CHAPTER 7

THE NEW MALAY MIDDLE CLASS AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

The term 'community' implies having something in common. However, community -- a social phenomenon found in every society even during modern times -- is often associated in people's minds with rural environments, and as something unfamiliar in urban settings. Since the nineteenth century, one central concern in social theory has been that the processes of urbanization and industrialization would result in the demise of community. The 'loss of community' thesis was first advanced by the German sociologist Tonnies (1957) in his work entitled *Gemeinshaft und Gesellschaft* (first published in 1887), in which he showed the change from the personal, the emotional and the traditional in the *Gemeinshaft* to the impersonal, the rational and the contractual of the *Gesellschaft*. While agreeing that both *Gemeinshaft*-like and *Gesellschaft*-like relationships could be found in rural and urban settings, he argued that there was a greater tendency towards *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships in rural areas. This idea was developed by a number of later scholars, the most well known being George Simmel and Louis Wirth (Lee & Newby 1994). Following Tonnies and Simmel, Wirth suggested that as people move from the countryside to the city, so they leave behind a 'rural way of life' and take on the values and behaviour of 'urbanism as a way of life' (Wirth 1938; Lee & Newby 1994: 47).

However, while a number of contemporary works support the above view, there are several studies in major industrial societies such as Britain, the United States and Japan which suggest that community-like social groups sometimes survive or grow in urban connurbations in the midst of cities. The well-known communities studied include Bethnal Green, a metropolitan borough in the East End of London (Townsend 1957; Young and Wilmott 1957; Wilmott & Young 1960; Frankenburg 1969), and the West End neighbourhood in Boston's inner city in the United States (Gans 1962).

In Japan, under the influence of works pioneered by Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), later developed by Kamishima Jiro, Kosaku (1992: 98-103) argues that when Japanese villagers migrated to the city, they brought with them village-style social organizations and belief systems, and formed 'secondary villages' or 'quasi-villages' within cities; thus, even after the disintegration of 'natural villages', traditional patterns of order persisted in these urban quasi-villages. He notes that in Japan, the company is frequently regarded as the epitome of the quasi-village, and that the social principles of the traditional village community are considered to have reproduced themselves in informal groupings developed among company employees. Kosaku's thesis -- which he calls the 'reproductionist' (or 'extensionist') theory of modern society -- depicts modern industrial society as a coherent and uniform whole, and views the village community as the prototype of modern Japanese society. In short, contra Wirth and others, Kosaku sees modern city living in Japan as extensions or reproductions of the Japanese traditional village settings, implying continuities rather than ruptures in the processes of urbanization and industrialization.

My study adopts a slightly different position. While acknowledging the opposing arguments of 'ruptures and change' on the one hand, and 'continuity, reproduction and extension' on the other have their merits, the study proposes that in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Malaysia, the dynamics of modern social class formations and urban living are more complex, producing a myriad of cultural forms including a complex array of adaptations, innovations, and changes.[1] The greater the complexity of society, such as found in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural metropolitan area of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, the greater the tendency of members of the new Malay middle class to exhibit cultural varieties and nuances, compared to their counterparts in the less urbanized and more homogenous Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu.

In Chapter 5, we showed that members of the new Malay middle class – in adapting to the new environment -- attempt to reconstitute and reaffirm family and kinship ties which have been altered by processes of rapid social change, and that their family exists within a 'modified extended family' framework adapted to urban conditions. In Chapter 6, we showed that new Malay middle class lifestyles were not homogenous; though the more affluent middle class fraction adopts high status

[1] Some of the adaptive forms of urban living in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Malaysia appear as hybridisation. Here, hybridisation is more than adaptation, and does not simply mean the phenomenon of cultural heterogeneity. Heterogeneity creates the conditions in which hybridisation may emerge. Hybridisation refers to the process of mutual influences between different cultures existing in the same milieu, with the resulting formation of something new, but still contains some elements of the originating culture(s). For example, in functions attended by an ethnically heterogeneous audience, Malay speakers usually begin the address with the Muslim salutation of *Assamu 'alaikum* (Arabic, meaning peace be unto you) to address the Muslim/Malay crowd, followed by *salam sejahtera* (Malay, meaning 'greetings of peace') to address the non-Muslims/Malays. When Chinese middle class families hold open houses to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year, and invite their Malay friends, they always assure their guests that the food served conforms with the Muslim *halal* (allowed by religion) prescriptions. Thus, the types of food comprise not only Chinese, but also Malay, and even Indian dishes. Nevertheless, in keeping with Chinese tradition, they serve mandarin oranges, and give *angpows* (monetary gifts contained in small red packets) to children. These two examples show that while elements of the originating culture(s) exist, the new cultural form is a cross or a hybrid between

lifestyles and become cosmopolitan urbanites, others lead relatively modest lifestyles not dramatically different from the lower classes. In this chapter, we examine further the social culture[2] of the new Malay middle class by looking at the processes in which middle class Malays attempt to establish communities within new urban environments, and the relationship between these processes with their religious commitment and activities. It shows that the *surau* (Muslim prayer-house) is pivotal in community-building among the Malay new middle class, and though Malay urban communities are built by relying on certain cultural resources acquired by Malays when they grew up in their *kampung*,[3] they also contain new, innovative elements created under changed material conditions. This chapter examines in particular the phenomenon of 'folk urbanites', i.e. urban-dwellers whose lifestyles are relatively modest, with relatively strong family- and community orientation, rather than being cosmopolitan, individualistic and isolated from kin and community. Contrary to cosmopolitan urbanites who adopt cosmopolitan urban living, 'folk urbanites' – though living in modern urban settings -- tend to operate within the domain of Malay cultural values and religious practices, and by utilising the cultural resources mentioned above, attempt to construct '*kampung*-like' communities in the city or town, based on their nostalgic images of the Malay traditional village.[4] However, it is

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two or more cultures.

[2] Social culture refers to the values and practices (including lifestyles) of individuals, as reflected in their relationships and interactions with other members of society.

[3] These cultural resources include experiences of growing up as a village child/adolescent and young Muslim, knowledge about the world and urban life obtained through schooling and the media, and knowledge about urban life obtained through stries related by those who h..ve been to towns and cities.

[4] In the context of Malaysia, this idea of 'folk urbanites' and *kampung*-like communities is by no means original, though I cannot trace its originators. What I have tried to do here is to present the idea more systematically by relating it to social theory. I first presented this thesis -- the construction by some sections of the Malay new middle class of '*kampung*-like' communities in urban settings and some members of the Malay middle class as 'folk urbanites' -- in a paper at a conference on the middle class in Taipei in June 1997 (Abdul Rahman 1997). By chance, I later met Kosaku Kunio at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and showed him my paper. He felt that there was a basis in what I was arguing and introduced me to his own work (Kosaku 1992) on Japan, in which he introduces the

argued here that though it may give a semblance of maintaining tradition, their cultural attachment to the 'pastness' is essentially modern. In this regard, I share Clive Kessler's (1992: 133-157) view that what appears to be 'tradition' in modern urban society is not simply 'residual' but something 'essentially new, modern, contemporary – a recent construct'. [5]

The term 'community' is not synonymous with neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is a fixed and bounded locality, but community, comprising a network of relationships, is more of a local social system, i.e. as a set of social relationship which take place wholly, or mostly, within a locality. But there is another dimension to the meaning of community as a type of social relationship providing a sense of identity between individuals, something like the 'spirit of community', or 'communion' (see Lee & Newby 1994: Ch. 4), engendering a sense of belonging among its members. Thus, in this study, when we refer to the Malay middle class community in the urban milieu, we mean not only the social relationships established by members of the Malay middle class in the physical locality in which they live, but also the extensive networks of relationships they maintain with their kin and friends in

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'reproductionist' (or 'extensionist') theory of modern society.

