Conceptualising Community Policing, Crime Prevention and Criminology: A Singapore Perspective

Narayanan Ganapathy

The paper traces the development of the community policing approach to crime prevention in Singapore, examines the perspectives which inform the approach, and briefly describes the various crime prevention initiatives that have been undertaken by the Singapore police as part of its machinery and philosophy of community policing. In addition to linking the interior history of crime prevention to specific social-historical contexts and modes of state governance, the paper attempts to conceptualise the Singapore Police Force's (SPF) community policing approach to crime prevention by using the criminological paradigms of Right Realism and Administrative Criminology to illustrate the tertiary role of the police in the social and situational crime prevention processes respectively.

Framing the Problem

The fundamental idea behind community policing is that effective working partnerships between the police and the community can play an important role in controlling and preventing crime (Moore, 1992; Skolnick & Bayley, 1986; Sparrow, Moore & Kennedy, 1990). Community policing enables a reconsideration of the role of the police in developing and strengthening community *institutions* as a means of preventing crime (Shapland, 1988). By "institution" is meant a whole range of groupings and organisations — families, friendship networks, neighbourhoods, associations of various kinds, means of employment, markets, public and private services, and administrative structures — which bring the community and police together in the form of a joint-partnership in the prevention of crime and which serve to transmit norms and values to guide and shape behaviour (Hope & Shaw, 1988, p. 2).

In essence it points to the partnership between community institutions and formal-legal institutions of the state — the criminal justice system — in the regulation and prevention of behaviours which come to be defined as criminal. Community policing, as an organisational strategy therefore represents a shift by police organisations from centralised, functional, organisational structures to

Address for correspondence: Narayanan Ganapathy, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, AS1, #03–31, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570. Email: socng@nus.edu.sg.

decentralised geographical structures that encourage closer links with local communities (Moore & Stephens, 1991). Some observers (e.g. Moore, 1992; Stenson, 1991) have also noted that the concept of community policing involves changes to conceptualising police legitimacy with regard to its functions. In community policing, the justification for policing is not only its capacity to reduce crime and promote security but also its ability to meet the service demands and needs of the community in ways that result in community satisfaction and community *neighbourliness* becoming important bases of legitimacy along with crime fighting and law enforcement functions.

The paper argues that in subscribing to the notion of community policing as involving the sharing of responsibility for crime prevention between the police and public (Morris & Heal, 1981), it is imperative, theoretically, that the *tertiary* crime prevention role of the police (in the form of detection, arrest and apprehension) be conceptualised in terms of its part in the *social* and *situational* crime prevention processes. The Singapore situation attests to conceptualising community policing in this manner pointing to the importance of considering both *social* measures as dealing with the *root* causes of crime — as in social democratic positivism (Young, 1994) — and *situational* measures as involving the manipulation of aspects of the physical environment to reduce criminal opportunities. Theoretically, discussions on crime prevention inevitably lead one to re-engage with the ongoing criminological debate as to which of the two images of the criminal one should subscribe to: "the moral actor, freely choosing crime; [or] the automaton, the person who has lost control and is beset by forces within or external to him or her" (Young, 1994, p. 69). Concomitantly, subscription to a particular image of the criminal influences the choice of what is to be explained — the supply of motivated offenders or the crime event (Pease, 1994, p. 661). Theories that address the supply of motivated offenders and those that deal with the crime event inform the social crime prevention and situational crime prevention approaches respectively.

Using criminological paradigms of Right Realism and Administrative Criminology to illustrate the social and situational crime prevention approaches respectively, the paper attempts to chart the Singapore Police Force's (SPF) community policing role as seen in its relationship with the various crime prevention projects. How community policing takes shape within the two criminological paradigms and its role in crime prevention will be delineated in detail to better situate the perspectives raised in the paper.

The relationship between right realist criminology, social crime prevention and the police is succinctly captured in the works of Wilson (1975) and Wilson and Kelling (1982). The affinity between right realist criminology and social crime prevention lies in its emphasis on tackling what it sees as the 'fundamental root causes of crime'. It calls for the socialisation agencies and community institutions to implement broad social measures intended to promote respect for moral values and increase community solidarity, improve police/public relations, reduce criminogenic inequalities and provide diversionary facilities for 'alienated' youth (Heal & Laycock, 1988, p. 238). Strengthening socialisation agencies and community institutions is also, to a large extent, about the rejuvenation and development of informal social control networks in the prevention and control of crime. Fundamentally,

the basic theoretical assumption which social crime prevention measures address is that anti-social behaviour is a product of anti-social conditions.

The role of the police from a right realist conception of community policing, as Wilson and Kelling (1982) state, is in the maintenance of social order rather than in the direct control of crime, arguing that disorder undermines the processes by which communities ordinarily maintain order. One popular version, the "broken windows" model (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), suggests that it is important for the police to intervene early in the cycle to clean up the environment and reduce incivilities — the metaphor being that unrepaired damage encourages further broken windows (Hope & Shaw, 1988, p. 6). Police involvement in 'order maintenance' facilitates, in the long run, crime control and crime prevention (Young, 1994, p. 99). Community policing therefore sees itself as jump-starting the informal social control system in areas where it has broken down and which are, *ipso facto*, high crime areas (Young, 1994, p. 101). The public assumes an important role in crime prevention and control within right realist criminology, which I have argued earlier, provides the fundamentals upon which community policing is based. SPF's commitment to the activities of the Residents' Committees (RCs) in public-housing estates, Police Boys' Club and School Uniformed Groups in an attempt to restore a *kampung* style neighbourhood and its informal social control networks should be understood in such a context.

