two reasons, as Andaya and Andaya (1982) pointed out. Firstly, the geopolitical position of the ports in the Malay Archipelago bring two major sea routes together; and secondly, the richness of the natural resources in the Malay Peninsula enabled many opportunities to traders to sell and exchange their products (p.10). Therefore, even before the colonials, the country was accustomed to communicating with people from divergent races, languages and religions.

On the other hand, as Hirschman (1986) indicates, although there was at some point ethnic segregation or common stereotypes present in the society, solidarity between ethnic groups or bridges across ethnic boundaries existed to a certain degree. Jesudason (2001), also supports Hisrchman (1986)'s claims;

> Most accounts of Sino-native interaction in precolonial settings do not mention overt ethnic conflict between the two groups. Native princes and Chinese financiers and traders formed close symbiosis in joint ventures. Intermarriage was common, and there was considerable Chinese absorption of the language and customs of indigenous society, leading to special terms – *peranakan* in Indonesia, *baba* in Malaysia– to describe the acculturated Chinese (p.71).

The colonial period, nevertheless, changed both the character of inter-ethnic relations and the demographic structure of Malaysian society. For that reason, Hirschman (1986) points out that the origin of ethnic segregation and antagonisms between ethnic groups in the current situation can be found in the colonial period, because "race" concept was constructed by the colonials. Emphasising "race" and reinforcing the ethnic differences and stereotypes, the colonial power managed to maintain its economic and political power over the local people, even more, by promoting the racial differences between ethnic groups, the colonial rule "created an ideology to explain ethnic inequality as an inevitable reflection of inherent 'racial' differences" (Hirschman, 1986, p. 348).

The British's allowing to the mass immigrant flows from China and India to Malaya in order to supply cheap labour to the mines and estates until the twentieth century, the demographic structure of Malaysia altered dramatically. In 1931, for example, Chinese population in four Malay states, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, was 64% of the whole population (Hefner, 2001). However, the problematic part is, the British did not allow the newcomers to mix with the local people in Malaysia to prevent possible conflicts between ethnic groups that could lead to disrupt the colonial rule (Holst, 2012, p.35). Thus, to segregate the ethnic groups in different social settings or workplaces caused to minimise the meaningful contact between them (Andaya and Andaya, 1982, p.176) and strengthened the racial prejudices (Holst, 2012). Separate living places in parallel with workplaces lessen the inter-group interactions, and thus it reduced the acculturation possibilities because of intense prejudices breeding among ethnic groups. Andaya and Andaya (1982) explains the ethnic stereotypes of Malays and Chinese about each other in the colonial period;

> For the Malay villager, the Chinese was a shopkeeper or a moneylender, often a man whom he was indebted. The Chinese saw Malays as a race submerged by others more energetic and sophisticated, which caused one Malay-language Chinese newspaper in 1894 to ask, "Why are the Malays inert?" (p.178).

The ethnic/racial stereotypes were not created by the colonials with separating ethnic groups in the first place, but as a consequence of the ethnic separation, prejudices were amplified in the minds of Malaysians.

The idea of different ethnic elements' separation in Malaysia finds its expression in the works of J.S. Furnivall who was British administrators and political writer studied in Southeast Asia region. It was him firstly introduced the concept of 'plural society' to describe the colonials' government strategy in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Hefner, 2001). Furnivall explained the plural society concept "two or more elements or

social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (Furnivall 1944, 446, cited in Hefner, 2001). The importance of the plural society concept lies behind the division of ethnic groups in different living and working areas. By doing that the Colonials managed to impede the creation of 'common social will'. Southeast Asian pluralism, according to Furnivall, protect the countries from descending possible anarchy, but also the ethnic segregation and lack of common will undermined their capability to unite against the colonial powers (Furnivall, 1944, p.468-469).

The concept of plural society is parallel with Putnam's claims for democracy and social capital correlation. Putnam (1993) emphasises the importance of civil society for the democratisation process of a country. In countries where the civil society is underdeveloped or inadequate to bring diverse social groups together, the democratic performance and the social capital of this country would be expected in lower levels (Putnam, 1993). In this regard, from the Furnivall and Putnam's perspective, if in the ethnically diverse countries, as in the case of Malaysia, civic associations are segregated based on their ethnoreligious identities, that country can be considered as a plural society. Moreover, these countries demonstrate undemocratic features with a low level of social capital.

As a result, the plural society concept was introduced to identify the social structure of the Southeast Asian countries under colonial rule. Nevertheless, Malaysian society is, to some extent, still showing segregated society features. Therefore, in the following part, the empirical studies conducted in Malaysian context will be discussed to further elaborate on the social structure of Malaysia and social capital relationship.

2.4.2 Empirical Studies in the Malaysian Context

Surprisingly, social capital is not a widely discussed concept in the political or sociological literature on the Malaysian context. Although there have been a number of studies of social capital in the economics and management disciplines (see Yokoyoma &Ali, 2009), media studies (see Adnan and Mavi, 2005; Yusof and Hashim, 2014; Ridzuan et al., 2017 and Ketab et al., 2016) and urban studies (see Hazline Hamdan et al., 2014, Noordin & Ngah, 2018), the topic has mostly been examined from the ethnic relations and communications perspective (Evers, 2014; Noraini Noor, 2009; Rycker et al., 2015; see also Selvaratnam et al., 2008).

One of the empirical studies directly connected with this current research is Campbell and Hwa's (2007) analysis of trust in multi-ethnic and mono-ethnic associations in Penang. Their findings showed interesting results in the Malaysian context. In mixed-ethnic associations, trust in others was found to be significantly higher than in mono-ethnic ones; members of mixed organisations had a high level of trust not only in members of the same ethnic group as themselves but also in members of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the level of participation was again relatively higher in multi-ethnic organisations. They found that in mixed organisations, people learn to trust others who have similar backgrounds to themselves as well as people who have a diverse background. Therefore, increasing trust supports participation and eventually builds trust, similar to Putnam's thesis. However, considering Achbari et al.'s (2018) study, this deduction can be criticised because there is no data on the members' trust level before their participation in the organisation. It is, therefore, hard to say that mixed organisations help to generate trust. Achbari et al. (2018) demonstrated that the members of mixed organisations already had a higher level of trust before their participation, in comparison with the level of trust among the members of mono-ethnic associations.

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar (2014) investigated social capital in Malaysia through online social network systems (see also Adnan & Mavi, 2015). Based on the user interactions on six social networks and interviews with the administrators of these sites, the research gave many insights into ethnic relations and the factors which hinder the production of social capital in Malaysian society. She found that the level of the three main ethnic groups' participation in online social networks was considerably high, but when it came to offline activities organised through these platforms, the circumstances changed. Whilst the Malays hardly participated in offline gatherings, mostly Chinese, and a small percentage of ethnic Indians did attend these organisations. As she indicated, the possible reasons for the Malays' reservations about offline gatherings were socio-economic inequalities across ethnic groups, different language preferences, and cultural and religious differences (Wan Munira Wan Jaafar, 2014).

The language preference, on the other hand, was another factor which shaped interactions between ethnic groups. She pointed out that "language is claimed to be a major contributor to the lack of participation and interaction between Malay and non-Malay members" because Malay people prefer to use Bahasa Melayu whereas ethnic Chinese and Indians use either their mother tongue or English rather than Bahasa Melayu. There is a language barrier problem between Malays who find it challenging to express themselves in English and Chinese and Indians who cannot or do not prefer to speak Bahasa Melayu. Language usage and preferences, as a result, emerge a form of social segregation on the social network sites.

She (2014) also highlighted that religious and cultural differences make it harder to converge on shared values or cultural practices between non-ethnics in Malaysia. Even more, the restrictions over alcohol and pork, and on gambling and nightlife, which are prohibited for Malays are the main factors which prevent Malays from attending multi-

ethnic gatherings. In this regard, religion plays a fostering role for bonding social capital and for in-group solidarity rather than for creating bridging social capital. This finding is consistent with that of Delhey et al. (2018), who suggested that religiosity is negatively correlated with social cohesion in western and Asian communities.

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar's (2014) findings demonstrated that when optimal conditions are fulfilled, Malaysian are willing to create bridges across ethnic identities on online social networking sites, but that when it comes to face-to-face activities which generate actual bridging social capital, there are still significant obstacles to overcome in order to bring people together.

The research of Yusof and Hashim (2014), on the other hand, contradicted the results of Wan Munira Wan Jaafar (2014)'s work. As their findings suggested, social interactions between the users of online social networking sites created positive outcomes on the of social capital levels of the users. Further, the users could extend their relationships beyond the online to the offline level so that they could enhance the community spirit (Yusof and Hashim, 2014). Nevertheless, in terms of interethnic relations of Malaysians, their research does not provide explicit data about the ethnic composition of those offline gatherings. In this regard, it seems difficult to claim that those gatherings can reinforce community feelings without knowing each ethnic group's reaction to this kind of social functions. As Wan Jaafar (2014) pointed out, the online gatherings could transform into offline meetings, however, the level of participation is too low among Malay users that overall can undermine the positive impact of offline gathering's in the creation of collective spirit.

Ethnic integration of students in the school environment is another compelling issue in the Malaysian literature (see also Rabushka, 1971; David & Wendy Yee Mei Tien, 2010; Carmen, 2010). Ketab, Tamam and others (2015) examined the interethnic online

and offline interactions between university students. They investigated the relationship between contact with outgroup members and ethnocentric attitudes. Their findings showed that the respondents had ethnocentric attitudes towards students from other ethnic groups. On the other hand, it was found that ethnocentric attitudes could be alleviated with the help of face-to-face communication with peers from other ethnic groups. Contrary to Wan Jaafar (2014), Ketab et al. (2015) noted that students had frequent offline interactions with non-ethnic peers; but interestingly, when it comes to online interethnic interactions, the level of communication decreased dramatically. As they commented, ethnocentric attitudes play a crucial role in obstructing effective interethnic communication, and therefore, ethnic integration of Malaysian students.

Another study examining the inter-ethnic interactions of students concerning bonding and bridging social capital was conducted by Ezhar Tamam (2013). The study was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, and the findings demonstrated that ethnicity seemed to be the dominant identity for expressing oneself, especially for Malay students, and that the level of inter-racial socialisation remained limited. The findings showed a positive correlation between inter-ethnic socialisation and bridging social capital, and, interestingly, the ethnic Indian students had a much higher level of bridging social capital than the Chinese and Malay students. These results are consistent with those of Nobaya Ahmad (1999), who analysed the ethnic relations and interactions of Malay and Chinese residents living in mono-ethnic and mixed settlement areas. The findings showed that the majority of the Malays and Chinese preferred to socialise within their ethnic groups. Nobaya Ahmad commented that the Indians seemed to be more comfortable about accepting Malaysian culture as the national culture than the Chinese because of the similarities between the two cultures (Nobaya Ahmad, 1999, p. 50).

Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin (2010) questioned the inter-ethnic relations and integration in neighbourhoods in the Klang Valley. In contrast to Nobaya Ahmad's findings, their study showed that the Malay and Indian residents were more sociable than the Chinese regarding neighbourhood activities and daily communications with their neighbours. On the other hand, when it came to social interactions between ethnic groups, many of them preferred not to become neighbours or to live side-by-side, even though they believed that a mixed housing environment helped them to gain a better understanding of the other ethnics and to improve tolerance towards them. Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin (2010) found that food exchange was quite common between neighbours, but that most of them only exchanged their food with neighbours of the same ethnic group, and especially the Malays were very reluctant to receive food from other ethnic groups, most probably because of the halal food issue.

Evaluating the findings of Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin (2010)'s study, it is striking that the Indians were the most open and eager to cooperate with residents of other ethnic groups, whilst the Chinese were the least. For the Malays, openness and willingness to participate in neighbourhood activities were of a moderate level, although religious rules should be taken into account when considering Malays' interactions with their neighbours.

One of the recent and illuminating studies on interethnic relations of Malaysians was carried out by Al Ramiah, Hewstone and Wölfer (2017). The quantitative research of them focused on the Peninsular Malaysia and the three main ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. The findings provide valuable insights into the inherence of interethnic relations of Malaysians. Similar to Tamam (2013), the research findings confirmed that Malaysians had more positive feelings toward their fellow-ethnics.

Besides, they found that the respondents who had more outgroup friends revealed more favourable outgroup attitudes (Al Ramiah et al., 2017).

Al Ramiah et al. (2017) also investigated the identity preferences of the respondents. In line with previous works, the respondents overwhelmingly identified themselves with their ethnic identities rather than the national identity. Besides, surprisingly, Al Ramiah et al. (2017) indicated that preferring national identity over ethnic identities is related to more positive outgroup attitudes for non-Malays, but not Malay respondents. According to them, this finding implies that Malays and non-Malays may have a different conception about being "Malaysian", which should urge the policymakers to re-assess their integration efforts.

In general, considering the empirical studies conducted in the Malaysian context, the results reveal that meaningful contact between non-ethnics creates positive influences on their inter-group relationships (Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin, 2010; Ketab et al., 2014; Al Ramiah et al., 2017). Nevertheless, there are also several obstacles in the creation of meaningful contact, social trust, and bridging social capital that is the main focus of this present study.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Conflict/ethnic competition theory and contact theory have been chosen for explaining the Malaysian case because of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious societal structure. Conflict or ethnic competition theory claims that the presence of an 'outgroup' in a community creates competition between social groups over scarce resources or values, and causes a conflict of interest between those groups, and that ultimately creates hostility in inter-group relations (Savelkoul *et al*., 2011). The competition between groups therefore induces a prejudice directed by the dominant group which has positioned itself

as superior in the society towards out-groups or minorities. The main source of this prejudice is not necessarily based on real competition between groups; most of the time it is only a perception (Blalock, 1967, cited in Savelkoul *et al*., 2011) of the dominant group which feels threatened by the possible loss of their group's prerogatives (Quillian, 1995). However, more importantly, it is a defensive reaction against explicit or implicit threats imposed towards the privileges at their disposal. The conflict theory, or as Quillian called it, "group-threat theory", sees prejudice as a collective phenomenon which affects individuals' attitudes considerably.

In this theory, racial prejudice is also the result of the collective threat. Blumer (1958, cited in Quillian, 1995) outlined four feelings which create racial prejudice: "(1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of a proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs of the prerogatives of the dominant race" (Quillian, 1995). The feeling of superiority and the externalisation of ethnic outgroups accordingly generate social identification and social contra-identification. When the dominant group has a positive group distinctiveness, its members perceive negative characteristics among an outgroup and generalise it to the whole group (Savelkoul *et al*., 2011). The conceptualisation of social identification and contra-identification are seen as complementary to the competition theory that competition, at the individual or contextual level, reinforces the mechanisms of social (contra-)identification and ultimately creates ethnic exclusionism (Scheepers *et al*., 2002).

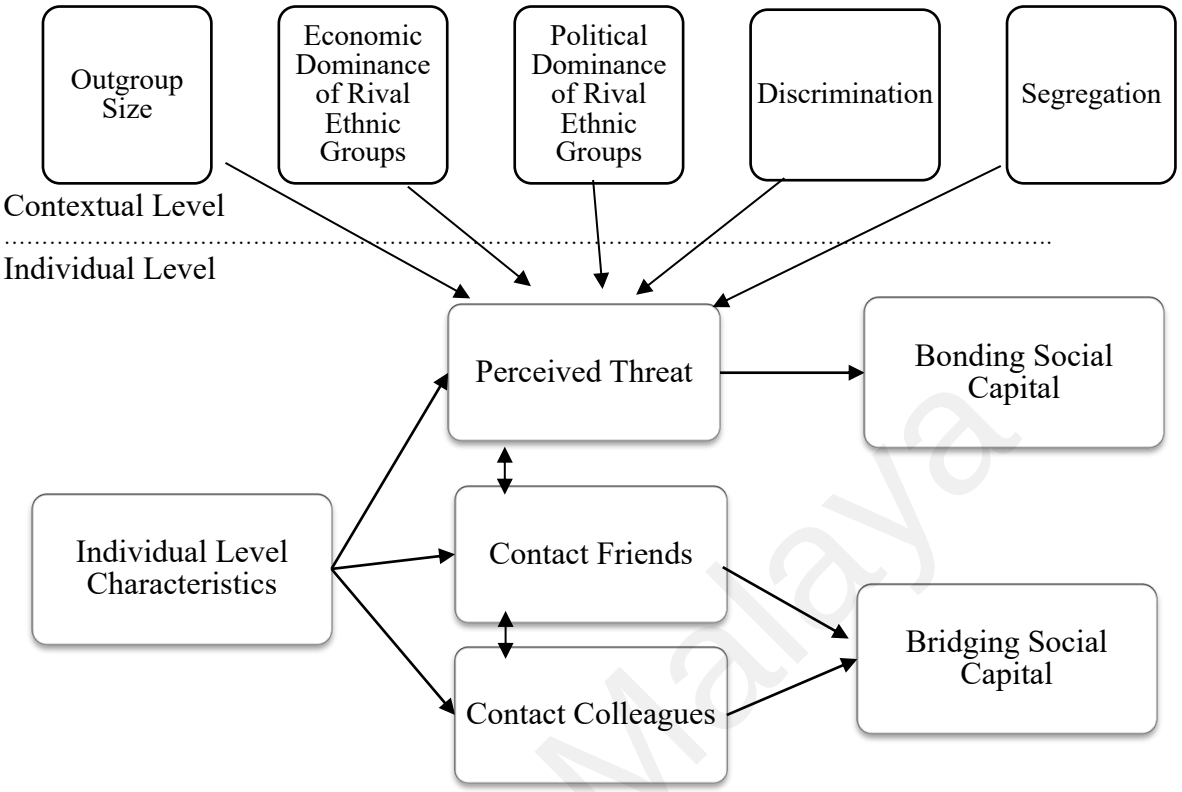
Group size also influences the prejudice and inter-group relations because when the relative size of the outgroup increases, competition for scarce resources scales up. Also, group size provides a political power for the minority, thus, when their political mobilisation rises, its consequences create a threat to the privileges of the dominant group.

The level of ethnic competition is highly related to the social position of the members of a society. This means that the members of the dominant group who hold similar social positions to those of the ethnic minorities are more likely to experience a higher level of ethnic competition, and as a result they are more willing to support ethnic exclusionism (Scheepers *et al*., 2002). Considering that ethnic minorities are mostly (in the developed country context) in the lower income groups, less-educated and lower-strata members of the dominant group support ethnic exclusionism more strongly.

The second theoretical tradition applied to this present study is contact theory. This theory assumes that contact between groups which is established under optimal conditions reduces prejudice and antagonistic attitudes (Allport, 1954). Allport also suggested that for optimal conditions, "equal status between the groups in the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law, or custom" features should be present. In the absence of these features, there is still a close relationship between contact and prejudice, but Allport's conditions enhance the positive effects of inter-group relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Savelkoul *et al*., 2011).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) demonstrated that intergroup contact substantially reduces prejudices. Even more, their participants who had meaningful contact with outgroup members generalised their experiences; as Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) put it, "Not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become more favorable, but so do attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup members in other situations, and even outgroups not involved in the contact". This means that the results of intergroup contact are well beyond the simple one-on-one contact in the reduction of prejudice across various groups or contexts (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Figure 2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study



The theoretical framework of this study (shown as Figure 2.4) is derived from Savelkoul *et al*. (2011) and modified according to the Malaysian context. In their study, two contradictory mechanisms – ethnic competition theory and intergroup contact theory – were tested in the context of anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands. Because it considered two deeply divided social groups which had hostile attitudes towards one another, the theoretical framework of that study is quite relevant to this present study. In the Malaysian context, ethnic competition theory is important for explaining the fragmented structure of the three major ethnic groups in the social, economic and political system. Historically, the economically dominant position and the relative size of the Chinese triggered Malays' perception of economic threat, which created actual ethnic competition over scarce resources. Furthermore, the Malays' political power and affirmative actions by the state to protect Malay's and other indigenous ethnic groups' superiority generates a political threat to the Chinese and Indians. This ethnic competition process produces ethnic exclusionism and induces perceived or real threats and

consequently fosters bonding social capital and particularised trust. On the other hand, the contact theory's claims are also crucial. Contacts between inter-ethnic groups mitigate prejudice and perceived threat and create trust. Many empirical studies conducted in the Malaysian context have shown that communication and interaction between Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups improve inter-ethnic socialisation in general. It is expected that members of co-ethnics who form contacts in optimal conditions have more positive attitudes towards others. For optimal conditions, there should not be a feeling of superiority among the participants, a hierarchy, socio-economic inequalities, or a force to violate cultural or religious norms in the first place. Once the contact is set up, it is expected that the perceived threat will fade out, and trust will increase between the ethnic groups as a whole.

2.6 Significance of the Study

The focal point of the present study is to examine the impact of ethnic diversity in Malaysian society on social capital, or to put it more clearly, to analyse the level of trust and intergroup relations between Malays, Chinese and Indians. The concept of social capital has been subjected to a number of studies in both the political science and sociology field in different parts of the world, predominantly in western Europe and the US. The relationship between ethnic diversity and social capital began to be widely studied after Putnam's (2007) claim that ethnic diversity is negatively correlated with the trust level of individuals and the social solidarity of a community. Although Malaysia comprises many different ethnic groups with three major races and ongoing debates on social solidarity and integration problems, the relationship between ethnic diversity and social capital has not been investigated extensively in the Malaysian context.

Malaysia is a unique case in comparison with western European countries or the US because, in those countries, the dominant ethnic group has both economic and political

power. In Malaysia, however, the Malays are the dominant ethnic group in terms of political power whereas the biggest minority group, the Chinese have leading the economic system. Therefore, the social structure and ethnic relations in Malaysia are very different from any western European cases. As a result, two issues make this current research particularly important: first, the limited number of studies focusing on social capital in the Malaysian context so far; and second, Malaysia has particular importance in the social sciences literature because of its peculiar social structure.

Another point related to the methodology is that the literature on social capital overwhelmingly comprises of quantitative studies because secondary data usage is widely prevalent. Nevertheless, secondary data, particularly surveys such as the World Values Survey and the Asian Barometer, embody different country contexts and overlook the special characteristics of each particular country. A quantitative methodology is viewed more suitable for testing the relationship between two different variables but it does not provide the necessary information about the underlying reasons for a social phenomenon.

From the researcher's perspective, Malaysia was at first sight, a well-integrated society consisting of more than three main ethnic groups without any civil war, violence or armed conflict. Over time, however, it did not take long for me to realise that most of the Malays, Indians and Chinese are grouped within their respective ethnicities, and each ethnic group in Kuala Lumpur has somewhat separate lives without interacting with the others meaningfully. This realisation sparked the researcher's interest on this issue. This study was therefore designed to provide a deeper understanding of the ethnic diversity and social capital relations in Malaysian society. So, this present study is a contribution to the sociology literature on social capital by extending our knowledge of the bridging and bonding social capital in the Malaysian context at the individual and the macro level.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

Despite the fact that most of the studies on social capital have applied quantitative methods, the qualitative method is preferred for the present study. Firstly, as Dudwick *et al*. (2006) have pointed out, quantitative methods generally refer to a standardised questionnaire applied to respondents, who are selected through various sampling techniques, which makes the results generalizable, comparable and representative. The feature of transformability to the numeric form of variables gives the opportunity to apply the same questionnaire in different areas; this is why qualitative methods are considered to be empirically accurate, fair and objective. Nevertheless, the strength of quantitative methods can also be a weakness because especially in social sciences it is very challenging to turn certain concepts – in this case, identities, trustworthiness or the perceptions, into numerical forms (Dudwick *et al*., 2006). Scholars have questioned the use of quantitative methods in analysing social capital as follows.

