**A draft chapter written in 2005 and revised thereafter; still incomplete and requiring updating; intended for the book Identities in Motion which is still in process.**

**Identities, Nations and Ethnicities**

What appears to characterize late twentieth century modernity – whether Southeast Asian or Western – is the concern with the issue of cultural identity and difference (Goh, 2002: 21)

Contrary to the will of theorists located in the (ex-)colonial centers, the nations/states in the region are, instead of declining, becoming the most powerful forces to be confronted (Chen, 1998a: 35).

Issues of national identity have certainly not arisen only in response to postwar globalisation. Yet it seems true to say that in recent decades national identity has become a dominant preoccupation in much of Asia (Vervoorn, 2002: 35).

[T]he study of ethnicity in the post-colonial world cannot be divorced from the study of media, public culture and nation building (Postill, 2006: 86).

**Identity and Ethnicity**

I have already indicated with Michael Hitchcock, in our excursion into images of identity in the Malay-Indonesian world that it is analytically useful to distinguish these identities and their ‘modes of representation’ at different levels or scales of magnitude (1997b). We emphasized the importance of examining the images of nationhood or the identities expressed and displayed at the national level as well as identities at the sub-national level which comprise what are usually referred to as ethnic groups or alternatively tribes, peoples or communities (and see Vervoorn, 2002: 82-95). Identity, or as Hitchcock and I referred to it then ‘ethnicity’ (rather than ‘race’ [and racial groups] which is often used in popular and state discourse in such places as Singapore and Malaysia to refer to the same phenomenon), comprises a form of social cleavage and is a means of organizing social and cultural relations in terms of similarity and difference (Du Gay, Evans and Redman, 2000). As Barth noted many years ago in what has become a seminal statement in the study of ‘ethnic groups’, that identities and differences entail the establishment and maintenance of boundaries and are generated in encounters and interactions across boundaries (1969). Indeed, identity cannot exist apart from the establishment and maintenance of ‘ cultural difference’ and the formation and operation of boundaries, and is constructed and sustained in relationships, both at the level of ideas and in practice with others who are perceived to be and categorized as ‘not us’ or ‘other’. In other words the way in which ethnicity operates is ‘relational’ (Boulanger, 2009: 19).

Classifications of people and the bases on which categories are formulated can also be quite arbitrary and comprise what we might term ‘folk models’, ‘stereotypes’ or ‘typifications’ (Purushotam, 1998a: 19). Identities might be relatively ‘contingent, fragile and incomplete’ (Du Gay, Evans and Redman, 2000b: 2), though we must recognise that we can get rather carried away with notions of contingency and fragility and some identities are more viable and enduring than others. Folk models of identity are relatively straightforward cultural short-hands to facilitate navigation through one’s daily life. However, we have to acknowledge that things are not as simple as this and that processes of cultural exchange, intermarriage, physical resettlement and absorption generate hybrid communities which bridge boundaries and partake of elements from more than one category or group or they generate multiple identities which co-exist, but which may be invoked according to circumstances. In these connections it is important to examine the ways in which these mixed communities establish and express their identities and how political elites define and address them in policy and administrative terms for purposes of nation-building (Chua, 1995: 1-3). A particular issue in Malaysia, for example, has been whether or not to include certain hybrid communities, which have some claim to Malay antecedents, in the constitutionally important and politically dominant category of ‘indigenes’ (*bumiputera*: lit. sons of the soil) (Goh, 2002; and see below).

It is sometimes difficult to anticipate what elements will be given significance in establishing similarity and difference, but the processes of identifying and differentiating are deeply cultural (Kahn, 1992: 159). The importance of addressing cultural processes which I have emphasized, perhaps too tediously, in Chapter 1 is demonstrated directly and with full force in any analysis of ethnicity and identity. Obviously those who study ethnicity and identity have to examine the criteria which can be used to unite and differentiate people and choose which make sense and are most appropriate and useful in their analyses. These may or may not correspond with the criteria which the people under study themselves use, the so-called ‘subjective’ dimension of identity, though it is unlikely that a serious scholar would ignore the perceptions and views of local people (Nagata, 1975:3). But an outside observer in attempting to construct wider ranging classifications for comparative purposes might well choose to emphasize certain criteria, say language, at the expense of others, or perhaps cuisine and costume. In the context of classification a useful distinction is that between a ‘category’ (which is the ideational or conceptual dimension of identity by which individuals are assigned or assign themselves to a particular unit within a system of units) and ‘group’ (which pertains to the dimension of social interaction and communication). Categories may not therefore acquire the characteristics of a group in which people actively realise their identity and unite to express and promote it (King, 2001b; King and Wilder, 2003: 197).

We should also note that, although I have chosen to talk about ‘ethnicity’ rather than ‘race’, the distinction between the two concepts is sometimes difficult to make in that the existence of physical differences between people do not in themselves generate racial differences; these are subject to interpretation and are assigned meanings which in turn usually result in what is termed ‘racism’ or racial prejudice (Boulanger, 2009:3). Furthermore, in association with ‘the cultural distinctiveness of a particular group [people] may invent, or at least exaggerate the prevalence of a “look” the members of the group allegedly share’ (ibid). An important way in which ethnic groups can be created and their boundaries fixed is also by linking cultural differences with racial-biological ones and the colonial powers tended to talk in terms of modes of cultural behaviour and attitudes rooted in biology and genetic predisposition (Hirschman, 1986).

The establishment of identities can also entail a range of active interactions (cultural exchange, social intercourse including possibly intermarriage, trade and commerce, political alliance, and even peaceful assimilation) across the boundaries between different or separate groupings or they may involve processes of exclusion, avoidance, non-recognition or hostility, the latter sometimes resulting in political subjugation, economic exploitation, forced acculturation or in extreme cases genocide. In the case of the construction of national identities we shall see how politically dominant groups, or in more abstract terms ‘the state’, attempt to promote, disseminate and sometimes impose on others their notions of identity and what that identity comprises. In some inter-group interactions both positive and negative relations may operate simultaneously or one form may replace the other over time.

***Primordialism and Instrumentalism***

It was argued some time ago that ‘essentialist’ approaches to the understanding of ethnicity and identity, usually glossed in Geertzian terms as ‘primordialism’ or the ‘basic givens’ of a community, which place emphasis on the strong sentiments attached to shared origins, descent and traditions (1963a), should be replaced with a perspective, usually referred to as ‘constructivist’ or ‘instrumentalist’, which focuses on the ways in which identities are actively constructed, maintained and transformed, and, at times, used strategically for the accumulation of wealth, status and power (Dentan, 1975; Nagata, 1974; and see Kahn, 1992: 170-171, and Mackerras, 2003:12). We have already seen in chapter 1 that the same debates have been conducted in relation to the broader concept of culture and the importance of examining the dynamic rather than the supposedly fixed, continuous, unchanging and traditional dimensions of culture. In this connection Kessler has argued, following Hobsbawm and others (1983), that in a fast-changing and modernizing present, ‘tradition’ or ‘the past’, rather than ‘an unchanged residue’… becomes a resource now capable of being consciously used to fashion and legitimate a form of life that exists only in a problematic and contingent present’ (1992: 134-135). Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that however fluid and contingent ‘identities’ are, they take on a real and more solid and fixed quality, for most if not all of us. We desire to make them more ‘natural’ and ‘embedded’ than they actually are.

Even in the 1970s in Southeast Asia anthropologists were examining the ways in which identities (using such alternative terms as ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’, ‘native’, ‘minority’) are not straightforwardly carried unchanging from the past and anchored reassuringly in some distant ancestral time and space, but they are instead constructed. Indeed, as a ‘resource’ they can be ‘switched’, ‘manipulated’, ‘deployed’ and ‘used’, and many anthropological studies in the region focused on the fluid and strategic ways in which particular communities adopt and discard identities, and the role-playing and behaviour associated with them, according to circumstances, needs and interests (Leach, 1954; Nagata, 1975, 1979; Dentan, 1975). Individuals can also carry multiple identities and deploy these as different situations and interactions demand (Dentan, 1976: 78; King and Wilder, 2003:196-200; Nagata, 1979). This is especially so in situations where minority populations are having to come to terms with more powerful majorities as in the case of the minority Semai and the majority, politically dominant Malay in Malaysia (Dentan, 1975). Well before this important work on minorities in Southeast Asia Edmund Leach had already developed the argument that identity had to be examined as a historical process; he demonstrated this with regard to interactions between the Kachin and Shan of Highland Burma and the fact that social forms and identities of the upland-dwelling tribal Kachin were forged and transformed in relation to the valley-dwelling Shan who were organized into hierarchical states. Kachin socio-political organization and identities were therefore unstable and subject to change and were indeed used strategically (1954). This gave rise to a whole series of studies on the relations between upland and lowland populations in Southeast Asia and the ways in which identities were developed and changed (see King and Wilder, 2003).

Therefore, Hall’s later declarations about identity from the perspective of cultural studies, though well taken, are rather predictable and unexceptional. However, the strength of Hall’s argument is precisely because it is underpinned by his own personal experiences and his contemplation of his own, in many respects, problematical identity. That is why he focuses on the ways in which one’s ‘position’ or ‘identity’ generates meaning, but which can never be final or closed (Hall and Sakai, 1998: 373). Hall sets aside an ‘essentialist’, ‘naturalist’ concept of identity in favour of a ‘discursive’, ‘strategic’, ‘positional’ one. Cultural identities are therefore ‘never unified…never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting discourses, practices and positions’ (2000: 17). He points to constant transformations in identity, their processual nature and their incompleteness; the contextualization of identity historically; the construction of identity in relation to ‘the play of power’ and in relation to the exclusion of ‘the Other’ (ibid: 17-18; and see 1990). Creating ‘otherness’ is a crucial process in the study of identity, and it is an activity in which anthropologists, in constructing ‘other cultures’ have developed particular skills (Béteille, 1990: 8-11).

**National Identities**

Returning to the theme of national identities these are constructed and presented by those in power in independent, politically and territorially defined units which we refer to as ‘states’. As Thongchai says,

[I]t is generally supposed that a nation is a collective body to which individuals must belong… that…[it]… has essential traits commonly imbued in its members, who, moreover, have the same national interest. Patriotism, loyalty, and other affiliations in terms of ideas, sentiments, and practices appear to be natural relationships (1994: 1).

However, as we have seen, nations are constructed or ‘imagined’. Political elites engage in nation-building to promote collective solidarity, unity and cohesion and hopefully to maintain political stability and in so doing keep themselves in power, and with political stability (most of them at least) attempt to promote economic and social development. Political leaders are usually assisted in this myth-making enterprise to ‘make’ citizens and ‘construct’ a national community by senior bureaucrats and by intellectuals (which include historians, novelists, poets, painters, and musicians) (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 41). Indeed, as a sense of national identity becomes embedded it is frequently ‘intellectuals’, ‘artists’ of various kinds and more generally ‘cultural intermediaries’ who continuously contest, re-produce and re-negotiate national culture and convert cultural products into forms which can be disseminated and consumed by ordinary people (Zawawi Ibrahim, 2009: 2-3). Therefore, in spite of the forces and pressures of globalization states are still vitally important units in the organization of people and space, and for nationalist historians like Constantino, in his reflections on Philippine history, nationalism provides ‘the only defense’ against the globalizing and homogenizing pressures emanating from the West, and particularly America (1998:62-63). Territories, though in some sense constructed, are also real; lines drawn on maps and what is contained within those lines usually matter and have consequences for those who are considered on the one hand to belong to a particular state (they are ‘citizens’ or recognized ‘legal residents’) and those on the other who do not and who have to secure permission to reside or work there for a period (Clammer, 2002:22; Vervoorn, 2002: 38-40). Territoriality is ‘the most concrete feature, the most solid foundation, literally and connotatively, of nationhood as a whole’ (Tongchai, 1994: 17).