The community (and its associated informal control system) assumes a much greater role in crime prevention within administrative criminology but with a corresponding limited role for the police. As in right realist criminology, administrative criminology stresses informal methods of preventing crime rather than formal policing as the major focus of social control. However, what it does not involve is social crime prevention in the sense of changing social conditions which are perceived to lead to crime (e.g. unemployment, disorganised communities). This is because, the theoretical thrust of administrative criminology is that the causes of crime are either relatively unimportant or politically impossible to tackle (Young, 1994, p. 91). The question becomes that of the most cost-effective way of securing control intervention, with an emphasis on the "purely technical, cost-benefit ratio aspects of crime: the opportunities for crime available in the environment, and the risks attached to criminal activity" (Downes & Rock, 1995, p. 253). They are not just based on a mechanistic manipulation of the environment but on the concept of the offender making rational choices. For administrative criminology, the flaw of all previous criminology is seen as being pervaded by a "dispositional bias" (Clarke, 1980, p. 136) — a search for *causes* which dispose people to commit crime, whether these be social factors, as in positivist criminology, or administrative labels, as in labelling theory (Young, 1994, p. 93). This "dispositional bias" of earlier theories tended to negate the fact that most crimes are indeed opportunistic. The primary focus of administrative criminology, by contrast, is the notion that the occurrence of a crime event can be prevented by structural barriers (for example, steering locks in cars, better locks and bolts) and the public themselves can prevent crime more directly and effectively than the police by 'target hardening'. The lifeline of community policing in Singapore, the Neighbourhood Police Post System (NPP), undertakes the key responsibility of

disseminating information on situational measures as part of a broader approach to crime prevention.

It might seem that conceptualising the police role within the right realist and administrative criminological paradigms within a single framework to understand community policing in Singapore points to a lack of 'fit' between the two policing roles in crime prevention, in that the former targets the offender and allows room for police interventionist strategies while the latter focuses on the victim (or potential victim) and recognises the limited role of the police. This contradiction is further strengthened by a strict criminological equation that links right realist criminology with social crime prevention, and administrative criminology with situational crime prevention. The introduction of community policing and the creation of specialised crime prevention departments here and elsewhere, I would argue, provide the practical, as well as a theoretical arena for reconciling the two different perspectives: first, it demonstrates the capability of the police organisation in performing a variety of tasks in terms of the practical objectives of policing in the area of community policing and crime prevention — the policeman in the street is both a social worker entrusted with the responsibility of rejuvenating 'broken' communities (right realist criminology) and a technocrat with the monopoly of knowledge in crime prevention (administrative criminology). For example, the establishment of NPPs on the void decks of Housing and Development Board (HDB) townships serves to curb public incivilities in the area and at the same time acts as a crime prevention centre in the neighbourhood. Second, the recognition of the practical responsibilities of everyday policing furthers our conceptual understanding that it is intellectually inconceivable, neither it is useful to speak of a 'model' in policing (see Brodeur, 1995; Monjardet, 1995, p. 49) characterised by that singular activity of the police. In other words, community policing approach to crime prevention bridges the 'criminological gap' that exist between the right realist and administrative criminological perspectives on the police role. In this respect, we therefore cannot document the existence of a pure policing model, a point which will be elaborated in the next section.

Although the paper will concern itself mainly with the Singapore experience, occasional references will be made to ideas and developments in other countries particularly the US and the UK, for two reasons: first, to plug the current research into the conceptual scheme of comparative criminological research on crime prevention, and second, because of the paucity of literature on crime prevention in Singapore which necessitates reliance on international literature to provide the theoretical and practical frameworks in addressing crime prevention issues.

The Singapore Context: Some Salient Features

Singapore consists of the main island of Singapore and some 63 offshore islands. The main island is about 42 kilometres in length, 23 kilometres in breath and 584.8 square kilometres in area. It has a coastline of approximately 150.5 kilometres long. The total area, including the offshore islands, is about 647.5 square kilometres (Singapore Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1997). As a city-state, Singapore has a negligible rural sector, as only 10.8 square kilometres are farm-holding areas (licensed farms). The small size of Singapore and its high degree of

urbanisation are cited as being advantageous for the SPF in its enforcement duties as the limited area of 28.6 square kilometres of forests and relative absence of hilly terrain have reduced considerably the number of hiding places for criminals (Quah, 1994). However, this factor has made detection and apprehension of criminals particularly difficult as the criminals tend to escape to the north to Malaysia by car, or to the south to Indonesia and surrounding islands by boat. The effectiveness of the still maturing Aseanapol, the region's policing body, has not been adequately evaluated (personal communication).

Singapore has a heterogeneous population of 3,044,300 as at June 1996, and its population density rose from 4,051 residents per square kilometre in 1986 to 4,702 residents in 1996. The population is multi-racial and consists of 77 percent Chinese, 14 percent Malays, 7 percent Indians and 1 percent of people of other races. In terms of religion, 68 percent of the Chinese are Buddhists or Taoists, and 14 percent are Christians. Almost all the Malays are Muslims. For the Indians, 53 percent are Hindus, 26 percent are Muslims, and 13 percent are Christians.

The modern police system in Singapore is organised around the British model of law and jurisprudence, as Singapore was a British colony between 1819 and 1959. Many of the functions that the police perform are similar to those of the British criminal justice system: prevention of crime and disorder and preservation of public peace (for community security), and protection of life, property and personal liberty (for individual security). Section 8 of the Police Force Ordinance of 1958 outlines the Singapore Police Force's role as maintaining law and order, preserving public peace, preventing and detecting crime and apprehending offenders. Consequently, from a legislative standpoint, there is nothing particularly conspicuous about the way in which Singapore categorises its major crimes. The nation's criminal code classifies approximately 330 different types of criminal activity in six broad categories (Saw, 1973, p. 1–5). Presently, the SPF has an operationally ready strength of 33, 228 officers comprising 9,005 regular officers, 790 civilian officers, 2, 829 National Service Full-time (NSF) personnel, 19, 374 Operationally-Ready national Servicemen (NSF) and 1,230 Volunteer Special Constabulary (VSC) officers (SPF Annual Report, 1997/1998, p. 38).