> …if your friends A, B, and C all know each other, this indicates that this group is well 'bonded' in Putnam's terms. However, in order to assess whether ties are densely connected or not, it is necessary to collect detailed network information on a wide number of friends and contacts, and this is rarely done within representative national surveys. The British Household Panel Survey, for instance, asks respondents to list their three closest friends, but because it does not ask whether these friends know each other, it is not possible to determine how well bonded, and densely tied they are. (Li *et al*., 2003, p.500)

The same problem also occurs especially when using secondary data which is widely common in social capital studies. The passive position of a researcher obliges him/her to use the data as it is. The generalised trust question in World Values Survey, for example, is designed to understand the absence or existence of trust in that community, but further questions, such as "Why do people not trust each other?" or "Which specific situations affect their level of trust?" remain unanswered.

Moreover, quantitative methods ignore the local contexts where respondents live (Dudwick *et al*., 2006). In this regard, qualitative methods using open-ended questions provide the researcher greater insights into the individuals' understanding and experiences shaped the by local community which the quantitative research may fail to notice. Therefore, qualitative methods are considered as more flexible than quantitative methods to explore the novel and unexpected findings in a context (Bryman, 1984, p. 77-78). As a result, this style "tilts the balance of power and expertise away from the researcher toward respondents and community members" (Dudwick *et al*., 2006).

For data collection, semi-structured in-depth interview technique was chosen. As Boyce and Neale (2006) points out, in-depth interviews are intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to investigate their point of view about a particular issue.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews particularly is deemed as more suitable to understand the real thoughts and feelings of respondents because, for the present study, in-depth conversations permit a deeper exploration for the bonding and bridging social capital generation connected with inter-ethnic relations in the Malaysian society (*see also* Bryman, 2006).

The research focused on the urban Malaysia, particularly Kuala Lumpur. The primary reason for choosing Kuala Lumpur as the research area was its multi-ethnic and multi-religious features. In this regard, the city serves a unique sample characteristic across Malaysia. In terms of distribution of the population, the rate of the Malays and the Chinese is almost equal in Kuala Lumpur, 44.7% and 43.2% respectively[4]; also, there are more

[4] 2010, Population and Housing Census of Malaysia

Indians than from the country average. As a result, Kuala Lumpur is an appropriate place to examine inter-ethnic relations and connections between Malaysians in an urban setting.

In the current research, 21 in-depth interviews were conducted. All respondents were from three main ethnic groups, namely Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Although the number of the interviews is within the average of qualitative studies sample range, the attempts to increase the research extent remained inconclusive because only a few (about 21) of the academics from two public universities were willing to participate in the study. Each ethnic group was represented by 7 interviewees. The reason for the equal representation for each ethnic group is to arrive at impartial results based on equal opportunities to each ethnic group to explicate their thoughts, feelings and share their experiences with the researcher.

Since the researcher is an international student and the ethnic relations in Malaysia is viewed as a sensitive issue, purposive sampling, which is also known as selective sampling, and snowball sampling techniques were utilised for selecting the participants. The main reason for applying the purposive sampling was to provide in-depth and detailed information about the research subject. Bryman (2006) explains what the purposive sampling technique as follows.

> Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling. The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants strategically so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed. (p.418)

As Bryman (2006) pointed out, in the purposive sampling method, the participants are selected not randomly but in accordance with the research objectives and the criteria in order to provide a more in-depth understanding for the investigated research area. Therefore, in this research, the sampling selection criteria were set as;

(i) representing the middle class,

(ii) living in urban Malaysia,

(iii) working as a professional

(iv) belonging to one of the main ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely, Malay, Chinese and Indian,

(v) having frequent interactions with the members of other ethnic groups in their workplaces

(vi) express himself/herself in English fluently

As a result, in order to represent these criteria, the participants were selected from the academics' realm who are working as lecturers in universities. More specifically, public universities were chosen as the sampling area, firstly, because of their prosperous ethnic composition, which is very suitable for the present study. Secondly, the public universities were more convenient for reaching the potential informants by using snowball sampling technique. For that reason, two public universities located in Kuala Lumpur, which are the University of Malaya (UM) and the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) were selected.

Purposive sampling is the most cost and time-effective sampling method, but on the other hand, it highly depends on the personal judgements of the researcher who is conducting the research (Bryman, 2006). For that reason, this type of sampling technique can also contain different kinds of selection bias elements. Under the 3.5.1 Validity subtitle, the potential biases that can affect the findings of the study and the researcher's strategy to avoid them will be discussed.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

In the initial stages of my study, I managed to reach some of the participants with the help of my supervisors and interviewees. Along with the interviewees whom I gained through snowball sampling, I also tried to diversify the range of sample group of the research by sending emails to the lecturers in different departments who are working at

the University of Malaya. Over 40 emails were sent, only ten of them responded, and only half of the respondents were available for the interview. This experience also showed that without using snowball sampling technique and the help of my supervisors it would have been rather challenging to finish the data collection process.

The participants in the International Islamic University were also found through using snowball sampling. My personal contact is a Professor in the IIUM and through her I managed to reach out to five Malay respondents from five different departments. The rest of the Malay respondents are lecturers at the University of Malaya.

3.3 Selection of the Participants

The overview of the interviewees' characteristics can be found in Table 3.1. All of the them belong to either middle or upper-middle class, and they have the highest education level, namely PhD with one exception. Each ethnic group was represented by seven participants. Religious affiliations were also considered as a variable, therefore I looked for each ethnic group-religion category specifically. Since Christians have a considerable proportion among Chinese Malaysians, Christian-Chinese were deemed as another category from the Buddhists-Chinese who are the majority of the Chinese Malaysians.

Table 3.1 The list of Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristics	Number
Age	
Minimum	31
Maximum	73
Ethnicity	
Chinese	7
Indian	7
Malay	7
Gender	
Female	12
Male	9
Religion	
Buddhist	3
Christian	3
Hindu	7
Muslim	7
None	1
Socioeconomic Status	
Middle Class	15
Upper-Middle Class	6
Level of Education	
Master's Degree	1
Doctorate Degree	20

The University of Malaya has a very multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment, whereas IIUM has a multi-ethnic but mono-religious environment. In both universities, multi-ethnic relations vary across vertical and horizontal interactions. Therefore, academicians have bilateral inter-ethnic interactions between each other. Besides, they have actively in relation with administrative assistant and other office clerks within their departments and university. Besides, their English proficiency makes it easier for them to contact with international students and academicians; therefore, they have vast experiences to share about the obstacles they have had in their inter-ethnic relations.

Regarding the participants, for the UM lecturers, I have respondents from eleven different faculties including the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Business and Economics, Institute of China Studies and Centre for the Initiation of Talent and Industrial Training. I also did interviews with lecturers in IIUM from five different departments in the Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Reveal Knowledge.

3.4 Demographic Information of the Participants

In this part, the demographic characteristics of the participants are revealed in order to provide a deeper understanding for the research. Therefore, the independent variables which are gender, age, marital status, educational background, ethnic denomination, religious affinity, language preference and the subjective socioeconomic status of the participants are examined.

3.4.1 Gender

As the first independent variable, the number participants' gender revealed in Table 1.2.

Table 3.2 Gender Distribution of the Research Participants

	Female	Male	Total
Malay	5	2	7
Chinese	3	4	7
Indian	4	3	7
Total	12	9	21

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

In the present research, as Table 1.2 shows, the number of female participants (12) outnumbers the male participants (9). All the participants (21) are working adults at the University of Malaya and the International Islamic University of Malaysia.

3.4.2 Age

The median age of the participants is 46.95. The vast majority of the participants are middle-aged adults, in the range of 40-55 ages. There are only four participants who are in their 30s and two participants who are above 55. (See Appendix A for the detailed list of the age of the participants).

3.4.3 Marital Status

When the marital status of the participants is examined, two thirds (14) of the participants are married while 7 of them are single.

3.4.4 Educational Background

The sample group of the research is middle and upper-middle class professionals who are working at the University of Malaya and the International Islamic University of Malaysia as lecturers. Therefore, the vast majority of the participants have a PhD degree, whilst only one respondent has a master's degree as the highest educational status.

3.4.5 Ethnic Denomination

There are seven participants from each of the three main ethnic groups; seven Chinese, seven Indian and seven Malay informants participated in this research.

3.4.6 Religious Affinity

The participants expressed five different religious affinities. As Table 1.3 illustrates below, all the Indian participants are Hindu, and all the Malay participants are Muslim, whereas the religious affinity of the Chinese varies; three of them are Christian, three of them are Buddhist and one of them described himself as not having a particular religious affiliation.

Table 3.3 Religious Affinity of the Participants

	Chinese	Indian	Malay
Muslim	-	-	7
Hindu	-	7	-
Christian	3	-	-
Buddhist	3	-	-
None	1	-	-
Total	7	7	7

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

3.4.7 Language Preference in Daily Life

According to the responses of the participants, all of them are able to speak Malay either fluently or in moderate level. However, as Table 1.4 below reveals, the majority of the non-Malay participants commonly use English in their daily life conversations. Therefore, it can be said that English is more popular than the Malay language among the non-Malay participants.

Table 3.4 Distribution of the Most Preferred Language in Daily Life of the Participants

	English	Malay	Tamil	Cantonese	Mandarin
Chinese	4	2	-	1	4
Indian	6	1	5	1	-
Malay	2	7	-	-	-
Total	12	10	5	2	4

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

As a compelling case, for almost all of the Indian respondents, English is a part of their daily life. Furthermore, some of them prefer using only English rather than their ethnic language e.g. “Tamil” or the national language “Bahasa Malaysia”. Additionally, an Indian participant responded that she speaks Cantonese in her daily life because her mother is a Cantonese speaking Chinese Malaysian.

The data also reveals that among all three ethnic groups, Malay participants are the least English-speaking in daily life among all participants. They prefer mostly to speak the Malay language in their daily life.

3.4.8 Subjective Socioeconomic Status

Among the participants, only 6 of them (out of 21) considered themselves in the upper-middle class, but the remaining 15 affiliated with the middle-class.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity, or *trustworthiness* as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests, are difficult criteria to fulfil for the qualitative studies because social life and circumstances are not stable and there is no absolute single truth in social life unlike positivist epistemology's point of view (Bryman, 2012; p.390). Besides, the scope of the qualitative studies and the sample numbers are rather limited to generalise the findings as compared to quantitative studies (Bryman, 2012; p.390). For that reason, validity and reliability are difficult requirements to fulfil for the present study or any qualitative research.

3.5.1 Validity

Creswell (2007)'s recommendations were followed to enhance the validity and the rigour of the study. As he suggests, at least two procedures should be conducted to accomplish credible qualitative research (p. 208).

Firstly, triangulation is a widely preferred technique to confirm the findings of a qualitative study. It refers to the cross-checking of the results of the research with other data source. For that reason, in the present research, secondary data were used for the triangulation technique. Three different kinds of sources, World Values Survey (Wave 6) (WVS) and the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) and Merdeka Centre's poll results were

used to check the findings of the research. WVS data have already an open-access for users, but Asian Barometer Survey data are limitedly accessible; therefore, the data was requested from the Asian Barometer Program Manager. As a local data provider, Merdeka Centre's polls and statistics were used to analyse the ethnic relations at the macro level in the Malaysian society.

World Values Survey has been researching in more than 100 countries since 1981. Wave 6 is the last survey of the organisation conducted between 2010 and 2014. In Malaysia, 1300 participants attended this survey from different states of the country. Asian Barometer Survey, on the other hand, only focuses on 14 Asian countries; therefore, it has some questions peculiar to Asian contexts such as questions about the relationship with China, or ASEAN. The data was gathered in 2014 in Malaysia with some 1200 respondents. Lastly, Merdeka Centre is a local opinion research firm doing surveys for particular country-level issues in Malaysia.

In addition to the secondary data, relevant previous academic works were consulted to elucidate or compare the results of this research.

Secondly, external audits were a part of this research. The supervisors of the researcher were consulted throughout the research and the data analysis processes; they also examined the accuracy of the findings. While assessing the process, they checked how much the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the results, as Creswell (2007) suggests for the validity of the research.

Finally, Creswell (2007) advises that the biases of the researcher should be clarified in order to provide a better understanding to the reader. The biases that can affect the research finding should be examined in two sections, first the researcher's biases, and second, biases can be arisen as a result of the sampling selection techniques.

3.5.1.1 Researcher's Bias

As an international postgraduate student, I believe that it is a positive feature to be an outsider researcher examining the Malaysian society because I can be less under the influence of certain stereotypes and prejudices embodied in inter-ethnic relations of Malaysians that may affect the analysis of the research findings. Besides, not having a sense of belonging to any particular ethnic group focused on in this research is another strength because ethnic affinities might damage the objectivity of the researcher, particularly for this kind of research focusing on ethnic relations.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the researcher and the study bear the Eurocentric perspective by accepting that an active civil society is crucial in essence with a liberal democratic model. From this point of view, individuals –rather than families or social groups– active civil society and active participation to the democratic processes –rather than robust and paternalist state control over society– and pluralistic, participatory democratic states –rather than autocratic states– are preferred. The researcher in the current study also agreed on these preferences.

3.5.1.2 Selection Bias

As Bryman (2006) pointed out, purposive sampling is a non-probability sample technique which he explained it as "some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others." (p. 187). For that reason, focusing on the academicians working on public universities located in Kuala Lumpur might have some bias elements. In this subtitle, the potential biases that can influence the result of the study were introduced.

First of all, academicians are not a typical occupation category representing the middle-class people in Malaysian society. Nevertheless, considering the main sampling group of the present study, namely urban middle-class professionals, is the broadest

category within the population of Malaysia, the researcher decided to focus on only a specific professional group.

Secondly, public and private universities have different ethnic compositions in Malaysia. Whereas in public universities, the majority of academicians and administrative staff are Bumiputera-origin, in private universities, the ethnic composition is in favour of non-Bumiputera Malaysians. For that reason, the ethnic composition of the workplaces can influence the informants' perspective on interethnic relations.

Lastly, participants voluntarily involved in the research. Therefore, it can be asserted that informants who were willing to participate in the study would be more openminded in terms of interethnic relations, and positive towards others from different ethnic groups. Therefore, according to their perspective, they could constitute a self-selection process. It should also be noted that since in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, involvement in research is based on the voluntary participation the selection bias derived from the participants' self-selection process cannot be avoidable.

3.5.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the repeatability of a quantitative study (Bryman, 2012, p. 46). However, there has been ongoing discussions among qualitative researchers whether the reliability criterion can be applied to the qualitative studies because the social life is in a constant change and therefore, qualitative studies cannot be repeated (Bryman, 2012). Nevertheless, reliability is a crucial category for the quality of a research. Bearing in mind the different characteristics of quantitative and qualitative studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests "dependability" to distinguish the reliability criteria for qualitative studies. For them, dependability indicates the fact that if other researchers have agreed on the collected data, the results are consistent and dependable (Merriam, 2002, p. 28).

Therefore, the consistency of the data can be demonstrated in the data analysis process. The process of the data analysis is discussed below.

3.6 Data Analysis

In the current research, content analysis was used to understand the social capital production and ethnic relations in Malaysia. Content analysis was developed firstly for the quantitative methodology, but in the process, it has started to be widely used in the qualitative methodology in a different way. As Graneheim *et al*. (2017) explains;

> The content analysis focuses on subject and context and emphasises variation (e.g. similarities within and differences between parts of the text). It offers opportunities to analyse manifest and descriptive content as well as latent and interpretative content.

Data collection process was conducted between June 2018 and August 2018. It took seven weeks in total to finish 21 interviews. Interviews conducted with the permission of the participants were recorded using a digital audio recorder, except the two interviews that the researcher was not allowed to record. In the following step, recordings were uploaded to the computer and transcribed by the researcher herself. Transcribing own interviews is rather beneficial because the transcription process reinforces the comprehension of the data.

After transcription, documents were reviewed, and for analysing the data obtained through interviews they were imported into ATLAS.ti which is a software designed for qualitative data analysis. In the initial phases of data analysis, line-by-line coding was conducted. At this step, codes were not preconceived categories, instead, each code was created by defining the data itself. After line-by-line coding, codes organised into distinct categories using the guideline of the semi-structured interview questions were prepared in parallel to research questions. In this early stage, codes grouped to compare and

contrast with each other, therefore the categories are divided into subcategories as well as merged under themes.

In content analysis, categories refer to "things, opinions, attitudes, perceptions and experiences" as Granaheim (2017) states. The first categories were still too broad to analyse, and they served as a guideline for the next step. When the general categories are created — such as micro and macro level categories for social capital production, the researcher scrutinised the experiences of the participants that was shared in the interviews so that similar and different experiences could be grouped, and each group could be categorised. At this stage, the researcher created sub-categories to define and identify shared and common characteristics of these opinions and experiences.

After that, the researcher looked for a meaningful pattern and relation between categories, in other words, themes that bring different categories together in a meaningful way. As defined by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) themes express an underlying meaning, or a latent content that can be found in two or more categories. When searching for meaningful patterns and relations, the theoretical framework was revisited to see how the results are compatible with the analytical framework to modify in light of new findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In qualitative studies, informants are the primary source of information. There are some ethical issues to protect the participants' rights that can be categorised into three sections, namely, informed consent procedures, deception or covert activities and confidentiality towards the participants (Creswell, 2007). As Creswell (2007) stated the researcher has to protect the anonymity of the participants, for that reason, the informants were randomly given numbers for each from 1 to 21 to provide the confidentiality of their

identity, but in addition to these numbers, the ethnic affiliation and their gender were also revealed because both categories are significant independent variables in this research.

Secondly, each participant was informed about the subject matter of the research and the content of the interview because the subject matter is considered as a sensitive issue in Malaysian society; therefore, participants may decline to be a part of the research as an informant. Participants were sent an email first, and before starting the interview the questions and reservations related to the interview or confidentiality of the informants were responded, the interviews did not begin without any approval of the participants. In a couple of cases, the interviews were conducted without prior notice of the informants. In those cases, they were given informants sheets explaining the details of the interview and the research problem; and the same with the previous cases, interviews started only after they approved to participate in the research.

Lastly, for the confidentiality of the informants, the participants were assured that their identities and the voice records would be kept as private data of the researcher. The records were held in the researcher's private password-laptop. The data was only accessed by the researcher herself. The data will be destroyed after five years.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

This chapter focus on the components of social capital namely the level of trust and participation in civic life or in other words intergroup contact with non-ethnics in Malaysian society. The chapter consists of two main parts. The first section examines the demographic characteristics of the participants of the present study compared to the World Values Survey (WVS hereafter) (2016) and the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS hereafter) (2014) results in terms of the respondents' trust level and their participation in civic life.

In the second section, the dynamics of the trust-building process, and the impact of meaningful contact with out-group member on the inter-ethnic interactions of non-ethnics are examined based on the experiences of the participants of this research. The data were analysed using the content and interpretive qualitative analyses.

As the contact theory suggests, a higher level of positive and cooperative contact with out-groups in a society lessens the level of prejudices and induce empathy towards them while helping to build social trust (Allport, 1954). Besides, individuals who are having good experiences in their relationships with others generalise their experiences to the whole social group that eventually brings about a more positive effect than one-on-one experiences (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Therefore, how the interactions with other ethnic groups affect their trust level and the participants' perspectives, and what are the contexts of interactions and their consequences are the main focus of the second section.

4.1 The Impact of Individual Characteristics on Building Trust and Intergroup Contact

The high level of trust between members of diverse social groups and intergroup contact networks created by prolonged interactions provide information flow about the

'other' across different parts of the society, also forms common norms and shared values, and the bridging social capital. Trust is considered as a compositional element of the social capital concept by Putnam, whereas for Fukuyama, it is equivalent of social capital, and for Lin, they are mutually dependent to each other (Son & Feng, 2018). In this study, trust is viewed as a compositional element of social capital following Putnam's definition. Another crucial component of bridging social capital is the participation in civic life, specifically, having links or contacts with the out-group members which is significant because civic engagement activities provide intergroup interactions, and therefore it weakens the taboos or prejudices against the members of an out-group while bridging the trust deficit. Hence, it seems plausible to give special attention to the trust level of the participants of the current research and their participation level in civic life –particularly in formal organisations–in comparison to the data on Malaysia from WVS and the ABS.

To examine the trust level, the informants for this study were asked, "In general, can you trust another Malaysian irrespective of race or religion?", and to assess the level of civic engagement, they were asked, "Are you currently a member of any social or non-profit or any professional/business organisations as a volunteer?" and, "In the last year, how many times have you attended or helped out at a voluntary organisation; such as a school, hospital, charity etc.?". Data from these questions were analysed according to age, gender, education levels, socioeconomic class, ethnicity and religious denomination of the participants.

4.1.1 Age and Gender Cohort

In this research, (*see* Table 3.1) only four of the 21 interviewees stated that they needed to be careful when they were dealing with others, and three of them were female participants. The rest of the participants stated that they had no issues with trusting other Malaysians.

Table 4.1 Participants who need to be careful in their relations with others

	Need to be careful	Participants
Chinese	1	P19 (M)
Indian	-	-
Malay	3	P4 (F), P12 (F), P14 (F)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

While some of them claimed to have some reservations in trusting other Malaysians or needing time to trust them (Participant-7), there were some participants who could trust other Malaysians without any hesitation (Participant-11).

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): You have to judge him by his actions. If he promises to do something for you and do it. [But] you have to do this enough time, not once. [It should be a] pattern of behaviour.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): I do have a very high level of trust. On the streets, I find Malaysians trustworthy. (…) If I have to leave a bag at the train station for a while because I need to get a ticket, if I see a fellow Malaysian, in general, I personally feel confident to ask, "Do you mind taking care of my bag and I need to go to the toilet?" or something like that.

When the age and gender characteristics of the respondents in the WVS (2014) are analysed, it is clear that neither age nor gender is a significant determinant (Table 3.2 and 3.3). Although the age of the respondents of the WVS is positively correlated with the trust level —senior respondents have a higher level of trust comparing to the younger respondents— and female respondents have less trust towards others, these differences are at a very small scale, the overwhelming majority stated that they needed to be careful when dealing with others. The trends provided by the WVS data (2014) is consistent with the ABS (2016) results. In this regard, there is no conflicting results between the WVS (2014) results and the findings of the present research.