However difficult it might be in a mobile, globalized world, governments attempt to police and monitor their borders, allowing some people in under certain conditions and excluding or deporting others. The political leaders’ vision of what defines a state is backed by ‘agents of law enforcement’ who exercise control within a particular territory (Purushotam, 1998: 5). The building of a state and a nation with specific borders also requires the development of a physical infrastructure – housing, schools, industrial estates, and a communication network along with national monuments and public buildings – which serves to underpin the process of constructing a sense of national identity and belongingness among the citizenry (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 39-41). Interestingly in addition to the realities imposed by territorial boundaries, some observers have noted that there is a ‘realness’ even in the ‘imagined’ realms of national identity. In the late 1990s Kahn for example, although he suggested that the relationship between state and nation (or the ‘blood-territory equation of classical nationalist….movements’) was at that time, and in his view, becoming attenuated, indeed ‘breaking down’ under the impact of globalization among other things, he nevertheless, recognized ‘the very real power’ of the beliefs which underpin nationalism (1998a: 17-26). I have already argued elsewhere in relation to what I preferred to call ethnicity (or identity) then that it is not merely an ideological expression or an idiom or reflection of something which is considered to be more concrete. This concreteness is usually sought in the economic realm and in social class terms and as Kahn has proposed the attempts to reduce ethnic identity to social class relations, ‘must still take ethnic attachment as a given’ (1992: 172; 1981). What is patently clear to me is that sharing an identity, however constructed, can provide ‘a powerful means to mobilize people to take a particular course of action’ (King, 2008a; 130). In the extreme case people are willing to kill or be killed in the process of projecting and defending their identity.

A state claims identity, separateness and autonomy on the basis of defined boundaries which separate it from like units and within which its citizens are assumed, encouraged or coerced to share a common nationhood which comprises such cultural elements as a language, history, origins and a sense of belonging, expressed in symbolic terms in anthems, flags and national rituals (Tongchai, 1994: 1-19). Ethnic designations are often conflated with the concept of the nation so that the boundaries of the state are seen as coterminous with the ethnically-defined nation (Evans, 1999a: 7). This modern cartographic device framing a shared ethnicity is very different from the pre-European, religiously-based conceptions of a polity as part of a cosmic or celestial order, identified with a ruler who was divine or semi-divine, in which there were spheres of influence and domains of sacred space which were not precisely defined in territorial terms (Tongchai, 1994: 20-36, 55,133-135). In political terms boundaries were rather zones, corridors or margins which were ‘not determined or sanctioned by the central authority’ (ibid: 75).

Importantly in a colonial context the constituents of a dependent state and those who governed and were governed were also often framed and conceptualized in terms of racial difference (Purushotam, 1998: 6-7). There were dominant races, native or indigenous races and immigrant races; racial differences and racial purity were central ideas in European colonialism and were frequently used to explain behaviour, motivation, socio-economic position and much more besides (Evans, 1999a: 16). However, it is this very notion of a ‘nation’, a realization and acceptance of oneness, rather than that of an objectively defined and legally and territorially recognized ‘state’ which usually requires construction and continuous reinforcement through state action and its use of the media and national educational systems – in the creation of national symbols, myths, histories, events and institutions. A shared ancestry or common origin, designed to build a ‘sense of belonging’, is often claimed which is associated with physical or territorial connectedness, cultural commonalities and various symbolic elements (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 2-3; Mackerras, 2003:11). An important arena of construction is that of language and language use in relation to identity and what language or languages are privileged in the formation and socialization of a nation (Purushotam, 1998a: 8-9). More than this it is a political search for order and control and in the forging of a national identity. As Silverstone suggests, identities are a means to order daily life and manage social responsibilities and roles (1994: 1).

We shall see in the chapter on media and identities how representatives of the state have used media technology to ‘build’ the nation (Postill, 2006: 1). It is this process of nation-building after the establishment of politically independent states in Southeast Asia which has been a major preoccupation of political leaders in the region and a major interest of social scientists in the post-war period. In Southeast Asia states are a relatively modern creation and a product of processes of modernization set in motion by the European colonial powers. They were the result of the arbitrary carving up of the region between European states (Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and Holland) and America, essentially from the nineteenth century onwards, although territories began to be occupied and administered from the sixteenth century. These were artificial creations, bringing peoples together who invariably did not share a common culture, language or history. Instead they were an amalgam, a hotch-potch of communities (local and immigrant, large-scale and small-scale, state-based and tribal), with different religions, languages, histories, and customs.

More than this the colonial powers also classified the dependent populations for administrative and other purposes and frequently assigned these ethnic categories particular legal and cultural ‘personalities’. For example Goscha, in his fascinating examination of French Indochina, demonstrates the complex arrangements which the colonial government put in place and the ways in which externally imposed categories had an important influence on local perceptions and definitions and on the emergence of ‘national’ identities (2009:1189-1228). Not only did the French create an overarching political and administrative entity which they called the ‘Indochinese Union’ from 1887 in which the former kingdoms were designated sub-units or *pays* (countries), but the territory occupied by the Vietnamese was divided into three separate sub-units – the northern protectorate of ‘Tonkin’, the central protectorate of ‘Annam’ and the southern colony of ‘Cochinchina’ (ibid: 1192). Nevertheless, unofficially the French referred to all Vietnamese as ‘Annamese’. The French project was to make the political, administrative and territorial space which they called ‘Indochina’ a reality, and a reality in which the Vietnamese played the leading indigenous role (Goscha, 1995).

Issues of identity came to the fore in situations where all Indochinese could move freely within the Union and where the French facilitated the movement of members of the dominant Vietnamese population into the Cambodian protectorate and the amalgam of protectorates, kingdoms and military territories of Laos primarily to take up positions in the lower levels of the colonial bureaucracy and in the local economies. The Vietnamese therefore moved into mainly urban-based, visible occupations and in the interactions between the colonized populations they enjoyed a relatively privileged position in relation to the Cambodians (Khmers) and the Laotians. The French, like their colonial neighbours in other parts of the region, also encouraged the immigration of Chinese into their dependencies, particularly Cochinchina, to service the expanding colonial economies; these ‘overseas’ Chinese they designated ‘Asian foreigners’ (*Asiatiques étrangers*) as distinct from the indigenous population (*indigènes*), which were in turn divided into the Cochinchinese (mainly Vietnamese) as ‘French subjects’ and those from the protectorates including the Vietnamese of Annam and Tonkin who were legally ‘French-protected subjects’ (2009: 1198-1199). Goscha demonstrates that this ethnic categorisation did not merely establish a distinction between ‘the colonizers’ and ‘the colonized’ but also set up distinctions between different ‘nationalities’ which in turn led to inter-Asian encounters, tensions and conflicts: between the Vietnamese and the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Khmers, and the Vietnamese and the Laotians (ibid: 1200-1224). An important mechanism which enabled the expression of these emerging ‘national’ identities, their consolidation and articulation and their dissemination to a wider audience was the print media.

Arising in part from the cultural diversity of Southeast Asia which the colonial powers had to address and which, in some respects, they exacerbated, the post-war creation of nation-states was rendered exceedingly problematical during the insecure and fragile period of decolonization. It is not surprising, therefore, that the notion of nations as ‘imagined communities’ and their deliberate invention should emerge in scholarly debates about the character and trajectory of the newly independent countries of the Southeast Asian region. Colonial and indigenous legacies were subject to constant reformulation and alteration prior to independence; they were not handed down in any unchanged and pristine sense, and this process of connecting the past with the present and re-working the past in the present has intensified in the post-independence period. Benedict Anderson’s analysis of the construction or invention of nations with reference to Southeast Asian and other cases focused on the role of various devices used by political elites to realize national consciousness; these included the print media, displays in museums, mapping and boundary-making, census-taking and ethnic categorization, and the adoption and development of a national language and educational system (1991). It is therefore even more interesting that the role of the media in nation-building has been a rather neglected field of study in Southeast Asia (see, for example, Hamilton, 2002). Nevertheless, nation-building projects in Southeast Asia and the ways in which political leaders have deployed their power and privilege to construct the nation in their image and have attempted to forge a national identity, and in the process legitimize their own political position and power, out of the cultural materials and memories available to them have been examined in some detail in numerous studies (see, for example Gomes, 1994; Kahn, 1998, Keyes, 1987). Nation-building gives us one of the best and most general examples of the deliberate construction of a cultural order or a supra-local identity.

As I have already indicated elsewhere, I am particularly attracted to Brown’s ambitious comparative studies of the relations between the state and ethnicity and the analytical framework which he develops (1994, 2000). I have relied on some of his work in my comparison of ethnicity in Malaysia, Singapore and Burma (King, 2008a: 134-154). It is an approach which Barr and Skrbiš have elaborated in their examination of the construction of the Singapore nation (2008: 3-5). Using Brown’s ‘conceptual categories’ (which provide a rough-and-ready formulation) Barr and Skrbiš arrange the nation-building strategies of Southeast Asian governments on a continuum from ‘ethnoculturalism’ in Burma, based on lowland Buddhist-Burman identity, then to a lesser extent Thailand with its emphasis on lowland Thai language, religion and kingship as the core of nationhood, to ‘multiculturalism’ in Malaysia, though with non-Malay and non-Muslim communities excluded from ‘full identification with the aspirational nation’ (in this sense the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ needs to be heavily qualified [see below]); then to a multicultural and ‘civic’ Singapore, combining ‘a modern concept of citizenship’ but with an emphasis on racial categorization and racial harmony and equality, and finally to the other ‘civic’ end of the spectrum with Indonesian nationalism based on ‘thoroughly modern concepts of citizenship’ in which race and ethnicity are not recognized ‘as legitimate forms of identification’ and the national language is not the language of the majority population, the Javanese (ibid). These analytical categories should not disguise the fact that government policies change and that they may be based on shifting combinations of modern/secular/civic and traditional/primordial/ethno-religious ideologies. We should also acknowledge that globalization, as well as having homogenizing influence on cultures has also led to fragmentation, hybridization and heterogeneity in identities.

However, in whatever form national images and ideologies are constructed, these do not eliminate or override regional and local identities, which have usually been referred to in terms of ethnicity or ethnic groups. Equivalent terms are tribe, minority, indigenous peoples or cultures, although it should be noted that in Southeast Asia certain of the ethnic groups identified are majority populations and politically dominant in their respective states: Malays (in both Malaysia and Brunei), Javanese, Tagalog, Thais, Burmans, Khmers, Lao, Vietnamese, and even the Chinese in Singapore. In a compendium on ethnicity in Asia Mackerras and his colleagues, like Brown before them, explore the various strategies which political elites have used to build the nation and the interactions between politically dominant populations (usually comprising majorities in their respective states) and minorities. The attempts to construct nationhood on the basis of ‘essentializing’ the identity of the majority and the responses to this on the part of various of the constituent communities, usually minorities, has been termed ‘ethno-nationalism’; there is then a political struggle or in current jargon ‘contestation’ over identities and what should be given precedence and what should be marginalized, reconfigured or eliminated. Struggles also turn on human rights issues, injustice and inequality (Mackerras, 2003: 3-7). But nowhere in Southeast Asia have national projects remained uncontested, nor can they be all-embracing and all-consuming (Gomes, 1994). Whether or not these projects will succumb to other competing identities at the supra- or sub-national level is a moot point. What is clear at the moment is that in certain cases government-constructed images of the nation do manage to assert and maintain themselves whilst in others they are rather more unstable and subject to dispute and reformulation. The Singapore government, for example, has been rather more successful in convincing its citizens of the appropriateness of its image of the nation than say Malaysia (where *bumiputera* privilege and the role and position of Islam, the Malay language and the sultans have been the subject of dispute at one time or another). On the other hand, the Kingdom of Thailand was not subject to colonialism, and on that basis did not have to construct a national culture in opposition to alien dominance or to build a viable identity in a state created and bequeathed by foreigners. But even for the Thai political elite their nationalism was ‘framed’ by colonialism and the nation progressively constructed from the encounter with the British and the French from the mid-nineteenth century, though they could be ‘more selective and open to Western and European influence’ than the colonized dependencies which surrounded them (Van Esterik, 2000: 96). In all cases and irrespective of specific historical circumstances the relevance of the nation-state continues to be strongly felt, not just by the political elite but by large sections of the citizenry of these countries as well.