Existing literature (e.g. Brodeur, 1995, Reiner, 1995, Skogan, 1995) suggests that two aspects make it possible to identify four ideal types of policing models, which are based upon "the respective place of societal goals and political aims in the functioning and organisation of a policing system" (Loubet del Bayle quoted in Monjardet, 1995, p. 49). The four models are: (a) a 'minimal' policing model where the societal and political dynamics that influence it are equally weak, (b) an arbitrational model where these two dynamics are equally strong, (c) a 'community' model where a strong societal dynamic dominates a weak political dynamic, and (d) an 'authoritarian' model where a strong political dynamic dominates a weak social dynamic (Monjardet, 1995, p. 49). The Singapore model of policing displays certain characteristics that suggest that it could well fit into the 'authoritarian' typology: its centralisation under the direct, and almost exclusive authority of the executive power makes it a *State* police. As a consequence of this direct connection with the political, it is characterised, first, by an orientation dominated by an absolute priority to order maintenance in police missions, and second — immor-

talised by the Internal Security Department (ISD) — by a function of political policing institutionally and explicitly attributed to certain services, or at least, to euphemise, a police function that does not shy from intervening in the political arena. The salience of social control theory in criminological studies in Singapore (Narayanan, 1998) and its credence in prioritising *order* over *justice* — as seen in the powers of the Internal Security Act (ISA) which allows for detention of a suspect without trial — underscores a police role that regards order-maintenance as its primary objective. The relationship between social control and the Singapore State, and its affinity to right realist criminology and administrative criminology will be charted later.

Yet, one can argue that the Singapore model of policing does display elements of the Anglo-Saxon model of 'community' policing based on the idea of 'policing by consent' (Reiner, 1985). This categorisation fundamentally flows from the assumptions that policing in Singapore is high on accountability; undertaken with public consent which does not mean acquiescence but a broad tolerance of and satisfaction with the helping and enforcement roles of policing; its organisational structure allows the public to express their policing wants and needs; and last but not least, SPF's professional culture is epitomised by the officer on the street, close to his community and patrolling his beat with the consent of the general public. The 32.7 percent of citizen-initiated arrests in the major crimes of outraging of modesty, robbery, housebreaking, motor-vehicle theft, rape, and murder for the year 1998 (Public Affairs Department SPF), and the apparent success of community-policing (Quah & Quah 1987; Bayley, 1989) could be attributed to some of these fundamentals of the English model being emulated by the Singapore State.

The ability of the police organisation to amalgamate what appear to be two antagonistic functions of and demands on the police is not a characteristic peculiar to the Singapore State. Classical police studies inspired by critical, revisionist accounts of the history of the 'new' police (Brogden 1982; Storch, 1976) have clearly established that the police function involves both [issuing] "parking tickets and class repression" (Marenin, 1982, pp. 241–266) which Brodeur (1983) has described as 'low' and 'high' policing respectively. Similarly, from the radical viewpoint, the concept of "community-policing", a corner stone of police and State legitimacy, could simply be a function of an ideology that seeks to "conceal its iron fist with a velvet glove". Discussions about models of policing, therefore, carry an undesirable connotation that the concrete structures and practices of policing are the realisation of some prior conceptual model, which suggests an over-idealistic and rationalistic account of how policing actually developed. They also imply an even more problematic notion that the Anglo-Saxon model of policing — the 'community' model — is superior to others, although its "superiority" as Reiner (1985) argues, lies in a professional police ideology that perpetuates the myth of the benevolent bobby (Reiner, 1985, 1995; Brogden, 1982).

A Period of Transition

The experiencing of the political and social upheavals in the immediate pre-independence and post-independence years effected major changes on the Singapore police system that were compatible to ensuring an orderly transition of

the state to eventual independence. The period particularly marked the intensification in the use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act which empowered the police to detain a suspect without trial. The chief priority of the criminal justice apparatus then was to address *public order offences* as the use of these laws was primarily designed to contain the problems of communism and communalism, and the violence associated with the Chinese secret societies in the newly formed multi-racial and multi-religious state. The Maria Hertogh riots of December 1950, the 1964 communal riots between the Malays and the Chinese, sparked off during a religious procession on the anniversary of the prophet Mohammed in Singapore, and the 1969 Sino-Malay riots in Kuala Lumpur are certain reminders of the traumatic origins of Singapore and point to the importance of SPF's role in a multi-racial and multi-religious state.

The challenge for the SPF in preserving racial and religious harmony, one can argue, lies in its ability to, and the degree to which it is able to mediate and reconcile the opposing demands on the individual member in the multicultural state — the question of ethnic loyalty or national identification — in its conceptualisation, operationalisation and management of community policing. Acknowledging the conceptual framework used by Brogden and Shearing (1993) in their analysis of and reform strategies for transforming racist policing practices by the South African Police (SAP) in South Africa, two basic approaches to meeting this objective are evident: the first is to *bring the community to the police* — as understood in its day to day operations of community policing — and the second is to *take the police to the community* — as in recruitment and selection policies (Brogden & Shearing, 1993). A particularly salient feature of the latter approach is the SPF's recruitment policy of ensuring that its own ethnic composition is representative of the various ethnic groups in the population. This consideration of ensuring ethnic representation in the police force, according to Quah (1994) and Quah and Quah (1987), could be traced to the race riots in 1950 when a Dutch girl, Maria Hertogh, who had been brought up by an Indonesian family and converted to Islam, was subsequently returned to her Dutch parents by a court decision (see Hughes, 1982; Maideen, 1989). When the riots occurred, the predominance of Malay-Muslim officers among the rank-and-file police and their ethnic/religious affiliations with the Malay-Muslim community severely hindered its ability to restore order, as the officers were reluctant to pursue a concerted paramilitary enforcement. The problem was compounded by the difficulty which the colonial police force in Singapore faced in recruiting the Chinese, who formed the majority of the population, into its force because of the traditional negative attitude of the Chinese population towards making a career in the police force and military. This could probably due to Chinese peoples' inclination towards relying upon informal mechanisms of social control (Vreeland, 1977). The need to ensure a proportionate ethnic representation in the police force, underlined by occasional State discourses on the dangers of regressing into the traumatic past, therefore remains an important consideration in recruitment and selection policies of the SPF. Incidentally, it is worthwhile to recognise that the recruitment of Gurkhas from the state of Nepal and the subsequent formation and deployment of the Gurkha contingent in sensi-

tive key installations including the prisons and top politicians' private residences were essentially based on the premise that the Gurkhas would be able to discharge their duties impartially, especially in a crisis situation, as they do not have any form of ethnic-linguistic association with the various ethnic groups in Singapore. The discussion on *bringing the community to the police* approach — community policing as conventionally understood — forms the essence of rest of this article.