[5] Modernization theory often assumes that for a traditional society to be modern, it has to change its traditional culture and adopt Western values and lifestyles. The literature is often filled with descriptions of the transformation process of traditional societies becoming modern, the resulting breakdown of traditional life, and the preservation of some aspects of traditional culture (see, for example, Lerner 1958, who is a pioneer in modernization studies). In this sense, as shown by Kessler (1992: 133-134), modernization theory sees tradition as 'residual': 'it is the residue of the past, that part which survives undisturbed and is accordingly, at least for the moment, preserved'. But, Kessler argues that what is preserved in modern society today is not simply 'residual' or 'traditional'. 'In this view tradition is not simply the surviving residue left undisturbed by the advancing yet incomplete modernization. Rather, it is essentially new, modern, contemporary – a recent construct. The recognition of and an attachment to the "pastness" of certain cultural materials (what we come to call "tradition") is itself, in this view, a product of modernity.' Kessler, in fact, takes another step beyond the 'modernity of tradition' argument, by suggesting that some aspects of the Malay *political* culture are not even residual, but inventions of tradition. However, in my discussion of the *social* culture of the Malay new middle class, I propose to limit it only to the argument of the 'modernity' of tradition.

the same city, in the home village or birth place, and elsewhere.[6] As shown by other scholars, in such communities, interactions can be kin or ethnic-based; economic; political; ritual or religious; and recreational (Frankenburg 1969: 249), though in our study, most of the interactions referred to are kin and ethnic, political, recreational, as well as ritual or religious.

Urban Residential Areas and Presence of Communities

In Britain, it has been noted that town planners and housing authorities generally see the housing estates they build as more than just aggregations of dwellings, but as neighbourhoods to evolve into communities, and that residents should not only live side by side, but come to be 'good neighbours and friends'. Such planning and ideology seeks to impose an idealized version of village life on the town dweller in housing estates (Frankenburg 1969: 197). In Malaysia, two contrasting trends have emerged. While similar planning and ideology prevails, stressing the importance of community, a trend towards appropriating global icons preferred by the new rich, including the cosmopolitan urbanites, is also to be found, especially in metropolitan cities. The first trend is often expressed in the form of names prefixed to housing estates – for example, prefixing the word *desa* or *kampung* (both words meaning

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[6] Communities naturally involve networks. The concept of 'community as networks of relationships' as defined above is partially based on Barnes (cited in Frankenburg 1969: 243), who distinguishes three social fields of networks: the first is *territorial*, consisting of the locality in which people live and carry on their day-to-day existence (such as a village), with a more durable membership. The second field is *occupational*, the membership of which is not permanent but where each independent unit is temporarily linked in order to carry out its function to the full. The third field has neither unit nor boundary nor coordinating organization, but consists of all the friends whom a person requires through life, whether such ties are formed through work or at leisure, through kin or by accident. Each person sees himself at the centre of his own particular network of friends, and each friend will himself overlap into someone else's network.

'village') to housing areas such as Desa Sri Petaling in Kuala Lumpur and Kampung Tunku in Petaling Jaya, or the word *taman* (meaning 'garden') to places like Taman Tun Dr. Ismail, Taman Aman, Taman Danau Desa and Taman Bukit Kajang. These are attempts to project an identity for the area, not only as green and beautiful, but more importantly, as constituting a peaceful community suitable for family living. More up-market developers, however, stress class more than community, by appropriating Anglicised names such as Country Heights, Damansara Heights and Ukay Heights, the global cultural icons projecting exclusive high-class profiles to create a niche market for property in the area. While the practice of choosing names for residential areas in the metropolitan Kelang Valley -- all the above-named places are found there -- reflects both tendencies of cultural homogenization among the new rich (i.e. identification with the cultural tastes of the western rich) and particularization (i.e. stressing local communities) among other middle class fractions, the practice in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu consistently stresses community, rather than class. The words *desa, kampung* and *taman* are common names for housing estates in these two provincial towns, while Anglicised names denoting westernised upper class tastes are rarely used there (except for names of certain mansions belonging to the wealthy elite).[7] However, besides these practices, in keeping with the NEP, Malaysian town planners and housing authorities also consciously work to ensure a more multiethnic composition of housing estates by stipulating that at least 30 per cent of houses in any new housing area be allocated to Bumiputera buyers.

[7] For example, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a wealthy prince-cum-businessman from Kelantan, named his mansion in Kota Bharu 'Palm Manor'.

How were these residential areas or housing estates perceived by our new Malay middle class respondents? Were they seen as mere aggregations of urban dwellings, or as communities?

Table 7.1
Respondents' Perceptions of Their Residential Areas, 1996 and 1997

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Do you agree that Malays attempt to set up communities in urban areas with characteristics similar to a *kampung*?					
• No	26.9	13.7	25.0	22.5	25.0
• Agree	61.1	55.0	51.0	56.0	43.0
• Strongly agree	12.0	31.3	24.0	21.5	31.3
Do you agree that your residential area has characteristics similar to a *kampung*?					
• No	38.0	10.0	13.5	21.8	23.8
• Agree	47.2	45.0	32.3	41.5	40.8
• Strongly agree	14.8	45.0	54.2	36.6	35.4

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

The idea of the Malays having cultural attachment to the 'pastness' (or tradition) can be found in the minds of respondents and is reflected in their words and actions. As shown in Table 7.1, many respondents perceived urban residential areas that Malays move into or grow up in as having a number of important characteristics similar to rural villages. If these characteristics did not yet exist in the area they moved in, they would attempt to construct them. This is suggested in our sample in which more than three-fourths of new Malay middle class respondents felt that Malays usually attempt to set up *kampung*-like communities wherever they go. This was true of respondents from the middle class in the three areas studied, especially in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, and also true of working class respondents in the

Kelang Valley.[8] While 73.1 per cent of new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley agreed that Malays attempt to construct *kampung*-like communities in urban areas, a much higher proportion of their counterparts in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu – 86.3 per cent and 75.0 per cent -- felt the same. Even among Kelang Valley Malay workers, a large proportion (three-fourths) also held the same view as respondents from the new Malay middle class.

