



**STATE-LED
MODERNIZATION
AND THE NEW
MIDDLE CLASS IN
MALAYSIA**

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Notes

1 Introduction

1. While the 1970 and earlier census reports used the term 'Malays', later census reports combined Malay and other indigenous ethnic groups in one category, Bumiputera. However, since Malays constitute the largest proportion of the Bumiputera community, the figures for Bumiputera in later censuses are still comparable with earlier census data on Malays.
2. Middle-class studies conducted in the West are too numerous to quote here. Among those referred to in this study are Mills (1975), Giddens (1980), Edgell (1980), Abercrombie and Urry (1984), Goldthorpe (1980, 1982), Wright (1991, 1994), Vidich (1995), Butler and Savage (1995) and Lockwood (1995).
3. Among the studies of the East Asian middle class are Hsiao (1993, 1999), Robison and Goodman (1996), Hsiao and Koo (1997) and Hing Ai Yun (1997).
4. According to the Ministry of Rural Development, in Malaysia in 1995 there were 417 200 households (9.6 per cent of all households) living below the official poverty line 16.2 per cent of poor households were found in Sabah (highest), followed by Kelantan with 14.7 per cent, and Terengganu with 9.9 per cent.
5. Although this procedure may exaggerate the characteristics of the provincial new middle-class respondents because of the apparent over-sampling there, its risks are minimized since in the chapters that follow (Chapters 4 to 8), the author always analyses each of the three sub-samples on its own before making an overall comparison between the metropolitan and provincial new middle-class respondents.
6. This metropolitan and provincial divide is only for analytical purposes. It should not be seen as a dichotomy, but rather as a continuum. This is because large proportions of the metropolitan new middle class consist of 'outsiders', that is, people who have migrated to the Klang Valley from the various provincial states. They have roots in their places of origin and return to these places at times of cultural festivals and other occasions.
7. Admittedly, if the researcher concentrates only on one residential area and a sampling frame is available, a random sampling technique is more feasible. However, since the study is comparative between three different geographical areas, it would be much more costly and time-consuming if the researcher used such a technique.
8. Many instances of the lack of co-operation from residents in the Klang Valley were reported in the press when the Malaysian government conducted the population and housing census in July 2000. See, for example, the letter from one of the census-takers, Vijay Ramasamy, entitled 'A Rather Bumpy Census Exercise' (*The Star*, 24 July 2000, p. 22). In this, Ramasamy outlines the difficulties he experiences in trying to conduct the census among the residents of a condominium on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

9. Among the proliferation of writers researching on class in the West today are Wright (1991, 1994), Marshall (1997), Marshall et al. (1988), Lockwood (1995), Edgell (1993), Crompton (1993), Vidich (1995), and Mc Nall, and Levine and Fantasia (1991). In the new industrializing countries (NICs), include Hsiao (1993), So and Hsiao (1994), Hsiao and Koo (1997) and Hing Ai Yun (1997).
10. Wright (1991) distinguishes two positions, adopted by Marxist writers: (i) the 'minimalist' position whereby some Marxist writers try to keep the concept of class structure as uncomplicated as possible, reducing it to a simple polarized vision of the class structure of capitalism; and (ii) the 'maximalist' position, whereby writers such as himself attempt to increase the complexity of the class structure concept in the hope that such complexity will more powerfully capture the explanatory mechanisms embedded in class relations (Wright 1991).
11. Referring to managers and professionals in the corporate sector.
12. Referring to administrators in the state sector, who try to run their organizations in accordance with their defined 'corporate philosophy and work ethic', and wield sufficient power in their dealings with the private sector as well as the lay public.
13. Literally meaning new rich persons, who become so through their business enterprise.
14. Literally meaning 'New Malays', a term used by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad when enjoining Malays to transform their work culture and ethic. (see Chapter 9).
15. To my mind, a definition is useful only as long as it delineates the entity by indicating what it is and is not, and also as long as it draws attention to objective and subjective processes leading to its formation and expansion. The working definition employed above, in some measure, not only conforms to the historically-based political economy approach that offers an 'objective' definition of the phenomenon of the new Malay middle class, but also to the 'cultural construction' approach that defines it 'subjectively', that is, from the viewpoint of the people, including members of the new middle class themselves. When reviewing the first volume in the series on the 'new rich' in Asia edited by Robison and Goodman (1996), Shamsul (1999) notes the absence of the 'cultural construction' approach in the study. He takes the contributors to task for the imprecision and elusiveness of the term 'new rich' employed by them – a fact also acknowledged by the editors. Shamsul's critique is that the volume unintentionally excludes two significant factors pertinent to the 'cultural construction' of the new rich in Asia: 'first, the changing idiom, texts and contexts of popular discourse that shape the social meaning of the new rich in the public sphere, past and present; second, the role of "cultural politics" in the formation of the new rich' (Shamsul 1999: 86-87).
16. Kahn (1991: 56), a proponent of the overriding role of the state, maintains that the Malaysian middle classes owe their existence not so much to the changing demands of capital as to the emergence of the modern state, and that the middle classes have been just as embedded in the state as in capitalist relations. In fact, he further argues that the emergence of a new middle class, at least in post-colonial Malaysia, might have as much, if not more to do with the emergence of the modern state as with capitalist development per se, and that the middle class 'is composed largely not of private, self-employed