Towards Community Policing

The national theme of remaining economically and politically sturdy diffused into the ideology and practice of the criminal justice system in the aftermath of the separation from Malaysia. The use and effectiveness of the Internal Security Act and the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act coupled with the "massive governmental campaigns waged to rid Singapore of urban slums, squalor, and underemployment" (Austin, 1989, p. 917) facilitated the change and shape of policing style. Apart from developments in the political, economic and social arenas that allowed the SPF to settle into a more preventive and deterrent mode of law enforcement, the trend towards community policing by the SPF can be explained by three other major factors.

The first of these is related to the success of the SPF in curbing the activities of the secret societies and in minimising the problem of police corruption in the 1960s and 1970s, both of which enhanced its public image. The use of the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions Act) against secret society members, for example, saw a decline of 416 recorded secret society related incidents in 1959 to 241 in 1960, and to 36 in 1973 (Narayanan, 1994, p. 47). In 1977, there were only 13 secret societies or secret society related incidents recorded by the Secret Societies Branch (SSB) of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) (*Police Life 1977* quoted in Narayanan, 1994, p. 47) and it is estimated that about 90 percent of secret society members were either moribund or made inactive under this ordinance between 1958 and 1993 (personal communication quoted in Narayanan, 1994, p. 48). Accordingly, a public opinion survey conducted in 1978 found that 80 to 90 percent of the respondents had favourable or very favourable perceptions of the police (Ong, 1979, pp. 20–31). Subscribing to the idea that community policing involves the sharing of responsibility for crime prevention between the police and public (Morris & Heal, 1981, p. 42), a favourable police image becomes an important requisite, at least at the discourse level, to formalising community policing.

The second factor involved the change in the population distribution on the island. Before the establishment of HDB in early 1960 and the subsequent prolifer-ation of public housing estates, most Singaporeans lived in small, *atap* or zinc-roofed houses. These shanty-type houses were piled together in communities known in the vernacular as *kampung*. However, as a result of aggressive government policies to provide public housing for the majority of the population (the propor-tion has increased from 69 percent in 1981 to 87 percent in 1990) and the emergence of new towns throughout the island, there was a significant change in the living arrangements of the populace.

These new living arrangements have had a profound effect on the style of law enforcement. With a large proportion of Singaporeans living in high-rise buildings, called a block, that contain an average of 150 dwelling units or flats, and averages from 10 to 25 storeys in height, the SPF was forced to abandon, or at least limit, its former method of random motorised patrolling and replace it with "vertical policing" which involved the movement of patrol officers from floor to floor of high-rise buildings. On "vertical patrolling", Bayley (1989, p. 13) remarks:

> Visiting homes means for the most part calling at apartments in HDB blocks. NPP officers begin at the top floors and work their way down floor by floor, apartment by apartment. They carry clipboards listing the apartments to be visited and briefcases filled with crime prevention pamphlets, stickers with emergency telephone numbers, and business cards printed with the NPP's address and telephone number. The business card contains space for the officer's name, so residents have a personal contact if needed.

Instead of relying on the various police stations, the SPF decentralised its functions and activities through the Neighbourhood Police Post System (NPP). Formed in 1983 as an attempt to replicate the successful Japanese model of community policing based upon the Koban system, the Singapore NPP system is a kind of "mini-police station situated in the heart of a neighbourhood and catering for the welfare of about 30,000 residents" (Quah & Ong, 1989, pp. 275–276). Fundamentally its main objective is to improve police-community relations and to prevent and suppress crimes by means of public support and co-operation. The formation of NPPs and the reorganisation of police patrols especially those on foot, bicycles and motor scooters have been found to enhance the means of surveillance and public security in housing estates — as understood in Oscar Newman's (1978) concept of defensible space or Shapland's notion of "watching and noticing" (1988, p. 117).

Accompanying the shift in policing methodology in view of the structural shift of population from *kampungs* to HDB apartments, was the need to rejuvenate neighbourhood cohesion and informal social control mechanisms that were associated with the earlier *kampung* way of life. Between mid-1970 and 1980, Singapore's overall crime increased, causing many to suspect that the ecological changes and perceived absence of informal support structures were responsible (Ong, 1984; Austin, 1989). I will expand on the importance of informal social support structures during discussion on the role of community policing in social crime prevention.

The third factor is linked to the SPF's recognition of and reaction to the reality of crime and policing. The need to introduce community policing flows from the tacit recognition of, if not a world-wide disillusionment with, the limitation of traditional-reactive policing — typified by random patrol (Kelling et al., 1974), rapid response (Scott, 1981; Spelman & Brown, 1984) and retrospective investigation (Greenwood, Chaiken & Petersilia, 1977) — in the prevention and control of crime. Reliance on police patrols, rapid response to calls for service, and retrospective investigation by a team of specialised officers either from Police Land Divisions or the CID, by definition, involve the use of police resources *after* commission of a crime or an offence being disclosed. Crime surveys conducted in the UK have also revealed that a high proportion of crimes are never reported to the police and, of those that are reported, a further proportion are 'de-crimed' and not recorded by

the police (Bright, 1991). Only about one out of every four crimes that are committed is eventually represented in the official statistics (Mayhew et al., 1988) with the criminal justice system dealing less than 10 percent of all crimes committed (Bright, 1991, p. 67). Most anti-social and criminal behaviour is controlled and prevented by members of the public and multiple non-policing agencies, and the primary policing function itself is profoundly predicated on community support (Young, 1992, 1994).