Consistent with the perception among the majority of respondents that there was such attachment to the 'pastness' among urban Malays, 78.1 per cent felt that their residential areas had characteristics *semacam kampung tetapi bukan kampung*, meaning that their residential areas had some *kampung*-like characteristics but were not *kampung* (villages) in the traditional sense. By comparison, the proportion who perceived that their residential had *kampung*-like characteristics was highest in Kota Bharu (90 per cent), followed by Kuala Trengganu (86.6 per cent). Though the proportion was much lower in the metropolitan Kelang Valley, it was still quite high considering that more than three-fifths (62 per cent) of the respondents agreed that their residential area possessed such characteristics. If we only take into account those respondents who strongly agreed that their residential area was *kampung*-like, we find that Kuala Trengganu had the highest proportion (54.2 per cent), followed by Kota Bharu (45 per cent), while the Kelang Valley was way behind, with only 14.8 per cent. This finding suggests that most residential areas in the two provincial towns in which the new Malay middle class respondents lived were perceived, not as mere aggregations of dwellings, but as communities in which various interactions take

[8] As indicated elsewhere, due to time and financial constraints, my study of Malay workers was conducted only in the Kelang Valley.

place. In the metropolitan Kelang Valley, community life was also perceived to be present in the residential areas, though it is considered relatively weaker.[9]

However, perceptions concerning urban Malays especially among respondents in the Kelang Valley were not homogenous. Over a quarter of the latter (26.9 per cent) -- comprising mostly the cosmopolitan urbanites – felt that there was no such attachment to the 'pastness', meaning that Malays do not attempt to construct such characteristics in their social relations and practices when they move into urban areas. They felt that there was change or even rupture from tradition, resulting in cultural uprooting, among Malays who moved to urban areas. They argued that *kampung*-like communities could not exist when people were too busy attending to their jobs, had little time for their neighbours (and some, even their families), and when they mainly cared for themselves. What should also be noted is that in small towns such as Kuala Trengganu, which is predominantly Malays, a quarter of respondents felt the same way as some of their Kelang Valley counterparts, i.e., Malays did not attempt to set up *kampung*-like communities in urban areas.

To establish the criteria for the presence of communities with *kampung*-like characteristics in urban Malay middle class areas, the study first asked respondents to indicate the presence in their residential area of seven items considered to be indicators of such community; then, we asked respondents if they agreed that any residential area with these criteria could be considered a community with characteristics similar to a *kampung* (Table 7.2). The items considered as indicators of

[9] By comparison, a much higher proportion (76.2 per cent) of the Kelang Valley Malay workers felt that their housing area was community-like (Table 7.1).

community are: presence of *surau*-based activities (*surau* is a Muslim place of worship or prayer-house smaller than a mosque); the extent to which neighbours know each other and the flows of gifts among neighbours; practice of *gotong royong* or mutual help among neighbours especially for certain *rite de passage* activities (for example, during preparation of their children's wedding feasts and while welcoming guests); group socialization of children in basic religious education, e.g. Quran reading; and residents' concern for neighbours who face family tragedies (for example, death of a member of the family) by visiting them as well as attending *kenduri/tahlil* (feasts that come together with thanksgiving religious rituals) in their houses.

All respondents were asked each of these items to measure the presence of these activities in their neighbourhoods and then asked to state whether a neighbourhood with these characteristics could be considered a community with *kampung*-like characteristics. From the respondents' replies, the overwhelming majority (four-fifths) agreed that if all or most of the criteria listed by the study were met by residents in a particular residential area, the area was a community with *kampung*-like characteristics in their opinion.

What are the dynamics of community life among Malays? Malays who have been Muslims for more than six hundred years regard the prayer-house – the *surau* or the mosque -- as an important religious-cum-social institution which brings believers together and forms the basis of community interactions. Such an institution -- a common feature of traditional Malay villages -- is reproduced everywhere Malays

go,[10] including urban areas. Compared to rural areas, the *surau* as a social institution in the changed material conditions of new urban settings, where neighbours are often strangers, becomes all the more important. *Surau*-based religious and social activities help Malay urbanites to get to know each other and to interact more frequently as neighbours. This can be regarded as a cultural innovation in a new environment based on their traditional cultural resources.

From Table 7.2, it can be seen that overall, new Malay middle class respondents generally had positive images of their residential area as far as neighbourliness was concerned. For example, over ninety per cent of new Malay middle class respondents regarded their respective housing areas as having congregation prayers and other *surau*/mosque-based activities (including 12 per cent who felt that their area had these activities to a certain extent), with the highest proportions - 93.8 per cent each - in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, and 88 per cent in the Kelang Valley. Besides *surau*-based activities, 85.8 per cent of respondents acknowledged that their residential area also had places where their children could attend Quran reading lessons, something every Muslim child is expected to attend. In terms of respondents' interactions as neighbours, over ninety per cent said their neighbours knew one another. This knowledge was cemented with

[10] For an interesting anthropological study of how Malays in a new area organized themselves to set up a *surau*, see Zawawi Ibrahim (1998: 89-96). In this study, Zawawi vividly shows how a group of Malay labourers who came from various places in Peninsular Malaysia to work in an oil palm plantation in Kemaman, Trengganu, got organized and set up a *surau*, which became the focal point of their community activities. "The early life of the Malay labouring community was marked by a concern in maintaining a sense of community based on some cultural and social norms typical of a Malay or village way of life. The community had not yet become a political community where lower-class members felt the need to form political organizations to cater to their interests. Given this socio-cultural definition of the emerging community, the role of 'expressive leadership' assumed by the elders was therefore relevant to the existing needs of the early society. Accordingly, this form of social organization culminated in the formation of a prayer-house (*surau*), which symbolized the above ideals of Malays 'living in a community' (*hidup bermasyarakat*)" (Zawawi 1998: 90).

expressions of neighbourliness, such as exchanging food gifts, or participating in *gotong royong* activities when their help was required. This happened, for example, when neighbours held wedding feasts for their children in the compound, during which neighbours' help was sought not only to play host to see that guests were well taken care of, but also to allow part of neighbours' compounds and even their houses to be used for purposes of preparation. (This was necessary especially for those who lived in linked houses, but those in single unit bungalows or other single unit houses would require less use of their neighbours' compounds, but still required their physical assistance).[11] Also, when misfortune befell any neighbour (such as the death of a family member), more than four-fifths of respondents said other residents would pay condolence visits to share the sorrow of the neighbour; over 90 per cent also said that neighbours were often invited to attend thanksgiving feasts such as *tahlil* or other *kenduri* held by other neighbours. The most positive assessment of the presence of these community activities came from respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, but many in the Kelang Valley also felt the same. This finding of respondents' positive assessment of their community corresponds with their overall perception that their residential area had many important *kampung*-like characteristics (Table 7.1).