entrepreneurs, or middle ranking employees of private enterprises, but those employed directly or indirectly by the state' (Kahn 1996b: 24) (see Chapter 3 for details).

2 A Critical Review of Malaysian Middle-Class Studies

1. An expanded version of this chapter appeared as Chapter 5 'Malaysian Middle Class Studies: A Critical Review' in Jomo (1999).
2. Due to space constraints, the review in this chapter is necessarily selective, confined to published works from 1989 to the present. Only one unpublished paper (Norani 1997) is included on the basis that it offers a different approach to the study. Shamsul's works (1997, 1999), which are published, focus specifically on *Melayu Baru*; thus they are discussed in Chapter 9, which deals with *Melayu Baru* and the new Malay middle class.
3. This view is pursued in his later works based on empirical studies in the 1990s (Saravanamuttu 2001).
4. Mohd Nor's survey focused on two questions: first, perceptions of members of the middle class concerning economic opportunities available to them through the NEP; and, second, their politics – whether tending towards moderation and compromise, or towards ethnic polarization. His sample consisting of 200 respondents – 65 per cent Malays and 35 per cent Chinese and Indians – drawn from six major towns in peninsular Malaysia (Penang, Seremban, Ipoh, Alor Star, Kota Bharu, and Kuala Terengganu) surprisingly included none any from the federal capital, Kuala Lumpur. By occupation, they consisted of white-collar employees from both private and public sectors, ranging from high-level professionals such as engineers, doctors, architects, and lawyers to administrators and schoolteachers and a few businessmen.
5. The usual argument is that since middle-class people are more educated, more open-minded and more tolerant, they therefore possess a natural inclination for democracy. Crouch, however, maintains that the middle class tends to favour democratization for different reasons. To quote:

Because middle class people are better educated and have a certain economic security, they are more prepared to stand up for their rights and to demand participation in order to further their own interests. They support democracy not because they believe in equal rights for everyone but because democracy gives them access to political power. Thus, a middle class 'chauvinist' Malay might not be particularly committed to giving rights to Chinese or workers, but he wants a system that will be responsive to his demands. To the extent that democracy meets his interests, he will be inclined to support it. But democracy is not necessarily the only system that will meet personal requirements. (Personal communications, 20 September 1995)

3 Industrialization and Middle-Class Formation in Malaysia

1. Some writers (such as Crouch 1994) take only the first four occupational categories listed in the census – professional and technical; administrative and

managerial; clerical; and sales – as middle class occupations. Besides these four, others – for example, Johan Saravanamuttu (1989) and Abdul Rahman (1995) – also include about half the workforce in the services category. The first two categories give an estimate of the new middle class, whilst the other three give an estimate of the old middle class and the marginal or lower middle class.

2. The participation rate of the female workforce during the early decades of the twentieth century was very small, making up only about 5 per cent of the total registered workforce (Nathan 1922). Thus, we find that workforce statistics used by various studies of that period (see, for example, Hirschman 1975) often only refer to the male workforce. This chapter, which relies on these secondary sources, refers only to the male workforce for the same reason.
3. Mining activities, although normally considered part of the primary sector, are included in the secondary sector here. This is so because mining activities since the 1970s have concentrated on oil, which involves not only upstream, but also downstream, activities.
4. According to the 1991 census, urban areas are gazetted areas with adjoining built-up areas which have a combined population of 10 000 or more. Built-up areas are defined as areas contiguous to a gazetted area with at least 60 per cent of their population (aged 10 or above) engaged in non-agricultural activities and at least 30 per cent of housing units having modern toilet facilities (Malaysia 1996: 153).
5. The public universities are: Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (previously known as Universiti Pertanian Malaysia) (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), International Islamic University (IIU), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI), and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM).
6. The 1996 Education Act allows the setting up of private universities, including branch campuses of foreign universities. The local private universities currently in operation include Universiti Multimedia, Universiti Tenaga (Uniten), Universiti Petronas, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (Unitar), and the International Medical University (IMU), while two foreign universities – the University of Monash, Australia, and the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom – have established branch campuses in Malaysia.
7. Brown (1994) divides the development of the Malaysian state into three phases: (i) the colonial period; (ii) the period from independence to 1969; and (iii) the post-1969 period. According to him, during the colonial period, the state was the agency of British capitalist interests, mainly those in plantation and mining, so that state expenditure was focused on the infrastructural developments necessary to promote primary-product exports. During the period from independence to 1969, the state mediated between competing classes and among class fractions among the bourgeoisie, and this was reflected in the institutionalization of a governing alliance between various bourgeois class fractions. During the post-1969 period, he argues that the bureaucratic bourgeoisie gained control of the state machinery and progressively used this to attain dominance within the governing alliance, and to acquire access to commercial and industrial capital. As the state more clearly became the agency of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, the stability of the alliance