**Singapore**

As we have seen governments in Southeast Asia have tried various means to build nation-hood from the dominance of a majority ethnic group and ethnoculturalism to multiculturalism or multiracialism and then to more secular and civic-oriented national ideologies. But what they have to do is handle cross-cultural interaction and cultural hybridization. One of the most obvious examples in Southeast Asia of the attempt to regularize and simplify ethnic complexity is Singapore where, as Chua argues, ‘the cultural activities promoted by the Singapore state are inclined to deepen divisions through either using existing differences or creating new ones’ (1995: 4). By way of introduction we should also note that probably nowhere else in Southeast Asia has nation-building been so meticulously micro-managed and elite-created and -driven (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 8-9).

Paradoxically in building a sense of national identity and in developing a modern society and economy governments such as Singapore (and indeed Malaysia) have chosen to emphasize and institutionalize primordialism and the divisions or differences between ethnic categories and groups rather than attempt to reduce or eliminate them. Purushotam refers to this process, in Foucaultian mode (1977), as ‘disciplining differences’ (1995, 1998a, 1998b; and see Chua, 1995, 1998a, 199b). In other words, differences are related to a particular political economy within the context of state policies designed to build the nation; they are constructed in political discourses and they are also realized in particular economic configurations. The rationalization of ethnic complexity serves to locate people firmly and unequivocally, at least at the level of state ideology, in particular political spaces in a nation-state and in a particular economic order. In this connection I am not convinced by Velayutham’s claim that there has been ‘little attempt in the literature on Singapore to think about national identity as a product of a globalized modernity’ (2007: 43). Neither am I persuaded by his argument that ‘historians have never considered envisioning Singapore’s past as always interconnected with the rest of the world’ (ibid: 44). Nevertheless, he is right in pointing to the contradictions between creating and maintaining a nation-state and operating in a globalized world as an international, cosmopolitan and multicultural city (and see chapter 3).

It is no coincidence that both Singapore and Malaysia, the former rather more than the latter, have substantial populations which originate from other parts of Asia and are primarily relatively recent arrivals during the colonial period. These live alongside communities indigenous to the region, though not necessarily to the particular territory in which they currently reside. Part of the problem for Singapore in attempting to build a post-independent nation which is both workable and acceptable within and outside the city state arises from the fact that the ethnic Chinese are in the majority. It would have been very unlikely that the neighbouring, mainly Malay-Indonesian-speaking majorities who controlled the national governments in Malaysia and Indonesia, would have accepted ‘a Chinese nation in their midst with equanimity’ (Chua, 1995: 6). Nor did the English-educated, conservative primarily Chinese political elite want to emphasize their Chinese credentials and encourage at least some of their citizens to identify with mainland China and its political system and values (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 43-44). The local minority Malay-Muslim population in Singapore, demographically very small, and economically and politically marginal, was not in a position to govern, nor was the Indian minority; even less so with the Indians because they like the Chinese were an ‘alien’ immigrant community but they were smaller in size than the Malay population and divided by religion, language, caste and origin.

To address this conundrum the Singapore elite under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, continuing the policy of his predecessor Chief Minister David Marshall, promoted a multiracial, multicultural and multilingual policy which presented a nation comprising ‘equal’, ‘harmonious’, ‘racially-defined’ ‘Asian’ communities which, in a meritocratic environment would in theory at least enjoy equal opportunities to succeed without favour being given to one or the other (Chua, 1998b: 191-192). What it also did was to draw attention away from increasing social inequality and class divisions - indeed the social hierarchies which Lee Kuan Yew’s elitism and his education-driven meritocracy served to generate - and towards a national Singaporean-Asian identity, and a set of constituent ethnic or ‘racial’ identities which cut across social classes (Velayutham, 2007; see below and chapter 5).

This seemed to be the only viable alternative when Singapore was forced to leave the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 and establish an independent republic; it faced a very difficult and uncertain future as a small, territorially confined city-state, primarily Chinese, surrounded by larger potentially threatening neighbours, with no significant internal market for goods and services, and without natural resources or even its own adequate domestic water supply. As Barr and Skrbiš indicate, after the departure from Malaysia, not only was Singapore in a relatively weak position, socially, economically and politically, but ‘[t]here were no idealised histories to recount, no indigenous heroic figures to mobilise the populace, and no autochthonous literary works that would lend themselves to nation building (2008: 43). However, what this vulnerability and a sense of crisis and foreboding provided were a breathing space for the PAP government. It ensured that the political elite’s imperative that Singapore must ‘survive’ as an independent state against all odds meant that most of its citizens were prepared to accept PAP policies and its nation-building agenda with little protest (see Velayutham, 2007).

For the brief period that Singapore was a constituent state of the Federation of Malaysia from 1963 to 1965 Lee Kuan Yew and his senior colleagues, including S. Rajaratnam and C.V. Devan Nair, had argued against a ‘Malay Malaysia’, the latter which entailed the introduction and acceptance of Malay as the national language and preferential treatment given to the Malays and to the symbols of Malayness, and they pressed for a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ in which the opportunity to learn and improve in English was open to all provided one’s ‘mother tongue’ was preserved and which did not discriminate culturally, economically, linguistically and politically in favour of one particular ethnic community at the expense of others (Purushotam, 1998a: 11). The Singapore elite also integrated its cultural policies into a national ideology which encouraged, indeed required its citizenry to embrace global capitalism: to work and study hard, to acquire new knowledge and skills, to compete, to be disciplined, and thereby to improve one’s material prosperity for individual, family and national benefit (Chua, 1998a: 29-34). Lee Kuan Yew was also convinced of the importance of developing and sustaining a gene pool which enabled the country to ‘reproduce’ talented and energetic individuals in the interest of national development and ‘perpetual improvement’; it was in the attempt to institute a form of genetic engineering through state policies that the government met particular resistance from a usually quiescent citizenry (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 47, 65). Although this national ideology is shot through with contradictions, particularly between the twin themes of modernity-individualism and tradition-communalism, it was designed to bring them into some form of harmonious and complementary combination. Nevertheless, at bottom the racial categories of Chinese, Indian and Malay are also ranked in a hierarchy of achievement and importance (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 10-11; see below).

In promoting this national vision and the social, cultural and economic policies which were required to realize it the government was able to raise itself above the complexities of ethnicity (or rather ‘race’ in Singaporean terms) as a neutral arbiter. The government also neutralized any potential opposition by espousing ‘pragmatic’ policies formulated and implemented in the interest not of ideology, but rather efficiency and rationality (ibid: 67-69). For Lee Kuan Yew governing Singapore had to be on the basis of an elite-formulated and –driven strategy. Governing depended on an educated, proficient, paternalistic, altruistic, motivated, moral leadership which would not be identified with any particular sectional interests and which was committed to the service of the nation-state, though we should not forget the importance of ‘personal power…privilege and connections’ (ibid: 81). The elite is selected and reproduced through rigorous education, streaming, selection, examining, training and sponsoring, through special or elite schools, National Service, the Civil Service College, and exclusive clubs (ibid: 112-123). Lee Kuan Yew’s cohesive and well-organized political elite therefore did not explicitly identify itself with the Chinese majority, though most of the senior politicians in Singapore are of course Chinese with a scattering of individuals from other ‘racial groups’. But, as Barr and Skrbiš suggest, in spite of its apparent modern, civic, inclusive, ‘rational’ model of citizenship, from the late 1970s and early 1980s the government did move increasingly to one in which Chinese ethnicity, education, language and Confucian values assumed ‘increasingly important roles’, disguised in a discourse of ‘Asian’ values and identities and a more general process of Asianization (2008: 5; Raj Vasil, 1995). Therefore, what seems on the surface to be ‘an even-handed multiracialism’ is in fact ‘a methodical and pervasive sensitivity for things racial that asserts the Chinese character of Singapore multiracialism’ (ibid: 11, 92-97; Chua, 1998b: 197-198). Barr and Skrbiš even argue that government has implemented a policy of ‘incomplete assimilation’ of the minority communities, encouraging the maintenance of certain distinctive cultural markers whilst expecting the minorities, particularly the Malays ‘to mimic generic aspects of the dominant group’ (ibid: 99).

Nevertheless, Chua argues that this discourse of race in nation-building, this combination of the ‘modern’ with the ‘primordial’, provided the state with ‘a high degree of relative autonomy in its exercise of power’ (1995: 13; 1998b: 191). Each race was defined in terms of their separate origins and descent and their distinctive language (or more specifically ‘mother tongue’) and culture. Race encapsulated ethnicity and culture. In other words races were homogenized, ‘essentialized’, fixed and exclusively demarcated and were made responsible (and empowered) for their performance in realizing the objectives and priorities of the state (Chua, 2003: 76-79; Velayutham, 2007). Moreover ‘officially one’s race is defined strictly by patriarchal descent’ (Chua, 1998a: 35), and ethnic characteristics, such as culture, language and religion are ‘inborn, unchanging and unchangeable’ (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 51). The boundaries between the racial groups were also monitored and maintained through the use of legal, educational, bureaucratic and other state mechanisms. Various racially-based community and self-help organizations were encouraged and established, in particular to encourage the attainment of the government’s objectives of continued self-improvement to ensure that economic growth would be sustained (Chua, 1998a: 36-39).

Culture embedded in a racial discourse in Singapore was given prominence and the communities so designated were generally prepared, with government encouragement, to play the ‘racialized’ game. Though we should note that Singaporean multiculturalism which excludes cultural hybridity and genuine cross-cultural engagement hardly deserves to be referred to in these terms (Chua, 1998b: 191). These constituent races within an overarching Asian national identity were constructed by the Singapore government, building on a process of rationalization and simplification which had been instigated by the British colonial authorities in such activities as census-taking (Purushotam, 1998a: 23). The British perceived Singapore as comprised of several races defined in terms of their origins or ‘original homes’, which in turn were associated with certain character traits which helped explain their general modes of primordial behaviour and their suitability for the pursuit of certain kinds of occupation and livelihood (ibid: 30-31). The British began their attempts to come to grips with a plural society by devising a broad categorization by ‘nationalities’ which were located ‘on the global map’ (‘Europeans’, ‘Americans’, ‘Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Tamils and Other Natives of India’) which were then subdivided into ‘races’ (for example, in the Chinese case these comprised Cantonese, Hokkien, Hailam, Teochew, Hakka, Straits born/Baba Chinese and so on) (Purushotam, 1998a: 32-33; 1998b: 55-87).

This ‘Orientalist’ discourse provided a straightforward short-hand device to arrange and administer the diversity of Singapore’s population into a few major categories, and it was this stereotyped and abbreviated racial framework that was adopted by Singapore’s post-independence political elite; Purushotam refers to these more recent practices as part of a ‘neo-Orientalist’ discourse (1995: 3; 1998b: 54-55; and see Said, 1979). However, Lee Kuan Yew and his senior colleagues translated the colonial system into one which was even more vigorously pared down to a few cultural markers: the diversity of languages and religions which the British to some extent preserved in their classification system of ‘nationalities’ and ‘races’ was collapsed subsequently by government edict into four racial categories: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (CMIO) (Siddique, 1989). Purushotam suggests that these in turn were defined by origin, but more particularly by language, and a few other elements of culture (1998a: 19; Chua, 1998a: 35-36): Mandarin for the numerous Chinese dialects, with the addition among other cultural elements of Chinese New Year and Confucianism; Tamil for the complex of Indian settlers and the Hindu religion and annual festivals, though the issue of language for the Indians was left ‘comparatively open’ (with Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali also permitted); and the Malay language and the Islamic faith and its associated celebrations for the diverse ‘local’ communities which settled in Singapore from the Malayan Peninsula and the Indonesian islands.