Besides the respondents' assessment of the presence of these activities in their neighbourhood, they were also asked the extent to which they themselves participated

[11] In a traditional Malay village, a wedding feast was (and is) always a community affair. Relatives and neighbours are mobilized to help in its preparation, such as slaughtering the cow or buffalo, cutting up the meat, vegetables, etc. and cooking them, as well as in seeing that guests have enough food to eat. In urban areas such as Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, this practice still continues today. In Kuala Lumpur or Petaling Jaya, community participation in preparing the dishes has been taken over by specially commissioned caterers, and sometimes, wealthy families hold their children's weddings in hotels. However, many still hold the ceremony in the community. To ensure the occasion is a success

in these activities (Table 7.3). Though the majority of respondents said their residential area had *surau*-based activities, those who regularly prayed at the *surau* made up slightly more than a third (34.2 per cent) while the majority (55.6 per cent) were not-so-regular, and 10.2 per cent admitted that they did not attend congregational prayers at the *surau*. The proportion of respondents who knew their neighbours was high -- more than a third (36.1 per cent) claimed to know many neighbours, with 15.7 per cent saying that they knew many of them well. (Some, especially among regular *surau*-goers, said they knew more than 50 neighbours well). However, the majority (79.5 per cent) said they only knew well between one to ten neighbours. About a third also participated regularly in *gotong royong* such as wedding preparations for any of their neighbour's children who were getting married. Unlike in Kota Bharu or Kuala Trengganu, the proportion among Kelang Valley middle class respondents who regularly participated in *gotong royong* was low (17.6 per cent), partly because some of them held their children's wedding ceremonies in hotels and also because of a weaker sense of neighbourliness in the metropolitan area. When it comes to paying condolence visits to grief-stricken neighbours due to the passing away of family members, an overwhelming majority (90.2 per cent) of respondents paid such visits, with 53.9 per cent doing so regularly. Many also participated in the flow of food gifts between neighbours, and attended *tahlil* or *kenduri* at neighbours' houses.

However, in all these activities, new Malay middle class respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu were, by far, well ahead of their Kelang Valley

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and memorable, the host holds discussions with close relatives and neighbours on how to go about the ceremony, and their help is sought to prepare various things necessary for the occasion.

counterparts. For example, while more than two-fifths in both Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu could be categorised as regular *surau*-goers, the proportion in the Kelang Valley that fell under the same category was very much lower (17.6 per cent). Also, there was a much higher proportion of respondents in the two provincial towns who knew their neighbours well, participated in *gotong royong* activities, or visited their grief-stricken neighbours. While only 11.1 per cent of Kelang Valley respondents made it a regular practice to exchange food with their neighbours, 37.2 per cent and 30.2 per cent did so regularly in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu respectively. This finding corresponds with the earlier finding that 90 per cent of respondents in Kota Bharu and 86.5 per cent in Kuala Trengganu regarded their residential community as having characteristics similar to a *kampung* (Table 7.1).

In the communities discussed, vertical impersonal ties to centralized decision-making bodies such as the local authorities as well as the state and central governments existed, especially when it concerned official matters regarding the affairs of citizens as rate-payers, voters, etc.. However, these vertical relationships did not replace horizontal ties, i.e. ties with kin, friends, neighbours and community.[12] Both vertical and horizontal ties are strong, while the presence of the former does not replace the latter. Nevertheless, compared to those in Kota Bharu and Kuala

[12] This is quite different from the finding by Maurice Stein (1964: 329) in his study of community in the United States. Commenting on 'the eclipse of the community', he observed that 'Community ties [in the United States] become increasingly dependent upon centralised authorities and agencies in all areas of social life' and that 'personal loyalties decrease their range with the successive weakening of national ties, regional ties, family ties, and finally ties to a coherent image of one's self'. Thus, he concludes that a series of separate but parallel 'vertical ties' to centralized decision-making bodies are replacing the 'horizontal ties' of local autonomy.

Trengganu, horizontal (read: community) ties among a substantial proportion of Kelang Valley respondents were weaker.

Table 7.2
Respondents' Assessment of *Kampung*-like Community Activities in Their Residential Area

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Are there *surau*/mosque-based activities in the neighbourhood					
• No activities	9.3	2.5	6.2	6.3	5.4
• I don't know	2.8	3.8	-	2.1	1.5
• Yes, to a certain extent	10.2	21.3	6.3	12.0	17.7
• Yes	77.8	72.5	87.5	79.6	75.4
Do neighbours know each other?					
• No, they don't	6.5	3.8	1.0	3.9	2.3
• I don't know if they do	4.6	3.8	5.2	4.6	6.2
• Neighbours know each other to a certain extent	45.4	27.5	25.0	33.4	31.5
• Yes, neighbours know each other	43.5	65.0	68.8	58.1	60.0
Is it common for neighbours to exchange food?					
• No	23.1	3.8	9.4	14.4	15.4
• I don't know	10.2	6.2	5.2	7.4	13.8
• Yes, to a certain extent	35.2	45.0	37.5	38.7	28.5
• Yes	31.5	40.0	47.9	39.4	42.3
Do neighbours participate in *gotong royong* (mutual help) when they prepare rites of passage activities such as wedding feasts for their children?					
No	8.3	3.8	3.1	5.3	12.3
I don't know	13.9	5.0	3.1	7.7	6.9
Yes, to a certain extent	13.0	18.8	11.5	14.1	19.2
Yes	64.8	72.5	82.3	72.9	61.5
Are there places for children to learn Quran reading?					
• No	9.3	5.0	5.2	6.7	4.6
• I don't know	11.1	3.8	6.2	7.4	15.4
• Yes, to a certain extent	6.5	13.8	10.4	9.8	11.5
• Yes	73.1	77.5	78.1	76.0	68.5
Do neighbours pay condolence visits to families who suffer bereavement with the death of family members?					
• No	8.3	3.8	3.1	5.3	6.2
• I don't know	13.9	5.0	3.1	6.2	4.6
• Yes, to a certain extent	13.0	18.8	11.5	10.4	23.8
Yes, they always do	64.8	72.5	82.3	78.1	65.4
Do residents attend *tahlil/kenduri* (feasts held with religious rituals) at neighbours' houses?					
• Yes					
• No	9.3	2.5	3.1	5.3	6.9
• I don't know	5.6	2.5	3.1	3.9	15.4
• Yes, to a certain extent	25.0	16.3	16.7	19.7	20.0
• Yes	60.2	78.8	77.1	71.1	57.7
Do you agree that any residential area can be considered a *kampung*-like community if all or most of the above activities exist there?					
• I don't agree	24.1	12.5	22.9	20.4	22.4
• Yes, I agree	75.9	87.5	77.1	79.6	79.6

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Table 7.3
Respondents' Participation in Activities in Neighbourhood Community