was threatened, both by fractional rivalries because other bourgeois class fractions were marginalized, and by class tensions because state-based industrial development exacerbated disparities between the bourgeoisie as a whole and subordinate classes. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie then sought to employ the machinery of the state to contain and mediate resultant tensions. They did this, partly by granting political concessions, but primarily through the manipulation of ideology, particularly the ideology of ethnicity (Brown 1994: 211–12).

8. The financial and economic weakness of the Malay business and middle classes can be clearly seen in the following example. In 1964, out of a total of RM15.1 million shares allotted to Malays – in fact, practically all the 50 000 or so Malay civil servants were encouraged to buy up to RM10 000 each in company shares – only RM3.8 million shares, or 25 per cent of their allocation – were acquired because of a lack of funds (Jesudason 1989: 64–5).
9. Jomo (1986) argues that until the NEP, the role of the post-colonial state had been largely confined to administrative, supportive, and regulatory activities, and that it did not make direct and active efforts in promoting the interests of the governing group. However, according to him, with the NEP, the state no longer merely played a supportive role for private capital; it now moved to centre stage to become a medium for capital accumulation, serving the particular interests of the governing class. He suggests that, at least in this important sense, it can be argued that the statist bourgeoisie crystallized with the implementation of the NEP. He posits further that with the growth of public enterprises, political power and control over capitalist enterprise have converged in the hands of the statist bourgeoisie. Ministers, other ruling-party politicians, and senior bureaucrats in government service share control of these new instruments of class interest (Jomo 1986: 266).

4 The Making of the New Malay Middle Class

1. This applies only to the white middle class, because the black or coloured middle class is still in the process of formation in Britain and the United States (Phillips and Sarre 1995; Evans 1995).
2. For an explanation of the sample, see Chapter 1.
3. MCE or the Malaysian Certificate of Education (now known as SPM or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) is awarded to students after they have passed five secondary examinations. HSC or the Higher School Certificate (now known as STPM or *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*) is awarded after passing six secondary examinations. Students are normally required to pass six secondary examinations before they can enter the university.
4. The respondents in the study numbered 520 persons, consisting of 42.1 per cent Malays, 42.1 per cent Chinese and 15.8 per cent Indians and Others. Of that number, 49.8 per cent were new middle class, 4.8 per cent capitalist class, 23.8 per cent old middle class, 11.9 per cent marginal middle class, and 4.8 per cent working class. The study, conducted in 1996, also shows a clear trend of upward intergenerational mobility among the new middle class. Nevertheless, such a trend was not confined to the new middle class alone; it was also a

general trend involving other classes, suggesting fluidity in the class structure. For example, the proportion of respondents originating from the labouring and peasant classes in the study was 40 per cent among the capitalist class, but was much higher among the old middle class (54 per cent) and the marginal middle class (54.8 per cent). This suggests at least two things. One, that a large proportion of members of the capitalist class, old middle class and new middle class were also first generation; and two, that although the class structure was rather open, and upward intergenerational social mobility was a distinct phenomenon, it nevertheless tended to be rather 'short range' in the sense that it was relatively easier to enter the old and marginal middle classes rather than the new middle class and the capitalist class.