Table 4.2 Most people can be trusted (by age cohort)

	Age			Total
	Up to 29	30-49	50 more	
Most people can be trusted	7.50%	8.30%	10.10%	8.50%
Need to be careful	92.50%	91.70%	89.90%	91.50%
Total respondents	360	613	327	1300

Source: World Values Survey, 2014

Table 4.3 Most people can be trusted (by gender cohort)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Most people can be trusted	9.40%	7.60%	8.50%
Need to be careful	90.60%	92.40%	91.50%
Number of total respondents	668	632	1300

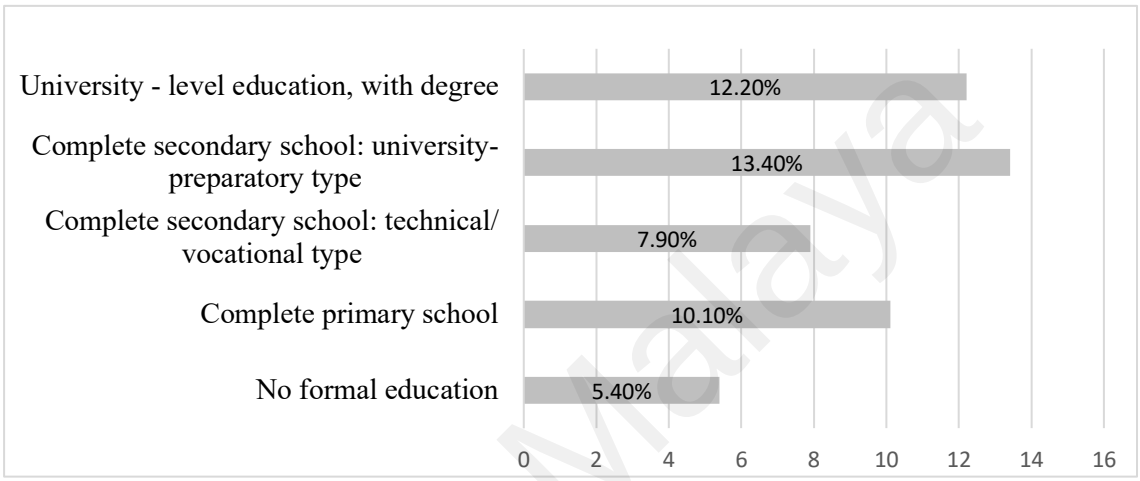
Source: World Values Survey, 2014

When participation in civic life and membership in organisations of the participants of the present study are examined, it is clear that the female participants (10 out of 12) are more actively involved in civic life compared to the male participants (5 out of 9). Similarly, WVS (2014) results indicate that even though membership in certain civic organisations, such as religious associations and political parties, number of male respondents are bigger than females, in professional organisations and charitable organisations female respondents are more actively involved in these organisations compared to males. More importantly, the involvement of female participation in these organisation is positively correlated with their socioeconomic status.

4.1.2 Education Cohort

All of the informants who participated in this study have high postgraduate level of education; for that reason, the level of trust or participation in civic life cannot be compared across different education levels. On the other hand, when comparing the same education level responses between the WVS and the present study, the secondary data reveals (WVS, 2014) that even the highest level of education which is the degree holders'

trust rate (12.20%) is substantially lower than the trust level of the interviewees of the present study (81%). Besides, although the trust level among the lower education levels are less than the higher ones, it does not increase gradually in accordance with the education level (Figure, 3.1). Therefore, there is not a positive correlation between the trust level and the education level according to the WVS findings.



Source: World Values Survey, 2014

Figure 4.1 Trust and Educational Background in Malaysia

Regarding participation in civic life, respondents of the WVS who have higher levels of education are more actively involved in civil society organisations, such as labour unions or charitable organisations (WVS, 2014). On the other hand, more than two-thirds of the participants (15) of the present study are actively or inactively part of a civic organisation, particularly academic organisations (*see* Table 3.4), even though some of them are mono-ethnic and mono-religious ones of which consisting only the members of an ethnic or religious group, such as Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) or Majlis Perunding Wanita Islam Malaysia (MPWIM).

Table 4.4 List of Organisations Mentioned by the Participants

Participants	**Number of Participants Involved in Civic Life**	**Type of Organisations**	
Malay	5	Academic	5 (Multi-ethnic)
		NGO	2 (Multi-ethnic)
Chinese	4	Academic	3 (2 Multi-ethnic, 1 mono-ethnic)
		NGO	1 (Multi-ethnic)
		Self-organised Charity	1 (Multi-ethnic)
Indian	6	Academic	3 (2 Multi-ethnic, 1 mono-ethnic)
		NGO	1 (Multi-ethnic)
		Self-organised Charity	2 (Multi-ethnic)
Total	15	Academic	11 (9 Multi-ethnic, 2 mono-ethnic)
		NGO	4 (Multi-ethnic)
		Self-organised Charity	3 (Multi-ethnic)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Therefore, as the data of the present study reveals, the number of informants' membership and participation in civic organisations are considerably high compared with the WVS (2014) findings of the rate of active membership in diverse organisations in Malaysian society (*see* Table 3.5).

Table 4.5 The Percentage of Active Membership in Malaysian Organisations

Type of Organisation	**Active Membership Percentage**
Religious Org.	14.5%
Sport or Recreational Org.	6.5%
Art, Music and Educational Org.	4.5%
Labour Unions	6.2%
Political Parties	4.6%
Environmental Org.	3.1%
Professional Org.	2.2%
Humanitarian and Charitable Org.	4.8%
Consumer Org.	2.0%
Self-help Group and Mutual Aid Org.	3.8%
Other Org.	2.0%

Source: World Values Survey, 2014

4.1.3 Socioeconomic Class Cohort

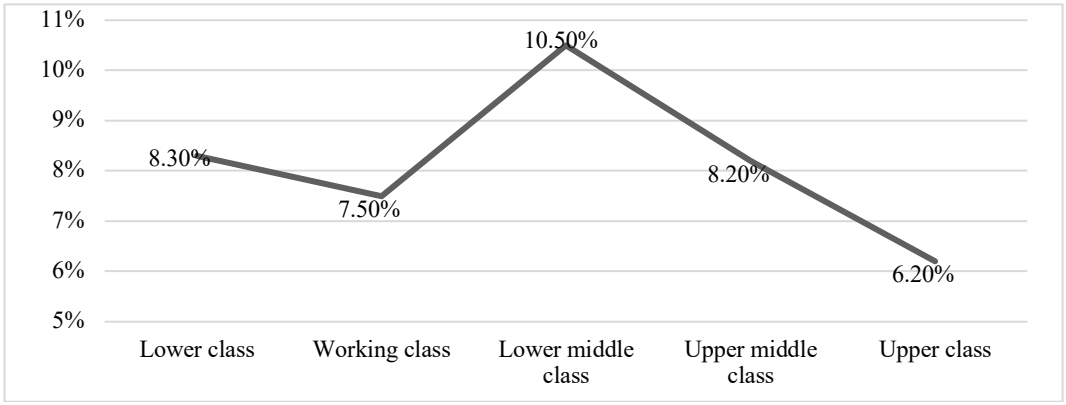
The sample group of this study is middle-class professionals; however, some of the participants (6 out of 21) described themselves as upper-middle-class members. In terms of subjective socio-economic class affiliation, only one upper-middle-class (Participant-14, Female, Malay) participant stated that she needed to be careful when dealing with other Malaysians. Similarly, with the exception of only one participant (Participant-7, Male, Chinese), the remaining upper-middle class members reported active membership in non-governmental organisations. As a result, considering the responses of the participants, from the subjective socioeconomic-class identity perspective, it can be said that the participants who see themselves as a part of upper-middle-class have a higher level of trust, and they are more an actively involved the civic life comparing with the middle-class participants (Table 3.6).

Table 4.6 Trust and Participation in Civic Life According to Socioeconomic Classes

	Subjective Socioeconomic Class	
	Middle-class	Upper-Middle Class
Can trust another Malaysian	80%	83%
Participation in Civic Life	66%	83%
Total	15	6

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

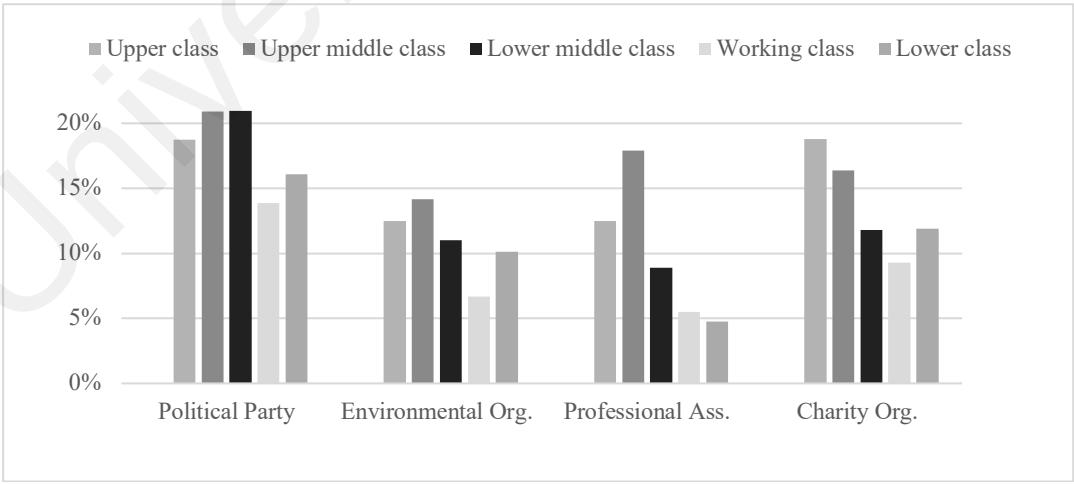
On the other hand, according to data from the WVS (2014), the trust level and socioeconomic status of the respondents (Figure 3.2) does not have a meaningful negative or positive relationship with the socioeconomic classes. Even more, contrary to expectations, the upper class has the lowest trust level (6.20%) while the lower-middle class has the highest level (10.50%).



Source: World Values Survey, 2014

Figure 4.2 Most People can be Trusted by Socioeconomic Class Cohort

When the socioeconomic class and participation in civic life are examined by using the WVS (2014) data, upper-middle class and upper-class members are more actively involved in civic organisations in comparison with other class members (*see* Figure 3.3 below). This trend reveals that increasing wellbeing of the individuals has a positive impact on the willingness to participate in civic life and acquire membership in civic organisations. Besides, when the civic organisation preference of the Malaysians is examined, political party affiliations are far more popular than professional associations, charity organisations or others.



Source: World Values Survey, 2014

Figure 4.3 Membership to organisations and socioeconomic class

In comparing the type of organisations mentioned by the participants in the present research compared with the WVS (2014) data, political party membership was not

mentioned by the participants, instead academic/professional and charity organisations were the most mentioned responses, respectively. Based on these results, it can be argued that the education level of the participants played a decisive role in their choice of preferred civic organisation.

4.1.4 Ethnicity Cohort

Ethnicity is one of the significant independent variables in this study. Although it is difficult to generalise the participants' trust level or participation in civic life to their ethnic identities, the spectrum of the participants' responses is revealed to depict the general picture.

Firstly, among the Malay participants, three of them expressed their concerns about trusting other Malaysians; therefore, they are categorised as having low-level social trust. This result suggests that, even though some of the Malay participants have a very high level of trust towards non-ethnics (Participant-16 or Participant-21 for instance), in comparison to the Chinese and Indian informants, Malay participants had a lower level of trust in general.

On the other hand, although the trust levels of the Chinese and Indian informants are relatively high compared with Malays, the Chinese are the least inclined in participating in formal or informal civic life activities (4 out of 7) among others. As a result, these results indicate that in both the trust level and participation in civic life categories, Indians revealed a higher level of trust and civic life participation rate than the Chinese and Malay informants.

Analysing the same aspects in the WVS (2014) data set, there is not a consistent trend with the findings of the present research. The Chinese distinguished from the rest with

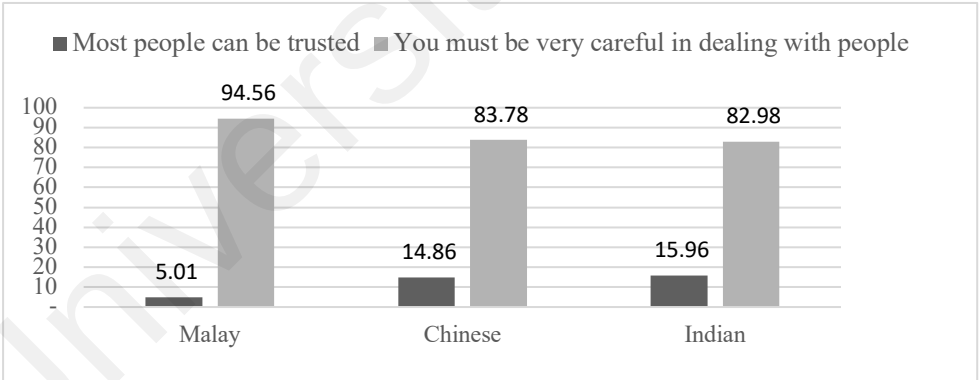
the lowest level of trust, which is 6%, while the rate for Indians and Malays is 8% and 9.5%, respectively (*see* Table 3.7).

Table 4.7 Most people can be trusted (by ethnicity cohort)

	Ethnicity			Total
	Indian	Chinese	Malay	
Most people can be trusted	8.00%	6.00%	9.50%	8.50%
Need to be careful	92.00%	94.00%	90.50%	91.50%
Total respondents	100	319	881	1300

Source: World Values Survey, 2014

Nevertheless, the data of the ABS (2016) are in line with the research findings. According to the ABS (2016), Indians have the highest level of trust (15.96%), whereas the Malays have the lowest (5.01%) (*see* Figure 3.4). Such a significant difference between the WVS and the ABS may originate from the time difference namely, when the data was collected.



Source: Asian Barometer, 2016

Figure 4.4 Trust Level of Each Ethnic Group

In terms of participation in civic life and membership to formal organisations, however, as the World Values Survey (2014) suggests, Malays have the highest rate of active and passive memberships in comparison to Indians and the Chinese, even though the number of memberships is not very high.

Overall, these results indicate that even though the level of trust is not too high among the Malay participants, they are actively part of civic life —particularly in professional organisations. Similarly, the trust level of the Chinese is found relatively high in this research, nevertheless, civic life participation is lower than the Malay participants. In this regard, these results demonstrate that the high level of trust does not necessarily promote membership or involvement in civic life for the participants of the present study. For that reason, it can be said that the civic organisation in Malaysia have a limited role for trust-building process among non-ethnics comparing with other multi-ethnic social settings, such as schools or workplaces, as Achbari *et al*. (2018) suggest. This finding will be further analysed by focusing on the interviewee's experiences in the second part of this chapter.

4.1.5 Religion Cohort

As the last independent variable, the trust level of the participants examined according to their religious denomination (Table 3.8).

Table 4.8 Religious Affinity of the Trusting Participants

Can you trust another Malaysian?	Religious Affinity	Total Number
Hindu	7	7
Muslim	4	7
Christian	3	3
Buddhist	2	3
None	1	1
Total	17	21

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

As Table 3.8 reveals, all of the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and none religious participants stated that they can trust other Malaysians. Whereas 3 of the Muslims and 1 of the Buddhist informants expressed their concerns to trust other Malaysians.

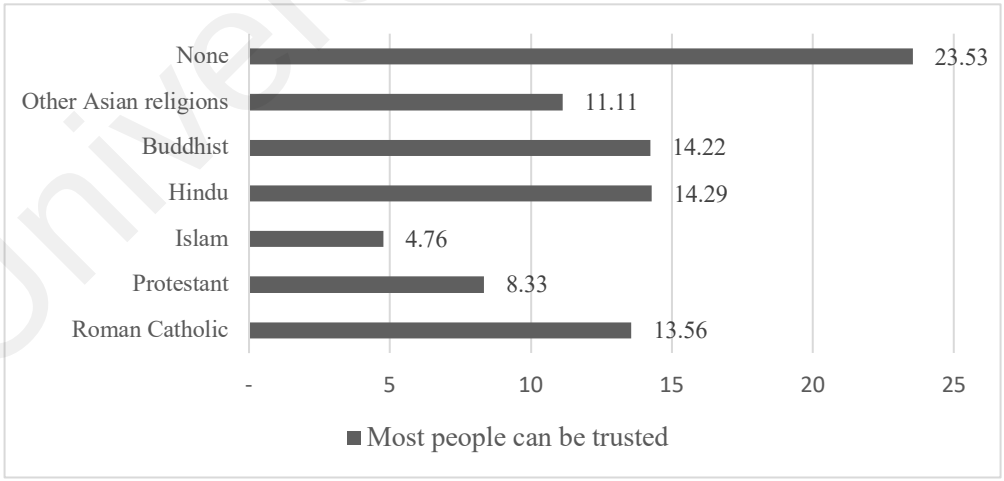
When religious affinity and trust level relationship is compared with the WVS and the ABS data, there are conflicting results. According to the WVS (2014), Muslims and none-religious respondents have a higher level of trust compared with Buddhists, Christians and Hindus, whereas Christians have the lowest (Table 3.9).

Table 4.9 Most people can be trusted (by religion cohort)

	Religion					Total
	Muslim	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	None	
Most people can be trusted	9.30%	6.80%	4.20%	8.10%	10.50%	8.50%
Need to be careful	90.70%	93.20%	95.80%	91.90%	89.50%	91.50%
Total respondents	820	220	95	99	19	1300

Source: World Values Survey, 2014

However, the ABS (2016) data (*see* Figure 3.5) suggests that none-religious, Buddhist and Hindu respondents have a higher level of trust unlike Muslims who have the lowest. Therefore, again the findings of the ABS are inconsistent with the WVS data, but has closer similarities to the present research.



Source: Asian Barometer, 2016

Figure 4.5 Trust Level and Religious Denomination

4.2 Building Trust and the Impact of Intergroup Contact on Social Capital

In this part, the factors affecting the participants' trust level and the perspective about each other will be discussed (*see* Figure 3.6). When the data obtained through the in-depth interviews are examined, it is clear that some of the participants had a higher level of trust, more positive feelings towards non-ethnics, and they were more open to cooperation with them. These participants highlighted that the ethnic identity of a person is less important than the character of that person. Some of the participants reported that they had very close friends from other ethnic groups (P5-Chinese, P6-Indian, P9-Indian, P17-Malay) or they grew up in a highly multi-ethnic environment, so they were acquainted with other ethnic groups' culture (P6-Indian, P7-Chinese, P9-Indian, P10-Indian, P13-Malay, P15-Indian, P16-Indian, P-17 Malay, P18-Chinese, P21-Malay). For that reason, they did not state an intense prejudice towards non-ethnics, and they seemed more open to out-group interaction. Furthermore, it is found that they had less out-group anxiety in comparison to other participants who were less trusting and grew up in a relatively less ethnically diverse environment.

In sum, to understand why some of the participants are highly trusting while the others have issues to trust in other Malaysians, "the meaning of trust according to the participants" was first put under scrutiny. By this way, how they defined the trust concept was investigated. The description of trust is critical because its definition could vary from person to person, therefore, different kind of trust perspective shapes and changes the individual characteristics and the attributes of individuals towards each other and, directly affects their relationships. For example, one can consider kindness as one of the most important trustworthy attitudes while for others, it may be perceived as a tool to deceive other people (the example derived from the interviews).

Secondly, along with the definition of trust according to the participants, to provide further information, it is essential to understand the process of building trust –to say more clearly, the participants' evaluation of the trustworthy behaviours and their expectation in their interactions with other Malaysians to be able to trust them.

Lastly, the social settings or environments in which individuals come together and have interactions, and the activities that enable them to make acquaints with each other, and have meaningful contacts to create bridging social capital are examined. Thus, the relationship between the trust level and the contact with non-ethnics is discussed in the last section.

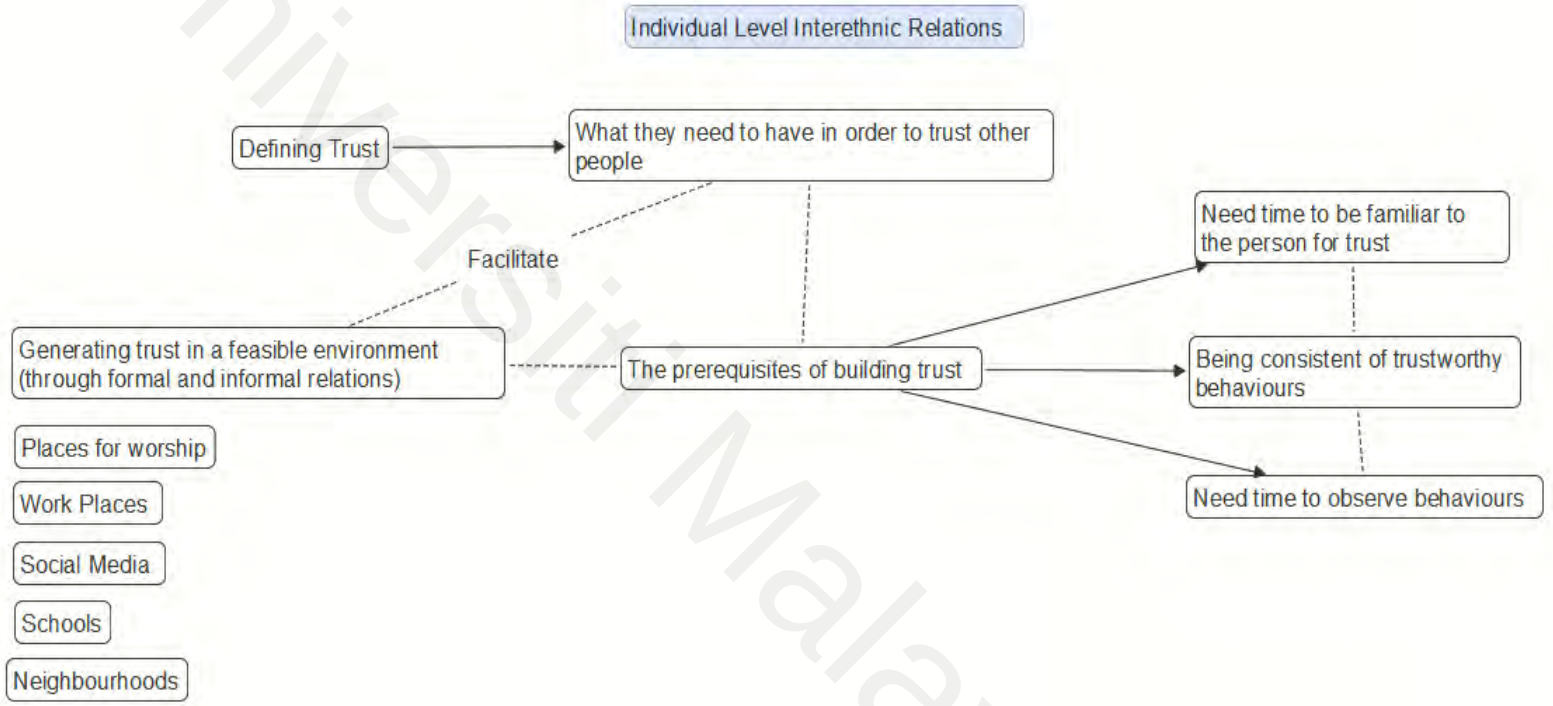


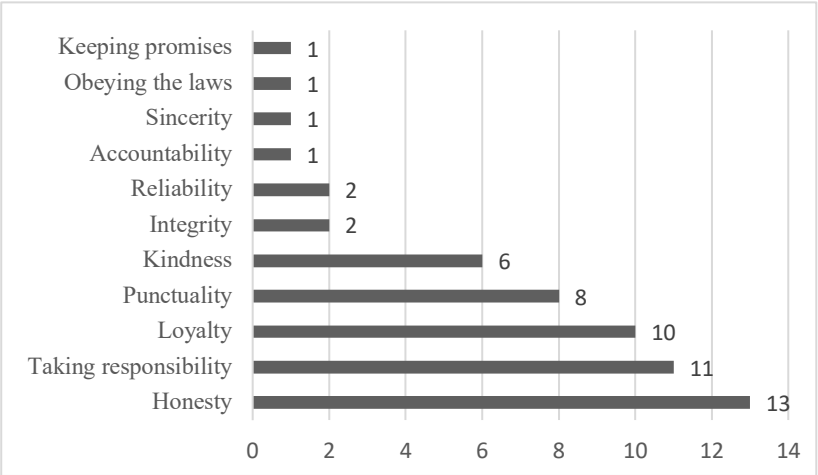
Figure 4.6 Overview of Individual Level Social Capital Process

4.2.1 Defining the Meaning of Trustworthiness

The significance of the trust concept as a component of social capital lies in the fact that it is the inherent attribute of social interactions. As Putnam indicates (1993), trust lubricates social life, and it facilitates the cooperation of people by enabling peaceful and stable social relations (Newton, 2001). Nevertheless, in those communities where the level of trust is too low, the community members need to experience how to trust through social relationships with the help of social interactions and experiences with other members of the community. To understand the process of building the bridging social capital, therefore, the factors that facilitate building trust between people are discussed in this section by analysing the participants' thoughts and experiences.