Chua also draws our attention to other ‘ethnic’ or ‘racial’ markers: for Chinese women of a certain age and social station the re-introduction of the *cheongsam*; for Malays the covering of the female body with the tunic-like *baju kurung*, *sarong* and head-scarf, and even, on occasion the use of the veil; and for Indian women the continued use of the *sari* (2003: 76-92, 143). With regard to cuisine there was a similar association of certain kinds of food with the major racial categories, although here hybridization of dishes is as much in evidence as separation (ibid: 93-117). Three clearly defined super-categories were therefore founded comprising the ‘Chinese’, ‘Indian’ and ‘Malay’ races, and a residual category (styled rather dismissively as ‘Other’) of presumably non-racial character which lumped together hybrid and other minority communities particularly the Eurasians, Europeans, Arabs and other Asians. The efforts required to depict ‘others’ in positive cultural terms obviously demand a high degree of bureaucratic manipulation and sleight of hand (Purushotam, 1995: 2-4). Nevertheless, Singaporeans are slotted or shuffled into one or another racial category despite the fact that in the everyday lives of Singaporeans and in their inevitable cross-cultural encounters hybridization is rather common, though not accommodated in national ideology (Chua, 1998b: 186-188).

Language policy and language instruction, pursued through the requirement that every school child has to learn English and a second language of origin, have been especially important mechanisms in the embedding of racial distinctions in the Singapore psyche, but also in attempting to balance the demands of a modern, globalizing economy with the need to sustain an Asian identity. Purushotam says ‘The population is exhorted to learn English language, (in order to contribute to and enjoy the fruits of economic development), and. a “mother tongue” language (to ensure social and cultural ballast to the people and thereby the nation)’ (1998a: 75). To be sure in any state there are people who will attempt to resist what government policy requires or encourages them to do, but Purushotam, though drawing attention to some of her own misgivings and minor resistances, suggests that the Singapore elite have enjoyed a considerable level of success in their multiracial mission through their educational policy, national symbolism, the national media and through various official requirements (in form-filling, census returns and so on) (ibid: 77-79; 1998b: 87-92). Singapore also has its own official version of its history – ‘the Singapore Story’ – provided in educational materials and in Lee Kuan Yew’s autobiography and other writings which are part of the armoury of socialization deployed to make ‘new’ Singaporeans in the image of the political elite (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008: 18-38). In this connection Purushotam, her examination of language issues, and specifically the responses of the ‘Indian’ community to government policy, suggests that ‘the obviously wide circulation that the elite’s script enjoys – as ascertained by the attention that ordinary members do give to it – attests to their cultural hegemony’ (1998a: 208). Language and race are ‘selected for notice and daily attention’ (ibid).

In building the nation the major anxiety of the government has been the perceived corrosive effects of Western particularly American influence in the era of globalization and the continued expansion of mainly Western-generated and –sustained capitalism and consumerism (ibid: 14-15). This anxiety has been expressed, among other things, in the close control of the media in Singapore, the restrictions placed on the international press and the controls exercised on television through the state-owned Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) (Atkins, 2002: 23-24). The use of English and the embracing of science and technology and the other baggage of modernity are essential, but this must not be at the expense of the loss of one’s Asian identity. The response has been to emphasize the values of a reconstructed Asian tradition, though drawing primarily on Confucian elements, which provides the means to unite the racial groups. In this regard Chua refers to ‘the Asianization of Singaporean identity’ (1998a: 45; and see Velayutham, 2007).

There have been long and tortuous debates about the authenticity or indeed the existence of shared Asian values (see King, 2008a: 178-196; Chua, 1995, 1998a: 39-42; 1998b: 194-195) but they need to be understood in relation to a national project and the operation of elite-generated cultural politics which have engaged in constructing an Asian identity by ‘othering’ the West and constructing two sets of starkly contrasting values – Asian and Western. One is focused on national duty, diligence, resilience, strength of community, family cohesion, consensus, order, harmony, respect and the value of education and ‘the other’ on individualism, hedonism, immorality, disorder, dispute, social breakdown and welfarism. This Asian complex in turn lends legitimacy to the Singapore state in that its political leaders have claimed that it puts into practice precisely those virtuous and positive values which both explain economic success and political stability and sustain them. Clearly the explanation of economic growth and success in terms of certain virtuous Asian values began to lose its gloss in the financial crisis of 1997-98 and there is certainly evidence of opposition to some of the policies of the Singapore government (see, for example, Rodan, 1993, 1996b, 1997). Nevertheless, Chua claims that in Singapore it has retained a degree of resonance since through the strenuous efforts of the political elite. Indeed, ‘By the mid-1990s, many Singaporeans across class lines, generational divides and educational levels were apparently willing to adopt an “Asian” identity and be subject to the constraints that such an identity would impose’ (2003: 78). The strength of this racial framework, according to Purushotam, is also explained in part because it is ‘deeply rooted’ in Singapore’s colonial past (1998b: 54).

Most certainly there is evidence of ‘dissonance’ and discontent among sections of the Singapore population about the government’s national ideology and its policy of elitism and racialism. Nevertheless, its citizens are unlikely to break ranks and seek an alternative system of government and administration in the foreseeable future. As Barr and Skrbiš the nation-building project, which is in perpetual motion, is considered to be ‘satisfactory’ (2008: 167). The Singapore elite has managed to construct, and it continues to construct a reasonably viable national project which, though not embraced with overwhelming enthusiasm, appears to have been accepted as the best that is currently available.

**Malaysia**

Whilst the Singapore government set itself the task of constructing racial categories and neutralizing them in the interest of a greater national-Asian identity, the Malaysian government, though it too operates with clearly ideologically defined racial (or more properly ‘ethnic’) categories, not altogether dissimilar from those we find in Singapore, privileges those who are categorized as ‘indigenes’ (*bumiputera*)*.* This category and its attributes are specified in constitutional terms. The special recognition and privileges attached to indigenous status and the more general claims of equality of citizenship irrespective of ethnic identity were at the heart of the dispute between political leaders in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore from 1963 when Malaysia was formed and which led to Singapore’s abrupt departure from the Federation in 1965 to create its own independent republic.

The broad racial categories which were constructed in Malaysia are also found in Singapore (that is the Malays, Chinese and Indians), but Malaysia has a more diffuse category of ‘indigenes’ embracing Malays and the native ‘Dayak’ populations of northern Borneo or East Malaysia as well as the constitutionally problematical category of *orang asli* [aborigines], the ‘original population’ of Peninsular or West Malaysia.As Kessler has indicated ethnic identities are rather more problematical and untidy in Malaysia and cannot easily be shoehorned into the major racial categories; this is not to say that they are not problematical in Singapore. But this is what makes ethnic and cultural politics in Malaysia particularly interesting and complex. Although they appear relatively straightforward to delimit, the politically dominant Malays defined primarily in terms of religion, language and custom and their claim to be ‘indigenous’, are a case in point in illustrating this untidiness. Kessler notes, for example, that if one takes two criteria (that is, being Muslim and being *bumiputera*) which are used to define the Malays, then one confronts populations which are ‘anomalous’ (1992: 139). These comprise Muslims who are neither Malay nor *bumiputera*; Malays who are neither Muslims nor *bumiputera*; Malay *bumiputera* who are not Muslims; Muslim Malays who are not *bumiputera*; *bumiputera* Muslims who are not Malays; and *bumiputera* who are neither Malays nor Muslims (ibid). There are also Malaysians who are neither Malays nor Muslims, nor *bumiputera* but because of hybridization with Malay culture and society make claims for *bumiputera* status (see below). Kahn makes the point, which had been made many times before by those of us grappling with the whole problem of delimiting ethnic groups for description and analysis, that it is ‘impossible, particularly in the modern world, to define discrete cultures except in a totally arbitrary way’ (1992: 161). This does not, of course, deter governments from constructing cultures and identities to both shape the nation-state and govern it.

The post-independence policy of rationalization and simplification in Malaysia, as in Singapore, carried forward the processes which were initiated during the colonial period, though prior to independence the states which came together eventually to form Malaysia contained a much more complex ethnic mosaic, complicated, in political terms, by the at least partial coincidence or overlapping nature of ethnic identity, social class, wealth, occupational position and residential location (Brown, 1994: 213). Malaysia unlike Singapore, which was very much a colonial creation, also had historical antecedents which, though transformed by the British, particularly in a process of the ceremonialization of royality in the Malay states, were not eliminated; these were embodied in the sultans and their symbolic expression of Malay identity and its privileged status (Kessler, 1992: 143-146). Moreover leading Malay nationalist figures, intellectuals, and journalists in the process of creating the post-independence Malaysian nation-state, projected a particular image of the Malays in contrast to the Chinese and Indians which confirmed and reinforced the compartmentalized racial-occupational and cultural-psychological stereotypes which were created by the British (Kahn, 2006: 57-71). This interpretation of ethnic or racial types and particularly the distinction and contrast between the values, attitudes, perspectives, psychologies and biologies of the Malays and Chinese was expressed most forcefully, popularly and politically in Mahathir Mohamad’s *The Malay Dilemma* (1970). In sharp contrast to the mainly urban-based, aggressive, hard-working, resilient and entrepreneurial Chinese the Malays were depicted as a rural-based, contented, easy-going, non-risk-taking, less economically developed, communalistic, spiritually- and aesthetically-motivated, subsistence-oriented peasantry, an image which deliberately marginalized the more dynamic, migratory, entrepreneurial elements of what came to be defined as Malay society, or in Kahn’s terms ‘the other Malays’ (2006). This stereotype emerged out of the colonial experience in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States in particular and the creation of a plural society, but it was subsequently used in rather different circumstances to help justify a set of post-colonial policies which needed to address what was for the young Malaysian nation-state a most traumatic event.

The ‘race riots’ of 1969 marked a watershed in Malaysian post-colonial history. These and the implementation and consequences of the twenty-year New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970 which was a forceful response to the problems raised by racial disharmony and the economic inequalities between the races, have been so amply debated, dissected and analyzed that they do not need rehearsing here. Although it must be noted that, following the declaration of a state of emergency, an affirmative action policy was formulated by the Malay-dominated government and instituted in particular by the then Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak (Goh, 2002a: 39-68; and see various chapters in Kahn and Loh, 1992, including, Crouch, 1992: 21-43; Khoo, 1992: 44-76; Loh and Kahn, 1992: 1-17). Along with this a National Ideology (*rukunengara*) was formulated and a Malay-centred National Cultural Policy. The NEP was designed through state-led development and targeted government support, particularly in education and training, the government takeover of companies (on behalf of the Malays) and the promotion of Malay-owned and managed firms to bring a rapidly increasing number of Malays into the urban-based, modern sector as businesspeople and professionals (Gomez and Jomo, 1999; Saravanamuttu, 1987). As we have seen these actions were justified in terms of a policy which argued that the Malay community, in the terms defined by the racial stereotypes so devised, needed protection and support.

This was Prime Minster Mahathir’s view to a point, but this special attention for him was designed not to perpetuate traditionalism through protection and subsidy but to help encourage the emergence of what came to be referred to popularly and in academic analysis as ‘new Malays’ (*Melayu baru*). Mahathir recognized the dangers of the development of a welfare mentality and over-dependence on government and as Prime Minister argued for the need for Malays not only to embrace new values and new ways of thinking initially with government support, but also to do this on the basis of hard work, self-reliance and confidence and the sustained development of these desirable characteristics. His vision also saw a major role for Islam but one which was closely integrated into and supportive of economic development, modernization and resilience, reminiscent of Max Weber’s thesis on the relations between the ‘Protestant Ethnic’ and the ‘Spirit of Capitalism’ (Khoo, 1992: 58-59). Mahathir wanted then a new, Asian-based modernity.

The primordial image of a more economically backward sector requiring protection and support and the intervention of government to address this unequal and uneven system served Malay political leaders well, and it provided a very direct means of garnering and sustaining the political support of the majority of the Malays, many of them still rural-based when the NEP was implemented, who were in receipt of state assistance and support and who benefited from government largesse. The dominant Malay party UMNO (United Malays National Organization) depended especially on the support of the rural Malays (including importantly prominent village leaders and rural school teachers) and those who had felt themselves to have been marginalized economically in their own homelands. It was inevitable that the pattern of politics in the Federation of Malaya from 1957, and then, despite the greater ethnic complexity in Sarawak and Sabah (formerly British North Borneo) in the wider Malaysia from 1963, would be one of primarily ethnic- or racial-based political parties. This political configuration and the incessant analysis in ethnic terms of Malaysian social, economic, and cultural life and of the historical development of Malaysia served to further cement and emphasize ethnic differences.