The insufficient preventiveness of the traditional-reactive policing strategies coupled with the findings of crime surveys, led to a complete reappraisal of the conventional equation in crime control from one of police fighting crime to police *and* community fighting crime. The institutionalisation of community policing involves the new emphasis on the fundamental role of the public and informal social control processes in the control and prevention of crime and the delineation and advocacy of a multi-agency approach to crime control (Young, 1992, p. 45).

Interestingly, the rewriting of the equation in crime control takes place within a conception of policing that establishes crime control as the most important, perhaps the only objective of policing (Moore, 1992, p. 114). The institutionalisation of community policing precisely deconstructs this conception of policing and police work by making explicit the innocuous disjunction between police self-perception as being predominantly crime-fighters and the reality of having to attend to calls of "social service" and non-criminal matters. A range of studies has documented that the bulk of police work and patrol duties centre around the service element of policing where arrest is a rare occurrence (see for example Black, 1971; Banton, 1964; Shapland & Hobbs, 1987). A local study of the complaints and calls for assistance made to the Jurong Police Station in the western part of Singapore over a one-month period revealed that calls for non-crime-related incidents, constituting 53 percent, were slightly higher than calls for crime-related cases of 47 percent; only one out of four calls to the police for assistance was deemed to be crime-related (Ee, 1982, p. 73). A recent SPF study of the '999' calls for assistance to the Police Radio Operations Room (the local police dispatch system) also revealed that of the 2.2 million calls made to emergency lines in 1997, only 176, 586 calls (about 7.9 percent) were crime-related (Straits Times Apr 10, 1998), the rest comprising service and nuisance related calls (Straits Times Apr 27, 1998).

The move towards recognising (and perhaps institutionalising) the order-maintenance and service roles of the police coupled with some of the macro-structural developments in post-independence Singapore to a large extent facilitated the adoption of community policing by the SPF in Singapore. It signified the transition of policing style from a watchman to a legalistic and eventually to a service one in the 1980s (see Wilson, 1978). With evidence of successful community policing programmes such as in Japan, where the *Koban* (or police post) system is responsible for the high crime clearance rate of about 60 percent (Ames, 1981; Bayley, 1991; 1984), the Singapore Neighbourhood Police Post system was thus organised on the Japanese method of community policing.

Although many local scholars have commented that the origin of community policing in Singapore is linked to the creation of the Crime Prevention

Department (CPD) of the SPF in 1981, which was later responsible for the imple-
mentation of the Neighbourhood Police Post system in "B" division, the concept
and philosophy of "community policing", according to Ong (1989), can in fact be
traced to the colonial authority's policy on "community security". In his discussion,
Ong (1989) demonstrates that even historically during the period of colonial rule,
the British had used a device, which essentially made the community responsible
for a large part of its own security. This was achieved through the appointment or
recognition of community headmen who were often linked to the Triad societies. A
vivid illustration of this was the technique used by the Governor to quell the riots
among the Chinese secret societies in the 1860s:

> The only way in which Cavenagh and his colleagues could hold the societies in
> check when trouble broke out was to swear in their leaders, as special constables and
> parade them up and down in order, as Cavenagh says with a nice irony, 'to entice
> them to take a warm personal interest in the preservation of the peace' (Freedman,
> 1960, p. 31).

The Chinese community, to a large extent, had its own institutions and organisa-
tions for facilitating social control, and the connection with Triad societies
provided much of the manpower and muscle power to exercise the function of
social control. Not only the British depended on these internal communal controls
to bolster their own limited policing resources, but "within the early Singapore
Chinese community these tightly knit networks of individuals, each fulfilling oblig-
ations to and having expectations of the other, defined the meaning of community
security" (Ong, 1989, p. 940).

Situating the origin of the concept of community policing historically, and
understanding its operative mechanisms in a specific socio-historical context, as
seen in the case of the Triads, serves as a particularly useful reminder: it underlines
the crucial role of the informal social control system in the machinery of commu-
nity policing. This, I would argue, forms the basis of the community policing
approach to crime prevention. Interwoven with the practice of *modern* community
policing — embodying a wide range of initiatives and activities including resident
patrols, citizen crime reporting systems, neighbourhood watch schemes, home and
commercial security surveys, property marking projects, the neighbourhood police
post system, neighbourhood police centres, and a variety of programmes for chang-
ing the physical environment — is the fundamental idea of a joint partnership
between the formal agents of social control — the criminal justice system — and
the informal social control apparatus of the community in preventing crime.

Community Policing, Crime Prevention and Criminology

Academics in Singapore have not as yet produced any particularly distinguished
Singapore-oriented criminological theory. The theoretical framework used to
conceptualise the crime phenomenon in Singapore does not differ in any marked
degree from those in western democracies. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that
most empirical research and theoretical debate on crime and deviance in Singapore
has relied extensively on social control theory of deviancy (Narayanan, 1998). The
appeal of social control theory does not only lie in its greater explanatory power,

but more so of its alignment with the political and social persuasion of the Singapore State in emphasising macro-sociological (formal control systems) and more importantly, micro-sociological (informal control system) factors, particularly the family being a source of moral values (Hill & Lian, 1995, p. 156), in promoting conformity in society (Narayanan, 1998). 'The family has been called upon to preserve the traditional cultural values and bear the responsibility for socialising the children in the virtues of the 'rugged society' (Kuo & Wong, 1979, p. 11).

Yet another appeal of social control theory as captured in the dynamics of community policing in Singapore is the manner in which it lends itself to the processes of crime control and crime prevention (Downes & Rock, 1995). Conceptualising the police role within the criminological paradigms of right realism and administrative criminology to illustrate the social and situational crime prevention approaches respectively forms the basis of understanding the community policing approach to crime prevention in Singapore.