In the first part of the interviews, participants were asked to define what are the trustworthy behaviours according to their perception. Description of the fundamental trustworthy behaviours provide information about the micro foundations of social trust. To define trustworthiness, the participants were given options to choose that were namely *honesty, taking responsibility, kindness, loyalty, punctuality* and "*others*" section. These options were selected within the most common words using either as synonyms of the word "trustworthy" or related to it in the English language[5]. The participants had the opportunity to choose multiple options. These options enabled the interviewees to describe the concept by expressing their own perceptions.

[5] https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/trustworthy



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 4.7 Responses for Trustworthy Behaviour Definition

As Figure 3.7 reveals, more than half of the interviewees mentioned *honesty* and *taking responsibility* as an indicator of a trustworthy person. Among the Malay participants, the vast majority of them (6 out of 7) selected honesty as an indicator for trustworthiness, whereas Chinese and Indian interviewees mentioned honesty 4 and 3 times, respectively. In terms of *taking responsibility* option, on the other hand, there is no dramatic difference between ethnic groups.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): I think the most important thing is the sense of responsibility because once a person is responsible actually it reflects [the] integrity of the person.
>
> Participant-13 (Malay, Female): To me, the bottom line is simple. If you are able to deliver any type of task given to you, even small it does not matter, that is an indication that we can put some kind of trust to this particular person in the future.

Besides, in smaller numbers, *loyalty, punctuality,* and *kindness* were also chosen to describe trustworthy behaviours. For loyalty and punctuality, number of responses are very close to each other (3 or 4 times for each ethnic group), nevertheless, kindness was mentioned 4 times by the Malay participants whereas it was selected only once by Chinese or Indian informants.

The Malay participants used more definitive concepts (25 concepts in total) for describing trustworthiness in comparison to the Chinese and Indian participants (16 and

17 concepts in total, respectively) that shows that Malay participants had more comprehensive trustworthiness understanding and more expectations for building trust in others.

> Participant-12 (Malay, Female): Honesty, taking responsibility, kindness… You should have all those, not one or two things, but a couple of things.

It is also surprising that certain behaviours were perceived as trustworthy attitudes for some of the participants but the opposite for some others. For example, kindness was mentioned by six of the participants as trustworthy behaviour; whereas there are also some participants who were sceptical about kind behaviours because, as they indicated, *kindness* could be used to deceive other people.

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): Sometimes people say something in front of your face, just to make you feel nice, but behind your back do something else. I think this is very dishonest. I do not trust that person.

Similarly, *punctuality* was also mentioned as the most significant attitude revealing the trustworthiness by one of the Indian participants (P6); nevertheless, there are other participants who did not give the same importance to punctuality. In the same vein, as one of the participants highlighted below, disparate cultural, religious, even educational and socioeconomic backgrounds can generate different mindsets that cause failure to meet the expectations for building the trust feeling.

> Participant-4 (Malay, Female): (Do you think people can be trusted in Malaysian society?) No, because Malaysian society is a complex society, — not only we have differences in terms of race, in terms of religions, we have also differences in terms of world view, in terms of education, in terms of economic background, all these differences determine your personality and your character and your attitudes.

As a result, these findings reveal that some of the participants had various trustworthiness understandings and different expectations for building trust. When the expectations do not match or satisfied because of different trustworthiness understanding, building trust among these people can be challenging.

4.2.2 Other Requirements for Building Trust

Along with the given options to the participants, their answers for the "*others*" section need particular attention which varied from *integrity, reliability, accountability, sincerity*, *obeying the laws* to *keeping promises*. For example, one of the Indian participants highlighted integrity and keeping promises as the rule of thumb for trustworthiness.

> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): When he has love and integrity, and he delivers [on his promise], I mean [if] he is sincere, punctual, people see that you could be trusted. If you deliver what you promise. That`s important. Be sincere to yourself and the people around you.

This example shows that there is somewhat a consensus on trustworthy behaviours in general, even though different expectations of individuals can cause problems at the individual level, due to lack of common aims and values. Therefore, meaningful contacts between out-group members can fill this information gap when the fundamental trustworthy behaviours are not adequate for bridging social trust deficit.

Revealing the significance of the contact with non-ethnics to build trust, some of participants expressed that there were also some requirements that can be considered as additional to the fundamental trustworthy behaviours. Those can be summarised in three groups in Table 3.10:

Table 4.10 Additional Requirements to Trust

Requirements	**Participants**
Being consistent with trustworthy behaviours	P3 (I, Female), P7 (C, Male)
Needing time to observe attitudes of the people	P4 (M, Female), P5 (C, Female), P8 (C, Female), P13 (M, Female), P19 (C, Male)
Needing to be familiar to that person	P1 (M, Male), P4 (M, Female), P12 (M, Female), P16 (I, Male), P19 (C, Male)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

All of the points need constant interactions with that person in order to provide the necessary information about his/her trustworthiness. That is to say, constant interactions play the role of building and transmitting a good reputation in intergroup contacts. As Participant-7 pointed out, for example, one-time behaviours could not create trust; these particular trustworthy behaviours had to be a habit of those people, which also requires constant interactions with them to understand that it is a ritual.

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): You have to judge him by his actions. If he promises to do something for you and delivers that, and he has to do this enough time, not once. It should be a pattern of behaviour.

Similarly, The Participant-4 emphasised the process of building trust; for her, it needs time to observe the attitudes of that person as a whole. In that sense, only the existence of trustworthy behaviours is not enough to trust, but also there is a necessity for the absence of distrustful behaviours, such as deceiving other people or lying.

> Participant-4 (Malay, Female): I always suspend my judgement only until the person is able to prove if he is worthy enough as a friend or as a colleague, so, I need some time for me to have some trust.

Another significant requirement stated by the participants is the needs for familiarity. As they indicated, on the one hand, familiarity facilitates building trust because when they were familiar to a person, they had the opportunity to observe the consistent trustworthy behaviours (Participant-1, Participant-12, Participant-16).

> Participant-1 (Malay, Male): We must know him to trust. We can only say that people who are we familiar with. If people let's say never break their promise, who are accountable, who are reliable, based on our own experience and reservations.

On the other hand, there are other participants who stated closer feelings towards some of Malaysians whom having more common norms and shared values with them (Participant-4 and Participant-19).

> Participant-19 (Chinese, Male): To Chinese Malaysian I little bit more I can trust. Because we are from the same cultural background. We can know the Chinese better, for other races maybe we have problems, cultural background problems.

Familiarity, suggested by the participants in this study as a requirement of building trust is also widely discussed in the contact theory research. Schneider (2008) claims that familiarity, particularly cultural familiarity, has a positive impact on decreasing threat perceptions toward out-groups. In social contexts where the size of the out-group is relatively substantial, and the group members are imposed with another group's culture, they become familiar to them, and moreover, this familiarity alleviates the out-group anxiety while inducing empathy towards out-groups (Savelkoul *et al*., 2011; Moussa, 2018). Nonetheless, familiarity has two different outcomes according to the present study findings. Firstly, even though the out-group size is large, individual characteristics and the high level of perceived threat may not allow contacting with members of different social groups. Instead, the lack of familiarity towards out-group members and high bonding social capital undermine the trust building potential of intergroup contact. It eventually causes each group to turn into their comfort environments in which the members feel at ease. This situation was also mentioned by Participant-18;

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): I think people challenge to go beyond race and religion. [Why people do not want to go beyond race and religion?] Part of the reason is that we are more comfortable with people of our own race.

Secondly, familiarity promotes inter-group contact opportunities as Schneider (2008) claims, but to create familiarity, individuals need common places or activities to gain experiences with each other. Therefore, the social settings where the participants come across with each other are significant.

4.2.3 Intergroup Contact with Non-Ethnics and Multi-ethnic Environments

Contact theory suggests that interactions between different ethnic groups are more likely to create positive ethnic relations while reducing prejudices towards each other. There are many empirical studies in the literature revealing the causal relationship between intergroup contact and trust (*see*, for example, Burns, Corno and La Ferrara

2015; Rao *et al*. 2013; Lowe, 2017; Steinmary 2016; and Moussa 2018). Salma Moussa (2018), in her very insightful research, investigated the inter-group contact behaviours of Christian and Muslim Arabs in Post-ISIS Iraq. Her research demonstrated that intergroup contact at the individual level —by the help of civic organisations in which social cleavages are cut across persistently, improved the trusting behaviours of both Christians and Muslims. As she indicated, given the research findings, "meaningful intergroup contact can reduce prejudices by sharing reputational information, creative cooperative norms, and encouraging in-group policing against the backdrop of tense political climates" (Moussa, 2018, p. 26).

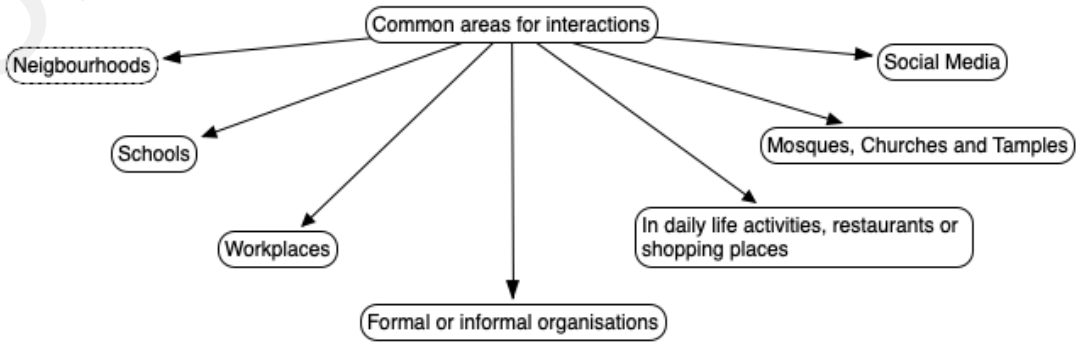
Moussa's (2018) findings are significant because it shows that even after wartime violence, intense distrust and fear of other social groups can be eradicated through the intergroup contact in a suitable environment. Supporting Moussa's (2018) findings, it is evidently clear from the interviews conducted for the present research that more than half of the informants emphasised the importance of multi-ethnic environments. As they pointed out, multi-ethnic environments play a significant role to create familiarity between non-ethnics, to generate more positive feelings towards them, a higher-level trust towards them, and to extend the networks. For the trust-building process, Participant-17, for example, explained how contact with the members of out-groups (non-ethnics in this case) in a multi-ethnic environment helps to build trust, networks and therefore social capital;

> Participant- 17 (Malay, Male): When you have spaces for interaction, then you have trust. How could you build trust? Can you trust me by talking? We need experiences, we need to test each other, face the challenges. [With] my closest friends in my childhood we used to go camping, hiking (…) that kind of bonding creates trust. (…) [I grew up] in a multiracial area. I was always together with different ethnic groups. I was exposed to different ethnic groups' culture, but not just exposure, I was in the environment that put you in together, so, you could build up social networks and social capital across different ethnic groups.

In the same vein, another participant, who grew up in East Malaysia, bolstered the trust-building effect of sharing the same environment with other components of Malaysian society. As she stated, in Sarawak, cultures shaped by the ethnic, cultural or religious identities do not prevent the interactions between non-ethnics, rather the trust environment they have promoted an inter-ethnic interaction.

> Participant- 5 (Chinese, Female): I do not have any problem with ethnicity, religion. Because in our state we used to mix together. For example, during secondary school time, in a class, you could find more than eight races sit together happily. (…) In Sarawak, during the celebration like Chinese New Year, you can find that your Malay friends, Indian friends are coming to your house. It is really like "it is a celebration for Chinese and also it is a celebration for everybody". So, whenever the celebration for Malays, like Hari Raya, it is a celebration for all the people. (…) We really can work in a group and enjoy that diversity together.

This shows that multi-ethnic environments have a substantial impact on building trust and communication between members of different social groups by enabling inter-ethnic interaction. Related to that, the participants were asked whether they had friends from other ethnic groups, and this question was extended with "in which context do you mostly come across with them". Considering the participants' responses about the positive contribution of multi-ethnic spaces on contact with non-ethnics, for a better understanding, Figure 3.8 demonstrates the list of areas in which inter-ethnic interactions took place mostly, according to the informants.



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 4.8 Multi-ethnic areas stated by the participants

Neighbourhoods are the most mentioned environments by the participants in which the interaction with other ethnic groups and exposure to other cultures occur. In multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, they met, became friends and extended their collegial contacts. From this perspective, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods make non-ethnics geographically accessible for interactions, as the Participant-13 indicated;

> Participant-13 (Malay, Female): During my time, the exposure was very high. [What do you mean with *exposure*?] For example, in my neighbourhood where all ethnic group were there, by living together harmoniously. We could visit a friend, play with each other, attend the same school. We were not strangers.

Despite the vernacular school system based on the ethnic languages of the Chinese and Indians (Tamils), schools are another common platform providing contact and communication opportunities between non-ethnics. Raman and Tan (2010) underline the importance of inter-ethnic schools because regardless of their ethnic identity, most of the Malaysian children have limited chance to come across with their fellow Malaysians. For that reason, they contend that British-medium primary schools played an important role to mix all the children from different ethnic groups (Raman and Tan, 2010). English-medium primary schools do not exist currently, so, its role in engaging Malaysian children disappeared. However, one of the informants who is a graduate of English-medium school shared his multi-ethnic school life experiences below and supported Raman and Tan's (2010) argument.

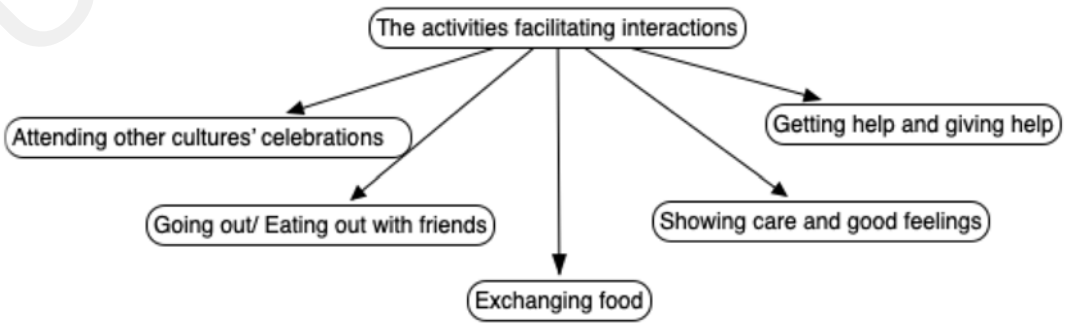
> Participant- 7 (Chinese, Male): Earlier on, the school system was the elite system. So, if you were really good, you went to the English Schools. (…) So, the top, the cream of the crop —regardless of what race you were, you went to English School. The elite group were quite connected. They knew that they belong to a different class, they were not ethnic in that sense. I don't know the rest. This was the system I grew up. So, we all went to English schools. [Don't you have any issues about ethnicity in there?] No, not at all. We are all good friends. I think most of the younger generation do not even know that.

Contact theory suggests that intergroup contact would reduce the prejudices towards out-group if certain principles are met; one of the most important principles is that "the two groups share similar status, interests and tasks" (Pettigrew and Troop, 2005, p. 263). Therefore, the equalising settings in which horizontal interactions take place is more effective to create meaningful contacts than vertical/hierarchal interactions. Participant-2, in this regard, shared his experiences with fellow Malaysians that shows how horizontal interactions can create positive feelings towards others.

> Participant-2 (Indian, Male): (…) ethnically Malays are fantastic people in my experience. They are so loving, so caring. Even nowadays if you go to the village sides you see how they treat you. They treat you so well. I felt there are no more Malaysia in somewhere people treat everyone as equal.

4.2.4 Activities Facilitating Contact and Communication with Non-ethnics

Along with multi-ethnic environments bring non-ethnics together, the type of activities also gives information about the level of meaningful contact between Malaysians. The participants who stated having friends from other ethnic groups were asked in which context they interacted with them. According to the responses (*see* Figure 3.9), some of the activities are convenient for building friendships (attending other culture's religious celebration for instance) while others are more suitable for the maintaining of the camaraderie, such as eating out.



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 4.9 Interaction providing activities

These physical activities help to build a positive and cooperative contact between out-group members, and consequently, to build trust in them because people need time and experiences with constant interactions. Positive experiences support creating better relations between different groups while weakening the prejudices towards each other. One of the Chinese participants explains how face-to-face contact build stronger relations.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): I think we really need to have more face-to-face contact. It suddenly affects me. I do not know how the others react, but my interactions with Malay friends and Indian friends shows that the more I connect with them the more I feel connected them.

As discussed above, horizontal interactions are more effective to generate meaningful intergroup contact according to contact theory. Participating in cultural or religious festivals with non-ethnics is one of the important social activities providing horizontal interactions, and Participant-10 shared that involving cultural or religious celebrations with non-ethnics helped to create social harmony.

> Participant-10 (Indian, Male): There is a harmony within there. (…) When people [Muslim] are fasting, there are Hindus and Chinese who are willing to serve to the Muslim. This is one of the classical example [in Malaysia]. When I am in the Hindu celebrations, festivals, like Thaipusam or Deepavali, Malays and Chinese do not celebrate it, but they are part of the celebrations.

In the social capital literature, there are also discussions about the pre-requirements for intergroup interactions to build trust, particularly in extreme hostilities between antagonistic social groups; however, in countries like Malaysia in which there does not exist any armed conflicts between ethnic groups, these debates seemed excessive to discuss in this part.

4.3 Evaluating the Consequences of Intergroup Contact

Supporting the contact theory, there are a substantial number of empirical studies that found a close relationship between contact and changing attitudes towards in-group and out-group. For that reason, to understand the impact of intergroup contact, the participants

were asked: “Based on your experiences in these voluntary activities, do you think that socialising with other people who are strangers to you changed your thoughts about them, or your trust in them?”. When the answers were analysed, results indicate that firstly, almost all of the informants have friends from other ethnic groups, although some of them are not very close, or they have contacts with non-ethnics at different levels of their social life. This shows that the interaction level is satisfactorily high among the participants.

Secondly, the vast majority (16 participants out of 19) of the participants reported that intergroup contact or socialising with members of an out-group had very positive results because it helps to reduce the prejudices towards them. Besides, they could learn fill the information gaps about them through contact and communication. An important issue that emerged from the interviews was the answers of the participants who had a relatively higher level of trust surfaced in two different themes; the participants in the first group stated that socialising changes their perception towards others because intergroup contact provides an opportunity to get to know these people better.

> Participant-13 (Malay, Female): (…) what you listen first is something bad or something negative, but the moment you get to know them, when you sit and talk with them, do things together and when you listen, [the negative thoughts] will gradually disappear because I am an anthropologist in order for you to understand a culture you need to be there with them, you need to have some kind of engagement, participation or activities with them.

For the participants in the second group (5 participants out of 19), however, contact with others does not have a major impact on their thoughts because, as they pointed out, they did not have any negative feelings towards others in the first place.

> Participant-3 (Indian, Female): I grew up in age that there was no boundary based on race and all that. To say that there were stereotypes and then changed and [became] different, I do not think so.

On the contrary to the participants having a higher level of trust, those who need to be careful in their relationships with other Malaysians noted the positive results of intergroup

contact with others. One of the Malay participants stated below that the contact with others and gaining information about them can create a difference in their perception towards them.

> Participant-12 (Malay, Female): (…) I can say that among the activity members there are non-Muslims, and they are very committed. Chinese, especially Chinese. So, they go all the way for helping out, giving people, offering assistance, providing food for the homeless people in the streets. Chinese, I mean, they are doing social work and some of them are very committed. So, we understand that something can change in our perception [towards] non-Malays.

These findings suggest that intergroup contact and building a positive perspective while changing the engrained beliefs or feelings have a clear correlation at the individual level. Even though the fact that some of the participants stated the intergroup contact did not change their perceptions, they also noted that they did not have any in the first place. Because they had already eliminated their prejudices about out-group members through meaningful contact with them in multi-ethnic environments or multi-ethnic activities. As a result, the findings of this research support the contact theory's claims of positive impact of contact with out-group members on trust-building process at the individual level.

On the other hand, it should be noted that ethnic and religious identifications, such as Muslim-Malays or Christian-Chinese, are significant categories defining and shaping the mindsets of individuals in Malaysian society because these identifications determine Malaysians' social position in the social stratification (*see* Andaya & Andaya, 1982). However, there were some participants challenging the ethnic and religious identities hegemony by emphasising that the personal character is more important than ethnic or religious identities of a person.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): My best friend is a Malay and the second is a Chinese, and the rest are some international friends one from Palestine, one from Jordan. These are very close friends. Race, ethnicity or religion does not matter. It really depends on the person' integrity and honesty. How to treat us personally.

> Participant- 21 (Malay, Female): There are good Chinese and bad Chinese and good Malay bad Malay. I think it is not just simply ethnicity. It is more a character. There are good characters, bad characters.

As these participants indicated, they differentiated ethnic identity, therefore cultural background, from the personal character. It can thus be suggested that these participants tend to create more bridging social capital across different social groups in the Malaysian society. The reason for that is they can easily meet on the common ground with other people who have good personality rather than sharing the same ethnic, religious or cultural background.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

In this section, the level of trust and the factors reinforcing contact and communication with non-ethnics in Malaysian society is investigated. To conclude the findings, firstly it was found that the trust level of participants was the highest among the Indian participants while the lowest among the Malays. However, in terms of involvement in civic engagement activities, particularly academic and professional organisations, Malay and Indian participants were more actively involved than Chinese participants, even though the trust level of Malay participants was lower than the Chinese.

Besides, although the trust definitions of the interviewees participated in this study is somewhat similar, it is likely that different expectations for trustworthiness can cause some misunderstandings or disagreements among people depending on the cultural or educational background. These misunderstanding can affect the trust-building process at individual level.