However, the NEP, if it was to work as the government intended, required an ever closer relationship between politics and business. The old pre-1969 arrangement in which government kept private capital and business at arm’s length and provided some assistance, largely piecemeal and uncoordinated, to the Malays was abandoned in favour of direct and comprehensive planned state intervention in the control, ownership, management, financing and development of business (Khoo, 1992: 49-50; Gomez, 1990). It is not surprising that, with the development of an increasingly politically determined and controlled economy, patronage and ‘money politics’ flourished with ever closer relations developing between Malay political leaders and senior bureaucrats and newly created Malay businesspeople. This also came to characterize the operations of other ethnic groups, though perhaps less noticeably so, given that the Malays were politically dominant; the Chinese, Malays and Dayaks were also drawn into this highly politicized and ethnically defined economy (Loh and Kahn, 1992: 2; Gomez, 1990; Gomez and Jomo, 1999).

Of necessity the government became increasingly authoritarian in style, particularly under Prime Minister Mahathir, because the need to ‘engineer’ greater racial equality through redistribution in which some were favoured and others not on the basis of ethnicity, and to ensure that there would be no more open racial conflict required close control of the political process and very swift action against any actual or potential opposition and dissent (Crouch, 1992: 21-41; 1996; Jesudason, 1996; Khoo, 2001). Clearly this set of policies also accentuated the divisions between the different ethnic or racial groups in that, for example, quotas were placed on certain kinds of employment by ethnicity, non-Malay companies had to restructure their shareholding to include the required proportion of Malay-owned shares, various forms of joint venture and contracting and licensing systems were deployed to include Malay participation, companies opened up their boardrooms to senior Malay bureaucrats and retired politicians, and government support through scholarships and quotas in higher education favoured *bumiputera* students (Crouch, 1996; Searle, 1999; Gomez and Jomo, 1999).

In Southeast Asia considerable attention is paid to minority populations in debates about ethnicity in that these usually have to develop and defend their identities in response to and in interaction with the majority communities; as those defined as ‘others’ they shape their identities in opposition to the majority However, it needs to be kept in mind that all identities are forged in contexts of social interaction and, as an important book edited by Gladney proposes, majorities are just as much constructed as are minorities (1998). The Malays, or more precisely the overlapping category of *bumiputera* in Malaysia as currently constituted, are the majority, politically dominant population but they have been gradually distilled as a definable category from a whole set of political, social, cultural and economic processes and discourses which began to be set in train principally from the second half of the nineteenth century (Milner, 1998; Shamsul, 1998).

Be that as it may, since the implementation of the NEP the Malay political elite have worked at translating elements of Malay identity into something which stands for the nation as well. In Singapore it was CMIO and a pan-Asian identity, expressed in terms of ‘invented’ Asian values contrasted with Western ones. In Malaysia the emphasis on the autochthonous Malays and more broadly the *bumputera* as the rightful heirs of the amalgam of territories which were carved out of ‘the Malay world’ by the British, symbolized at least for the Malays in such institutions as the sultanates, the ‘rotating kingship’ (though it was an institution created only from independence in 1957) and in the position accorded their customs and Islam meant that a political ideology based on balanced and equal multiracialism and multiculturalism and on an ethnically neutral meritocracy were unlikely policy paths for the Malay political elite to take. Instead Malay culture had to be given a privileged position in the development of a national identity and, as Kessler notes, Islam is an especially effective mechanism for maintaining boundaries because of its various restrictions placed on such matters as food and gender relations (1992: 139).

There were attempts to introduce a Malay-derived National Cultural Policy from the early 1970s; this met with considerable resistance from representatives of other ethnic groups and has not been wholly successful (see, for example, Goh, 2002a: 40; Loh and Kahn, 1992: 13) (but see chapter 4). It is not unexpected that the efforts both to maintain a Malay-defined political realm underpinned by the fact that, as Kessler argues, Malay culture is ‘inherently political’ and increasingly strongly Muslim, and at least to address the fact that that culture exists side-by-side with other non-Malay, non-Muslim cultures in Malaysia have produced all kinds of tensions and contradictions (1992: 136-138). Nevertheless, the main ingredients of national identity, at least those which are presented in the international arena and for certain domestic purposes, are Muslim-Malay (in language, religion, history, and political institutions).

We should note, however, that even in Malay circles these elements of ethnic and national identity do not go unchallenged; they are even more subject to dispute and opposition from members of the non-Malay middle class and as we shall see there are those who make a claim to *bumiputera* status because of the problems of drawing boundaries in practice around the category (Crouch, 1992: 40-41). Kahn’s and Loh’s volume pointed to a fragmentation of Malaysian images and visions and it drew attention to processes of socio-economic differentiation and the emergence of new cultural activities as long ago as the early 1990s and the process within the Malay community of re-working elements of Malay ethnic identity (1992; and see Loh and Kahn, 1992: 14-15). The fracturing of the Malay political community and the emergence of a relatively strong Malay opposition during the 1980s also made it important for the pool of Malay supporters to be increased and this was done by drawing selected minorities like the Portuguese-Eurasians into the category *bumiputera* (Goh, 2002a: 134-137). Malay identity became a focus of debate and disagreement. For example, debates have been taking place among the Malays on matters to do with the position, role and character of Islam in Malaysia and whether or not an Islamic state should be introduced and ‘a more universalistic conception of Muslim brotherhood/sisterhood’; the relationships between a narrow conception of Malay nationalism and Islam has also been the subject of disputation; similarly the status of the Malay language and the need to improve proficiency in English have also generated heated discussions. There is also the debate about the importance of Islam in defining the Malays as against shared history and tradition (Goh, 2002a: 45, 133-137; Hussin Mutalib, 1990; Jomo and Ahmad, 1992). We shall return to some of the debates about Malay identity in chapter 5 when we consider the emergence of a new Malay middle class and changing consumption practices in Malaysia in the context of globalization. What should be noted here are the ways in which ‘traditional’ images of Malayness rather than an Islamic identity, which are derived from a pre-colonial village and feudal order are resurrected and contested in the attempts of elements of the middle class to address modernity and the place of the Malays within this process in a multi-ethnic society (Kahn, 1992: 133-155: and see Goh, 2002a; 45-46). As Kessler indicates, with reference to Kahn’s work, ‘As the former (“traditional”) Malay peasant cultural order declines or is eroded, the Malay middle class becomes increasingly involved in and committed to what is now seen as “traditional Malay culture”: a simulacrum, a hyper-realization even, of Malay tradition that, since it goes far beyond whatever existed in the past, is nothing if not modern’ (Kessler, 1992: 146). Another arena of this debate is the relationship between the post-colonial and post-modern consumer and citizen in Malaysia, particularly with the rise of a relatively affluent middle class, and the colonial past and its classification of its dependent subjects (Watson, 1996; and see Lee, 1992).

The differences of view over culture and identity have emerged much more obviously and vigorously since the 1980s, and the espousal of different visions for Malaysia and what it means to be Malay. These have been primarily the result of profound changes in social and economic structures, associated with changing lifestyles, resulting in the creation of a wealthy Malay business or capitalist class, a grouping of middle and small businesspeople dependent on state patronage, and an educated middle class of urban-based professionals, administrators and technocrats, many of them exposed to the West through their pursuit of higher education overseas and their interaction with the globalized media (Crouch, 1992: 31-32, 40-41; Khoo, 1992: 62-63; Searle, 1999: 58-102). These social and other changes also signalled shifts in government policy away from the NEP, which, though it had not achieved everything expected of it, certainly provided substantial benefits for the Malays. Malaysia had enjoyed significant economic growth in the 1980s. Ethnic preoccupations and affirmative action at the heart of the NEP were softened from 1991 and replaced by the New Development Plan (NDP) and Vision 2020 (*Wawasan 2020*) which were directed to achieving fully developed and industrialized status for Malaysia within a twenty year time frame (Goh, 2002a: 42). The focus was on addressing hard-core poverty, developing an industrial community, including a substantial component of *bumiputera*, relying more on private sector involvement, embracing technological development, and building a Malaysian rather than a Malay-Malaysian nation, based on cultural and moral excellence (ibid:51-52). Government propaganda in the 1990s was designed to enliven the resolve and commitment of the Malaysian citizenry to work towards national goals, to instil in them a growing sense of national pride and to warn them against the perils of adopting undesirable Western values. What is demanded is an Asian, specifically a Malaysian modernity, arising from local ‘culture’, ‘tradition’ and Islam (ibid: 53-54). Expressions of this modernity were to be seen in the urban landscapes of Malaysia, especially in the high rise buildings, expanding infrastructure and post-modern icons of Kuala Lumpur (ibid: 58-61). But this was combined with a concern for local heritage with the conservation of vernacular buildings and the inclusion of local cultural and architectural elements in new buildings (ibid).

The political dominance of Muslim-Malays, nation-building and disruptive and painful processes of modernization and urbanization in Malaysia have led to a number of arenas of cultural debates, ethnic accommodation and conflict. I have chosen two such cases: that of the Ibans of Sarawak, and more broadly the non-Malay *bumiputera* or Dayaks, a community which I know at first hand and one in which I have been involved as a researcher (see, for example, King, 1993a, 2001b; Jayum and King, 2004) and to which I return in chapter 4 on nation-building and the media; and that of Penang because of the detailed studies of Goh Beng Lan (see, for example, 1998, 2002a, 2002b), and Gwynn Jenkins (2008), the latter study to which I contributed as a doctoral supervisor. Another case study of shifting identities is addressed in chapter 8 when we examine hybrid Chinese communities (see, for example, Clammer, 1980).

The complexity of ethnicity in Sarawak and more widely in Borneo is well known (see for example King, 1993a; and Boulanger, 2009). Nevertheless, the ethnic classifications which emerged in peninsular Malaysia during the colonial period (specifically the division between Muslim Malays and Chinese and the broad categories of identification which were gradually formulated by the British and then underwent post-colonial institutionalization there became influential in the Malaysian Borneo states where the local population increasingly oriented themselves to these externally imposed stereotypes. Yet it could never be adopted in any thoroughgoing fashion primarily because there were two major categories of *bumiputera* in Malaysian Borneo: one was the Muslim Malays and the other the mainly non-Muslim Dayaks, complicated by the presence of such ‘liminal’ groups as the Melanau who were primarily Muslim, though with a minority of Christians and pagans, but were not Malay and in various of their traditional or pagan beliefs and practices were closer to Dayak cultures (Boulanger, 2009: 19). A further complication is that, although the ‘supra-ethnic’ term ‘Dayak’ has been adopted in various contexts by the local populations, particularly in political encounters where it is important to build and maintain wider solidarities in interaction with Muslims (mainly Malays) and Chinese, there are enduring and strong sub-ethnic identities like Iban and to a lesser extent Bidayuh (even though these categories are also constructions and are not without their problems).

The Brooke Raj in Sarawak like the British administration in peninsular Malaysia, operating within the requirements of a colonial political economy, formulated ethnic classifications and usually ascribed the groups thus delineated with particular and generalized personalities and habits. James Brooke’s ‘Sea Dayaks’, later to become known increasingly as ‘Iban’, were from his perspective truculent and war-like sea-going head-hunters and pirates, though led astray by the Malays; they were ideal as ‘military conscripts when the need arose’; the ‘Land Dayaks’ on the other hand he saw as oppressed, exploited, timid and quiet people who had been forced to retreat from mainly Malay domination and Iban raiding to the interior uplands; they required the protection of a paternal Raj (ibid: 29, 34). The Land Dayaks were a relatively culturally and linguistically diverse complex of peoples which eventually came to be designated as ‘Bidayuh’. The Brooke Raj, through the first Rajah James and his successor nephew Charles, set about defining ethnic boundaries. Given their assessment of Malay-Dayak relations, and the Raj’s need to control and administer a culturally plural society, the decision was taken to separate the Malays, some of whom were recruited into the lower echelons of the administration, socially and politically from their Dayak charges. The Chinese were assigned the role of petty traders, miners and small-scale cash-crop farmers. Restrictions were also placed on intermarriage and interaction between different Dayak groups (ibid: 35; Pringle, 1970: 90-91, 282-288, 299-302, 310). In addition, the imposition of a Western-style administrative structure, the pacification of those who were former enemies (even though they were culturally similar) and improvements in communications also served to connect previously isolated and divided populations and helped create a consciousness of and identification with larger scale cultural units.