Right Realism, Social Crime Prevention and the Police Role

The relationship between right realist criminology, social crime prevention and the police lies in its emphasis on tackling what it sees as the "root causes of crime". Fundamentally, the basic theoretical assumption which social crime prevention measures address is that anti-social behaviour is a product of anti-social conditions. Here, the legacy of the Chicago school for crime prevention is significant in three respects: first, it provides a conceptual link between crime and socially disorganised and social disadvantaged communities, and suggests that the distribution of both crime and social disorganisation between and within communities can be affected by social policies formulated to alter the urban scene. Second, measures against offending should somehow seek to socialise and integrate residents, especially youth, into a shared set of norms and standards of behaviour. And third, it maintains that ordinary members of the community, community institutions and informal social control networks comprising family and kin are effective resources to accomplish this aim.

The role of the police from a right realist conception of community policing is in the maintenance of social order than in the direct control of crime. As mentioned earlier the "broken windows" model suggests that if disorderly behaviour such as that of public drunkenness or rowdy youth is not controlled, the neighbourhood enters a spiral of decline in which law abiding citizens emigrate from the area, informal social controls weaken, and crime itself begins to rise. Police involvement in 'order maintenance' facilitates, in the long run, crime control and crime prevention. Interestingly, the concept of "stakeholding" (Chua, 1997), which the "broken windows" model denotes, is exemplified in the Singapore Government's provision and conduct of its national public-housing programmes. The state's public-housing agency, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) which started modestly as an agency entrusted with building 1- and 2-room rental flats for the poor in 1961 (Chua, 1997), had by the mid-1990s constructed more than half a million high-rise flats, housing more than 85 percent of the three million population resident in the island-nation. Furthermore, the small rental flats have largely been demolished, making way for larger flats which are offered as 99-year leasehold properties to the

tenants. Public-housing in Singapore, importantly, is also an arena in which every household, as stakeholders in the property market, is able to make significant financial gains through buying and selling of the leases on the flats. This has prompted every household to participate actively with the HDB to improving, developing and maintaining basic and ancillary facilities in the housing estates with a view to enhance their own financial assets. This, in turn, right realists argue, facilitates the sustenance of strong informal social mechanisms — the social antibodies of the community. Consequently, part of SPF's community policing approach to crime prevention, as conceived from a right realist criminological perspective, includes the involvement by the police in the activities of the Residents' Committees (RCs) in public-housing estates, Police Boys' Club and School Uniformed Groups in an attempt to restore a *kampung* style neighbourhood and its informal social control networks, which the government believes, had been dislocated with the population shift to HDB public-housing projects.

Residents' Committees and the Institutionalisation of Neighbourhood Watch

The RCs, a form of grassroots organisation, was formed in 1987 for primarily three reasons: first, to ensure a better sense of security and protection from crime, vandalism, drugs and other public-order offences and anti-social activities; second, to encourage a sense of neighbourliness and racial harmony through sports, social, cultural and other activities; and third, to provide a better channel of communication with the authorities, principally the maintenance section of the HDB and Town Councils to effect prompt action to problems of lifts, corridor lighting and Public Utilities Board (PUB) facilities (Seah, 1987, p. 187). Given the importance of the RCs, the SPF has relied on the RCs to promote crime prevention among the residents of HDB townships and as a base upon which to consolidate police-community relations. The RC members assist the SPF in spreading the message of crime prevention to other residents by conducting regular visits, organising crime prevention exhibitions, distributing crime prevention literature, giving talks and staging audio-visual shows (Ong, 1984, p. 16).

The SPF, for its part, helps the RCs by assigning divisional police officers to sit in every RC meeting as its representatives. The latter's role is to inform the RC members of the incidence of crime occurring within the neighbourhood, to persuade them to encourage appropriate crime prevention measures, and to facilitate community participation in the formulation and implementation of criminal policies. In other words, the RCs provide the "vital social-infrastructure" responsible for the SPF's management of community policing (Ong, 1984).

One of the most important developments in the course of this partnership was the establishment of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) in 1981, described in its official brochure as "an informal arrangement among a few immediate neighbours to help each other protect themselves against robbers, thieves and molesters by looking after each other's home and well-being". This crime prevention project has been conceptualised, here and elsewhere, as a collective, "public-minded" strategy as opposed to the individual-focused, "private-minded" responses to crime that are typical of most citizens (Rosenbaum, 1988, p. 126). Essentially, Neighbourhood

or Block Watch involves citizens in a constituency coming together in relatively small groups (usually at a precinct level) to share information about the local crime problems, exchange crime prevention tips, and make plans for engaging in informal surveillance — the concept of "watching and noticing" (Shapland, 1988, p. 117) — of the neighbourhood.

The SPF introduced two measures to promote and expand the NWS. First, it recommended the formation of a NWS three-tier Co-ordinating Committee in every constituency to promote and sustain the NWS. Members of this committee include police officers, RC members, residents and other volunteers such as those from Community Centres. The second measure was in line with a more multi-agency approach to crime control and crime prevention with the police pivoting the functions and activities of other organisations to promote the NWS. These organisations include the auxiliary forces, the Volunteer Special Constabulary, residents' associations in private housing estates, the National Police Cadet Corps, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Boys' Club, the People's Association of Youth Group, and National Crime Prevention Council and the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (Quah & Ong, 1989).