	Kelang Valley (n=108)		Kota Bharu (n=80)		Kuala Trengganu (n=96)		All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)		Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)	
Do you always go to *surau*/ mosque?										
• I don't go	15.7		6.3		7.3		10.2		0.8	
• I go once in a while	66.7		50.0		47.9		55.6		53.8	
• I go regularly	17.6		43.8		44.8		34.2		45.4	
Do you know your neighbours?	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
• No	11.0	6.8	1.3	-	3.1	1.0	4.8	2.4	9.4	5.7
• I know a few (1-5)	47.9	28.8	66.6	52.5	69.8	56.2	62.2	47.0	38.7	13.2
• I know quite a number (6-10)	28.8	20.5	16.3	12.5	0.4	11.5	17.3	14.4	28.3	28.3
• I know many (11 and above)	12.4	43.8	16.2	35.0	17.7	31.2	15.7	36.1	23.5	52.9
Do you and your neighbours participate in *gotong royong* (mutual help) whenever any of you hold wedding feasts for either your children or theirs?										
• No	28.7		12.5		12.5		18.7		10.0	
• Occasionally	53.7		45.0		47.9		49.3		40.0	
• Yes, I always do	17.6		42.5		39.6		32.0		50.0	
Do you make it a practice to pay condolence visits to neighbours when any of their family member/s pass away?										
• No	18.5		2.5		6.2		9.8		8.5	
• Occasionally	55.6		28.8		20.8		36.3		36.2	
• Yes, I always do	25.9		68.8		72.9		53.9		55.4	
Do you exchange food with your neighbours?										
• No	34.3		5.0		13.5		19.0		21.5	
• Once in a while	54.6		57.5		56.3		56.0		53.1	
• I always do so	11.1		37.5		30.2		25.0		25.4	
Do you attend *tahlil/kenduri* regularly?										
• No	19.4		5.0		11.4		12.7		14.6	
• Once in a while	50.9		36.3		40.6		43.3		45.4	
• I always do so	29.6		58.8		47.9		44.0		40.0	

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

1 = Know well;
2 = Know as acquaintance only

Ethnic Composition of Urban Communities

From the preceding discussion, we can infer that for many new Malay middle class respondents, urban residential areas, which might be anonymous to them in the beginning, gradually turned into familiar places through social interactions with neighbours, in particular, through their *surau*-based activities. After a while, new communities were formed and horizontal relationships continued to be reinforced. The question is: what are the contributory factors for the emergence of this phenomenon? One important factor is the ethnic composition of local residents: the greater the proportion of Malays in the area, the greater the probability of it developing into a community, though it need not necessarily be so in all cases. From Table 7.4, all respondents in Kuala Trengganu and 93.3 per cent in Kota Bharu reported that Malays comprised the majority in their area. In the Kelang Valley, the composition is more varied; only 48.2 per cent of respondents in the Kelang Valley reported that Malays made up the majority in their area, and another 37 per cent said that their areas had many Malays, but they did not constitute a majority. The correlation between ethnic composition and community is strongly established in Table 7.5, which shows that 85.7 per cent of residential areas in which Malays comprised the majority were regarded as having community characteristics by Malay middle class respondents, while the opposite is true in areas where Malays were a minority. Because of this, it is not surprising that the proportions of respondents who regarded their residential areas as communities were higher in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, where Malays made up the overwhelming majority, and lowest in the Kelang Valley.

Table 7.4
Do Malays Constitute a Majority in Your Residential Area?

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Minority	14.8	-	-	8.7	12.5
Many, but not majority	37.0	6.7	-	23.5	51.8
Majority	48.2	93.3	100.0	67.8	35.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Table 7.5
Correlation Between Residents' Ethnic Composition and Respondents' Perception of Residential Areas as Communities

Ethnic composition of residential area	Is your residential area a community?			All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)
	No	Yes to a certain extent	Yes	
Malays a minority	85.0	10.0	5.0	100.0
Many Malays, but not majority	36.2	53.2	10.6	100.0
Majority Malays	14.3	47.6	38.1	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Table 7.6
Years in Existence of Housing Areas of Respondents

Years in existence	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
5 years & below	29.1	-	20.0	21.3	8.5
6-10 years	22.3	8.6	24.4	20.2	38.7
11-15 years	18.4	20.0	17.8	18.6	17.0
More than 15 years	30.1	71.4	37.8	39.9	35.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Another factor that may be relevant is the age of the housing area. As shown in Table 7.6, most (71.4 per cent) housing areas in Kota Bharu in which respondents lived were relatively old, having been in existence for more than 15 years with

another 20 per cent between 11 to 15 years old. By comparison, the residential areas in which respondents in Kuala Trengganu and the Kelang Valley lived were relatively newer; only 55.6 per cent of the residential areas in Kuala Trengganu had been in existence for more than 10 years, while in the Kelang Valley, housing areas of the same age were much lower (45.5 per cent). This finding suggests that the longer the residential area had been in existence, the greater the probability of it developing into community, provided that Malays constituted the majority or a large proportion of residents in the area.

Nevertheless, we should not assume that more ethnically homogenous residential areas that have been established for a longer period time would automatically develop into communities. As suggested by the data in Table 7.5, 14.3 per cent of respondents in Malay majority areas felt that their residential areas had no characteristics of *kampung*-like communities, while another 47.6 per cent felt that they only had such characteristics to a certain extent. The presence of community activities and relationships depends on what the actors (i.e. respondents) themselves do in their everyday social interactions.

Religion and Community

Today, all societies in the world are affected in one way or another by the multi-layered processes of globalization (Robertson 1992; Beyer 1994; Mittelman 1996). As Beyer (1994: 3) points out, one paradox of globalization is that while the global system undermines inherited, ascribed or constructed cultural and personal identities (through homogenization processes), at the same time, it promotes the construction and revitalization of particular identities as ways of gaining control over

systemic power. One particular cultural and personal identity discussed in this chapter is religion.

Table 7.7
Respondents' Participation in Religious Activities, Quran Reading, and Self-Assessment of Their Religiosity

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Self-assessment of current state of religiosity					
Very religious	8.3	20.0	18.8	15.1	10.5
Quite religious	83.3	77.5	78.1	79.9	77.4
Not religious	8.3	2.5	3.1	4.9	12.1
Self-assessment of their religiosity 10 years ago					
Very religious					
Quire religious	10.2	7.5	14.6	10.9	7.5
Not religious	67.6	78.8	72.9	72.5	72.9
	22.2	13.7	16.5	16.5	9.1
Attend Religious Activities					
Never	1.9	1.3	-	1.1	4.5
Seldom	25.9	7.5	9.4	15.1	12.0
Sometimes	24.1	20.0	21.9	22.2	30.1
Often	32.4	47.5	44.8	40.8	42.1
Very often	15.7	23.8	24.0	20.8	11.3
Quran reading					
Read in Arabic only	50.9	31.2	32.3	39.1	40.8
Read in Arabic & translation	44.5	68.8	66.7	58.8	55.8
Never read	4.6	-	1.0	2.1	3.3

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

In Malaysia, as in many other countries, rapid industrialization and modernization have not diminished people's beliefs in religion and participation in religious movements and activities. The resurgence of religious movements,

especially Islamic resurgence, in the 1970s and 1980s in the country has been the subject of study by many scholars (Chandra Muzaffar 1987; Zainah Anwar 1987; Ackerman & Lee 1988; Jomo & Ahmad Shabery Cheek 1992; Sharifah Zaleha 1997). In our study, it was found that next to political parties, religious movements seem to attract the highest number of respondents from the Malay middle class, while membership in other organizations was much lower (see Chapter 8, Tables 8.1 & 8.5).