In comparison with the Sea and Land Dayaks, which, although not culturally homogeneous were at least rather more easily demarcated, the scatter of minority indigenous communities in interior Sarawak defied any simple description. It was this miscellany which, in the immediate post-Raj period Edmund Leach divided into three major sub-categories: Kayan, Kenyah and Kajang, the Kajang being exceedingly problematical and something of a ‘leftover’ hotchpotch in relation to Kayan and Kenyah (1950). Another residual category was that of the small nomadic groups of hunters-gatherers referred to usually as either Punan or Penan, though even here there were other nomads who were referred to by other names and/or did not accept the term ‘Punan’ or ‘Penan’. There were still other categories including the Lun Bawang/Lun Dayeh, Kelabit and Bisaya which also did not fit easily into any larger designation. Nevertheless, in post-independent Sarawak the umbrella term ‘Orang Ulu’ (or ‘Upriver People’) has been increasingly adopted by government and by the people themselves to classify this indigenous ethnic mosaic outside the more easily delineated Iban and Bidayuh (Boulanger, 2009: 19-20). As we have seen the grand catch-all term ‘Dayak’ has also entered into public discourse to embrace all indigenes who are not Malay or more broadly not Muslim, though again the term does not demarcate a precisely delineated category.

Therefore, what were once relatively fluid, more localised communities which were not neatly bounded became much more clearly delineated initially under the Brookes into larger scale categories and groupings which were much more administratively manageable. These were consolidated further during the post-war British colonial period from 1946 until the merger with the Federation of Malaya in 1963 when for census, administrative and development purposes the incoming colonial government required an even more precise, state-wide ethnic classification system (Boulanger, 2009: 40-43). Postill provides an interesting analysis of the development of Radio Sarawak during the colonial period and its effects on ethnic identity with the decision to establish four sections based on language: Malay, Chinese, Iban and English (2006: 46-50). In September 1958 the Borneo Literature Bureau was also founded to publish in the four major language categories with some attention to other indigenous languages as well (ibid: 51-58). This process of ethnic rationalization, standardization and simplification was given a further stimulus when political parties were formed in the run up to independence within Malaysia. In Sarawak these also tended to coalesce around emerging ethnic identities (Chinese and Malay-Melanau-Muslim in particular) although they were less clear cut than in peninsular Malaysia. In fact there was a greater tolerance of multi-ethnic parties and the Ibans in particular joined several different parties dominated by either Chinese or Malay-Melanau-Muslims, even though specifically Dayak parties were also formed.

The interesting dimension of ethnic politics in Sarawak following the formation of the Federation of Malaysia was that the dominant model of ethnic relations in peninsular Malaysia was relatively quickly superimposed on a rather different ethnic mosaic in a marginal state. Malaysian politicians were as assiduous as their former colonial masters in using ethnicity for their own purposes. In political terms what happened as in the peninsula was that a Muslim political elite entered into an alliance with and was supported by a subordinate Chinese elite. It turned out that in Sarawak the Dayak access to power and influence was far less than their demographic importance. It was clear from the outset, in spite of the safeguards written into the documents which underpinned the new Federation that ultimately a Muslim hegemony would be established at the expense of viable representation for the Dayak population (King, 1990; Leigh, 1974, 1979). Malay politicians at the centre of power in Kuala Lumpur and with control of the federal apparatus had the means to engineer a suitable political configuration in Sarawak by both direct and indirect intervention in the political, economic and financial affairs of the state. However, what was not predicted was that a minority non-Malay, primarily Muslim group, the Melanau would be able to gain control of the state and establish a ‘dynasty’ which has now survived for 40 years (through the Chief Ministerships of Abdul Rahman Yakub and his nephew Abdul Taib Mahmud). Although the Dayaks, and particularly the Iban, provided the first two Chief Ministers of Sarawak from 1963 to 1970, they have been governed and dominated since then by a small group of Muslim Melanau and Malay, and co-opted Dayaks. This situation was made possible by the direct intervention of the ruling elite in Kuala Lumpur in Sarawak affairs and, for example, the removal of the recalcitrant Iban Chief Minister, Stephen Kalong Ningkan in 1966 and the installation of a ‘puppet’ successor, Tawi Sli as an interim measure until a Muslim Chief Minister could come to power (Boulanger, 2009: 84). For those who govern from Kuala Lumpur, the fact that the ruling dynasty is not Malay has not been a problem. It is after all a Muslim dynasty and has delivered faithfully the necessary support to the ruling coalition (Boulanger, 2009: 71). Rahman Yakub in particular was a strong champion of the Malay language and its use as the medium of instruction in schools (at the expense of the use of English, Iban and Chinese) and of Islam and its importance as a unifying symbol and expression of Malayness (ibid: 75). Although his nephew successor played down the Malay agenda and deliberately sought to appeal to various Dayak constituencies as well as developing a stronger sense of Melanau identity, he too continued to keep the Malay leadership in UMNO happy by delivering majority support to the ruling coalition. Moreover, the Taib Mahmud promoted the same kind of development-obsessed ideology as federal politicians (Postill, 2006: 92-93). In the event he has managed to conduct a delicate political balancing act with the senior politicians in Kuala Lumpur ensuring that he had some room for manoeuvre in Sarawak but recognising that he also had to play a subordinate and supportive role at the federal level.

In her study of ethnic identity among the non-Malays in Kuching, the state capital of Sarawak, in the context of urbanization and modernization, Boulanger investigates whether or not ethnic identities are being ‘destroyed, renewed, [or] created’ (2009: 84). Interestingly what she found were certain defining features of a Dayak identity which had emerged only in recent times and which still competes with other identities; but it also drew on ethnic stereotypes which had been constructed during the colonial period and then reinforced during political independence. These are not based on specific cultural, linguistic or physical characteristics but rather on perceptions of where they are situated in the Sarawak and Malaysian scheme of things and on the attitudes of others towards them. On the negative side her urban informants saw Dayaks as ‘left behind’ in socio-economic terms as a result of shortcomings within their culture and personality which could be remedied by striving hard and proving oneself; they were ‘second-class *bumiputera*’ primarily because of the advantages afforded to the Malays and Melanaus through their adherence to Islam and their dominance in political and public life; Dayaks were still considered to be ‘primitive’ by certain members of other ethnic groups. On the positive side urban Dayaks emphasized education, conversion to Christianity, the importance of establishing and celebrating their origins as the truly indigenous people of this part of Malaysia and importantly those traditions expressed in material culture, dance, music, story-telling, myths, sagas, chants and in a robust and cohesive longhouse-based social life which can lay claim to the status of a civilization or at least a culture which should be valued (ibid: 103-141). However, overall the designation ‘Dayak’, especially for urban, educated people, is seen in ‘instrumentalist’ terms ‘as a political tool lacking in cultural depth’ (Postill, 2006: 44; and see Boulanger, 2000: 54).

The process of presenting and sustaining an identity in an urban environment can be a profoundly ambiguous experience and the statements of Boulanger’s informants demonstrate this in abundance. But her conclusions demonstrate the problem which an ethnically driven agenda presents, usually to minorities but also to those who should be at least capable of representing their ethnic constituencies, but for various reasons seem unable to do so. She says that in the political arena ‘it appears that Dayaks must always be divided against each other, salted out to a variety of parties that are either ineffectual or become dominated by their non-Dayak component’ (ibid: 144). Some of us reached this conclusion many years ago (and see Jayum and King, 2004). Given the way in which Malaysia came into being for larger reasons than giving the Dayaks a prominent place in the federation, it has always seemed that the non-Malay indigenous minorities would struggle to have their voice heard. What the Sarawak case demonstrates is that ethnicity and the way in which it is used politically is a powerful social force. It gives advantage to some and disadvantage to others even though in this case the advantaged and disadvantaged are classified together as ‘indigenous’, an ethnic category that is given special status and support.

Turning now to a minority group in Penang what is striking about the Portuguese-Eurasian community in Kampung Serani, as Goh explains, is that the conflict there comprised in part the local residents’ resistance against the state’s conception of modernity and its definition of cultural identities; the residents were from the poorer sections of the Pulai Tikus community (2002a: 12). On the other hand, Pulau Tikus, which was outside the rent-controlled districts of central Georgetown, had become a focus of urban modernization and the development of upper middle and middle class apartments and condominiums. The Portuguese-Eurasians (though the Eurasian community shared its origins with other European nationalities besides the Portuguese) fought a long battle to prevent their eviction from their historic urban *kampung* (village) in the Pulau Tikus district. Their protagonist was their landlord, the local Roman Catholic Church which, in partnership with a private property developer, wished to realise its assets, in case they were subject to compulsory land acquisition, and transform a piece of undeveloped urban real estate, seen as out of step with the city’s aspirations for modernity, into a profitable and modern condominium and commercial complex (ibid: 69). This was firmly within the context of the boom in property development in Penang and the Malaysian political elite’s promotion of high-rise urban modernity (Jenkins, 2008: 113-121). This was combined with the desire to push forward the modernization of the Malays and their participation in the urban economy. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Church establishment was by no means in agreement about the decision to re-develop Kampung Serani and evict the residents.

The case, which Goh recorded between 1980 and 1994, demonstrates the complexity of discourses about nation, identity, social class and socio-economic development in the process of modernization and cultural politics in Malaysia and the interaction of culture, power and resistance in the case of the attempts by representatives of the state to reshape the urban landscape in this part of Penang (2002a: 37-38). Changing representations of Portuguese-Eurasian identity must also be understood in relation to debates within Malay communities about their identity and the status of being indigenous (ibid: 49-50). As Goh has said the shifts in conceptions of Malaysian identity ‘implies concomitant relaxation of the definition of Malay identity, since the nation and Malayness are interrelated categories’ (ibid: 52).

It was from the early 1990s that the Portuguese-Eurasians of Melaka, and the hybrid Straits Chinese there began to make claims for the recognition of their *bumiputera* status, supported by the argument that they had been long established in Melaka, the cradle of Malay civilization and had interacted and indeed intermixed with the Malay community there (ibid: 57). The Portuguese-Eurasians were also given some comfort in the prospects for this bid when in 1984 they were allowed to participate in the National Unit Trust scheme (Amanah Saham Nasional) reserved for *bumiputera* (ibid: 74-75). The Kampung Serani Eurasians in Penang traced their settlement in Georgetown back to the early nineteenth century and so were relatively long settled and based their case against eviction or at least eviction with the provision of alternative low-cost accommodation as compensation on the basis of this pioneer heritage status in Penang and the fact that they were long-established, legal tenants (ibid: 72, 77-78). Putative links were made between the original Eurasian communities in Melaka and the later settlement of Penang. The mediator in the Church-Eurasian dispute was the Penang Eurasian Association (PEA) whose leaders were drawn from the Eurasian elite.

The Association, as the guardians of the heritage of their community, had been busy from the mid-1980s constructing a homogeneous Portuguese-Eurasian identity out of a heterogeneous collection of peoples of diverse origins and one which claimed close affinities with the Malays (ibid: 75). It had a much wider agenda than the local residents in representing all Portuguese-Eurasians and their heritage. In its role in the dispute the PEA also made a request for a clubhouse on the site with the support of the local residents, then shifted the terms of the debate and asked for a heritage house to be built on the site or elsewhere to display wider Portuguese-Eurasian heritage as part of the compensation package from the developers. Initially the PEA asked for the preservation of what was claimed to be the first school building in Pulau Tikus (referred to locally as Noah’s Ark), as an example of early Eurasian heritage (ibid: 84-85). Significantly the medium of instruction in the school was Malay. It then argued for Noah’s Ark to be rebuilt, since the developer wished to demolish it, as a Eurasian heritage house.