5. In the 1970s, a Superscale G civil servant earned RM2000 a month, a Superscale A RM4000, and the Chief Secretary to the Cabinet, that is, Malaysia's top civil servant, earned RM4500 (Nordin 1976: 194). Today, based on the salary revision implemented from 1 January, 1995, their basic salary had increased considerably, with Superscale G officers earning about RM3000, Superscale A about RM7000, and the Chief Secretary to the Cabinet about RM10 000. (These figures do not include the various allowances they enjoy.)
6. For example, despite her high position and five-digit income, a financial director (a lady in her forties) of one large Malaysian conglomerate studied, planned to give up her present job to start her own company. She felt that her prospects would be better by being independent and her own boss.
7. During the interview, Tun Ismail said that at the First Bumiputera Economic Congress in 1965, he initially opposed the move by some delegates to form a Bumiputera bank (later known as Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Berhad), but that he later changed his mind. The reason why he opposed it was his reservations about the availability of a sufficient pool of Malay managers and professionals to run such a bank successfully. However, he admitted that he had no regrets for having changed his mind. After leading PNB for almost two decades and seeing the involvement of Malay managers and professionals at various levels and sectors, including in the banking sector, he became fully confident in their ability.
8. Tan Sri Geh was Tun Ismail's trusted colleague who is also a member of the PNB's Board of Directors since PNB's formation in 1978 and board member of several other companies. He was a member of the National Operations Council (NOC) set up by Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (Malaysia's second prime minister) following the May 13, 1969 riots, and also a member of the National Economic Consultative Council.
9. Interview with Tan Sri Geh on 19 March, 1996.
10. Tan Sri Khalid is currently Executive Vice-Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kumpulan Guthrie Berhad, a large Malaysian conglomerate involved in the plantation and, property sectors among many others. He was the second general manager and CEO of PNB after Dato' Mohamad Desa Pachi. Reflecting on his experience working with Tun Ismail, Khalid – who has been dubbed as Tun Ismail's 'blue-eyed boy' – said that 'it was difficult working with Tun. With him, you've to work hard to earn his respect and trust.' (interview with Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim on 9 February 1996).

5 The New Malay Middle-Class Family

1. Using data from national census reports, Jones (1994: chapter 3) noted the increase in the age at first marriage among Malays and highlighted the dramatic reduction in the numbers who married young. According to him, while almost 54 per cent of Malays in peninsular Malaysia between the ages of 15 and 19 were already married in 1957, the percentage of ever-married individuals in the same age group had been reduced to only about 7 per cent in 1985. Among those aged 20 to 24 years old, the percentage of those who had been married at some time in their lives fell from 90.6 per cent to 51.3 per cent over the same period.
2. The average age at first marriage among new Malay middle-class and working-class respondents in our study is comparable with that in some developed countries. In the United States, for example, women married at 20.2 years of age and men at 22.5 in the mid-1950s. In 1994, the average age of marriage for young women had increased to 24.5, and for men, to 26.7 (Shehan and Kammeyer 1997: 137).
3. In her study of families (including the middle class) in modern cosmopolitan Singapore, Quah (1990a, 1990b) noted that even highly educated women saw marriage and motherhood as major personal goals in their lives.
4. In Nordin's sample, 9.5 per cent were aged 51 and above, compared to our 4.9 per cent, while those aged 41–50 constituted 19 per cent (compared to 23.6 per cent in our study). The largest group in his sample were those aged 31–40 which made up 62.9 per cent (compared to 42.2 per cent in our sample), while the youngest (30 and below) comprised 8.6 per cent, compared to 29.2 per cent in our sample.
5. In Fatimah's study, those with no children comprised of recently married couples (three years or less). In terms of the preferred number of children per family, 16.2 per cent of her respondents preferred five or more, almost two-fifths (37.7 per cent) wanted four, while 23.4 per cent wanted three children. These figures suggest that the majority wanted large families of four or more children, which is quite consistent with our findings above.
6. Studies in western societies show that it is part of new middle-class values to prefer small nuclear families (Edgell 1980; Shehan and Kammeyer 1997). In Malaysia, this is true among the new Chinese middle class, while the new Malay middle class and, to a certain extent, the new Indian middle class prefer larger families. A recent study of the new Malaysian middle class shows that the preferred mean for the new Chinese middle class was 3.4, Indian 4 and Malays 5.2 (Abdul Rahman 1998: 258).
7. Willmott's (1969) 'symmetrical family' thesis claimed that partnership between husband and wife is expressed in three major forms. First, partnership in power, with major decisions being discussed and made together; second, partnership in the division of labour within the household as the old distinctions between men's and women's jobs (though still made) become increasingly blurred; and third, it is a partnership in social life, with couples spending more of their free time together and with their children. He concluded that despite continuing sexual inequalities, women today enjoy higher status in the family and society.