While religion is closely associated with politics in Malaysia (this subject is discussed in Chapter 8), religiosity is also crucial in revitalizing and reinforcing the sense of community and identity discussed above. As shown earlier, the *surau* was a key institution which helped to develop the community, while *surau*-based activities could only be sustained if there were enough regular *surau*-goers, i.e., members of the community committed to their religion who regularly performed public religious rituals, namely congregational prayers. Table 7.7 shows the respondents' self-assessment of their religiosity, attendance at religious activities as well as their Quran reading, while Table 7.8 shows whether they have performed the fifth pillar of Islam, i.e. by making the pilgrimage to the Mecca. The data in both tables suggest that Malay middle class respondents had become more religious over the years, with some becoming very religious, though most were moderately religious today. This is evidenced by the fact that 95.1 per cent stated that they were very religious or quite religious today compared to 83.5 per cent ten years earlier, while the 'not religious' proportion, who made up 16.5 per cent a decade earlier, had now been reduced to only 4.9 per cent. The self-assessment of their religiosity corresponds with their performance of various rituals. For example, the majority (61.6 per cent) said that

they regularly attended religious activities held in the neighbourhood and outside, while those who seldom or never did so, i.e. those considered as 'secular', were a small minority (16.2 per cent). On reciting the Quran, 97.9 per cent said they did so, though not necessarily on a regular basis, while only 2.1 per cent said they never recited the Holy Book. Almost three-fifths (58.8 per cent) said that they not only recited the Quran (in Arabic), but also read and studied its translation, suggesting that they not only recited it as part of religious rituals, but also tried to understand its contents through the translated text since most Malays are non-Arabic speakers.

Table 7.8 shows that though the majority of respondents were very or quite religious, only 50 respondents, or 17.6 per cent, had performed the *haj*, of whom six respondents had gone to Mecca twice (three each from Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, but none from the Kelang Valley). Again, the highest proportion of those who had performed the *haj* were from Kota Bharu (21.3 per cent) and Kuala Trengganu (19.8 per cent), while among Kelang Valley respondents, a higher proportion (21.3 per cent) of respondents had been on the *umrah* or minor *haj*, with a third having gone on the *umrah* twice or thrice.

The data in both tables suggests that the majority of new Malay middle class respondents in the three urban areas were religiously inclined, with a small proportion very religious, and the intensity of their religiosity generally increasing with age. By comparison, new Malay middle class respondents in the two provincial towns (especially Kota Bharu) were more religiously inclined than their counterparts in the metropolitan Kelang Valley. But this does not mean that respondents in the Kelang Valley were not religious; many were also religiously inclined though in

aggregate, not as fervently as those in the two provincial towns.[13] In fact, over a quarter (27.8 per cent) of Kelang Valley respondents admitted that they seldom or never attended religious activities (Table 7.7).

Table 7.8
Malay Middle Class Respondents: Pilgrimage to Mecca

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Have you performed the *Haj*?					
• No	87.0	78.8	80.2	82.4	96.9
• Yes	13.0	21.3	19.8	17.6	3.1
If yes, how many times in the last 10 years? (refers only to those who have performed the *haj*)					
• One	100.0	82.4	84.2	88.0	100.0
• Twice	-	17.6	15.8	12.0	-
• Three times and above	-	-		-	-
Have you performed the *Umrah*?					
• No	78.7	88.8	85.4	83.8	99.2
• Yes	21.3	11.3	14.6	16.2	0.8
If yes, how many times in the last 10 years? (refers only to those who have performed the *umrah*)					
• Once	60.9	55.5	78.6	65.2	100.0
• Twice	26.1	11.1	21.4	21.7	-
• Three times and above	13.0	33.3	-	13.0	-

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Among Kelang Valley Malay workers, the trend of becoming religiously oriented was also clear. For example, there was an increase over the years of those

[13] This trend of religious resurgence is also found in other Muslim countries. A report in *Asiaweek* (January 29, 1999) in neighbouring Indonesia, citing a thesis by one scholar on this topic, observes thus: The Indonesian middle class is 'both modern and pious'. They are young, professional, ethnically diverse. And the evidence of their presence is everywhere – from the explosion of Islamic-oriented tabloids and magazines (now numbering more than 40) to the popularity of Islamic music and sermons. The visible resurgence of Islam in elite, urban culture is partly a reaction to the breathtaking economic changes the country has experienced since the 1960s. Islam becomes a way out to look at identity, where its adherents are really rooted. (See Jose Manuel Tesoro, 'Traditional Yet Modern: The Muslim Middle Class and Politics', *Asiaweek*, January 29, 1999, p. 24).

who were fervently religious from 7.5 per cent to 10.5 per cent (Table 7.7). Nevertheless, the opposite tendency towards what is regarded as 'secularization' also existed, as suggested by the proportion of those with secular orientation increasing from 9.1 per cent to 12.1 per cent. Overall, it can be concluded that new Malay middle class respondents were more religiously inclined than Malay workers in the Kelang Valley. Their commitment to religious practices and rituals partially explains the existence of community life in Malay middle class neighbourhoods, especially in the provincial towns.

When new middle classes of different ethnic groups are compared, members of Malay and Indian middle classes are found to be more religiously inclined than the Chinese middle class. A study of 520 respondents of all ethnic groups in the Kelang Valley (Abdul Rahman *forthcoming*) found that while there were a few freethinkers among Chinese middle class respondents, there were none among Malays and Indians. Among Malays, 16 per cent regarded themselves as "very religious", 73 per cent as "quite religious", while more secularly-oriented or nominal Muslims constituted a minority (11 per cent). This pattern was also found among Indian respondents, of whom 17.1 per cent regarded themselves as "very religious", 59.8 per cent as "quite religious", and 23.1 per cent as secular-oriented. Among Chinese (respondents in the sample were mainly Buddhists), the proportion who regarded themselves as "very religious" was much smaller (nine per cent), with another 33 per cent "quite religious", while the majority (56 per cent) regarded themselves as secular or non-religious.

New Malay Middle Class and Inter-ethnic Relations

The discussion above shows that ethnic and religious identities are strong and important among the new Malay middle class, helping them to forge community relationships and awareness. The tendency of the new Malay middle class to construct ethnic- and religious-based communities in towns and cities has several implications. However, does this mean that they only conduct their lives within the confines of their own ethnic boundaries, leading to lack of contact or interaction with other ethnic groups in their daily lives? Or do they also have social circles beyond their own ethnic groups?

As shown above, in the Kelang Valley, especially in Kuala Lumpur, which has traditionally been identified with the Chinese ethnic group, housing estates today comprise households from at least three major ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – though in some areas, a particular ethnic group may be numerically more dominant than others. As part of its national integration policy, the government has tried to ensure a more balanced ethnic mix in housing estates. In Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, however, where Malays had traditionally been numerically dominant, there is only a small number of non-Malays. But urban housing areas are also mixed, though in some areas, one may only find Malay households. The reasons for this may not be so straight forward. It may partly be due to land policy (Malay land reserves can only be owned by Malays), but more so because non-Malays are fewer in number. At the same time, cultural and religious preferences may lead some households to decide to settle down in more ethnically homogenous areas.