The PEA argument was seen as a means of serving the whole Eurasian community and not something confined to the more locally focused heritage of Kampung Serani residents and it was also a claim for the indigenous status of Portuguese-Eurasians. Eviction notices were served in 1992, some residents had accepted compensation packages and had moved out; others carried on their resistance and some residences were bulldozed by the developer (ibid). Goh takes us through the details of the conflict and the complex and shifting relations between local residents, the PEA, the property developer and a competing developer, the Consumer Association of Penang (which provided legal representation for some of the residents) and the Catholic Church (ibid: 69-122). She also examines the dispute through the eyes of nine resident Catholic families of Kampung Serani, five Eurasian and four non-Eurasian (one Chinese and three Indian). What materialized was that the agendas of the PEA and the remaining local residents also increasingly diverged and the Association focused on its argument for a new heritage house with a museum to serve all Eurasians rather than argue for compensation for Kampung Serani residents and the recognition of their local Eurasian heritage and their long connections with the site. In spite of the local residents’ active articulation of cultural discourses based on their claim to be the descendants of the pioneer settlement of Eurasians in Pulau Tikus they ultimately lost out but the PEA, adopting a wider Eurasian discourse got its heritage house in compensation. The PEA had adopted a regional and national discourse arguing that the original Portuguese-Eurasian community of Melaka, its links with the centre of Malaydom and its claim to be descended from Portuguese-Malay intermarriage and cultural exchange give it a rightful claim to indigenous status and to a certain kind of Malay cultural identity. It provided the spokespeople for the Melaka and wider Portuguese-Eurasian community, who had adopted the position of guardians of Eurasian culture and identity, and through their administrative role in managing the Portuguese-Eurasian access to the National Unit Trust scheme and *bumiputera* status an important level of political leverage in their negotiations with the property developer and the Catholic Church (ibid: 123-143). In the context of urban redevelopment the PEA wished to stake its claim to a specially constructed heritage presence in what was the oldest Portuguese-Eurasian *kampung* area in Penang (ibid: 200).

This case is but a small element of the contestation over urban space and identity which has engulfed Penang since the 1980s. These tensions have been very ably documented by Jenkins and they comprise those which have been generated between the state and the private sector in pushing forward a modernization agenda qualified by the need to promote tourism and therefore sustain local heritage and culture for the tourist gaze; the various ethnic communities which reside in Penang and have established distinctive architectural, social and cultural enclaves; the aspiring multi-ethnic middle class which demands a certain lifestyle which expresses their status as well-to-do consumers and which demands certain kinds of residential area with associated commercial, service and leisure facilities; and the national and international bodies which argue for the importance of maintaining the architectural and cultural heritage of Penang against unrestrained urban re-development (2008: 103-149).

**Thailand**

In contrast to Singapore and Malaysia the absence of a colonial power in Thailand has meant not that the Thai political elite has been able safely to ignore issues of national identity but rather that they have had the time and space to be more selective and less self-conscious about the development, adjustment and maintenance of that identity (Van Esterik, 2007: 95-96). Indeed, rather than having their culture transformed by ‘colonial others’ they have been able to modernize much more on their own terms in their encounter with the West. Again in contrast to the former British dependencies where the issue of forging a national identity from radically plural societies had to be addressed, in Thailand there appears at first glance to be a long-established culturally homogeneous nation (*chat Thai*) where the vast majority of the population subscribes to a set of primary shared symbols, which come together in what might be termed ‘Thainess’ (*khwampenthai*) (Tongchai, 1994: 3). Nevertheless, as Keyes demonstrates, this strong national identity is of quite recent origin, that it has been subject to periodic reformulation and is a product of the modernization of the Thai state in its encounter with Europeans from the latter part of the nineteenth century (1987: 3-5, 44-67). When we probe below the surface of nation-building in Thailand we find a much more complex reality and the status of the core institutions of the nation-state (monarchy, Buddhism, *sangha*, and the concept of ‘Thai’) have from time to time been subject to intense debate and disagreement. Indeed since the second half of the nineteenth century ‘various interpretations of Thainess are advanced from time to time’ (Tongchai, 1994: 3).

In exploring this complexity we must recognize that the concept ‘Thai’ is a relatively recent ‘discursive construct’ in contrast to official histories which focus on the longevity of the monarchy, the continuity of Thai Buddhism and the resilience of traditional institutions usually associated with rural society (ibid: 12-15). Although the majority of the citizens of Thailand are Tai-speakers and they are able to speak the national language - ‘standard Thai’- which is in effect the language of the Siamese or Central Thai (who trace their descent from the kingdoms of Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok [from 1350]), there are very distinct regional ethno-linguistic groups within the Tai language family. They comprise speakers of ‘Northern Thai’ (*Khon Muang* or in its written form *Yuan*), ‘North-eastern Thai’ (*Khon* *Isan*, which is closer to the Lao language) and ‘Southern Thai’ (*Pak Tai*). There are also other smaller groups of Tai-speakers in Thailand (including Shan and Phu Thai). This complexity is compounded by the presence of Austroasiatic speakers (the Mons and Khmers), Austronesian-speakers (the Malays in the southern provinces), immigrant Chinese, some of whom have mixed with Thais to form a hybrid Sino-Thai community mainly residing in Bangkok and the Central Plain, Vietnamese, Indians, and a host of tribal highlanders (*chao khao*) in the north and west (Karen, Hmong [or Meo/Mioa], Yao [or Mien], Akha, Lahu and Lisu) (Keyes, 1987: 15-22). As in other parts of the Southeast Asia ethnolinguistic groups are also divided by political borders, and speakers of Tai languages are found not only in Thailand but in neighbouring Burma, Laos, Vietnam and China. Nevertheless, within Thailand the ‘nationalization’ of the language of Central Thai was aided enormously by the absence of a colonial power which in other parts of the region served to deflect educated people from their local language to the imported language of an alien administration.

The core of the Thai nation was the founding and growth of Tai-speaking states in north and north-central Thailand and the emergence and flowering of what was to become the foundation of the Thai Buddhist polity and culture in Sukhothai in the Yom Valley from the mid-thirteenth century. Thai language and culture in this early period were embodied in King Ramkhamhaeng who ruled from 1279 to 1299. Sukhothai was ‘founded on personal loyalty to a paternalistic ruler who protected his people, promoted their welfare, and settled disputes in accordance with his sense of justice’ (Girling, 1985: 37). This tradition was carried forward by Uthong or Ramathibodi who founded the Tai kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1350, although personal rule came increasingly to be combined with ‘an elaborate civil law and a large and increasingly complex bureaucracy’ (ibid.). The development of the culture and organisation of these two Thai kingdoms were important stages in the construction of what came to be Thai identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though it is interesting and entirely in the spirit of cultural and identity construction that Uthong may have been of Chinese or part-Chinese descent and his royal bride a Mon (ibid: 27; and see Girling, 1985: 20-24).

Of course Siam as it was called prior to 1939 did enjoy a politico-cultural continuity which was denied their neighbours. Nevertheless, from the second half of the nineteenth century the Thai monarchy found itself under increasing pressure from the British and the French, and it was not long before then in 1767 that they had suffered a devastating and ignominious defeat at the hands of their age-old enemies, the Burmese, the loss of their capital, Ayutthaya, and the humiliation of their king and members of the royal family who were taken into captivity. Sustaining and building an identity and instilling a sense of belonging and cultural pride and resilience in this hostile environment were essential, particularly when King Mongkut [Rama IV] and King Chulalongkorn [Rama V] (1868-1910) embarked upon a radical process of social and economic modernization and the building of a modern nation with its associated symbols of nationhood (Tongchai, 1994: 171). Siam was increasingly opened to the expanding global economy and the commercialization of such important areas of the economy as rice production. To assist in this process of transformation foreign advisors were brought to the Bangkok court to promote reforms in the administrative, taxation and military system, the development of infrastructure, and the introduction of Western science, technology and education (Keyes, 1987: 49-54; Vella, 1955).

The prospect of Thailand’s transformation demanded that a robust national identity be put in place because the country’s definition in territorial terms was ‘the product of the colonial period even though Thailand was never itself a colonial dependency’ (Keyes, 1987: 27; Vella, 1955). As Tongchai so admirably demonstrates Thailand, or, in his terms, its ‘geo-body’, comprising a bounded territory which is controlled, policed, defended and given a particular identity, is ‘merely an effect of modern geographical discourse whose prime technology is a map’ (1994: 17). This discourse increased in importance in Thailand from the 1870s when modern geography and the concept of the earth’s surface divided into ‘governed (or occupied) territories’ ‘or material space’ with clearly defined boundaries began to take hold (ibid: 49, 55, 116-127). Thailand, in its encounter with the British and the French, had its first map of a bounded territory by 1893, though this was adjusted through several boundary treaties with the two European powers through to 1907 (ibid: 128). It was this process that saw Siam, as the territory which was left following the negotiations with the British and the French, incorporating formally and officially within defined borders several ‘”foreign” tributaries’ and provinces, including, among others, very significant Lao-speaking populations in the north-east and Malay communities in the south. (ibid: 131, 165). Following the creation of the Siamese ‘geo-body’ then conceptions, understandings and narratives of the past had to be adjusted to fit with this emerging territorial/spatial reality (ibid: 138-139). Nation-building begins in earnest and with it the notion that the geo-body existed prior to, though with the loss of territories to the British and French not coincident with the more recently created nation (ibid: 140-163). In this historical device and the re-writing of history the voices and interests of the minorities who were incorporated into the geo-body were suppressed; they became instead citizens of Siam/Thailand politically and culturally dominated by the central Thais (ibid: 147). Of vital importance was the progressive ‘integration of outlying regions under centralized authority’ (Girling, 1985: 55).

Fortunately the central Thais had a closely integrated politico-cultural complex with which considerable numbers of people within and beyond the core populations could identify: the Theravada Buddhist religion (*satsana*), the institution of the monarch (*phra maha kasat*), the monkhood (*sangha*) under royal patronage, which served to coordinate communities at both the state and the local level, the symbolic association of the king and the image of the Buddha, and the civilian and military bureaucracies as the ‘servants of the crown’ (*kharatchakan*) (Keyes, 1987: 3). Of great significance for wider integration was that Buddhism penetrated to the rural communities and both in the past and today large numbers of young men, from all walks of life, enter the monkhood, if only for three months during the Lenten period (ibid: 36; and see Keyes, 1971; Girling, 1985: 32-37). Van Esterik has said pertinently ‘there is no doubt about the importance of Buddhism as a fundamental part of Thai national identity’ and, of course, its close association with the king, his acts of public piety, including the undertaking of pilgrimage, sponsoring new religious buildings, and performing court rituals, and his patronage of the *sangha* (2000: 95; and see Keyes, 1971, 1987: 56-57; 201-202). Beginning in Mongkut’s reign there was a progressive reformation of Buddhism which served to transform it into a unified religion, and the *sangha* with its ‘supreme patriarch’ appointed by the king became a national institution. These reforms also distinguished ‘Thai Buddhism’ from the Buddhisms of other neighbouring peoples. During Chulalongkorn’s reign the king also adopted a much more public and national presence rather than remaining as a remote ‘godlike figure’; the present King Bhumipol has also managed to install himself as ‘a central pillar of the modern nation-state’ (Keyes, 1987: 201, 208, 210). Having said this and notwithstanding the king’s ability to serve as the ‘father’ of all his citizens the non-Buddhist, non-Tai-speaking minorities, including the Malays and the upland tribal populations, are virtually excluded from national politics and unable ‘to achieve positive national recognition’ (ibid: 204).

Although the status of kingship changed after the coup of 1932 which replaced an absolute with a constitutional monarchy, and following this change it has had to come to terms with both anti- and pro-royalist governments, it remains a central symbol of the Thai nation and the basis of the legitimacy of the state and its senior offices (the Prime Minister and the Cabinet) (Keyes, 1987: 3). However, there was no requirement on the part of the political elite to foster or mobilize a mass anti-colonial nationalism, nor has there been much need to use excessive force to ensure that the political centre in Bangkok holds sway, though there have been moments of intense conflict and violence, and ongoing intra-elite struggles for power. Legitimacy was assured through state level cultural institutions and the continuity in patron-client relations between the elite and ordinary people. Indeed, the coming to power of a military-bureaucratic elite from 1932 and their desire to create a nation in their own image and one which served to legitimize their rule further intensified the push towards the creation of a Thai nation and its associated symbols and institutions, although now it was such institutions as the military, particularly the army, which began to play a more important role in embodying and symbolising the nation. The concept of the ‘bureaucratic polity’ formulated in the analysis of Thai politics and society captured several elements which together characterized and served to integrate the country: bureaucratic policy-making, hierarchy, and patronage, underpinned symbolically by the monarchy and Buddhism (Riggs, 1966; and see Girling, 1981, 1985).