Youth and the Police

One of the most important constituents in the offender-centred, social crime prevention approach of the SPF is youth. The problem of juvenile delinquency generally and the 'discovery' of female gangs in particular in early 1997 helped to heighten official and media concerns over this emerging trend, although the visibility of some of these gangs could simply be attributed to an increased deploy-ment of police resources against these groups of youth. Arguably, the context of the official concern over the youth problem in 1997 was a vague reminiscence of the influential Goh's Report on Education in 1979 which, amongst other things, identified a 'moral crisis' caused by a perceived increase in crime, juvenile delin-quency, drug abuse, abortion and divorce rates. Typically, law-makers and politi-cians were once again pointing their accusing fingers at the "decadent" western culture (Kuo, 1992) which they perceived to be responsible for the 'moral crisis'. To abridge the tide of moral decadence, the SPF, as a matter of ideological and practi-cal considerations, has accordingly introduced four basic projects to spread the message of crime prevention among the younger Singaporeans. These projects include the Boys' Club, Crime Prevention Proficiency Badge Scheme, the Neighbourhood Watch Badge Scheme, and formal crime prevention education in the schools co-organised by the Ministry of Education. Of all the police-initiated crime prevention projects involving the youth, the Police Boys' Club is worth mentioning in detail.

The SPF formed the Boys Clubs in June 1982 for four reasons: (a) "to contain and curb the growth of juvenile delinquency"; (b) "to improve police-youth relations"; (c) to provide youth with a sense of identity and belonging"; and (d) "to inculcate a sense of responsibility, co-operation, and righteousness as prerequisites for good citizenship" (Ong, 1984, p. 51). More specifically, the raison d'être of the Boys Clubs is to provide boys between twelve and eighteen years who are prema-ture school leavers, and those juvenile delinquents who have been officially

processed but have had been committed to a non-custodial sentence by the juvenile criminal justice system, with a means of channelling their energies into conventional pursuits instead of re-engaging in criminal behaviour. In addition to the sports and cultural activities organised on a joint-club level, members are actively encouraged to participate in fund-raising activities of the RCs and Community Centres, National Day parades, activities of Neighbourhood Watch Groups, educational tours to neighbouring countries, and community service to senior citizens and under-privileged children. A team of five junior police officers and a senior officer is assigned to run a Boys Club for twelve hours each day from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Perhaps an interesting aspect of the community policing approach to crime prevention, as conceptualised from a right realist perspective, lies in its emphasis on expanding the criminalisation process of the police to include even minor *public order offences* and *incivilities* that are perceived to have an impact on *real crime*. This view of the police role in intervening in the spiral of disorder before a crime situation actually develops is identifiable with a Durkheimian approach to the need to escalate and expand the definition of crime, and to possibly invent new crimes in order to preserve the collective conscience by constantly redrawing its moral contours and boundaries. Criminal categories in Singapore, consonant with the "disorder equals crime" equation, have thus ranged from major crimes like murder, robbery, theft and rape to those minor crimes and regulations affecting life-styles and personal etiquette such as personal grooming (for example acceptable length of hair for males), flushing of public toilets, and even chewing of gum. The description provided by Austin (1987, p. 916) is illustrative:

> Other regulations, which were necessarily imposed due to the extreme size and density of the populations, pertain to littering behaviour. Trash dropped on the sidewalk may bring a $500 fine. Spitting on the street or walkway is likewise seen as littering as well as a health hazard nuisance. The mobility of the citizen, whether on foot or in a vehicle, is highly regulated. Jay-walking may result in a $50 penalty...Queuing for taxis is highly organised, and in parts of the city a taxi-driver can be fined for picking up passengers at any point along the road other than at a queuing station. Further examples of community regulations are prohibitions against fruit or flower picking on any public land on the island, and a curfew against noise, generally in effect after 10 p.m.. All citizens on reaching the age of 12 years are required to be finger-printed and to carry official identification. Any change of address must be reported to the authorities within two weeks or the violator is subject to a $5000 fine, two years imprisonment, or both...

It is this feature of Singapore society, the image of a highly regulated and disciplined society, which is usually cited in the local and international literature as contributing to a low crime rate in the city-state. Although the *institutionalist* and *radical* positions (Jupp, 1989, pp. 92–101) caution that official statistics on crime collated by official departments — in the case of Singapore the Criminal Investigation Department — must necessarily be located within a particular theoretical tradition informing its collation and use before being used as "reliable" indicators for comparisons, several independent studies, nonetheless, indicate that the crime rate in Singapore is far lower than in most countries in the West and

elsewhere in Asia (Clutterbuck, 1985; Ong, 1984; Austin, 1989; Quah, 1994). A comparison of rates of major crimes in Singapore with those in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and London between 1988 and 1990 revealed that Singapore's crime rates for murder, robbery, housebreaking, rape and motor car theft are lower than those of the countries compared (see Table 1).

A study by Yip and Ong (1991) also revealed that the statistics for these crimes in Singapore are very much lower than those in Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, and Oregon, four states in the United States with approximately the same population size as Singapore (Quah, 1994). The latest crime statistics released by the CID for the year 1997 showed that crime rates are down for the ninth consecutive year with the total number of reported seizable offences (or index crimes used for international comparison) such as vehicle theft, housebreaking, robbery, murder, rape, rioting, outraging of modesty and motor vehicle thefts fell by 5 % or 2, 372 cases from 47, 145 in 1996 to 44, 773 in 1997 (SPF Annual Report, 1997/1998, p. 25). Specifically, motor vehicle thefts, housebreaking and robbery were at their lowest levels in 18 years, 40 years and 39 years respectively (SPF Annual Report, 1997/98, p. 26).