8. For non-Muslim students, Moral Education has been made a compulsory subject in the school curriculum.
9. The moral panic led to a study commissioned by the Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1994 on *lepak* 'loafing' among youth and the ensuing *Rakan Muda* (Young Friends) programme being implemented based on the study's recommendations.
10. The nuclear family refers to any family comprising of husband and wife, and their dependent children. The extended family refers to any persistent kinship grouping of persons related by descent, marriage or adoption, which is wider than the nuclear family, comprising at least three generations, from grandparents (one or both) to grandchildren (Bell 1968).
11. Litwak (1960a, 1960b) distinguishes between the classical extended family and the modified extended family. His 'modified extended family' thesis suggests that extended family relations are possible in an urban industrial society, at least among the middle class, albeit in a modified form. The modified extended family is a series of nuclear families joined together – on an egalitarian basis – for mutual aid, not bound by demands for geographical propinquity or occupational similarity. He argues that geographical propinquity is not a prerequisite for these relationships and that such extended kin relations do not impede occupational mobility. Litwak states further that neither the classical extended family of rural society nor the isolated nuclear family is functional and suited to modern urban conditions (Litwak 1960a, 1960b; Bell 1968).

6 New Malay Middle-Class Lifestyles and Culture

1. By profession, most (62.9 percent) top-level executives and senior managers among the new Malay middle class in the Klang Valley owned luxury cars, while among middle-level managers and professionals, the percentages were much lower – that is, 29 per cent and 27.8 per cent respectively.
2. Muslims have to perform prayers five times daily, beginning with *Subuh* (prayer at dawn), *Zuhur* (afternoon prayer), *Asar* (evening prayer before dusk), *Maghrib* (night prayer immediately after dusk), and *Isya'* (late night prayer, normally performed an hour after *Maghrib* and before *Subuh*).
3. Some studies (for example, Tan Poo Chang et al. 1996) took the one-year period prior to the study as the cut-off point. In this study, we took a two-year period because travel and vacations are not necessarily an annual occurrence. Because of their busy work schedule or financial constraints, some respondents may not take their families on vacation this year, but may go in the next. Thus, the period of one year may not fully capture such activity.
4. Foreign travel and vacation discussed here does not include travel to perform the *Haj* or *Umrah* in Mecca (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of the latter).
5. Compare the Malaysian situation with South Korea under President Roh Tae-woo, which was dubbed 'the golf republic', although it had a much smaller number of golf courses than Malaysia. In 1991, South Korea had 60 golf courses in operation and another 118 were under construction (half of these golf courses were in the Seoul metropolitan area) (Cotton and Leest 1996: 190). In Malaysia, the metropolitan Klang Valley alone had over 130 golf courses in the

early 1990s managed by exclusive golf clubs, while there are less than 20 recreational parks for the public with a population of over two million (Norani Othman et al. 1996).

6. To gain an insight into the thinking of agencies responsible for promoting the use of Malay in government, universities, and the private and public sectors, I interviewed Tuan Haji Aziz Deraman, the Director-General of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (the national language and literature agency) in 1997. In the interview, he regretted the apparent lack of commitment among members of the new Malay middle class as well as the private sector, especially those in the metropolitan Klang Valley, to join hands in promoting Malay in their daily communications as well as in commerce and industry. He saw the task of extending the usage of Malay in the private sector as an uphill struggle.

7 The New Malay Middle Class and Community

1. Some of the adaptive forms of urban living in multi-ethnic and multicultural Malaysia appear as hybridization. Here, hybridization is more than adaptation, and does not simply mean the phenomenon of cultural heterogeneity. Heterogeneity creates the conditions in which hybridization may emerge. Hybridization 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 comprised 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 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 stories about those who have 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 being classified as 'folk urbanites' – in a paper at a conference on the middle class in Taipei in June 1997 (Abdul Rahman 1997a). By chance, I later met Kosaku Kunio at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and showed him my paper. He felt that there was some strength to what I was arguing and introduced me to his own work (Kosaku 1992) on Japan, in which he introduces the '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: 133–4), 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.

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.
7. For example, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a wealthy prince-cum-businessman from Kelantan, named his mansion in Kota Bharu 'Palm Manor'.
8. As indicated elsewhere, due to time and financial constraints, my study of Malay workers was conducted only in the Klang Valley.
9. By comparison, a much higher proportion (76.2 per cent) of the Klang Valley Malay workers felt that their housing area was community-like (Table 7.1).

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 shows vividly how a group of Malay labourers who came from various places in peninsular Malaysia to work in an oil palm plantation in Kemaman, Terengganu, 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)

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, and so on, in cooking them, as well as in seeing that guests have enough food to eat. In small urban areas such as Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu, this practice still continues today. In metropolitan 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 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.
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.
13. This trend of religious resurgence is also found in other Muslim countries. A report on neighbouring Indonesia in *Asiaweek* (29 January 1999), 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*, 29 January 1999, p. 24.)

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 lines.