Secondly, needing time to observe the person' trustworthiness and requiring for familiarity were emphasised by the majority of the participants as a necessity. It means that the level of generalised trust they possess may not be adequate to trust in a person

whom they meet for the first time. Another point related to the familiarity is, it can make easier to contact with non-ethnics once they get familiar with the culture; for that reason, familiarity plays as a connective role between different social groups, as reported by the participants growing up in multi-ethnic environments. Nevertheless, when the perceived threat is too high or in situations that the segregation between social groups is explicit, the familiarity of own group outweighs the others, and that can foster particularised trust and bonding social capital of individuals due to lack of common norms and shared values. In countries like Malaysia in which the ethnic boundaries are relatively clear and the fear of other ethnic groups exist, familiarity, in that sense, can also be discriminatory.

Finally, when the contact theory's claims are investigated, it was found that the quantitative data of the present study, namely the number of low trusting participants and the number of informants involving civic engagement activities, the results suggest no relation between intergroup contact and building a high level of trust. On the other hand, the detailed questions posed to the participants revealed reverse results; accordingly, from all three ethnic groups, the participants experiencing constant meaningful contact with non-ethnics, sharing multi-ethnic settings, involving cooperative intergroup activities, experienced more positive feelings towards others. With the help of intergroup contact, they were provided to gain information that reduces their prejudices towards others.

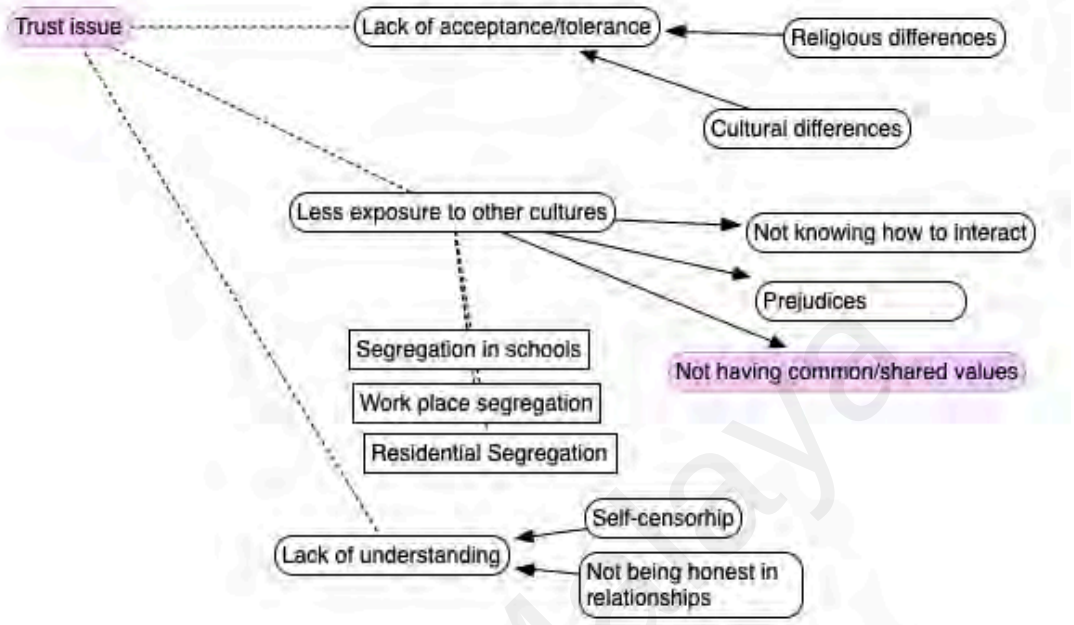
There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative results of the present study; firstly, the type of civic organisations can play a significant role in building trust. In informal organisations or social settings, trust can be built without difficulty in comparison to formal organisations. Another explanation might be the barriers, such as religious or cultural background differences, limit the positive impact of intergroup contact on the trust building process. The second explanation will be further analysed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: LIMITATIONS TO SOCIAL CAPITAL ACCUMULATION: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

This chapter will examine the problems in inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia that impede social capital accumulation by creating distrust, negative attitudes towards non-ethnics or feeling discriminated by others. This is a follow-up to the findings in the previous chapter that investigated the formation of bridging social capital. It was found that intergroup contact has a positive impact on building trust as well as reducing out-group prejudices. Nevertheless, the effect of an out-group contact can have a limited role because of certain factors, such as cultural and religious differences, speaking diverse languages and segregation in social settings.

The social capital literature indicated an ongoing debate on the existence of negative correlation between ethnic diversity and social capital (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000, 2002; Costa & Kahn, 2003, Delhey & Newton, 2005; Putnam, 2007). As discussed in the previous chapter, the data provided by the WVS (2014) and ABS (2016) reveals that the social capital indicators, namely the trust level and participation in civic life, remain in low levels in Malaysia. Therefore, the chapter will examine the possible factors that are causing a low level of bridging social capital, and reinforcement of in-group solidarity and bonding social capital. These factors are investigated in two subsections; namely (i) problems inhibiting trust-building process in the first subsection, and (ii) the difficulties faced in intergroup contact examined in the second subsection.

5.1 Problems That Undermine Trust-Building Process



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 4.1 Overview of the Problems Related to Building Trust

The research findings, as revealed in Figure 4.1, indicate that broadly, there are three major problems discussed by the participants related to the trust-building process which are *lack of acceptance or tolerance by non-ethnics*, *less exposure to other cultures* and *lack of understanding of each other.* Each of these factors will be examined in the following section.

Although it was discussed before that meaningful contact with non-ethnics generates positive attitudes towards them and thus eventually helps to build trust and bridging social capital, some factors create intense distrust and forge out-group prejudices. In doing so, they engender social distance between these competing social groups. Ethnic/racial competition theory, tries to account for the causes of this competition. Accordingly, the members of different social groups perceive each other as rivals for scarce political, social and economic resources in ethnically diverse social settings (Olzak, 1993 cited in Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Therefore, in Malaysia where the society comprises of different

social groups divided along ethnic and religious lines, to understand the minority-majority relations and the possible competition between ethnic groups is crucial. When examining this impact, the participants were asked to suggest "what is missing in Malaysian society?" and "in your opinion, is Malaysian society integrated?" according to the participants' point of view, and the responses were analysed and categorised.

5.1.1 Lack of Tolerance

The non-Malay participants mentioned mostly lack of tolerance as a trust-building process undermining factor. Almost two thirds of the non-Malay participants indicated that the missing element was tolerance or acceptance by others, while none of the Malay participants mentioned that. When the participants were asked to elucidate their responses, cultural or religious identity-related problems were mostly pointed out; such as facing with ignorance of food restrictions of their religion as an Indian participant shared his experience.

> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): (…) intolerance starts when they [Malays] serve beef [to Hindus]. If we are sensitive for you, you should also be sensitive to me. This has been going on for a very long time. So, that religion, in this way, becomes dominant over the others. If you have this disrespect and intolerance, anyone can have the same.

According to the non-Malay participants, especially Indian participants, who stated *lack of tolerance* as a problem, religious issues drew the highest intolerance (P2, P15, P16). They asserted that Malays do not demonstrate the same religious self-importance to other religions. Considering the official religion of Malaysia is Islam, and also it is vital in the definition of *Malayness* (Norani Othman, 2011), it is the dominant religion in the social life with all the rules and regulations. Furthermore, the increasing visibility of Islam in public places and national schools (Quranic verses on the school walls for example) while the lack of similar displays or sensitivity to other religions creates discontentment, according to some of the non-Malay participants.

> Participant-2 (Indian, Male): Malays are becoming more and more fanatic. Most of the Malays in this country believe that what they believe is the only truth in the world. Because they think, whatever they believe, that is the only truth, there are not others. There is no tolerance. Whereas for us, Hindus, what we believe is true, and what the others believe is also true. It is only different way of looking at things.

Besides religious matters, cultural difference is another factor viewed on triggering the problem of intolerance. One of the Chinese participant claimed that their ethnic difference is targeted by and reported unfavourably in local newspapers. The news is presented in mainstream media, as she claims, illustrates how much the majority of Malaysian society viewed the cultural differences of the Chinese.

> Participant- 18 (Chinese, Female): If you do not accept differences, you do not trust the person. It is kind of connected. (…) If you do not accept differences, your cooperation will be superficial; it is not going to be civic engagement. (…) If you follow the local newspapers, [how] the people talk about the things based on religion, race and all those, [or] the way how sometimes some of the issues are being cast or reported, or talked. I think those show the lack of acceptance.

The tolerance or acceptance problems of non-Malays were also pointed out by Ting (2009). As she indicated, the Malay culture and Islam were considered as superior over minority ethnic groups' culture and religion in the national polity. Other cultures or religions' lower status can be declared explicitly through the discourses – as exemplified by Participant-18 above – or practised implicitly in the bureaucratic procedures by the state agencies (Ting, 2009).

The sense of intolerance is a feeling that becoming stronger for most of the participants; most agree in comparing the present Malaysian society to the past, that there were fewer issues about intolerance and religious insensitivities. At that point, as one of the Chinese participants indicated, the barrier standing between Chinese and Malays was not there forty or fifty years ago.

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): I was in the university in the early 60s. This barrier between Malay and Chinese did not really exist [at that time]. We are

> quite clear that we were much closer [in the past] than now. (…) When we graduated from high school we went out for a dinner. My classmates were Malays and non-Malays and all of us went to a Chinese restaurant and some ordered pork. Malay friends didn't eat the pork but they had no problem with us eating pork, and they were sitting next to us. So that was a completely different ethos in terms of ethnic relations at that time compared to now. Now everything is changed.

Participant-7 is the only senior interviewee in the present study whom age is over 70. Mandal (2011) calls this generation as Merdeka Generation who were born in the independence period. This period was named as "a rosy multi-ethnic past" because of the effortless ethnic interaction between non-ethnics and closer bonds with the members of other ethnic groups, especially between Chinese and Malays. After the inter-ethnic violence of May 1969, the relations were changed dramatically and revived the ethno-nationalism in Malaysia (Mandal, 2011)

When the "lack of tolerance" responses are examined, it is difficult to claim a competition between ethnic groups, however there is clear distinction between the participants' *us* and *them* identification in the answers. In this regard, the responses are in parallel with the Bobo & Hitcman (1996)'s thesis that suggests threat perception reinforced with the members of an ethnic group who are feeling collectively oppressed and treated unfairly by the society. Therefore, even though the participants did not face any oppression when they practised their religions or culture, they expressed dissatisfaction about the unfair or discriminatory treatments in social life because of their religious denomination. In extreme cases, as Blumer (1958) indicates, intense distrust and prejudices can cause racial hostility between different groups. Nevertheless, even though the non-Malay participants reported discontentment and mistreatments, hostile feelings towards Malay people were not detected and observed during the interviews.

However, the lack of tolerance statements indicated by some of the participants, there are also opposite views on the issue of intolerance. A Malay and a non-Malay participant

stated that rather than lack of tolerance, Malaysia has a remarkable level of tolerance towards the members of other social groups.

> Participant-4 (Malay, Female): The missing thing is trust, but I must say that we have lots of tolerance. Malay people are very soft-hearted people, if you observe the behaviour of a Malay, when they speak with a Chinese person, they directly change their accent to the Chinese accent, because we are very accommodative people. So, we have lots of tolerance. Even though we have a sort of prejudices about each other, I am satisfied with the feelings, impressions, perceptions… We are very tolerant. That is why we are able to maintain this harmony.

The Chinese participant who is of Sarawak origin, also agreed with the Malay participant in terms of the tolerance level of Malaysia. As she stated, the tolerance level of Malaysians was very high, although there could be some problems related to cultural differences when in contact with non-ethnics.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): We have a very high level of tolerance actually. Every day we have to come together we have to work together to have a better country a better place to live. But sometimes when it comes to action. It is a problem. [What is the problem?] Language sometimes. It could be a different background. [Can culture or religion be another factor?] Religion, yes, but very small. The culture is a factor, yes. Sometimes people may have a different level of trust, culture. When it comes to work and cooperate together it can be challenging, hard.

As a result, the majority of the non-Malay participants consider that either religious or cultural differences impede inter-ethnic relations with others because, as they reported, they were not accepted with their differences by the majority ethnic group. In this regard, the feeling of not accepted by other people helps to reinforce bonding social capital and the perceived threat along ethnic lines. Therefore, it invigorates the in-group solidarity that eventually alienates non-ethnics from each other, rather than to increase the trust level and build bridging social capital.

5.1.2 Less Exposure to Other Cultures

According to the participants, another factor undermining the trust-building process and inter-ethnic interactions is the less exposure to the other cultures due to segregation and polarisation in social environments. Although the common areas are crucial for meaningful interactions of all-ethnics, there is somewhat a consensus among the participants that there is a gradual decrease in common multi-ethnic areas. Children, for example, are divided in ethnic-language based education system, the ethnic diversity of some residential areas are deteriorating, and employees are concentrating in public or private sector according to their ethnic identities. This situation causes fewer interactions between non-ethnics, and less exposure to other cultures. It also reduces the trust level of Malaysians, bolstering ethnic prejudices and fostering perceived threat as suggested by some studies (*see* Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Savelkoul *et al*., 2011). This fact supported by Participant-17 who indicated that the segregation or separation in the society was not officially implemented by the state as in the case of the South African apartheid regime, rather, the multi-ethnic social environments, such as neighbourhoods or schools, making non-ethnics physically accessible for interaction decreased in number while the common areas were becoming more ethnically segregated in recent years.

> Participant-17 (Malay, Male): Everyday spaces that young generation growing up is highly racialized and divisive (…) for example housing areas, schools like that, you find less spaces for interaction unless you join very specialised agency. But at the same time, by all this is going on, there are no physical boundaries. We are not a segregated society. We don't have institutional forms of separation. We have institutional form of discrimination but they are not separating us. What it does is, it gives us a lot of ammunition to complain.

In the literature, some studies claim that segregation in social settings is worth considering because it affects building the bridging social capital. As Uslaner (2002) claims, for example, that it is not ethnic diversity inhibiting social capital; instead, the residential segregation creates a barrier between people. In line with Uslaner's (2002)

claims, the participants indeed indicated that not only residential areas but also other common places, such as schools and workplaces, tend to be fairly segregated. As Participant-13 noted, for many of the Malaysian students, experiences with the non-ethnics start at the high school or at the university level, therefore, they cannot learn how to interact or how to communicate with their peers until that ages.

> Participant-13 (Malay, Female): Today, I can see that things have changed, residential areas for example are very segregated. Although there are still some children attending schools with other ethnic groups, but I think it is getting lesser. (…) My children now, in their kindergarten, [they are] all Malays, and then in their primary school, too. (…) the exposure begins at the university, not so much at the secondary school level. Because of that less exposure, so trust is also less, and perhaps also they do not know how to interact because they have no experience at school.

Another participant also gave an example to describe how university-level students had been facing difficulties when they needed to work as a group with non-ethnics. Participant-3 reported that the students intuitively preferred to group with their co-ethnics if they were not forced to be in with non-ethnics.

> Participant-3 (Indian, Female): What I see with my students is when I ask them to get into a group, there is a tendency that they become a group in the same ethnic group. When I ask them to mix, they are a bit hesitant —maybe they are not used to it, I am not sure what is really happening. It seems that they do not like to mix with different groups when they work. But when I force them, they get used to it.

The school system in Malaysia based on ethnic languages is particularly important because it helps to maintain the ethnic division of children in the schools. Malay students are mostly sent to the national schools whereas non-Malay parents have the option to send their children to vernacular Chinese or Tamil schools. Tan, Ngah and Darit (2013) contend that national primary schools are not very successful to attract non-Malay students. If there are Chinese or Tamil schools in the same area, the size of the non-Malay students in the national primary schools tends to be small (the Chinese and Tamil students studying in national schools was only 2.1 percent for Chinese and 4.3 for Indians percent

in 2002) (Tan *et al*., 2013). Bearing in mind the numbers above, Raman & Tan (2010) claim that the school system in Malaysia plays a contributing role in ethnic segregation of Malaysians, instead of uniting them. As they pointed out, "Ethnic segregation has become an emerging feature in Malaysia's education system even though the institutional role of education should have been a unifying force for the country's multi-ethnic society" (Raman & Tan, 2010, p. 117).

However, even though the role of national schools is limited to gather pupils from diverse ethnic group together, international schools and Chinese schools have become increasingly multi-ethnic. According to ISC Research, that is a provider of English-medium international school data, the total number of English-medium international schools has risen 75% since 2012, and almost half of the students are the local Malaysians[6]. In addition to that, the number of non-Chinese students in Chinese schools are rising since 2010 as reported by Kate Ng (2017); accordingly, almost one fifth of the students were non-Chinese in 2016. As a result, even though single school system might be beneficial for providing interaction spaces for ethnic groups, in case of Malaysia, this is partly true. As the increasing number of Malaysian students in the international and Chinese vernacular schools shows, apart from the ethnicity-related issues, the main problem is the declining popularity of national schools in Malaysia.

Su-Hie Ting and Yan Lee (2019) investigated the ethnicity-related motivations in choosing primary schools in Malaysia. Their study revealed that Chinese parents consider the national primary schools as lower-performing, and so, they do not prefer non-Chinese dominant school environments for their children. On the other hand, the majority of Malay and indigenous parents avoid choosing Chinese-medium schools because of their

[6] ISC Research's Market Intelligence Report for Malaysia, 2018, cited in https://www.relocatemagazine.com/articles/education-schools-education-and-international-schools-in-malaysia-apac1 (Retrieved on Apr 5, 2019)

children' lack of Mandarin proficiency. Nevertheless, by stating the importance of ethnic-identity for the school choices, Su-Hie Ting and Yan Lee (2019) emphasised the importance of educational pluralism, because the current education system reinforces ethnic segregation in Malaysia. As the experiences of the participants indicated, growing up in ethnically segregated schools without having any opportunity for meaningful interaction with non-ethnics for children. Thus, children who are not having non-ethnic peers in school do not have many opportunities to challenge the racial prejudices towards non-ethnics because they have limited number of inter-ethnic contacts.

The reasons for that might be the perception of low quality standards of national schools, or at some point, high demand for English and Chinese languages. However, as some of the non-Malay participants pointed out, the Islamisation programme in the national primary schools was an important reason creating concerns among the non-Malay parents. Raman and Tan (2010) supports these claims, according to them, the increasing visibility of Islam in national schools is one of the significant reason for the non-Malays' school choice; non-Muslim parents do not feel comfortable to send their kids to national schools. (Raman & Tan, 2010).

> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): In the 70s, when you went to the national school, you did not see Quranic verses on the walls, but these are quite open now. Also, school assembly starts with the recitation of the Quran. It is something that is imposing on other religions. Now, we can see Islamic university, a lot of Islamisation technique. This has divided. So, people feel when they send the kids to the national school, it is going to create an indoctrination. That is why they send them to Chinese school or international schools.

National schools are increasingly viewed as Islamic schools by non-Malays, which causes national-level debates in Malaysia. Kaur (2017) argued that Islamic practices in national schools are damaging the *Rukun Negara* (National Principles) (cited in Su-Hie Ting & Yan Lee, 2019). Participant-15 supported the claims suggesting the following.

> Participant-15 (Indian, Female): Education system divided people, they do not know each other, they do not know how to interact with each other, and because of the Islamisation, Chinese and Indian parents do not want to send their kids to the national schools. Interactions start only at high school or university level.

In addition to the education system, the impact of Islamisation programme on national schools causes serious concerns among non-Malay parents over religious propaganda. Therefore, this kind of concerns also trigger to create less ethnically diverse school environment for the students studying in the national schools. As a result, Islamisation programmes in national schools do not promote ethnically mixed environment for trust building and meaningful intergroup contact, but instead, strengthen the fear of assimilation among the non-Malays.

Along with the ethnically divided schools, the work places in Malaysia also incline to be segregated. While Malays are predominantly being employed in the civil service or the public sector, the majority of the private sector are constituted by non-Malays, particularly Chinese. As Participant-18 stated, this division could be observable in academia as well.

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): For Muslims, it is easier to get into university. In terms of getting a place in a public university, especially. You see also a division. In public universities, there are more Muslims, but in non-public, private universities, you see predominantly non-Muslims. You can see very clearly. Even lecturers. If you go to a public university, [there are] more Muslims; [but to] a private [university], non-Muslims, Indian or Chinese. You can see the pattern very clearly.

5.1.3 Lack of Understanding or Misunderstandings between Non-ethnics

The third and last factor is the lack of understanding or misunderstandings between non-ethnics, was highlighted by the participants as being a vital problem related to trust issue. According to participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P9, P11, P18), the very first reason for the lack of understanding between non-ethnics is that ethnic/racial and religious differences are considered as taboo in inter-ethnic relations of Malaysians. As Participant-

1 commented, in Malaysian society, every issue had the potential of turning easily into a racial problem, even though the issue did not need to be discussed in that context.

> Participant-1 (Malay, Male): I think, there are many things in Malaysia that have been understood in racial terms. So, there are things that need to be understood in racial context, but also there are things that cannot be understood with racial terms. This would be detrimental to the wellbeing of society. There are things that are too racialized in Malaysia. That is not good. I think, we do not adequately understand each other, culturally, and historically. That leads sometimes to misunderstandings and prejudices. People are very cautious when they are dealing with other races.

According to the quotation, in order to avoid from possible conflict with non-ethnics, people tend to keep silent, which also plays an important role for perpetuating prejudices of each ethnic group. As gathered from the interviews, stereotypes for Malays include, being lazy, easy to manipulate and not good at business, whereas, for Chinese, they give importance to money first, they are untrustworthy people in business especially, and they are prosperous. For Indians, they are manipulative and untrustworthy people. Surprisingly, these stereotypes and prejudices comprise an important category in inter-ethnic relations in Malaysian society. As the Indian interviewee stated, these prejudices and stereotypes were hidden in the minds, and only through meaningful contact and communication with non-ethnics, their roots might be comprehended and eventually changed.

> Participant-6 (Indian, Female): I have very close Malay friends. (…) Sometimes, there are quite heated conversations usually about religion or cultural differences. When my Malay friend says that "you can trust a snake but you cannot trust an Indian!", and I say, "what are you trying to say?". We go like that, "if you are Malay, you must be lazy!". There are conflicts there and I understand what they are trying to say. I understand their perception what the Indian community is and what my perception, on the Malay community is. (…) At least by the communication I know "ok, this is what they think of us and this is what we think of them".

Therefore, when people tend to be silent and pretend as if there is no issue in order to prevent possible conflicts with other ethnics, they eradicate the opportunity to create a

meaningful contact and build trust in them with their silence. As the Chinese participant indicated, they had to hide their actual opinions to not offend each other.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): There are certain issues that we do not want to talk about freely. The one is race, and the other is religion. These are the two subjects that we sometimes exercise self-censorship, and we have to be very careful with ourselves when we want to express our actual feelings.

The difficulty is, however, not only being self-censored in relationships with intergroup contacts which is likely to create misunderstandings between ethnic groups, but also, in regard to honesty that affects trusting others. Because it seems that there is a tacit agreement to not discuss sensitive ethnic or religious issues with each other.