What the colonial powers also did in their negotiations with the Siamese elite and in marking out the boundaries of their own possessions in mainland Southeast Asia was to demarcate and create a Siamese territory within which its national institutions could function and be clearly recognized (Keyes, 1987: 27). What happened was the superimposition of a Western concept of territory on a Thai concept of a personalized and sacred political space which comprised the relationship between ruler and subjects (rather than ruler and a designated territory) and the expression of that relationship in court rituals which presented the king as the embodiment of the nation. Therefore, the person of the king came to embody this partly externally imposed territory (Thongchai, 1994:133-134; and see Keyes, 1987: 31). We should also note, as Anderson argues, that rather than seeing this process purely in modern, nation-building terms, we should recognize the specifically patrimonial and dynastic characteristics of these transformations in Thailand (1978). This nation-building process associated with a progressively centralizing politico-administratively system which were focused on the monarch, the political elite, the military and on central Thai culture, was given further momentum in the reign of King Vajiravudh [Rama VI] (1910-25) and his expression of ‘Thainess’ in terms of racial factors, particularly in relation to his ‘othering’ of such immigrant communities like the Chinese and his reference to them as ‘the Jews of the East’ (Skinner, 1957: 163-164; Van Esterik, 2000: 98-99). And this was in spite of the fact that there had been considerable intermarriage and cultural exchange between some segments of the local Thai and the Chinese population.

Van Esterik draws our attention to another dimension of the study of Thai nationalism and that is the relative neglect of the gender, which in part derives from the preoccupation with the position, status and role of male monarchy in that identity (2000: 98; and see Reynolds, 1991). Nevertheless, this is somewhat surprising given the ways in which Rama VI and, following the replacement of the monarchy in 1932, Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram (1938-44 and 1948-57) acted to modernize Thai identity by elevating the status of women through their appearance, demeanour and dress, their role in instilling national values in their family, and emphasizing the importance of the active development and resilience of Thai culture (Van Esterik, 2000: 100-101). These national policies were based on the notion that Thai identity would be strengthened by presenting it as civilized and, among these attributes of civilization was the status of women. Women became increasingly ‘the public embodiment of Thai culture’ (ibid: 103).

Prime Minister Phibun also passed a law in 1939 ‘requiring people to eat Thai food, wear Thai clothes, purchase Thai products and support public activities to build Thai national identity’ (ibid: 102). References were increasingly made to the ‘Thai race’ (Tongchai, 1994: 150). In the same year the country’s name was officially changed from Siam to Thailand; ‘Thai’ meaning ‘free’ was deployed as ‘an ethnically exclusive name’ and one which identified a culturally and historically defined population (Van Esterik, 2000: 106). It was an attempt not only to promote a wider cultural unity extending beyond the Siamese of Central Thailand and bringing an ethnic referent together with the name of a nation-state, but also to embrace all Tai-speaking peoples whether they lived in Thailand or in neighbouring states (Evans, 1999a: 5; Tongchai, 1994: 150). As Keyes emphasizes what Phibun sought to do was infuse the concept of being Thai with an unequivocal meaning; so to be Thai one had ‘not only to speak a Tai language and be born of parents who were also Thai but also to be Buddhist’ (1987: 68). Following the Pacific War and the military coup of 1947 which ushered in another Phibun premiership along with the emergence of General, later Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and General Phao Sriyanonda as powerful political figures, it was the military and the bureaucracy (as national institutions) which determined the character and shape of the nation (Riggs, 1966). However, increasingly they did this whilst securing their legitimacy through the support and blessing of the king (Keyes, 1987: 68-82). The role and status of the king as the symbol, arbiter and authority of the nation were to increase further as Thai politics and society became more complex and uncertain with the emergence of other bases of power outside the bureaucracy; through business, the middle class and civil society (ibid: 77-79, 82-84). Despite the post-war turmoil in Thailand’s political life, the military coups, frequent changes of government and the violence, the central props of Thai nationhood have persisted. King Vajiravudh’s slogan of ‘Nation, Religion, King’ which he coined shortly after his accession to the throne in 1910 has been constantly reaffirmed in the post-Second World War period (Girling, 1985: 139). As Girling says appositely

The veneer of an idealized past covers up or transforms (depending on one’s point of view) the reality of rule by military-bureaucratic cliques, maintained by the occasional use of force. Yet despite its appeal to the Thai past, the slogan also encapsulates attitudes and ideas imported from the West. Even from a conservative standpoint, the words “Nation”, “Religion” and “King” are open to a range of interpretations spanning the old and the new (ibid: 140).

However, what the Chakri dynasty did and what later political leaders carried forward, some more energetically than others, was also to designate and create a Thai heritage, a Thai past and Thai history which comprised selected elements of the cultural and natural landscape (Peleggi, 1994, 1996). These include the ancient Thai capital of Sukhothai, the later capital of Ayutthaya and such national parks as Khao Yai, all of which have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and which are important centres of tourism development (ibid: 112-113). We shall return to examine the relationships between tourism encounters and identities in Chapter 6, but it is worth exploring albeit briefly the national dimension of heritage tourism in Thailand.

It is interesting to dwell on these UNESCO sites for a moment because tourism serves as an arena for the construction and transformation of identities and, as Van Esterik argues, ‘the tourist industry’s agenda is extraordinarily compatible with regard to national identity and public culture’ (ibid: 120). Because of the enormous importance of tourism to Thailand and the fact that it is a very widespread phenomenon, there is little in the way of ethnic or area- and district-specific tourism. Instead it is usually the nation of Thailand and its peoples that are presented. In this regard the ‘national’ images of international heritage sites are of overriding importance. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) knows precisely where to situate its World Heritage Sites. In a promotional pamphlet entitled *Paragons of World Heritage* it introduces these sites with a statement which emphasizes the role that they play in giving expression to the Thai nation-state and its partly invented past. We find that the ‘ancient Thai kingdom reaches back thousands of years’ and that these ‘national treasures’ serve as ‘dignified reminders of a glorious past’ (TAT, 2008a: 5). The roots of the Thai nation are therefore not only traced back some seven hundred years to the foundation of thirteenth-century Sukhothai but are projected back to the distant past, some 5,000 years to the Bronze Age site of Ban Chiang in North-East Thailand, a past which is described as ‘glorious’ (ibid). This is also not merely an isolated national plea for recognition because the ‘internationally esteemed UNESCO has recognised the outstanding value of Thailand’s historic and natural conservation sites and has bestowed six such destinations [more precisely five sites counting the Sukhothai complex as one] with the title of UNESCO World Heritage Sites’ (ibid). The cultural sites are managed on behalf of the Thai government by the Fine Arts Department in the Ministry of Education which is involved in conservation work, historical studies and the planning of land use and tourism promotion. The natural forest complexes are managed by the Royal Forest Department which has its National Park officers on site.

Most importantly in one of the official guides to Ayutthaya published by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the national value of the cultural sites to Thailand are expressed in the words of His Majesty the King, Bhumipol Adulyadej, which are appended to the back cover: ‘A new building today is just the pride of the builder, but an ancient monument is the pride of the Nation. A single ancient brick alone is valuable and should be preserved. Without Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok, Thailand would be meaningless….’ (TAT, 2000). Sukhothai and Ayutthaya in particular are presented as ‘the antecedents of the modern Thai nation-state’ (Peleggi, 1996: 433). Although modernity and globalization are acknowledged what is emphasized are the essential elements of ‘Thainess’ which are continually reinforced in the government tourism promotional literature: Thailand retained its independence when their neighbours were inexorably incorporated into Western colonial empires in the East; there is a very strong adherence to the ‘national religion’, Theravada Buddhism and the monastic order; Thais are staunchly loyal to the monarchy and hold it in deep reverence; there is a set of cultural characteristics which delineate the Thai nation expressed in language, ritual, dance, architecture, behaviour and personality. These cultural commonalities override or at least neutralize ethnic difference and cultural dissonance. They are also used to counter the threats posed by modernization and globalization in order to reinforce Thainess (ibid: 434).

It is also important to note that these heritage sites are not the main attraction for international tourists. In fact as Peleggi proposes ‘heritage attractions in Thailand are definitely more popular with local patrons’ and associated hotels and resorts are now patronised by wealthy residents from Bangkok (1996: 433, 436). In undertaking pilgrimage to Buddhist shrines and visiting family for important festival days the Thais are internally very mobile people and the high standard of the country’s road network enables them to get around the country with relative ease. Certainly ancient monuments, temples, Buddhist images, costumed dancers, saffron-robed monks, colourfully costumed ethnic minorities, and the stunning architecture, colours and magnificence of the Grand Palace, the Temple of Dawn and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok provide a picturesque Oriental backdrop in promotional literature, tourist brochures and guidebooks. These images emphasize the exotic timelessness and draw sharp contrasts between Western (and Asian) modernity and Asian tradition, but these traditions are usually presented as in harmony not in conflict. Bangkok is the gateway to the country where the old and the new ‘blend’ and amidst the ‘dynamic modern world’ the capital city ‘manages to preserve its cultural heritage to a marked degree’ (TAT, 2008b). Whether or not the official promotional literature has an influence on prospective tourists whose images are also constructed on the basis of personal networks, previous experience, media reports and commercial tour company brochures and videos/compact discs is a moot point. But clearly government agencies think that it has some positive effect on visitors to their country. On the other hand domestic tourists tend to share the national agenda of the TAT, though not completely and slavishly. It is unlikely that domestic tourists will become engaged in ‘the intellectual exercise of deconstructing the interpretations of the past conveyed by heritage institutions’ (ibid: 446). It is much more likely that they will absorb and enjoy the touristic opportunities offered by them whilst recognising that they also offer something which celebrates the achievements of the Thai nation and the need, however imperfect, to preserve and promote them.

In this connection the UNESCO status of Thailand’s World Heritage Sites are placed firmly in a Thai national space and attract large numbers of domestic visitors. After all the Thai government had decided to protect these sites before it sought UNESCO registration, and what seems to have happened is that the national agenda has remained pre-eminent in this programme of heritage promotion. In the 1980s the TAT began seriously to promote its ‘cultural heritage’ in part at least to counter the country’s more racy, nightlife image, but also because it had embarked on major restoration work of its ancient monuments from the 1970s (Peleggi, 1996: 433, 435). A very significant opportunity to promote the kingdom and its national identity was in 1987 and 1988 to mark King Bhumipol’s sixtieth birthday with the 1987 Visit Thailand Year and other promotions. Here we have an interesting example of the way in which UNESCO listing is sought after and, in the promotion of the sites so designated, partially ignored. This is especially the case because of the importance of domestic heritage tourism. Peleggi makes the point that ‘urban Thais are keener than foreign tourists in their longing for the quaint or nostalgic aspects of a pre-industrial Thai lifestyle and certainly more receptive than they [sic] to festivals, national celebrations and heritage attractions that exploit the folk patrimony and the repertoire of historical and nationalist symbols’ (1996: 437). Clearly visits to ancient Buddhist shrines and monuments and to such major attractions as the Grand Palace hold a different meaning for local tourists who are familiar with the religious, monarchical and nationalist meanings of the sites as against international visitors who can certainly appreciate the splendour of these sites and their importance to the nation but are essentially experiencing them as tourists (ibid: 437).

In conclusion, Thailand as with Singapore and Malaysia are the consequences of a process of political construction in which the colonial powers played a formative part. The carving out and the cartographic situating of precisely demarcated territories required a ‘filling in’ of these spaces with identified nations. However, by its very nature ‘the definition and domain of nationhood are not given…[rather it is]…always unfixed, ambiguous, self-contradictory, too restricted, yet too extensive’ (Tongchai, 1994: 173).