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 Terengganu had more open attitudes towards non-Malays, although they may not have many friends among them. This is also acknowledged by my Chinese informants in these two towns. In the Klang Valley, I have come across a number of Malays having such openness and multi-ethnic perspectives on various issues. At the same time, I also have come across many Malays who held strong views along ethnic lines. I have also encountered both tendencies among non-Malays in the Klang 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.
16. The annual *balik kampung* from the Klang Valley is referred to in the media as an 'exodus' in which large numbers of people – some estimates in the mid-1990s put the figure at over one million – leave the place on homeward journeys. However, lately, the figure seems to have increased. According to a report in *Utusan Malaysia* on 26 December 2000, the highway authority, Projek Lebu Raya Utara Selatan (PLUS), recorded that for the *Hari Raya* which fell on 27 December 2000, more than one million vehicles (mostly cars, buses and motorcycles) left Kuala Lumpur for the *balik kampung*. This means that the actual figure of the people involved could well be around two million including those who went by air and rail.
17. In a letter to the *New Straits Times* (4 February 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*' (italics added).

8 Malay Middle-Class Politics, Democracy and Civil Society

1. This introduction is, in part, based on the analysis of Malaysian middle class-politics contained in Abdul Rahman 1999.
2. Samuel Huntington, the leading advocate of the 'third wave' democratization thesis (that is, democratization of the late twentieth century), argues that rising incomes lead to changes in social structures, beliefs and culture that have been conducive to the emergence of democracy.

Rapid economic growth creates rapidly the economic base for democracy that slower economic growth creates more slowly. It, however, raises expectations, exacerbates inequalities, and creates stresses and strains in the social fabric that stimulate political mobilization and demands for political participation. (Huntington 1991: 68–9).

However, we should note that there is no linear route to democracy. Some countries, such as the post-Marcos Philippines and post-Suharto Indonesia, despite their slower economic growth than Singapore or Malaysia, have a far more vibrant political life and democracy than their two Southeast Asian neighbours.

3. Those who indicated that their vote was 'secret' are assumed here to have voted mostly for the opposition (see Table 8.3).
4. Due to various constraints, the study on Malay workers was only conducted in the Klang Valley.
5. This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by UMNO leaders. Of late, UMNO leaders have repeatedly expressed concern that many Malay youth were not joining the party and they urged the UMNO Youth to intensify campaigns to recruit them. In fact, UMNO Youth has come under strong pressure and criticisms for its ineffectiveness in attracting Malay youth, including young Malay workers. These criticisms became stronger after the November 1999 general election in which the BN, and especially the UMNO, suffered serious setbacks. Subsequently, UMNO Youth became embroiled in a leadership crisis after the BN defeat in its traditional stronghold in Lunas, a state constituency in Kedah in the November 2000 by-election, with the critics alleging that UMNO Youth had failed to prevent the youth from going over to the opposition. The debate has been going on in the mainstream media for quite some time. For example, Abdullah Ahmad, an UMNO veteran who was formerly deputy minister and a close confidante of Malaysia's second prime minister, Abdul Razak Hussein, wrote thus in his weekly column in *Mingguan Malaysia* on 17 December 2000:

UMNO must admit that it finds it hard today to attract Bumiputera youth though they might not be anti-government. This happens because of our [UMNO's] own doing, including the action by some UMNO leaders with strong vested interests who erect brick walls [between the party and the youth]. If UMNO fails to inspire the confidence of these youth and convince them that UMNO is not a party of the selected few, but a party of all Malays, then the youth will seek a different political alternative. There was no

alternative to UMNO before, but there is such an alternative today. If UMNO doesn't change fast enough, it will face defeat in future elections.

In another column written for the *New Straits Times* on 26 December 2000, Abdullah Ahmad stressed that UMNO Youth 'must re-invent itself' and 'be youth-friendly'.

6. This is not to deny that in the 1995 general election, Chinese voters gave greater support to the BN compared to their stand in the 1990 election, whereas there was less change among Malay voters in the Klang Valley.
7. During the acute water crisis in the Klang Valley in 1998, the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (FOMCA) threatened to take the Selangor State Government and the Water Supply Department to court for their failure to provide the water supply to the public. The confrontation later cooled down after both sides entered into discussions to resolve the issue amicably, and the Selangor State Government pledged to handle the crisis more effectively.
8. Nevertheless, of late, due to rising prices and environmental degradation, awareness of consumer rights and the need to protect the environment is growing.
9. In his study, Gomez (1996: 39–40) drew attention to the swing against the BN among rural voters in Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah in the 1995 election, which he attributed to their frustration that government policies were exacerbating social differentiation and economic disparities in the community. In our study, except for new Malay middle-class respondents in Kota Bharu, the economic disparity issue also appears to be a major concern among a substantial number of the Malay middle-class respondents in Kuala Terengganu and in the Klang Valley.
10. In a special interview with the media, the new Chief Justice admitted that public confidence in the judiciary was at its 'lowest ebb' and that 'I fully realise that during the next two years or so there is plenty of work to do to repair the damage.' He stressed that his immediate task was 'to put our house in order' ('CJ Confident of Bringing Change', *The Star*, 22–3 December 2000).