> Participant- 10 (Indian, Male): There is a boundary between ethnics. They can't explain, can't be very sincere, transparent to what they really [are] looking forward. They are double-faced. They are wearing masks. I see you as a human first. I should not see you from ethnical, racial or religious based first. When I talk to you, I am not really transparent as you are. So, I feel like if I talk these sort of areas, if it might hurt you, I don't want to talk [about] this area, I don't want to share with you.

Although self-censorship is widely performed in inter-ethnic relations in Malaysian society according to the participants, it is difficult to claim that it helps to solve the disagreements between non-ethnics, or prevent social problems and contradictions. As one of the Chinese participants indicated, keeping silent rather than handling the problems, makes them more complicated because silence eliminates the chance of overcoming them.

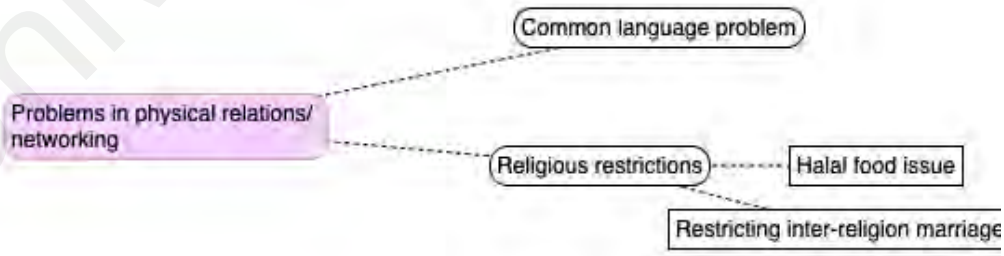
> Participant- 18 (Chinese, Female): Even though we do not express it, we feel it deep inside, and it is good to express because it also gives us an opportunity to challenge our views. Because they say that we are different people, I may have a prejudice towards the other people. But how do I know it is prejudice if I keep it inside myself.

Along with the lack of understanding or misunderstandings between non-ethnics as the possible consequences of self-censorship or not being honest in intergroup contact, self-censorship is, to a large extent, performed to prevent a possible conflict with non-

ethnics or not to offend non-ethnics. When trust is built between non-ethnic contacts, they are more open discussing and challenging stereotypes and prejudices, as Participant-6 noted above. Nevertheless, when trust does not exist in a relationship, self-censorship deepens the prejudices and helps the maintenance of prejudices. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, *honesty* was the fundamental trustworthy behaviour for the vast majority of the participants for trust-building process. Therefore, it can be claimed that self-censorship directly affects the process of creating bridging social capital, because it restricts the meaningful role of contact between non-ethnics in the trust building process.

5.2 Problems Inhibiting Interactions and Networking

The participants were asked their thoughts about problems that hinder social interactions with non-ethnics. According to them, lack of a common language (P1, P3, P4, P5, P8, P11, P21) and especially for the non-Malay participants, religious restrictions of the Muslims, particularly halal food, create barriers in the interactions and networking processes with non-ethnics in Malaysia (*see* Figure 4.2).



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 4.2 Overview of Problems with Interactions and Networking

Although the national language is Bahasa Melayu, each ethnic group preserve and speak their own ethnic languages in their daily life. The education system of Malaysia also promotes preserving ethnic languages, particularly Mandarin, Cantonese and

Hokkien for Chinese and Tamil for Indians, with the help of vernacular schools. As the official national language, Bahasa Melayu is a compulsory course for the students studying in these schools. Moreover, English is spoken widely in professional life and taught in schools as second language because of its importance in the business realm. Therefore, the social structure inherently comprises multilingualism. Concerning the lingua franca between ethnic groups, Bahasa Melayu and English is commonly used as a medium of communication among Malaysians (Albury, 2017). However, as Mukherjee and David (2011) pointed out, rather than Bahasa Melayu, English is more common in communication, especially among middle and upper-middle class non-Malays in urban areas.

This research's revelation supports Mukherjee and David (2011) in terms of non-Malays' English language preference in daily life. The participants were asked to specify the language they speak in their daily life, and they were allowed to choose more than one language. Among the non-Malay participants, Bahasa Melayu preference in daily life is rare compared to English, even though they are able to speak the language. Among all participants, English is the most preferred language in everyday life conversations (as shown in Table 4.1). This preference is higher among the non-Malay participants.

Table 5.1 Distribution of the Most Preferred Language in Daily Life of the Participants

	English	Malay	Tamil	Cantonese	Mandarin
Chinese	4	2	-	1	4
Indian	6	1	5	1	-
Malay	2	7	-	-	-
Total	12	10	5	2	4

Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

The low popularity of Bahasa Melayu among the non-Malay participants is consistent with the findings of Ying *et al*. (2015). Their research on school children studying at national-type Chinese and Tamil schools demonstrated that Bahasa Melayu is the least

preferred language among the non-Malay children in their interactions; even more, the children do not consider the language as a significant one because they think that it does not fulfil their daily communicative purposes (Ying *et al*., 2015).

Mukherjee and David (2011) points out that code-switching and English preference with words from other languages is common among Malaysians. Some of the Malay participants also mentioned the mixed-language usage, as well. As Participant-13 stated, the language they speak was not only Bahasa Melayu, but they also preferred whichever language was convenient for people on each side of the conversation, that could be a mixed-language of Bahasa Melayu, English, some Tamil and Chinese words as well.

> Participant-13 (Malay, Female): To me, when we interact together in one sitting, sometimes we use broken Malay, sometimes we use English but we do not use. But we use the language which is convenient to everyone. (…) my son is not English-speaker, they speak not the standard Malay, [but] broken Malay, and then, when you listen carefully the conversation between ethnic group, we take also Chinese words, some Indian words, to construct a meaningful sentence, conversation. Everyone here can speak or understand a little bit of Malay.

As Mukherjee and David (2011) indicate, each ethnic group create their friendship circles, and communicate through their preferred language which is a signal for the respective members of that friendship group (p.21). In this regard, ethnic language usage in daily communication, such as Mandarin, Tamil, or Cantonese rather than the official language Bahasa Melayu, pose a problem in creation of a meaningful contact with others who cannot speak that language. How language can create a problem in intergroup interaction was mentioned by one of the participants in the university group project.

> Participant- 3 (Female, Indian): (…) sometimes [when] the majority is, let say, Chinese in a group, they tend to speak their own dialect, and then the non-speakers have left out. You have to constantly remind them that there are other races in their group, they need to speak the language that everybody can understand. I think it happens with all races. If you the majority is Indians, and one or two non[-Indian], they tend to speak their own languages, too. Malays, as well.

As the Malay interviewees participated in the present study reported, they did not mind speaking English with a Chinese or Indian who could not speak Bahasa Melayu properly. In this respect, English comes out as a mediator language in the communication with Malays and non-Malays when both sides can speak English fluently. Nevertheless, using English in conversations with non-Malays can breed discontent among some of the Malays as the Malay interviewee reported based on her experience.

> Participant-4 (Malay, Female): I was accused by someone saying that I am non-patriotic because whenever I start a conversation with non-Malay, they speak English and I speak English with them. So, some of my Malay friends say that "you should not be confirming to them by speaking English, speak Malay". But then you know that someone who speaks English but not Malay, you will not have a smooth conversation. You will not feel comfortable, you will find a barrier. So, I think the most important barrier is language. This is my observation.

It is surprising the Malay participant reported difficulties when conversing in Bahasa Melayu with non-Malays because non-Malays are taught that language in schools as a compulsory subject. Nevertheless, local dialects or non-Malay's lack of Bahasa Melayu practice might be the possible reasons for not having a "smooth" conversation with Malays and non-Malays in Bahasa Melayu. In addition to that, there is a growing tendency in English usage among non-Malays instead of Bahasa Melayu which Mukherjee and David (2011) explained it as the discrepancy between the national language policy and social life reality. However, English preference of non-Malays or their fluency problem to speak Bahasa Melayu make some of the Malays feel offended. As the Indian participant stated, not being able to speak Bahasa Melayu for the third or fourth generation of the Chinese and Indians was considered as disrespectful because they had to learn it in the schools.

> Participant- 16 (Indian, Male): If you are a Malaysian and cannot speak Bahasa, that is wrong. It shows that you do not respect this national language. That is fair for them [Malays] to feel, but if you are from 1930s 1940s, it is understandable, but if you are from 1970s 1980s, it is not acceptable. You must pass that [Bahasa Melayu subject] in order to go to the public university.

> So, it does not make sense unless you are not fluent. It is sceptical you hardly understand, you hardly speak. This is ridiculous.

Another point affecting the interaction and networking processes of non-ethnics, is religious differences. The interviewees referred mostly to the halal food, or general food restrictions of the Muslims. Considering the many Hindus are vegetarian -or they do not consume pork- the problem is mostly evident between Muslims and non-Muslim Chinese. From the Chinese participant's point of view, the food problem adds more barriers to inter-ethnic relationships because they have to be more considerate of their Muslim friends' dietary needs.

> Participant- 11 (Chinese, Male): We used to exchange cakes and fruits with one another, but now you have to be careful. Because they are afraid of utensils are not halal, the kitchen is not halal. Once upon a time, it was not an issue, but now it is becoming an issue. So now we have to become sensitive to each other, but that also create an additional barrier.

On the other hand, Chinese and Indian interviewees stated that they are aware of the halal food sensitivity of the Malays and they have respect for that. Nevertheless, why Malays are sceptical about the food that non-Malays serve them is related to the level of trust to each other, according to the Chinese interviewee.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): Normally, in Sarawak, when we invite our friends, we know where to get our food. So, we ask the Muslim people to cook for us *rendang* and curry chicken even the plate we use we have a set of plates for Muslim people. This is not only in Chinese family itself. When you go to the Chinese people`s house, you can be sure enough that they use a clean plate for you. They do serve you food which is halal, and you trust. We do not have these problems because we trust each other. We know how to work with each other.

Besides the food restrictions of Muslims, inter-religious marriages are also regulated in Malaysia. Muslim man or woman cannot marry with a non-Muslim unless he or she converts to Islam. This restriction also affects the intergroup contact because in some societies inter-ethnic and religious marriages play an important role in the creation of a creole culture, such as the *Peranakan*s or *Baba and Nyonya* in the Malaysian context.

Nevertheless, the rule for conversion to Islam can cause additional pressure on the non-Muslim communities. The Malay participant emphasised this pressure as following.

> Participant-17 (Malay, Male): Today the perceived barrier is religion. You don't see many inter-ethnic marriages because if you want to marry with a Muslim, you have to convert to Islam. If there was not such a rule, I guess we have a lot more inter-ethnic marriages. When they convert to another religion, the community and their family feel threatened.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

There are significant number of studies discussing the relationship of ethnic diversity and the level of social capital in the social sciences literature. As the secondary data suggest, the level of social capital in Malaysia is considerably low, but how ethnic diversity is related to that is not widely discussed in the Malaysian social sciences literature. In this study, ethnic diversity is not considered as the main reason for the low level of social capital, rather, there are underlying causes fostered by the ethnic diversity. In this chapter, these causes were discussed.

According to the participants of the present study, three fundamental problems were defined in building trust in non-ethnics. These are, namely (i) lack of tolerance or acceptance of non-ethnics, (ii) lack of exposure and (iii) lack of understanding (i.e. self-censorship). In addition, (i) common language problem with non-ethnics, and (ii) religious restrictions and regulations were found constraining intergroup interactions.

When these limitations and experiences of the participants evaluated as a whole, it was found that the level of interaction is crucial for building social capital. Interaction levels vary in the range of superficial, one-time contact to an extended, close relationship with out-group members (*see* Moussa, 2018). Needless to say, willingness to interact with other people depends on the characteristics of a person in the first place, however, if the

potential integrators have difficulties to build bridges across diverse social groups, this is an indicator for the low level of social capital in that community.

At the superficial interaction level, it was found that cultural and religious differences and the strong self-censorship are significant factors inhibiting building a trust relationship with out-group members. The racial prejudices fed by the religious and cultural differences are widely-known by Malaysians; therefore, both sides of the interaction have an assumption about their self-image in the mind of the other component. But, practising self-censorship to prevent a possible conflict eradicates the opportunity to change the prejudices about others.

The second scenario is the extended and prolonged contact which is the suitable one for building trust and bridging social capital. Bad reputations about out-groups which was created as a result of negative experiences and intense prejudices can be eliminated through extended and prolonged contact. Nevertheless, in the Malaysian context, the level of intergroup contact remains limited because of the increasing segregation in multi-ethnic social settings. In racialized everyday spaces, non-ethnics are physically unreachable; thus, reducing negative perceptions and prejudices about each other become increasingly challenging for Malaysians. Besides, even though there are still ethnically-mixed places, such as international schools or companies, their numbers compared to the whole community remain inadequate.

Meaningful contact and the level of trust is also related to the common norms and shared values. Increasing level of intergroup interaction and trust feeling help to create and reinforce common norms and shared values accepted by the community members as a whole. Nevertheless, even though, at some level, there can be seen a cultural interaction in terms of food, clothes or lifestyles, neither the interviews conducted for the present study, nor the field research observations of the researcher indicated value exchanges

between ethnic groups. This can be accepted an indication for the level of bonding social capital of ethnic groups. How the ethnic groups, namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, determine and crystalize their in-group borders which impede the creation of common norms and value system will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS TO SOCIAL CAPITAL: MACRO LEVEL

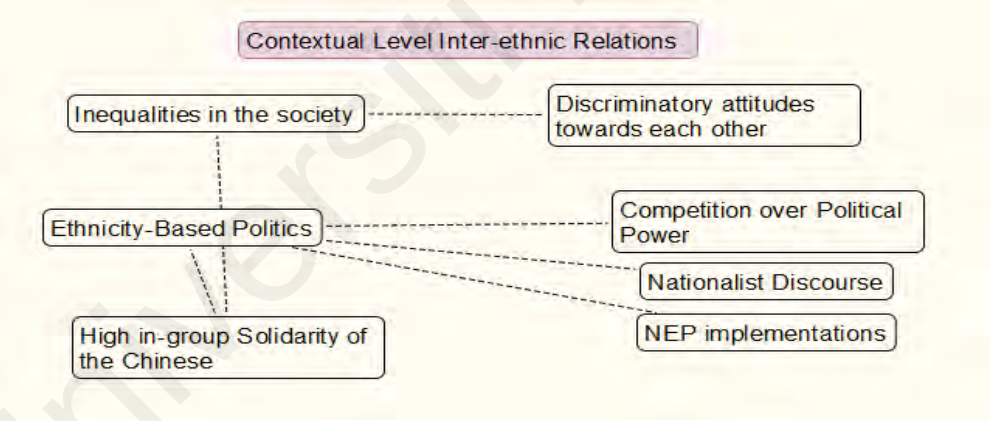
Social capital can be built through cooperative intergroup activities or meaningful contact with others in a multi-ethnic social setting. However, some macro social factors such as the social, political or economic structure of the society can influence building social trust or intergroup relations of the community members. Newton (2006) emphasises the role of the state/government and social capital association as follows.

> Social capital theory argues that there is a virtuous circle of high trust, well-established social institutions, good government and strong popular political support, which then helps to sustain social trust between citizens, foster community and civic participation and encourage collective activity for the common good. (Newton, 2006)

On the other hand, as empirical studies revealed, there is a close connection between low-level of social trust, high levels of corruption, poorly-functioned state, low-level of confidence in government institutions, and strong in-group bonds (*see* Delhey and Newton, 2005; Knack, 2002; Putnam, 1993; Newton, 2006). Therefore, it can be claimed that the functioning of the state determines the level of social trust and the participation of its people in civic life.

Ethnic competition theory suggests another explanation namely, the presence of an out-group in a community creates a competition between social groups over scarce resources, and causes a conflict of interest and hostility (Savelkoul *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, government' political or economic implementations can promote existing competition or contestation between rival social groups over power or resources. At the individual level the competition is on a very small scale; therefore, it may not be evident; however, at the macro level, resources and power are on a large scale, so is the competition.

Ethnic division had major ramifications at the societal level in Malaysia. Historically, the ruling elite of independent Malaya perpetuated the colonial governing system. The new government through its policies such as categorising Malaysians as Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra, providing special entitlements for Bumiputras, positioning Malay language and culture above others and promoting them caused some discontentment among the non-Malays (Haque, 2003), On the other hand, the relative out-group size and the economic superiority of the Chinese fostered the imbalances and distrust of Malays towards Chinese. This led to the introduction of the New Economic Policy aimed to reduce the economic disparities and improve the economically disadvantaged position of Malays in the society (Andaya and Andaya, 1982, p.284). Based on that, ethnic competition between ethnic groups shaped the intergroup relations. How it affected social capital building of individuals in Malaysia is the focus of this chapter.



Source: Compiled by the author based on the interviews

Figure 5.1 Social factors that undermine social capital in Malaysia

Macro social factors were examined in three subsections; in the first part, the inequalities in the community were put under scrutiny to find out how the participants considered themselves in the society, and what kind of discriminatory attitudes they faced. Subsequently, their perceptual position in the society and its impact on non-Malay's sense of belonging was discussed. In the second part, ethnicity-based politics and its consequences were examined to locate how fear of others shaped relationships with 'others'. Lastly, in the third section, the Chinese participants' perspective, the origin

of in-group solidarity was examined in order to understand the macro social factors undermining the social trust-building process and meaningful contact between non-ethnics.

6.1 Inequalities and Perceived Threat

Inequality is one of the major indicators of a poorly-performing state, and the level of inequality between people in a community is closely associated with the low level of social capital according to Delhey and Newton (2005). As they indicated, a well-functioning government helps to create an environment that people can act in more trustworthy nature, but in a reverse condition, the level of social capital is low. In this subsection, the survey participants' perception about their social position is examined from the inequality and social capital relationship perspective.

6.1.1 Being Secondary-Citizen and Discrimination (Non-Malays)

Rather than discussing the factual social or economic inequality between Malaysians, in this research the perceived inequality of the minority participants was examined. For that reason, the non-Malay participants were asked whether they considered themselves as second-class citizen or not, and also, whether they had faced any discrimination so far. These two questions were particularly important because if minority groups consider themselves as equal to the majority group, the level of trust is expected to be higher, according to previous empirical studies.

However, when the responses were examined, only 5 out of 14 (2 Chinese and 3 Indian participants) stated that they did not feel like secondary citizens; whereas the rest of them indicated that they felt unequal to the Malays. The reasons for this feeling vary, some of the reasons mentioned by the non-Malay participants included, (i) Bumiputra, non-Bumiputra division and excluding non-Bumiputras, (ii) affirmative actions and providing

special rights and quotas for Bumiputras, (iii) giving scholarships, promotions and positions mostly to Malays, (iv) applying glass-ceiling to non-Malays and non-Muslims, (v) not treated fairly by the state.

According to the responses, Malays are positioned as a superior ethnic group to the rest of the society, even in the constitution of Malaysia; one of the Chinese interviewees pointed out that as follows.

> Participant-8 (Chinese, Female): Yes, I feel like a second-class citizen. Even according to the constitution, we are not really treated equally. According to the constitution, ethnic Malays enjoy the special entitlements, special position. If you check the constitution, you will find that.

Apart from the constitution, as another Chinese participant reported, there was a social hierarchy based on ethnic identities of the individuals. In accordance with the position in the social hierarchy, people receive different treatments which are the embodiment of unwritten rules in the social and political structure. In other words, non-Malays are facing a sort of a glass ceiling in this social hierarchy, that impede their promotion or even obstruct their climbing up the career ladder.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): It is not official. I mean, usually the promotion or our rankings. You get promoted, not based on merit, but you get promoted based on race usually. There is a glass ceiling somewhere. It is unstated, but the vice chancellor of the UM will always be a Malay. (…) It is not official but, you can understand. Like the Prime Minister of Malaysia will never normally be an Indian or Chinese. It is not in the constitution, but it is just politically incorrect. (…) I can understand the reason, but you feel as a second-class citizen because you feel like, up to a certain level, "this is what you get, stop! You cannot go up!".

There are also different perspectives among the Chinese participants. For example, Participant-7 claimed that non-Malays did not come across with any serious problems in their daily lives, nevertheless, as he pointed out, the "newcomers" or "immigrants" expressions used by the majority ethnic group indicated their distrust of the Chinese community;

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): [Do you think that you or your co-ethnics are treated as a secondary citizen?] In some respects, yes, but some respects no. I don't think most of the Chinese have a major issue in their personal lives. Every now and then they [Chinese] are told "go home" and things like that, these things have reminded them "you are not fully trusted by local population". But apart from that, they don't have much problem [from] day to day.

Two thirds of the non-Malay participants (half of them is Chinese and the other half is Indian) stated that they or their co-ethnics faced discrimination at some stages of their life. In this regard, discrimination, in the workplaces or in schools such as qualifying for scholarship, were frequently mentioned by them. Certain positions, especially the top positions in the university for example, are only given to the Malays according to the non-Malay participants. However, even though they were not happy with the situation, they seemed to accept it;

> Participant-19 (Chinese, Male) […] they [Malays] get more advantages because this country is giving the affirmative actions to the Malays until now it is still on. [Do you feel angry?] No, I think I have to accept it. Here is something we cannot do anything. That is why a number of Chinese and Indians are migrating. We have to accept it. Normally Chinese accept it if you stay in the country.

The reason for the emigration of Chinese and Indians is the discrimination they suffered, as Participant-19 noted. Nevertheless, the Malaysian state does not perform an active role in fighting the discrimination (Haque, 2003). Nepotism, namely protecting co-ethnics to give the opportunity to them even though there are more qualified and deserving people is widely practised and implemented among all ethnic denominations. A non-Malay participant indicated his experience as below.

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): If you are a Chinese or Indian […] if you want to reach the top, you had better be a Malay. There is no problem for [being] a deputy dean normally, but top [positions] must be Malay. We all know that.

The same nepotism problem was reported to occur in schools especially in matters related to scholarship for university education. The non-Malay participants (P2, P5 and

P18) commented that Muslims/Malays could find scholarship much easily, even though there are non-Malay students who have greater scores than Malay students.

> Participant-2 (Indian, Male): Even now the scholarships, if the hundred scholarship comes up non-Malays get only 10%, 90 will go to them, and they [the government] are manipulating it in a different way, they say the money comes from outside.

In terms of discrimination, religion comes out as a more important category than ethnic identities, as the participants indicated. They pointed out that they would be given promotion, scholarship or higher-level positions, if they were Muslim. In this regard, ethnic identities seemed to be in the background when it comes to getting opportunities for promotion or scholarship. One of the Chinese interviewees shared her experience, when she was a student, she was asked to convert to Islam to get the scholarship for her university education. As she noted, being a Muslim would have made finding a scholarship easier for her.

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): When I was small, I did well in my exams, and someone told me "you need to embrace a different religion if you want to get a scholarship. [Was he implying that you should convert to Islam?] Yes, if I wanted a scholarship. So, that made me very uncomfortable, that happened to me when I was a teenager, young. If I was willing to change my religion, he could find me a scholarship. I was very upset at that time. I found it very insulting.

Besides the discrimination, as the Chinese interviewees experienced, in general, it is very clear that most of them are feeling unprotected in such a way that they have no place to complain or demand justice when they faced unfairness or discrimination. Considering even at the micro level, segregation is a part of life, it seems that non-Malays perceive that they have to internalise it.