However, culturally and socially, Malays are not averse to other ethnic groups. As history has shown, Malays had been very accommodating with foreigners from other lands, who later came and settled in the Malay Peninsula, and even intermarried with some of them (Alisjahbana, Nayagam & Wang Gungwu 1965; Alisjahbana 1983). Despite the colonial divide-and-rule policy and the creation of a Furnivallian 'plural society' (Furnivall 1956),[14] in which different ethnic groups lived in separate compartments and only met at the market place, Malays and non-Malays lived together and gradually came to accept each other. Save for the May 13 incident in 1969, no other ugly incidents have occurred since then. The deep social transformation of the last thirty years has made a significant impact on inter-ethnic relations. While the view that there has been a de-emphasis on ethnic politics, leading to a shift to the politics of developmentalism (Loh Kok Wah 1997), may be overly optimistic, one cannot deny that inter-ethnic relations have improved tremendously over the years, though squabbles and tensions over specific issues may surface from time to time.

This generally peaceful and friendly macro-level scenario is reflected at the micro-level in some degree of intermingling between respondents of different ethnic groups as shown in the data presented in Tables 7.9 to 7.11 below. In terms of cultural tastes, members of the new Malay middle class are not averse to various cultural items of other ethnic groups. As shown in Table 7.9, Malay middle class respondents did not only watch and enjoy Malay programmes to fill their leisure hours. The vast

[14] Furnivall (1956: 304) defines a plural society as one with diverse groups within the same political unit who "mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separated within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere, there is a division of labour along ethnic

majority also watched Chinese, Indian and Western programmes, though not very regularly. This is true not only in the Kelang Valley, but also in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu. Tamil and Hindi movies, and lately, Chinese kong-fu films – all of which come with Malay sub-titles -- are popular among Malay viewers. In terms of regular viewers, overall, 21.1 per cent of respondents watched Chinese television programmes regularly, the highest being in Kuala Trengganu with 24 per cent, followed by Kota Bahru (22.5 per cent) and the Kelang Valley (17.6 per cent). As for Indian television programmes, overall 20.8 per cent watched them regularly, with proportions in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu being higher (21.2 per cent and 20.8 per cent respectively), while the Kelang Valley much lower (14.8 per cent).

Table 7.9
Respondents' Tastes of Other Cultures through Watching TV Programmes

Type of TV Programme	KELANG VALLEY (n=108)	KOTA BHARU (n=80)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=96)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=284)
Do you watch Malay TV programmes?				
• No	5.6	2.5	3.1	3.9 (n=11)
• Sometimes	36.1	32.5	17.7	28.9 (n=82)
• Yes	58.3	65.0	79.2	67.2 (n=191)
Do you watch Chinese TV programmes?				
• No	18.5	25.0	12.5	18.3 (n=52)
• Sometimes	63.9	52.5	63.5	60.6 (n=172)
• Yes	17.6	22.5	24.0	21.1 (n=60)
Do you watch Tamil/Hindi TV programmes?				
• No	34.3	25.0	11.5	23.9 (n=68)
• Sometimes	50.9	53.8	67.7	57.4 (n=163)
• Yes	14.8	21.2	20.8	18.7 (n=53)
Do you watch Western TV programmes?				
• No	6.5	12.5	3.1	7.0 (n=20)
• Sometimes	28.7	38.8	37.5	34.5 (n=98)
• Yes	61.8	48.8	59.4	58.5 (n=166)

Source: Survey data 1996

lines."

Table 7.10
Respondents' Friends from Other Ethnic Groups

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All respondents (N=284)
Do you have Chinese friends?				
• No	22.2	28.8	28.1	26.1 (n=74)
• Yes, 10 or less	48.1	52.5	54.2	51.4 (n=146)
• Yes, more than 10	29.6	18.7	17.7	22.5 (n=64)
Do you have Indian friends?				
• No	25.0	48.8	39.6	36.6 (n=104)
• Yes, 10 or less	54.6	36.2	54.2	49.3 (n=140)
• yes, more than 10	20.4	15.0	6.3	14.1 (n=40)

Source: Survey data 1996

Table 7.11
Respondents Visiting Chinese and Indian Neighbours/Friends to Celebrate Their Festivals

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	**Kota Bharu (n=80)**	**Kuala Trengganu (n=96)**	**All respondents (N=284)**
Do you attend 'open house' held by Chinese and Indian neighbours/friends? If so, how many times in the last one year?				
• I never attended any	28.7	46.3	57.3	43.3 (n=123)
• Once	39.8	33.7	22.9	32.4 (n=92)
• Twice	16.7	8.8	10.4	12.3 (n=35)
• Three & above	14.8	11.2	9.4	12.0 (n=34)
Do you attempt to understand and appreciate the meaning of their festivals?				
• No	17.6	30.0	39.6	28.5 (n=81)
• Yes	82.4	70.0	60.4	71.5 (n=203)

Source: Survey data 1996

Though one's cultural preferences (such as watching television programmes of other ethnic groups), by themselves, may not tell much about one's everyday relations with other ethnic groups, this data can be verified by examining other aspects of inter-ethnic relations, such as whether new Malay middle class respondents mix and have

friends from the Chinese and Indian communities. The data in Table 7.10 and 7.11 suggests there were three categories of new Malay middle class respondents in terms of levels of inter-ethnic relationships: first, a small group who had close relations with Chinese and Indians friends. They had many friends from other ethnic groups (those identified in Table 7.10 of having more than 10 friends from other ethnic groups), frequently attended open houses of other ethnic groups, and tried to understand and appreciate the cultures of other ethnic groups. This group can be regarded as more multi-ethnic and Malaysian in their attitudes and ways of life. The second group, which was much larger (about half the respondents), had Chinese and/or Indian friends, interacted with them, and sometimes attended the open houses held by the latter. But, their circle of non-Malay friends was smaller, and their interactions were much less. The third group, smaller in proportion, did not have friends from other ethnic groups, did not attend the latter's cultural festivals, and did not try to understand or appreciate the meaning of their cultural activities. They can be regarded as conducting their lives mainly within their own ethnic community, except at the market place where they meet with other ethnic groups.