9 The New Malay Middle Class and *Melayu Baru*

1. Over different periods of Malaysian history, the agenda of modernization and transformation of Malay society has been redefined. The debate on *Melayu Baru* that has unfolded since 1991 is the newest attempt at such a redefinition.
2. The question was posed by the former Malaysian Opposition MP, the late Dr Tan Chee Khoo, who asked whether Mahathir had modified his views contained in *The Malay Dilemma*. Mahathir acknowledged that since the book was written in the late 1960s, certain things were only valid then. However, he added that 'All the views are still held by me. But certainly some of them are still valid and where they need to be acted on, we do act' (quoted in Khoo 1995: 25).
3. Shamsul (1999: 91–3) suggested that the term is actually a replacement for *Orang Kaya Baru* (lit. the new rich person), which was already in use in everyday conversation before the 1960s:

The term *Orang Kaya Baru* was coined and came into popular use to refer to people who had just become rich, or *orang yang baru jadi kaya*, whose behaviour is rather odd and not really like the 'real' rich people. The way it is used in this context indicates that the emphasis is on the word *Baru*, not on *Orang Kaya*, because the term as a whole refers to those who have just become rich, but who adopt behaviour that is perceived as not in the repertoire of the 'really rich'. Similarly, it is used for those who are not really rich, but who behave oddly in trying to make out that they are.

4. Abdullah's acute observations about the cause of Malay poverty and their so-called indolence are worth considering. According to Abdullah, the people only saw futility in greater striving; as they argued: 'What is the point of working hard? When we get a little bit of money or food, they attract the greed of the nobles who are sure to seize them. That's why the people remain in poverty and indolence all their lives' (Abdullah 1964: 45). Abdullah was of the opinion that

there has never been a country in the world in which all the subjects are complacent. If they can get the benefits of their own work and efforts, and the profits arising thereof, and feel secure at heart, and if just half of the population in the country work hard to earn their living, the country is sure to be great and rich. (Abdullah 1964: 44)

(For a further discussion of Abdullah's views, see Shaharuddin Maaruf 1988.)

5. Abdullah criticized the Malays for their orthodox practice of only reading the Quran in Arabic without understanding its meaning. He also regretted that Malays did not study their own language seriously, and neglected the pursuit of learning. He warned that in the end, the Malays would neither acquire Arabic, nor would they be well-versed in their own language, and ultimately 'the name of Malay itself would disappear from the face of this world' (Abdullah 1964: 36-8).
6. Islamic reformist and founder of *Al Imam* in 1906, a periodical espousing Islamic reforms along the lines advocated by the Middle Eastern Islamic reformist Mohamad Abduh (Roff 1994).
7. Pioneering Malay language scholar and writer who systematized Malay grammar and wrote essays on Malay backwardness in the 1920s (Roff 1994).
8. Pioneering Malay journalist and chief editor of several Malay newspapers in the 1930s (Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar 1984).
9. A left-wing Malay nationalist who formed the first Malay political party, the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*, or Union of Malay Youth in 1937 to fight for Malaya's independence (Roff 1994).
10. Another well-known left-wing Malay nationalist, a close comrade-in-arms of Ibrahim Yaacob.
11. See Chapter 2, especially on views of Joel Kahn (1996b).
12. This slogan, which in Bahasa Malaysia reads 'Budaya Penentu Kecapaian', was proposed by Mahathir for the 39th National Day celebration in Malaysia held on 31 August, 1996. This slogan is meant to underline the importance of developing a work culture and ethics in line with the imperatives of modern industrial capitalism.

13. Note that in the above formulation, Mahathir had widened the scope of cultural reform to include non-Malay Bumiputera (Iban and Kadazan) as well. Despite Mahathir's repeated urgings to UMNO members to discuss seriously the issue of cultural change and Islamic reform, the party has not risen to the challenge. Mahathir was disappointed that very few UMNO leaders and members took up the two issues on which he spoke at length in his presidential address at the UMNO General Assembly in September 1997. He felt that the delegates shied away from the subject (culture and religion) not only because it was 'academic' in nature but also because they were being politically cautious (*New Straits Times*, 8 September 1997, p. 6).
14. In my discussion of Malay middle-class lifestyles in Chapter 6, it was shown that the middle-class respondents did not have a strong reading habit.
15. In popular discussions, the ten years or so (prior to the financial turmoil of 1997) had been regarded not only been 'a decade of growth' in economic terms, but also 'a decade of greed' in moral-cultural terms. Some people attribute the moral backlash in the form of religious conservatism today as a reaction to such consumerism.