> Participant-8 (Chinese, Female): I remember that during [my] undergraduate years, I stayed in a residential college. Most of the clubs and activities in the hostel dominated by Malays. (…) I was appointed as a vice president of the sports club in my hostel, but during most of the meeting, they tried to exclude me. Very obvious. Back then I was no courage to complain about that because whom to complain? If I complain to my seniors, they also couldn't do

> anything. (…) If I complain to the head of the hostel, even more trouble to cause to myself. They might kick me out of the hostel.

Another important point closely related to the social capital concept is that some of the interviewees stated that they had not faced any discrimination, or they faced but not affected much from the discrimination. Being professional and having a broader network protect them when they need help against discriminatory implementations. This also demonstrate how bridging social capital can be effective to deal with discrimination social, as well as professional life.

> Participant- 3 (Indian, Female): I faced discrimination but I think it did not go to the extent that really affected me. Because I have a great support system around me, where people stepped into and make sure that it did not get out of hand. In that case, I was lucky.
>
> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): It might be. I do not see because I am professional. I am sitting in a position where people respect me and everything is fine. You are in a position that you are good. I think things get easy but if you are not in that position and you are the minority, that is a problem.

6.1.2 Feeling Discriminated (Malays)

Discrimination is not only practised by the state supported majority group against minority groups, but also practised by minority groups towards the majority, Malays. As pointed out by Participant-18, Malays suffer from discrimination particularly in the private sector by non-Malay owned companies. Predominantly in the job market related to business sector, Malay graduates face challenges in their job applications because non-Malay governed private companies do not prefer choosing Malay applicants, but instead, they mostly employ non-Malay candidates.

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): It is not Chinese are being discriminated by others, or Indians by Muslims. I think the reverse can also happen. We all humans, I think no one' race is perfect. I think Chinese themselves could be discriminatory towards others. If you look at the study that has done by Lee Hwok Aun and Mohammed Abdul Khalid. It is a joint work between a Chinese and a Malay. They looked at the private sector. In the private sector,

> one of the findings was that for Malays it is harder to get into a private sector job. They prefer non-Malays.

The study of Lee and Mohammed (2013) mentioned by the participant to exemplify the discrimination against Malays reveals that racial identity in the job market is a more significant consideration than the quality of the applicant. As the findings of their study indicated, the Malay applicants have lower chance to be called for interview in comparison to the Chinese candidates because of the Chinese language proficiency requirements or racial profile of the employers (Lee and Muhammed, 2016). This study, in this regard, reveals that bonding social capital of ethnic groups and their in-group solidarity is much stronger than their bridging social capital. High level of bonding social capital among the Chinese excludes Malays from the Chinese-dominated business sector. It is also parallel with Portes (1998)'s argument suggesting that ethnic niches reinforce the group identity, while creating barriers for others from gaining the same opportunities. Participant-9 illustrated how ethnic identities created barriers for non-ethnics in the workplaces.

> Participant-9 (Indian, Female): Actually, it is not in a written document, or it is not a rule in the country, it is based on a person's perception. Sometimes in working places (…) they may treat the other race as a secondary citizen. So, based on this, I have encountered this kind of discrimination before. For example, if the leader or the immediate one belongs to one particular race, if there is an opportunity coming up for the staff, so if the person is only looking for their race, they may give the opportunity to that particular staff, even though others have more qualifications.

6.1.3 Feeling Discriminated (Co-ethnics)

In addition to the all discriminatory attitudes towards non-ethnics, "discrimination towards co-ethnics" was also reported by the interviewees. One of the Chinese participants described her situation as "boycotted by her co-ethnics". The reason for the discrimination was that breaking the tacit agreement of staying in a closed ethnic-community group circle.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): When I came over to KL, I was culturally shocked. Because at that time, all my roommates were Chinese. In Sarawak, I mixed with Malay and Indian people. One day, my roommates had a problem with me, and they did a boycott on me. I did not know what happened. (…) After that, I found out that because I had good relationships with Malay friends, that is why they boycotted me. This is so silly. This is the difference between the Chinese in Sarawak and Chinese here. I grew up in Sarawak, so, I cannot trust only Chinese and sacrifice the friendship for them.

The multi-ethnic environment she grew up, and her high level of trust towards non-ethnics made it possible to become friends with other ethnic groups easily, unlike her Chinese roommates from Peninsular Malaysia. On the one hand, this quote clearly shows how inter-ethnic experiences change an individual's behaviours by teaching them how to interact with each other. But on the other hand, as she indicated, Chinese in West Malaysia had difficulties to mingle with non-ethnics because, for them, the need for security outweighed the eagerness of socialising with others. As a result, they eventually turned to their closed group while reducing the inter-ethnic contacts. This was clearly expressed by Participant-5.

> Participant-5 (Chinese, Female): They feel insecure actually. [Why?] I do not know, but they try to generate a group for themselves, to protect each other, help each other like that. […] I am sure there is something problematic in cultural development here West Malaysia.

Participant-5's comparison between West and East Malaysian Chinese gave some insights into the cultural development in two different community. As far as the researcher is concerned, this difference and the reasons for the insecurity of the West Malaysian Chinese should be further investigated in order to understand the underlying causes of bridging and bonding social capital building process in Malaysian society.

6.1.4 Governance and Citizens' Sense of Belonging

The literature on social capital indicates a close relationship between poorly-governed state, such as lack of impartial legal structure, economic inequalities or corruption of politicians, and the country's social capital level. In this regard, as discussed above, non-

Malay participants commonly discussed the state' discriminatory implementations towards themselves, such as special rights and privileges for Bumiputra. The feeling og being second-class citizen and facing impartiality and discrimination is associated with the sense of belonging according to the Chinese participants. As a reaction to the treatments the Chinese faced, a new phenomenon of the "re-immigration of the Chinese" emerged. Participant-11 pointed out that some of the Chinese and Indians felt frustrated and helpless under the unequal treatments they faced in the country and chose to move out of the country.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): [Does the discrimination you face affect your sense of belonging to Malaysia?] Yes, some of us feel very frustrated. Half of my family has migrated to Australia. It is very common, a lot of professionals, Indians and Chinese, the middle-class and upper middle class have moved on, and that is why there is a brain drain. Malaysia has lost a lot of talent because of that.

Parallel to the phenomenon, in the interviews, the participants were asked the question of "do you feel as a part of Malaysian society?", and all of the non-Malay interviewees responded positively; nevertheless, some of them would still consider moving to another country if they had a chance (4 out of 14), or they had already immigrated but had to turn back to Malaysia. All of the participants who would consider moving out if there was a chance, were Chinese. This is an interesting indicator because the Chinese and Indian participants had similar experiences about the discrimination or unequal treatment, but none of the Indian participants stated eagerness to immigrate to another country. Even more, they stressed that Malaysia was their "home".

> Participant-15 (Indian, Female): [If you had a chance, would you move to another country?] I don't [won't] go anywhere. This is my home.

It should also be noted that one of the Chinese interviewees was willing to move to another country, preferring to go to more a democratic country in which they could enjoy

freedom of speech, or equal rights, for example. This is an indicator of how the quality of government or its governance affects the sense of belonging of its people;

> Participant-8 (Chinese, Female): Netherlands, Taiwan, Canada. These three countries, they are highly democratised, and in these countries, people can enjoy freedom of speech. Something that cannot speak in Malaysia and Singapore, in those countries, yes, you can discuss.

6.2 Ethnicity-Based Politics in Malaysia

As discussed earlier in the literature section of the first chapter, ethnic identifications in Malaysia have a substantial impact on almost every dimension of life, from social, to political, and to economic life. According to Haque (2003) from administration to business, economics, education, language and religion, there is a clear ethnic competition in Malaysia, and in this competition, the Malaysian state plays a negotiator role between main ethnic groups.

The British colonisers' governing system based on "divide and rule" was applied to regulate the ethnic relations in Malaysia, moreover colonial power muted the ethnic competition between major ethnic groups by this way (Tan, 1982). The divide and rule policy were continued to be used by the ruling elite after independence. The parliamentary system was shaped on the basis of prioritising ethnic or communal identities, in that sense, the political institutions became highly racialized; the political parties were considered to protect the interest of the ethnic groups they represent (Tan, 1982). The same mentality is still dominant in the political system according to Participant-16. As he exemplified, members of an ethnic group can solve their problems by the help of NGO's or political parties that represent them.

> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): The problem here is, each community has their own problem, and the problem is solved by their political party. (…) When Indian wants to set up a museum, they will have these NGOs, and then they will consult the Indian Minister. The same goes for Chinese. How do you bring these people together!

On the other hand, after the last election in 2018 (G14), the winning coalition front has many multi-ethnic elements, for that reason, in the near future, it can be expected to see some changes in the ethnic-group and representative-political-party equation in the Malaysian political system.

Similar to Participant-16, the ethnicity-based political system was seen as an obstacle to enable national integration in Malaysia because to attract the voters, politicians were using ethnic sentiments that led to polarisation in the society, as claimed by Participant-18.

> Participant-18 (Chinese, Female): The problem of integration is partly because of history, the Chinese [were] in certain fields. I think it started during the colonial times, but I would not blame just the colonials. (…) If you want to win votes, you use the race sentiment. And also, because when you talk about race and religion, it is so easy to mobilise people.

As a result, the non-Malay participants pointed out their displeasure with the ethnically-driven political system, unlike the majority of the Malay participants. Moreover, when the participants asked their opinion about the last election in 2018 (GE14) the majority of the Malay participants mentioned getting rid of corrupted politicians.

> Participant-4 (Malay, Female): [Has the last election (GE14) changed the way you think about government or politics?] Yes, in good way, we have the same ideas about the kind of leader that we want. Integrity is very important, I am happy about that.

On the other hand, the Chinese and Indian participants shared overwhelmingly their pleasure with the changing nature of ethnicity-based politics after the last general election in the country.

> Participant-19 (Chinese, Male): [Has the last election (GE14) changed the way you think about government or politics?] Yes. We have a better chance to change ethnic base policy. We have a hope. I think this time a lot of Chinese and Indians, and some of the Malays hope for a change.

6.2.1 Competition over Political Power

The competition between ethnic groups and the importance of ethnic identification among Malaysians is best seen in the political realm, because the political system of Malaysia was designed on the ground of ethnic division after the colonial era. Since the independence, the Malay majority party helmed the political power in the country, while the second biggest ethnic group, the Chinese dominated the business sector of Malaysia. To understand the competition between Chinese and Indians over political power, the question if a Chinese or Indians is seen as a part of Malaysian society was posed to the Malay interviewees. According to responses, all of the Malay interviewees agreed that non-Malays were a part of Malaysian society.

> Participant-4 (Malay): I take the Chinese and Indians as part of Malaysian society. Some bad ministers use the word, you can go back to your home country, I think that is bad. I never thought the Indians and Chinese who stay here or born here, whose parents migrated from China and India and became the residents, a citizen of Malaysia I never thought they are not Malaysian. I always treated them as Malaysians regardless of this problem of trust that I have.

However, as gathered from the interviews, although the Malay participants see the Chinese and Indians as inseparable parts of Malaysian society, the majority of them were not willing to have a non-Malay govern their country. To understand Malays' social trust towards the Chinese and Indians, the question "if a Chinese or Indian Prime Minister ruled your country, would it bother you?" was asked to them. The question aimed to analyse the degree of Malays' perception of other ethnic groups as a threat to their social positions in the country. Political competition between Chinese, Indians and Malays came to light when Malay participants were asked about sharing the political power with non-Malays. Although some of the participants stated positive feelings towards the idea of a Chinese or Indian Prime Minister, the majority of them (5 out of 7) had strong

reservations about this. As Participant-1 pointed out, the leader of the country had to be a Malay because it was their priority to hold this position.

> Participant-1 (Malay): Because I have to think about the general sentiment as well, in terms of whether or not it is acceptable. […] So, I would say, it would bother me a little bit. Because this is one of the areas where we still consider that it is the prerogative of the Malay Muslim community, priority to become Prime Minister.

The dichotomy of "us" and "them" came to light from the Malay participants' interviews. Accordingly, the top position of the country is important and symbolical because the Prime Minister represents *the owner ethnic group* of the country. From one of the Malay participant's point of view, for example, Chinese and Indians should not be in the top positions because they are *newcomers* (immigrants) to Malaysia; therefore, their position in the state should be limited to the position of Deputy Ministers.

> Participant 14 (Malay, Female): I want a Malay to be the head, but they [Chinese or Indians] can become a Deputy [Ministers] because in Malaysia, Malays are the first who were here. They [Chinese and Indians] are the one who comes from another country. They come from China, from India. They are like an immigrant. We are the original [people] of this place.

These reservations fundamentally are associated with "the fear of others". The interviewees who objected to a Chinese or Indian Prime Minister were asked "what would change if a Chinese or Indian Prime Minister ruled the country?", and the trust issue between the three ethnic groups turned out to be clear. Some of the interviewees stated that they would feel vulnerable or insecure in that situation because they did not know what to expect from the Chinese or Indian Prime Minister. One of the Malay participants shared her thoughts that if a Chinese or an Indian became Prime Minister, s/he could change the constitution, national language or the official religion of the state.

> Participant- 12 (Malay, Female): If you want to have a non-Malay as a Prime Minister, it means also other things like the education system, the official language of the country all these considered as well. If all these changes taking place, [it would be] perhaps less [fewer] special rights for the Malays, and then, like what happened to Singapore, perhaps the other languages

> would also be considered as official languages simultaneously English, Chinese etc. So, Malay rights might be reduced, Malay privileges [too]. Even religion, which is Islam, perhaps more liberal policy [would apply], [so that] anybody can change their religion etc.

It can be derived from the quotation above that the level of perceived threat from the non-Malays and distrust towards non-ethnics is considerably high. From that perspective, ethnicity-based politics seems to have a significant influence on Malaysians.

Another Malay participant highlighted her feeling of vulnerability when a non-Malay ruled the country, with similar concerns with Participant-12, but more importantly she revealed religion-related concerns. Accordingly, having a Muslim Prime Minister is a guarantee for the position of Islam in the country and in the constitution.

> Participant- 4 (Malay): (…) I am not sure what he is going to bring this country, how is he going to accept the federal constitution, how much respect he has [for] diversities, for the majority in the country, especially talking about the dominant religion, which is Islam. One thing that I feel so much insecure is the third and fourth generation [who] do not understand religion in a way the elderly people understand it. […] I [will] have a vulnerable feeling, if the Prime Minister is not a Muslim because it is normal [for] a religious person [to] give a preference to his religion. So, I think distrust [towards non-Muslims] is normal. How could you trust a person, for example, a Hindu who become a Prime Minister and give you a guarantee that he will not change the constitution.

On the other hand, there are also Malay interviewees who embrace the idea of a Chinese or Indian Prime Minister (2 out of 7). For them, as they stated, the ethnic identity of the person was not important; as long as they were capable of being a good leader they could vote for and trust.

> Participant-21 (Malay): For me, the question is not about ethnicity. The question is capabilities. If someone is capable, it doesn`t matter what ethnicity [he/she] is.

Consequently, the majority of the Malay participants were not willing to lose their political power, some of them revealed their fears of the Chinese and Indians. Nevertheless, there were also Malay participants expressing that the ethnic identity of the

Prime Minister did not create a concern for them, as long as he/she was able to govern the country.

Mandal (2001)'s national self-being conceptualisation is relevant in the context of race relations in Malaysia. Mandal (2001) pointed out that the cultural solidarities do not work in a coordinated manner with the ethnically-divided party politics. Rather, there are other individual identities on the definition of self-being at the grassroots beneath the collective identities. According to him, the individual identities vary "from the strictly plural (in the sense of a divided society) to the pluralist (fluid intermingling across boundaries), to the fused and hybrid" (p.158). The responses of the Malay participants in this section can be reviewed in light of Mandal's argument. In this respect, the Malay participants reflect two different kind of individual identities, namely, the strictly plurals and the pluralists. The majority of the Malay participants shared similar viewpoints with the plural perspective, whilst there were also 2 participants who can be seen as pluralists. The plural perspective supporters saw Malays as superior to other ethnic groups and emphasised Malays' pre-eminent position as the landlords of the country. Their mentality was shaped mainly by the fear of others, rather than their personal memories of the past, as Mandal (2001) suggests.

On the other hand, the pluralist participants pointed out that the characteristics of a person were more significant than his/her ethnic identity, and they were more open to contact with out-group members. Therefore, the participants in the second category, i.e. the pluralists, appeared to be able to construct their collective identity with the positive intergroup experiences, instead of the fear of 'other' ethnic groups. They also seemed to be more comfortable to create meaningful intergroup contact in comparison to the participants in the first category. This would be one of the main reasons for the pluralists' high level of bridging social capital.

6.2.2 Nationalist Discourse

Distrust of non-ethnics is significantly correlated with the narrative based on the fear of others. The Malay nationalist way of thinking has shaped Malaysian politics since colonial times (Tan, 1982). As Cheah (1984) indicated, the earliest Malay nationalism discourse was formed based on the fear of Malays losing their homeland to the outsiders, namely Chinese and Indians (cited in Mandal, 2001). The nationalist discourse has been formulated based on the division of the ethnic groups as Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra at the societal level, by somewhat maintaining the divide and rule style of the British, and the competition of ethnic groups at the societal level.

According to Leow (2018), Malayness and Chineseness are the two labels creating mental borders in the minds of Malaysians. In Leow's words "… Malayness and Chineseness are not perfectly formed single identities to be worn or removed like a hat, but disciplined, social creations, cognitive process or even mindsets and sociocognitive frames which produces a certain lived reality" (Leow, 2018, p 7-8). Malay nationalist discourse, in this regard, has played an important role in the creating the borders of Malayness on the basis of the Malay dominance or Malay political primacy, and the threat from other ethnic groups, particularly Chinese. Nevertheless, by doing that, this discourse has regenerated and reaffirmed the borders of Chineseness, as well (Leow, 2018, p. 11), which was a significant factor for the formation of the high bonding social capital of the Chinese community in Malaysia.

According to Ting (2009), the mindset of Malay political primacy is originated from the ideological rationale which non-Malays should not equally be treated with Malays because they have non-native ancestral origins. In the same vein, one of the Malay interviewees discussed how the nationalist political discourse utilized the ethnic awareness, and doing so, undermined the social trust of non-ethnics and fostered bonding

social capital among co-ethnics. The discourse is based on the fear of others and the fear of losing the resources that each ethnic group has at their disposal or the opportunities to access these resources.

> Participant-17 (Malay, Male): We have got a political narrative, that is our political discourse. This narrative is based on fear; fear of losing out. Losing resources, or the opportunity for access to resources. Losing whatever the space you perceive or you gain […] Any kind of resources that available, it can be business, it can be governmental —the fear that you have at stake. You have something that belongs to you, and you are afraid the other group is going to take a bit of what is yours. So, we are fed this narrative of fear in our political discourse.

The segregation of Malays and non-Malays from the colonial era is reinforced by the nationalist discourse against the non-Malays. Thus, as Participant-17 indicated, instead of a cohesive, unifying discourse in order to generate a superordinate Malaysian identity comprising each and every ethnic group, the ruling elite have preferred the hegemony of ethnic identities over the national identity. By fostering the perceived threat of ethnic groups with the help of the nationalist discourse, the inter-ethnic trust got damaged severely. Daniels's (2005) discourse analysis of Malaysian politicians supports the claim of fear of politics. According to his findings, the political discourse originated in protecting ethnic group's interests separately, and exerts "the fear" instrument; "Politicians and mainstream newspapers frequently reminded people that if it were not for government "affirmative action" programs for Malays, the relative peace, prosperity and stability would fall apart and dissipate." (p.77).

However, on festivals and other celebration days such as Deepavali, Christmas, Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Chinese New Year, the national/official discourse highlights national unity and strong inter-ethnic bonds. Nevertheless, even this unity massages focuses on the three main ethnic groups in general, as Participant-17 pointed out below.

> Participant-17 (Malay, Male): One of the advertisement was playing during the Independence Day shows how ethnic communities are represented, you

> mostly see the three ethnic groups. During the festivities, recent Hari Raya Qurban, Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, but we don't hear [about] other ethnic celebrations. This reinforces the agency of the major ethnic communities that have become part of the narrative.

As Participant-17 discussed, the discourse based on fear of others plays an important role to perpetuate the divisions based on ethnicity and it fosters the perceived threat of each other. By doing that, the state undermines the trust-building process between ethnic groups by threatening them of each other.

6.2.3 New Economic Policy and Dividing Political System Based on Ethnic Identities

The last factor that fosters the inequalities of the community and maintains the state flaws of policies is the favouring of particular ethnic groups over others, the New Economic Policy (NEP) in a case in point. According to the responses of the participants, ethnicity-based politics, NEP and affirmative actions, namely special rights and privileges for Bumiputra, and discrimination were mentioned frequently in the same context, particularly by the non-Malay participants.

For the non-Malay participants, the patronage system in politics, based on ethnic division, maintains the power of the ruling party. The NEP implementations, in this regard, helped to create Malay ruling elite's own business class, but the poor –which was the main target of the NEP to ameliorate their socioeconomic position stayed neglected. However, according to Participant-7, after the failure of the NEP in terms of increasing the socioeconomic position of the lower-income group of Malays, the ruling elite used the racial sentiments and the fear of Chinese's economic power in order to manipulate the lower classes' frustrations because of their poor socioeconomic conditions.

> Participant-7 (Chinese, Male): What I saw in the previous system is rich are being rewarded. So even though they called [it] New Economic Policy, the rich Malays become rich and poor Malays are still very poor. And then, the

> poor Malays stay very poor and blame the non-Malays. This is what I say, "the usage of the race in politics".

From the non-Malay participants' point of view, NEP was considered discriminatory policy because it was planned to focus on the lower-class Malaysians regardless of their ethnic identities, but, to a large extent, it helped a small percentage of Malays in the society. Therefore NEP, in practice, did not help Malays as intended, and also ignored the lower-class non-Malays.

> Participant-16 (Indian, Male): It was meant to restructure the society. Before 1970, the Malays were backward, they need to be helped. So, this policy came in place. New economic policy, intention on, they have 30% of all wealth in this country. But what happened in the implementation. It really did not help the needful Malays. Rich Malays have become richer. (…) So, what I am trying to say is [that] so much is given to rich Malays, [but] the one who is neglected is the non-Malays.

On the other hand, one of the Malay participants had a different opinion in terms of the NEP's negative consequences because, for him, the NEP did manage to improve the socioeconomic position of disadvantaged Malays. However, he claims that the policy did not restrain development of the Chinese business in Malaysia.

> Participant-17 (Malay, Male): There were positive discrimination in recognition of disadvantageousness certain population, for example Malays against the Chinese. So, for 30 years, there was a New Economic Policy. It was meant to uplift lower income Malays, so that they would be, at least, equal. What has happened is, yes, it has uplifted a lot of lower income Malays to the middle class, but it didn't cartel the opportunities for the Chinese business to grow. So, you can find a lot of Chinese companies['] growth.