Administrative Criminology, Situational Crime Prevention and the Police Role

Within administrative criminology (see Young, 1986, 1988) the concept of situational crime prevention and rational choice theory side-step the etiological crisis by suggesting that the causes of crime are either relatively unimportant or politically impossible to tackle (Young, 1994, p. 91). The question becomes that of the most cost-effective way of securing control intervention: opportunities for crime available in the environment, and the risks attached to criminal activity" (Downes & Rock, 1995, p. 253). The primary focus of administrative criminology is the notion that the occurrence of a crime event can be prevented by structural barriers and greater surveillance from, for example, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, and the public themselves can prevent crime more directly and effectively than the police by 'target hardening'. A Singapore study of police investigations demonstrated that about 70 percent of crimes such as house-breaking, theft of vehicles, and robbery could have been effectively prevented by members of the public (The Mirror, 1983,

TABLE I

Comparative Major Crime Rates per 100,000 Population of Selected Cities

City	Major Crime Rates per 100,000 Population of Selected Cities		
	1988	1989	1990
Singapore	248	245	230
Tokyo	321	274	245
Hong Kong	342	355	448
London	3189	3267	3706

Source: Compiled from Interpol figures provided by the Public Affairs Department, Singapore Police Force.

p. 8). Interestingly, the situational approach to crime prevention tends to empha-sise the actual spatial nature of crime, in terms of both opportunities and surveil-lance. Administrative Criminology at this juncture coalesces with the two main concerns of Environmental Criminology: first, *explaining the spatial distribution of offences* and second, *explaining the spatial distribution of offenders* (Bottoms, 1994, pp. 586–7). According to Bottoms (1994) crime and criminality are highly geographi-cally skewed, and an understanding of this uneven distribution in terms of time and space is of crucial importance both to the explanation of *crimes* and to the social production of *offenders* (1994, p. 586).

In his article on *Crime Prevention: Singapore Style*, Quah outlines SPF's philoso-phy towards crime prevention as one concerned with the "anticipation, recognition and appraisal of crime risk, and the initiation of action to remove or reduce those risks". Concomitantly, seen from the administrative criminological perspective, SPF's community policing approach to crime prevention centres on the area of offering advice on situational crime prevention measures to HDB residents through the NPP system, and to the industry and commercial sectors.

The NPP, in addition to providing conventional services available at any police land division in Singapore, functions as well as a crime prevention centre where exhibitions and talks on situational crime prevention measures are held. The NPP officers are required to patrol the constituency and to make house visits. Two NPP officers are assigned to visit 250 households twice a year. The rationale for such house visits is to enable the NPP officers to develop rapport between the commu-nity and the police and to disseminate information on crime prevention. The crime prevention role of NPP officers is clearly evident in a local case study of the Toa Payoh NPP over a period of one month which revealed that desk duties, preventive policing, house visits and crime prevention formed more than 90 percent of the time of the Toa Payoh NPP officers. The study concluded that the "neighbourhood residents can indeed be mobilised by the police to participate in crime prevention efforts...[and] in serving as a deterrent not only by reducing the opportunities for crime but also by increasing the certainty of responding to crime" (Toh, 1988, pp. 68–70).

The importance placed on the police-initiated situational crime prevention projects was also apparent from a survey report submitted to the Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs assessing the public's preventative behaviour towards crime (Chang, Mak & Ong, 1982). For example, the study revealed that 71 percent of the respondents were aware of crime prevention campaigns and that about 68 percent of them would take up some of the measures suggested in these campaigns, while 86 percent of them agreed that crime prevention is not the business or duty of the police alone but the responsibility of the public. A police-sponsored survey discovered, however, that membership in Neighbourhood Watch Groups — which is fundamentally a police-initiated project — did not mean significant involve-ment. 76 percent of the population had not received oral briefings about Neighbourhood Watch, 90 percent did not know the name of their group leader, and 97 percent had never worked with neighbours in any crime prevention activity (Bayley, 1989, p. 15). Nonetheless, significant implications of community policing from the perspective of administrative criminology are threefold. First, situational

prevention approach of the police to crime "normalises" both the occurrence and activity of crime: crime is there and always will be. What is needed therefore is a strategy for how best to prevent its occurrence. Second, the responsibility to prevent crime falls on the victims or potential victims, and there is a tendency to privatise one's own security: "normalisation" of crime leads to a "privatisation of security" (Young, 1992, p. 59). Third, the community policing role of the police is limited to that of providing crime prevention advice to the public by encouraging the public to engage constructively in the range of situational crime prevention initiatives.

Conclusion

In using the criminological paradigms of right realism and administrative criminology to illustrate the community policing approach to crime prevention, I argue that the tertiary role of police should be conceptualised in terms of its part in the *social* and *situational* crime prevention processes. The introduction of community policing and the creation of specialised crime prevention departments provide the practical, as well as an intellectual arena for reconciling differing police roles seen from various criminological paradigms: it demonstrates the capability of the police organisation in performing a variety of tasks in terms of the practical objectives of policing in the area of community policing and crime prevention - the policeman in the street is both a social worker entrusted with the responsibility of rejuvenating 'broken' communities (right realist criminology) and a technocrat with the monopoly of knowledge in crime prevention (administrative criminology). In this respect, community policing approach to crime prevention bridges the 'criminological gap' that exist between the right realist and administrative criminological perspectives on the role of the police. This, as I have pointed out, is a useful way to understand community policing approach to crime prevention in Singapore, as well as to understand generically, the theoretical and practical linkages that exist between community policing, crime prevention and criminology. To this end, the factors that led both to the 'birth' of community policing in Singapore and its development were documented within a socio-historical context.

Theoretically, the salience of social control theory in criminological studies in Singapore was illustrated in the context of its relevance to crime prevention and crime control strategies within the right realist and administrative criminological paradigms. Also, the appeal of social control theory lie in its alignment with the political and social persuasion of the Singapore State in emphasising both formal and informal systems of social control in preventing crime.

I have refrained from taking the cop-sided (conservative) or the lop-sided (revisionist) view of policing (Reiner, 1985) to make sense of community policing in Singapore simply for the reason that it is methodologically difficult, nor is it useful to speak of *a* 'model' in policing, based upon *a* singular activity of the police. As classical police research has documented, police work involves both the issuance of parking tickets and managing class conflict. Theoretically, although the Singapore model of policing, as I have pointed out earlier, displays features that are peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon model of 'community' policing based on the idea of

'policing by consent', it aligns itself more readily with the 'authoritarian' model where a strong political dynamic dominates a weak social dynamic.

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