10 Concluding Remarks: The New Malay Middle Class and Social Transformation

1. As shown in Chapter 5, the modified extended family system is not specific to the new Malay middle class as it is also found among the new Chinese middle class in Malaysia and sections of the new middle class in advanced industrial societies. However, preference for, and practice of, having large families, while common among Malays, are not common among them.
2. Conditioned by the feudal background of Malaysian society, this relationship between ruler and ruled, which was particularly strong within the majority Malay community, was reinforced by its deep psychological need for a 'protector' to look after the community's interests in the face of the competition posed by the economically better-off Chinese minority. Invariably, it was the UMNO President and Prime Minister, who donned the mantle of 'protector'. Blind loyalty to the protector was, however, not just a product of a feudal psychology. As in other political systems, what assured the protector of the loyalty of his followers were the perks and positions he could provide. (Chandra 1998)
3. The disaffection of the middle class towards the UMNO-led state has been due to a whole gamut of factors, including Mahathir's handling of the Anwar incident, the state's tendency towards excesses and extravagance, the high-handed attitude and the lack of an engaging approach by the state towards dissent, and the leadership's loss of touch with the grass roots, especially with the young and women.
4. Three other seats went to Parti Bersatu Sabah or PBS which is neither in BA nor in BN.
5. Though the voters registered themselves in April and May 1999, the Malaysian Election Commission ruled that they could only cast their votes after their names had been verified, an exercise which the Commission said, would normally take nine months to complete (*New Straits Times*, 15 September 1999,

- p.4). Since the tenth general election took place in November the same year – that is, seven months after the voter registration – the new voters were thus denied their democratic rights in the 1999 general election.
6. In an interview with the new Chief Justice of Malaysia, Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah, who took over as head of the judiciary on 20 December, 2000, he admitted that 'the credibility of the judiciary is at its lowest' and one of his main tasks was to 'put our house in order' (*The Star* 21–2 December 2000). Concurring with the views of the Chief Justice with regard to the crisis of confidence towards the institutions of governance, especially the judiciary, in a media interview on 24 January 2001 Rais Yatim, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Malaysia's legal and judicial administration, said that the Prime Minister's Department was preparing a report on the administration of the judiciary, the Attorney-General's Chambers, the police and other enforcement agencies 'to restore public confidence' (in these institutions). He admitted that 'we are coming under close scrutiny now and the administration of justice has come under heavy criticism. The Government cannot simply leave it at that. We must do something fast. The Government is concerned about the people's perception of the administration of justice' (*New Straits Times*, 25 January 2001, p. 1).
 7. The worst incident that severely eroded the credibility of the police was the beating of Anwar Ibrahim by Rahim Noor, the then Inspector-General of Police, while the former was held in police custody after his arrest on 20 September 1998 (Royal Commission of Enquiry 1999). Thousands of Anwar's 'black eye' posters were displayed throughout the country by BA campaigners during the 1999 election campaigns, a testimony of police brutality which the BA leaders cleverly utilized.
 8. One very senior journalist on the *New Straits Times*, who chaired a round-table discussion on *Bangsa Malaysia* held just before the 43rd anniversary of Malaysia's independence on 31 August 2000 (the discussion was organized by the paper in which the author was one of the panelists), admitted that the paper had suffered a serious blow to its credibility. He said that one reason why the Malaysian public was somewhat sceptical of the Malaysian government's explanations regarding the *Al Maunah* arms heist in Perak in July 2000 (in which a group of Muslim men donning army fatigues raided two outlying army camps, and carted away weapons and ammunitions) was because they were conveyed through mainstream media which had suffered a serious credibility problem among the people.
 9. One UMNO Supreme Council member, Shahrir Samad, called Mahathir 'a sulking old man' always in a state of denial, and suggested that he might have become a political liability (*Asiaweek*, 15 December 2000, p. 25; *International Herald Tribune*, 16–17 December 2000, p. 5). Commenting on UMNO's current malaise, including its defeat in Lunas, UMNO Youth deputy head, Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir, in an interview with the Malay weekly, *Mingguan Malaysia* (10 December 2000, p. 7) put the blame on the UMNO leadership, and cited Mahathir by name. In an outspoken style – rare under Mahathir's leadership – Aziz bluntly said that the era of not wanting to offend the party leadership 'has ended', and that UMNO must change if it wanted to remain relevant.