6.3 High In-Group Solidarity among the Chinese

The in-group solidarity and high level of bonding social capital among Chinese is another macro social problem impeding social trust and interactions with non-ethnics. As Leow (2018) points out, both Chinese and Malay ethnic boundaries and the Malay nationalist discourse was formed by the state, and this played a crucial role in shaping the Chinese ethnic identity (p. 11-13). It can be claimed that the Chinese Malaysians have

one of the strongest ethnic awareness among the overseas Chinese. As Participant-7 criticised, Chinese Malaysians still consider themselves as Chinese instead of Malaysian. He highlighted that although mainland China's culture has been changing, the Chinese Malaysians are not changing simultaneously. The reason for that is their strong hold and attachment to the Chinese heritage and the culture of their ancestors. This might create problems for them in becoming neither Chinese nor Malaysian.

> Participant- 7 (Chinese): I do not blame a hundred per cent Malays for this divide. We call ourselves as Chinese. So, every time I went to class -I used to teach a PhD class- asked them [students] that "how many [of us] are Chinese", and they all raised their hands. I asked them, "which part of China are you from?". You are not Chinese; you are Malaysians. You have Chinese descent. If you go back to China, you will have a very bad time because China had changed. What we have here are the customs of ancestors when they [brought] from China. Our social system is frozen in [our ancestor's] time.

The Chinese vernacular schools have contributed significantly to the protection of Chinese culture and identity to be passed it on to the future Chinese generations. Nevertheless, as Participant-8 indicated, allowing Chinese to protect their cultural heritage and ethnic identity through the Chinese schools or other institutions leads unwittingly to the separation from the Malaysian society, instead of unifying under a superordinate "Malaysian" identity.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): (…) the Malaysian government, in their good will, allow us to preserve our language, our schools, our culture, the Chinese heritage and culture and everything. But the unintended consequence, the culture does not mix. (…) We do it in the name of multiculturalism. We allow the ethnic minority to preserve the heritage and culture which is a wonderful thing. But we [as Chinese] lose the Malaysian identity. We [Chinese] do not interact with one another as much. So, we become so proud and so obsessed with our own culture. (…) We are so proud of thousands of years of civilisation; this proud [feeling] itself insulate us from interacting with the other [Malay and Indian] civilisations which is not a good thing.

Another reason for the high bonding social capital of Chinese, and their perceived resistance to coalesce with other Malaysian cultures was, their perception of the Malay

culture as not being up to standard. Participant-11 stated that the Chinese could adapt to other cultures if they saw that it was pragmatic to do so.

> Participant-11 (Chinese, Male): The Chinese are quite pragmatic; it doesn't matter which language and culture, as long as it helps me to improve my advance, my living, my integration, I would embrace it. (…) The Malay system doesn't work for us. We are reluctant to give up our Chinese culture and embrace Malay culture because we feel that the Malay system is not up to the standard. If it is English, there is a debate whether Malaysia should use, education should use English, we would be more than happy to embrace it because English is a much stronger international language.

On the other hand, the state policies, namely the affirmative actions and the Malay privileges has also impacted the relationships with Chinese and Malays at the individual level as argued by Participant-19.

> Participant-19 (Chinese, Male): Some groups are more advantageous. They are Muslim Malays. Because this country is giving the affirmative actions to the Malays, until now it is still on. [Does it affect you relations with Malays?] In a way, yes.

As a result, when the responses were examined, it is clear that the Chinese in-group solidarity and ethnically divided political system has an action and reaction relationship, supporting Leow (2018)'s claims.

Contrary to the Chinese Malaysians, the Indian community, on the other hand, does not reveal a high in-group solidarity and bonding social capital signs. A likely reason for this is partly the size of the community because, in comparison to the Chinese, Indians constitute a relatively small portion of the population; by implication, they have to interact with other ethnic groups more frequently in social and economic life. Furthermore, since the size of the Chinese community and their economic power is more significant, the Malay nationalist discourse targeted the Chinese more than Indians. Thus, have led to the Chinese community feeling much more alienated than Indians. Because of the lack of economic power of Indians, they could not manage to survive on their own and they have become somewhat dependent on the state. As a result, their in-group solidarity did not

develop as much as Chinese community, but, as the previous empirical studies revealed, Indians have a higher level of bridging social capital in comparison to Chinese and Malays (*see* Tamam, 2013).

6.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the macro-social factors, such as the state's social policies and political activities inducing the bonding social capital while undermining social trust and the positive impact of meaningful contact between non-ethnics was discussed. According to the participants' thoughts and experiences, three different themes arose from the interviews. In the first theme, a sense of inequality faced with discrimination and perceived threat relationship was revealed. Three types of discrimination were mentioned by the participants, namely, non-Malays discriminated by the state, Malays discriminated by non-Malays, and ethnics discriminated by their co-ethnics. As a result of discriminations, a majority of the non-Malay participants did not see themselves as equal citizens like the Malays, and thus, the sense of belonging deteriorated, especially among the Chinese participants.

Secondly, ethnicity-based political system was another factor restraining social capital building process: political system divided on the basis of ethnic identities made clear the competition of ethnic groups over political power. In this regard, the majority of the Malay participants were not willing to share the political power with non-Malays because of the fear of non-Malays, that when they governed the country, they would change the official language, the religion or Malays could lose their privileges. This kind of fear was also fostered by the nationalist discourse, according to a Malay participant. He explained that the nationalist discourse based on the fear of losing the resources reinforced the distrust of non-ethnics. Lastly, NEP was commonly mentioned by the non-Malay participants as an example of the implementation of ethnic-based politics. Therefore, non-

Malay participants mostly highlighted its discriminatory side and function in the polarisation of the Malaysian society.

The third and last factor, is the high in-group solidarity of Chinese community. Their high motivation to sustain and preserve their cultural heritage, language, or customs have played a large part in impeding the integration of Chinese culture in the national culture.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the literature on social capital indicates a close relationship between a high level of social capital and a well-functioning state. In this regard, it is expected that state policies and implementations have a direct impact on people. As the findings of the present research found, the divisive and discriminatory policies of the Malaysian government have a significant influence on non-Malays in terms of their trust level, their sense of belonging, their relationships with co-ethnics and non-ethnics.

Ethnic competition theory, at the same time, can be applied to the Malaysian context, as the findings revealed. Accordingly, ethnicity-driven political system and the Malay nationalist discourse have formed and reinforced the ethnic boundaries of being Malay, even though there is a range of different identity categories existing, as Mandal (2001) indicated. However, "re-Sinification" of Chinese identity is noted in parallel to defensive Malay identification (Leow, 2018). While the nationalist discourse creates Malays supporting the plural Malaysia perspective, re-Sinification generated high in-group solidarity and bonding social capital of Chinese in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Social capital has long been researched in different disciplines across the world. Social capital comprises of trust, common norms and shared values and dense network system with active participation in political life, and it has been widely used to evaluate the "civicness" of a country (Portes, 1998). In recent years however, the aggregate level of social capital has been used as a useful instrument to compare between a number of different country contexts. These comparisons provide deeper understandings for why some of the countries have a higher level of social trust, dense network system and social solidarity, while others are struggling to find solutions for tension or conflicts between social groups and to bridge the trust deficit.

Putnam (2007) suggests that ethnic diversity in a hinders social capital building process as it can lead to declining social solidarity, lower level of trust and mutual help, rarer cooperation and rarer close contact with other ethnic groups. Furthermore, he argues that a lower level of social capital with fewer connections and less trust induces ethnics to turn inwards, or 'to hunker down' (Putnam, 2007). Therefore, as he contends, ethnic diversity leads to social isolation and a lower level of social capital.

Social scientists have investigated Putnam's thesis in different country contexts repeatedly. Although the majority of findings affirmed that high degree of homogeneity in communities is positively correlated with the social capital levels, the distribution of public expenditures, income equality, the quality of governments, or accessibility to multi-ethnic physical places for inter-group interactions affect the social capital accumulation significantly. This indicates that there is no single and simple explanation for why some countries have higher levels of social capital while others do not. In this regard, the current research investigated the underlying reasons for the low level of social

capital in the urban Malaysia from the standpoint of ethnic diversity, because ethnicity is a crucial contextual frame providing explanations for the social structure in Malaysia.

The ethnic diversity level in Malaysia is considerably high; the majority ethnic group is slightly more than half of the population while the rest of the population is comprised of various ethnic groups. Moreover, ethnic groups have diverse languages, religions and culture. Along with the individual level differences that might become barriers to inter-ethnic interactions; macro-social factors, rooted in colonial period policies that continued after independence, caused segregation along ethnic lines in Malaysian society. The British divided Malays, Chinese and Indians' workplaces, and so, their living areas were inevitably separated. As a result, the chances of meaningful contact between ethnic groups lessened whilst the racial prejudices about each other was reinforced.

In the post-independence period, under the economic and political system, ethnicity has continued to be a significant consideration in policy directions. Because of the delicate power balance between ethnic groups, particularly between Malays and Chinese, Shamsul (2003) describes the ethnic relations in Malaysia as 'in a stable tension'. Although it seems that all three ethnic groups are living together harmoniously, the interactions between them are rather limited or superficial which causes the low level of social trust, less participation in civic life, fewer common and shared values, and therefore, a general low level of social capital, as the World Values Survey (2014) and the Asian Barometer Survey (2016) results demonstrated. Therefore, by taking the historical contexts and the current conditions of ethnic relations into account, the question "in what ways ethnic diversity causes a low level of social capital in Malaysian society", particularly in Kuala Lumpur, was examined. The present research focused on three dimensions of social capital at the individual and contextual level in the urban Malaysia. The dimensions are as the following.

- The dynamics of ethnic relations that foster trust feeling and intergroup contact at the individual level,
- The problems impeding trust-building process and meaningful contact between non-ethnics at the individual level,
- The state politics and other macro problems with their consequences undermining the potential for the social trust-building process and the positive influence of meaningful contact at the macro level were discussed.

Although there are still controversies on its definition or measurement, social capital is a practical concept. It provides a varied perspective to the social structure by focusing on trust and commonly-shared norms at the individual level, and political processes, or state implementations at the macro level. It is evident that social capital is related to the modern-city life phenomenon, which means the busy and crowded cities, superficial relations, fewer friends and individuals not having very close relationships with family members as it is usually in rural areas. Thus, Kuala Lumpur, as being a metropolis with a high level of ethnic diversity, was deemed appropriate for this study.

Two main theories were applied in this study as possible explanations for inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. First is contact theory which claims that the positive, prolonged and cooperative contact between members of an out-group increases the close relationships while decreasing the perceived threat and prejudices towards them. Nevertheless, to create a positive and meaningful contact between diverse social groups, there are certain rules to be met; such as equal status, common goals, and support of authorities (Allport, 1954). When these requirements are met, the positive feelings created in these interactions are likely to be generalised on other out-group members who have not had meaningful contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Thus, contact with out-group members play an

essential role in the trust-building process and creating bridging social capital with the members of diverse social groups.

In contrast to contact theory, ethnic competition theory supports that the impact of intergroup contact is limited because the existence of an out-group in a community creates a competition over scarce resources and power, and eventually hostility between social groups (Blumer 1958, cited in Quillian, 1995). The superior position of the majority group over minorities and the size of the minorities compared with the majority group cause prejudices towards out-group members. Even though the competition is not real, the perception of out-group threat undermines intergroup contact's potential for social trust. In this theory, prejudices are the consequences of collective perceived threat.

The findings of the current research can be summarised into three parts. Firstly, the meaning of trust and intergroup relationship at the individual level was the main focus of the study. Although the cross-country surveys, such as the WVS and the ABS, ask their respondents whether they trust in other people or not, these surveys never asked what the respondents' understanding of trust was. In multi-ethnic countries like Malaysia in which religious or cultural differences overwhelmingly shape the mindsets of individuals, it is important to know what people refer to or mean when they use the word "trust". When the responses were examined, the definition of trustworthiness did not differ radically among the participants; nevertheless, some of the participants reported different expectations or requirements to build trust feeling towards others which can trigger confusions or discrepancies between non-ethnics, depending on their cultural or educational background. This finding highlights the importance of meaningful intergroup contact because, by contacting with out-group members, individuals have the opportunity to learn of their expectations or requirements for generating trust feeling.

Along with building trust, regardless of the ethnic identities of the participants, the majority of the participants emphasised the importance of positive, prolonged and cooperative contact with non-ethnics, such as attending each other's cultural festivals, exchanging food, or eating out with non-ethnic friends. According to them, meaningful contact with them helps to create social trust and decrease the level of prejudices. However, to maintain and foster the relationships, multi-ethnic social settings play an important role in providing familiarity and exposure to the other cultures by enabling physical proximity to non-ethnics. From that perspective, the Malay, Chinese and Indian participants, who were experiencing constant meaningful contact with non-ethnics in multi-ethnic settings, and participating in cooperative intergroup activities, experienced more positive feelings, and fewer prejudices towards each other. Considering those participants' non-ethnic contacts, they have, clearly, more bridging social capital at their disposal in comparison to other participants who are interacting less with out-group members. In this regard, the participants' experiences support the empirical studies based on contact theory's claim contending that a close relationship between intergroup contact reduce racial prejudices, build a high level of trust, and therefore create bridging social capital across diverse social groups.

Secondly, even though meaningful intergroup contact can create positive feelings among non-ethnics in certain circumstances, some factors undermine the beneficial impact of intergroup contacts and social trust. Those factors are categorised as lack of acceptance or tolerance, less exposure to other cultures, ethnic segregation in common places such as schools, neighbourhoods or workplaces, and lack of understanding or misunderstandings between non-ethnics.

As the ethnic competition theory suggests, the majority and minority division is felt deeply by the non-Malay participants, particularly in religion-related issues. The reason

was that, as they pointed out, their ethnic or religious differences were not accepted or tolerated by the majority Malays. This feeling has been reaffirmed with the statements of politicians or media coverages that are widespread especially during the election periods. Moreover, the dominant position of Islam and the religious discourses used by the politicians can be an aggravating factor for the perceived threat of non-Malays.

Another problem related to inter-group contact is that multi-ethnic social settings are becoming fewer. Children, for example, studying in the ethnic-language based schools only have limited chance at the primary school level to mingle with non-ethnics. In a similar vein, Malays predominantly work in the public sector whereas non-Malays are employed in the private sector. Therefore, the segregation in the multi-ethnic environments remove the intergroup contact opportunities, but strengthen racial prejudices. Besides, because these settings bring non-ethnic together, as Moussa (2018) demonstrated in her empirical research, they play an important role to enable non-ethnics in physical proximity for interaction. However, in the Malaysian case, these environments are limited, so is the opportunity to mingle with non-ethnics and building social trust in them, as well.

While segregation in multi-ethnic areas fosters prejudices, it also causes not knowing how to interact and to bond with non-ethnics, especially for the younger generation. It may be asserted that although common physical places are decreasing, people spend more time on social media in which each ethnic group can communicate effortlessly via these platforms. Nevertheless, it should also be considered that people are more cruel and unmerciful with their comments most of the time. Also, they can be anonymous in these platforms which allows them to speak however they want without considering its consequences on the other person, unlike face-to-face relations. Interestingly, a majority of the participants indicated, Malaysians avoid discussing ethnic or religious issues in

their actual relationships until they build a trust relationship. If there is not close relationship between ethnics, they prefer to perform self-censorship not to offend each other or prevent a possible conflict. This, most of the time, makes ethnic or religious problems more complex and causes misunderstandings or lack of understanding between Malaysians.

The absence of a common language was mentioned by some of the participants for hindering interactions with non-ethnics, even though Bahasa Melayu is the official language and a compulsory subject in schools. Nevertheless, as the findings of Ying *et al*. (2015) revealed, non-Malays are not very fluent in speaking Bahasa Melayu. Moreover, English, or broken Malay (English and Malay mix) has a wider usage than Bahasa Melayu in the daily communications of the participants. On the other hand, when one of the parties does not speak either English or Malay, the contact or communication with that person becomes very challenging.

As Melasutra Dali and Nikmatul Nordin (2010) found, the majority of Malaysians living in Klang Valley area preferred multi-ethnic residential areas because mixed-living areas provided them with a better understanding of other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Malay and Chinese respondents particularly preferred their fellow-ethnics to live side-by-side (Melasutra Dali & Nikmatul Nordin, 2010). As they pointed out, the reason for this preference is the lack of understanding on socio-cultural characteristics of other ethnic groups. The findings of the present research, on the other hand, indicated that neighbourhoods are not only one of the multi-ethnic social settings, there are also other mixed areas that should be taken into account, such as schools and workplaces in which people can come together to interact with non-ethnics. In addition, 'lack of understanding' might be a reason for preferring co-ethnics, but it is also a result of increasing ethnic-segregation in multi-ethnic social settings. Due to this segregation, the impact of these

areas on enabling physical proximity among non-ethnics for inter-group interactions have remained limited.

Schools remain one of the most important multi-ethnic spaces for interaction, yet the school system in Malaysia has been scrutinised in the literature in terms of inter-ethnic relations (*see* Raman & Tan, 2010; Tan *et al*., 2013; Su-Hie Ting & Yan Lee, 2019). The vernacular school system based on ethnic or mother tongue languages leads to the segregation of children based on their ethnic affiliations at the primary school level. This is particularly important because even though the Chinese and Indian students learn the national language as a common language in the vernacular schools, the limited interactions of non-ethnics seem to cause problems in acquiring friends from other ethnic groups in the later stages of their educational / pre-adult life. It should also be noted that, in view of, the growing number of international schools in Malaysia for the last ten years, and the increasing demand from non-Chinese students for enrolment in the Chinese schools (Kate Ng, 2017). Therefore, the international and Chinese schools can be considered as new multi-ethnic social settings, as well. Nonetheless, this also reveals that national schools are losing popularity among Malaysians against international and Chinese schools.

According to the non-Malay participants of the present study, Islamisation programme in the national schools is one of the reasons for the declining popularity for national schools. The competition between two predominantly Malay political parties, namely Barisan Nasional (BN) and Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS), stimulated Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, and therefore, BN government introduced various Islamisation policies in the 1980s (Loh Kok Wah, 2001). These policies have become clearly visible in the national schools. However, Islamisation policies in the national schools raised concerns from non-Malay and non-Muslim parents because of the widespread indoctrination of

Islam to their children without the parents' consent. Islamisation programme, in addition to the affirmative policies, fosters discrimination feelings of the non-Malays by reinforcing their perceived threat of Malays in the social and cultural sphere. As a result, along with the economic competition between non-ethnics, there is also growing religious/cultural competition influencing the level of perceived threat of Malaysians and their relationships with each other.

Lastly, there are macro-level problems strengthening bonding social capital in Malaysia. They can be summarised as (i) the feeling of discriminated, (ii) ethnicity-based political system, (iii) nationalist discourse promoting fear of other races and using race sentiments to mobilise own voters, and (iv) high in-group solidarity of the Chinese. These problems eradicate social trust while promoting perceived threat of non-ethnics towards each other. Perceived threat undermines the social cohesion by fostering in-group solidarity and bonding social capital of each ethnic group, and cause animosity between them. The division of Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra generates social hierarchies in Malaysians', especially in non-Malays' mind. These hierarchies and non-verbal discriminatory implementations against the non-Malays cause discontentment and weaken the sense of belonging of them. On the contrary, the in-group solidarity of the Chinese and their economic power reinforce the perceived threat perceptions of the Malays. As a result, the high perceived threat of ethnic groups strengthens the ethnic identities which are the main macro-level problem of social capital in Malaysian society.

Overall, these findings and the observations of the researcher suggest that meaningful contact is crucial in creation of trust relationships and bonds between non-ethnics. At that point, the participants who were raised in multi-ethnic social settings found more trusting towards others, and they seemed less affected by the racial prejudices. Similarly, the participants, who were migrated to other countries and encountered with different cultures

for a long time, found more open and willing to interact with non-ethnics, as contact theory and empirical studies of Moussa (2018), Lowe, (2017) and Steinmary (2016) indicated.

As the empirical studies in the social capital literature revealed, people having higher levels of education are more prone to trust in others, they more actively participate in civic life organisations, and they have broader contact networks from diverse social groups. Although the present study is based on a small sample of participants from the same education levels, the findings suggest that bridging social capital levels of the participants are lower than expected; this is particularly so among the Malay participants. Furthermore, interactions between ethnic cultures in terms of food, clothes or living styles are evident. Nevertheless, as the researcher's field research observations suggest, embracing each other's values or norms remains very limited among ethnic groups. This is rather disadvantageous for building trust, common norms and shared values, and so social capital. The possible reason for the reservations might be the high religious and ethnic-identity awareness of Malaysians that ultimately fostered by the hands of politics and social media.

Besides, the findings of the present study revealed that the Indian participants are the most willing to trust and contact with other Malaysians compared with Chinese and Malays. This finding indicates that if the group size is relatively smaller than out-groups, the members of that group is more likely to interact with out-group members. For the Chinese and Malays, on the other hand, they have a broader opportunity to stay within their ethnic group circles, speak their mother tongue and exclude themselves from out-group members. Therefore, it can be asserted that the group size of the Chinese is an important factor reinforcing their in-group solidarity, unlike Indians who have a considerably smaller population compared to the Chinese.

Finally, as Mandal (2001) and Leow (2018) argued, 'singular' Malay, Chinese and Indian identities, encompass sub-identities. For example, the singular Chinese identity comprises many sub-identities i.e. Mandarin-educated Chinese, English-educated Chinese, and Buddhist Chinese, urban and rural Chinese, as well as Christian and Muslim Chinese. Similarly, the Malay identity includes rural Malays, urban Malays, religious and secular Malays (Mandal, 2001). Therefore, using the homogeneous Malay, Chinese or Indian ethnic identity categories in the evaluation of inter-ethnic relations can be misleading. The current research revealed similar findings that challenge the 'singularity' of ethnic identities in Malaysia. The Chinese participants approach to trust issue and interactions with non-ethnics varied significantly between East Malaysian Chinese and West Malaysian Chinese (for a rural Chinese case *see also* Sathian and Ngeow, 2014). As mentioned by the East Malaysian Chinese participants, the insecurities of West Malaysian Chinese in interaction with non-ethnics was noted compared to the East Malaysian Chinese. In the same vein, the Malay participants who emphasised Islamic concerns repeatedly, had significantly different approach in terms of the inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia from other participants. As a result, the study revealed that treating ethnic identities as homogenous categories overlooks the different particular characteristics of sub-groups. Therefore, in order to understand the social capital formation process and inter-ethnic relations of Malaysians, the different characteristics of the sub-groups should be taken into consideration.

7.1 Suggestions for Future Studies

The present study has offered a framework for the exploration of the social capital phenomena in Malaysian society. The interviewees who participated in the research were highly educated and mostly belonged in the higher social classes of the society. Their perceptions provided a deeper understanding of social capital building or, what was

undermining the process, but the data does not represent the general sentiments or ideas of the Malaysian society. Hence, other research focusing on rural areas, East Malaysia, other socioeconomic classes, younger age groups, and people from lower education levels of the society would provide crucial data to compare and contrast, as well as to provide a better understanding for the social capital process in Malaysia.

The present study focused on the three major ethnic groups in the country. As noted above, in each ethnic group, there are many sub-categories with different characteristics, such as Muslim Chinese, English speaking Chinese, or Mandarin speaking Chinese beneath the overarching Chinese Malaysian category. Therefore, in future studies, these sub-categories should be taken into consideration in examining the social capital process and formation. In this way, these studies will profoundly extend the social capital knowledge of Malaysian society in the literature.

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