By comparison, a larger proportion from among Kelang Valley respondents can be classified as belonging to the first category of having closer relationships with other ethnic groups compared to those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, as shown by the data on the number of non-Malay friends and attendance at the latter's open houses. However, in the Kelang Valley too, there is also an almost equal number of Malay middle class respondents who belonged to the third category, i.e. those who conducted their lives mainly within their own ethnic group, with no circles of friends outside their ethnic boundary. This finding suggests that one's presence in a multi-

ethnic surrounding (such as Kuala Lumpur or Petaling Jaya) does not automatically induce one to establish contacts with those from other ethnic groups. On the contrary, it may make one feel a greater need to keep within the same ethnic boundary. In Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, the proportions of respondents who had Chinese and Indian friends were smaller, and those with no friends from other ethnic groups were larger than in the Kelang Valley. However, this data has to be read carefully. The fact that larger proportions of middle class respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu did not have Chinese or Indian friends should not be interpreted to mean that they shunned non-Malays. It is just that in the two provincial towns, Chinese and, more so, Indians are small minorities. In fact, one may argue that in predominantly Malay areas such as Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu where there are less inter-ethnic rivalries, Malays feel more secure and may be more open towards non-Malays, while in the Kelang Valley, where such rivalries are more common, attitudes and feelings vary from being open, secure and confident, to one of being less open, insecure and suspicious of other ethnic groups.[15]

One of the activities of members of the new Malay middle class that may involve interactions with other ethnic groups is the Malay *Hari Raya* (*M*uslim *id* celebration that comes after the end of the fasting month of Ramadan). For this

[15] The issue of inter-ethnic relations is complex, and the survey data unfortunately does not allow us to draw firmer conclusions. This issue needs to be explored more fully by using the ethnographic approach, which I could only do partially here. From many conversations and interactions I had with several informants as well as personal observations in the three areas, I could sense that those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu had more open attitudes towards non-Malays, though they may not have many friends among them. This is also acknowledged by my Chinese informants in these two towns. In the Kelang Valley, I have come across not a few Malays having such openness and multi-ethnic perspectives on various issues. At the same time, I also have also come across many Malays who held strong views along ethnic lines. I have also encountered both tendencies among non-Malays in the Kelang Valley. There are some middle class Chinese and Indians who have strong views regarding ethnic issues in Malaysia, yet they have close friends among a number of Malays who they think they can trust and confide their problems.

occasion, Malays, especially from the new middle class, do two things. First, as already discussed in Chapter 5 on the Malay middle class family, they *balik kampung* (return to their original village or town of their birth) to visit their parents or relatives and reaffirm their kin ties. In our sample, 89.8 per cent of our respondents *balik kampung* for the *Hari Raya* annually, the largest proportion being from the Kelang Valley, with 91.7 per cent, followed by Kuala Trengganu (89.6 per cent) and Kota Bharu (87.6 per cent) (see Table 5.18 in Chapter 5).[16] It is not surprising that the proportion from the Kelang Valley was very high because most respondents there were migrants from outside the area who may still have parents or relatives in their former home village or town. Second, Malays especially from the new middle class, hold the *Hari Raya* 'open house', which is normally done after their return to their urban homes from their *balik kampung* exodus. The festive mood goes on for the whole month of Syawal (the month following Ramadan) and the 'open house' can be held any time during this one month. The function is meant to entertain nearby relatives, neighbours, friends and office-mates, thus strengthening their community networks. In our sample, 69.2 per cent of our respondents regularly held such *Hari Raya* 'open house' functions (see Table 5.18 in Chapter 5). Just as a proportion of new Malay middle class respondents attended 'open houses' of their non-Malay neighbours and friends, a number of neighbours, friends and office-mates from other ethnic groups too attended Malay 'open houses' to celebrate the *Hari Raya*. Such occasions are marked by relaxed and free mingling between hosts and guests as well as generous offers of various Malay culinary delights. Foreigners who visited Malaysia have often remarked that *Hari Raya* 'open house' – though a

[16] The annual *balik kampung* in the Kelang Valley is referred to in the media as an 'exodus' because large numbers of people – some estimates put the figure at about a million -- leave the place on homeward journeys.

Malay/Muslim festival -- is shared by other ethnic groups and has become "a time for celebration as a nation".[17] From the author's observations and experience in attending many 'open house' functions over the years, this is not an over-statement, but this applies mostly to those who have many non-Malay friends.

Conclusions

In his study of the new Malay middle class and culture, Kahn (1994: 39) drew three conclusions. First, though the Malay middle class may be 'firmly urban-based and urban-oriented', they still have 'not yet ... adapted culturally to city life (for) they have not yet produced a characteristically urban culture'; second, they 'feel ill at ease in cities which they perceive as dominated by alien peoples and patterns of life, of Western and/or Chinese origin'; and third, they constitute 'a breeding ground for new forms of anti-Chinese sentiments'.

My study of the three urban centres discussed above suggests a more varied and complex picture. Some members of the new Malay middle class may have become 'firmly urban-based and urban-oriented', as shown by the attitudes and lifestyles of the cosmopolitan urbanites, who enjoy city life, and feel secure and confident, rather than ill at ease in the city. The 'folk urbanites' on the other hand, have developed rather different lifestyles, have set up urban communities based on the *surau* and other activities, through which they establish new networks of friends in their neighbourhood and outside, while at the same time, reaffirming their kin ties.

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[17] In a letter to the *New Straits Times* (February 4, 1999), Shane L. Stone, an Australian from Darwin wrote that "Ramadan and *Hari Raya* are not new to me and perhaps I have tended to take the importance of these religious observances and celebrations for granted.... Regardless of one's religious, ethnic or cultural background, *Hari Raya has become a time for celebration as a nation*"

Their construction of these communities, which have several important *kampung*-like characteristics, is their way of culturally adapting to urban living, and over the years, they have become rooted and begun to 'feel at home' in the urban milieu, which they no longer find hostile or anonymous. Though they *balik kampung* during *Hari Raya*, on their return, they hold 'open houses' for their neighbours, friends and office colleagues, including many non-Malays. When asked by elderly parents or relatives to stay back a bit longer during their *balik kampung* trips, they often reply by saying that they have to return to their urban homes quickly, not only because they have to get back to work, but also because '*kawan-kawan mahu datang ziarah Hari Raya*' (friends want to come and visit for the *Hari Raya*). While it is true that ethnic identities and religious sentiments are strong among the Malay new middle class, and may involve anti-Chinese sentiments and suspicions, it is too hasty to draw the conclusion that they constitute 'a breeding ground for new forms of anti-Chinese sentiments'. As shown in this chapter, members of the new Malay middle class may be divided into three groups in terms of levels of relationships with non-Malays, i.e., those who have close relationships with non-Malays and have developed multi-ethnic perspectives; those who have some non-Malay friends, but their contacts and interactions are still limited; and those who confine themselves within their own ethnic boundary and interact with non-Malays only at the market place. Thus, just as the new Malay middle class is not homogenous politically (see Chapter 8), they are also not homogenous socially and culturally, i.e. that while some may confine themselves within their own ethnic boundary, others have developed multi-ethnic social circles.

(italics added).

It was also argued in the chapter that though a significant proportion of new Malay middle class respondents attempted to build *kampung*-like communities, or communities with *kampung*-like characteristics in urban areas, these are not necessarily traditional or extensions of the traditional rural villages. Some characteristics of the rural villages have been dropped, but others such as *surau*-based activities, *gotong royong*, mutual flows of food and other gifts, and other characteristics exist. However, these are constructed within a new milieu and modified according to the changed material conditions. Thus, the cultural attachment of the new Malay middle class to the 'pastness' is essentially modern, or contemporary, though it may give a semblance of maintaining tradition.