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chapter three

DISCIPLINING DIFFERENCE
Race in Singapore

NIRMALA PURUSHOTAM

Ethnic Names in Contemporary Singapore

The most commonsensically available ethnic names in Singapore that are applied to self and others are "Chinese", "Malay", "Indian", and "Other". These categories surface and simultaneously create, yet constrain social space in a multitude of ways. Every citizen of the island is required to carry around with him/her an identity card in which there is the entry "Race". The most commonly used, accepted, and recognized categories therein are Chinese/Malay/Indian/Other (CMIO). The use of the word "race" itself deserves mention. Commonsensically, CMIO is perceived to arise from innate, biological differences between peoples.

On the eve of Singapore's nationhood, the political élite chose "multiracialism" as one of the tenets upon which the republic would be predicated upon. "Multiracialism" in turn rested upon the construction of the population as being constituted of four main racial categories: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other. Correspondingly, "Race" is associated with a plethora of policies and regulations. Additionally, almost every government-organized national event highlights the existence of this CMIO. Pictorial depictions, even effigies of CMIO

that was a highlight of the 1994 National Day Parade, further hammer home the message that the population of Singapore comprises four "racial" types. Standard elements in pictorial depictions are noteworthy also for the stereotyping that they more than hint at.

Thus, the Chinese are represented in yellow-ochre skin tones, with just a touch of pink that gives them a pleasant rosiness. The man will be dressed in trousers and a shirt, but the woman will be clothed in a cheongsam; her children have some varying items that are commonly identified as Chinese, such as the *guàzi mao*, a black Chinese skullcap with red tassels, and a false pigtail to boot. The Malays are always warmly browned, and dressed up in appropriate clothes, namely, in *baju kurong*, with *kain samping* around the waist and *songkok* on the heads of the males, and *slendang* hanging down one shoulder of the females. The Indians are given a richer, darker brown (closer to milk chocolate), with the woman invariably in a *sari* and with a *bindhi* between her eyebrows, the man quite often in a Sikh turban, and the girl child in a long silk skirt and the boy child in *salwaar khameez*. "Others" are one or two shades pinker than the Chinese, and dressed in what would be described, in everyday language, as formal Western dress.

In contrast to this caricature, most men, women and children in Singapore are attired in the latest fashions from Hong Kong garment factories, produced for the American and European markets. Most Indian men in Singapore are not turbaned, unless they are Sikh practitioners, and while many women still hang a cheongsam, *sari*, *sarong kebaya* or two in their wardrobe and also actually wear them on a daily basis, any casual observer would notice at once that for most women daily dress is not a marker of their ethnicities. Still, the caricature does reflect the reality of a fourfold category that encompasses even those who devise ways to try and escape from them.

The difference is not just a matter of surface presentations. A central feature of the 1994 National Day Parade was a dance of "Races in Harmony". In this dance, the audience witnessed a stream of dancers running into the vast stadium field in a variety of dress and symbols marking "Chinese" out from "Malay", "Indian" and "Eurasian" as "Other". Additionally, one of the prominent songs of the day, written precisely for events of national meaning, resounded

from the National Choir who were joined by an enthusiastic crowd that packed every seat in the stadium. This song included the potentially loaded refrain, "Every creed and every race, Has its role and has its place".

In kindergarten, a private Montessori school even, my five-year-old son, who had by then learned that the diversity of his background gave him the privilege of being multicultural, was faced with a dissenting Mandarin language teacher. My son tried to argue that he was "multicultural" and that all humans were only of one race anyhow. But the teacher, who thought his arguments to be misunderstandings that arose from the complexities of his background, took pains to make him understand that he was "Indian", even if different from most other "standard Indians", as she put it. In relation to this, one of his assignments in Mandarin class involved him in the work of searching for appropriate pictures — that of a Chinese man in shirt and tie; a Malay woman in *sarong kebaya*; and an Indian man in turban. He carefully pasted these on separate sheets of paper, under which he wrote, in his newly learned Mandarin, "He is Chinese", "She is Malay" and "*I* am Indian", respectively. To my consternation, he also then explained to me, as his teacher had to him, that he *was* "Indian" really.

As an adult with more recourse to arguing against being typed, I find the attempts to reside outside the CMIO categories as barricaded as my son did. Almost all forms in Singapore, whether emanating from public or private offices, have an entry for "Race". I have always entered into the space so provided the category "Homo Sapiens Sapiens". Invariably, I have been asked to explain the term: when I try to insist that racially I belong to this one species I meet with either mirthless laughter or cold annoyance. My efforts are then scratched out and replaced by the term "Indian". Sometimes, however, I am not so easily identifiable: these are at those times in my life when I have had extremely short hair cuts, and dressed in "Western" clothes. At these times, there is some confusion whether I should be entered as "Indian" or "Eurasian". By this time, I merely submit to the answer expected of me, "Indian".

Face-to-face encounters that are not initiated by forms allow me more room to manoeuvre, but for a limited time and in a limited

way. They usually run like this: "What are you?" (this is a fairly standard and common question that arises in daily life in Singapore). Most Singaporeans familiar with Singlish know that it is a question about your CMIO ethnicity. When I reply that I am a human being, I am usually met with laughter and the enjoinder "Aiyah, you know what I mean, lah". I have tried a variety of approaches to this: "Singaporean"; "my mother was born in Selangor", "my family is very mixed, even got Hokkien, Cantonese and Ukrainian". Thereafter, I will be subject to a cross-examination that I have yet to develop the skill to fence off. In this, inadvertently, I will refer to roots that reveal that I am also "Indian", but this is then translated to, "Oh, that means you are Indian, lah".

Where have these four names, that powerfully frame all of us in contemporary Singapore, come from? This question, as I shall show, reveals that orientalism as a colonial system of ongoing meanings still exists, albeit in new forms; and more significantly, in our work, so placing us in what might be perceived as neo-orientalism in our daily lives. For these four names are actually deeply rooted in our colonial past. Its applications by the present élite, its acceptance by most people at this time, involve us in some, even if limited, way to consenting to a neo-oriental rule of sorts.

My argument is that these names derive — although they are also reinforced and modified in different ways by other histories that were occurring simultaneously — from the orientalist concern to understand, catalogue and sometimes explicitly explain the "Other". A significant inheritance of the colonial period then is a system of ethnic names and procedures for their achievement that nationalist élites received and worked with. Often, there was little re-examination of the names they had inherited, even when those names were used upon themselves. I should stress that these ethnic names and even some of their meanings could have emerged from what existed prior to colonization. Colonization, however, brought with it immense changes. This included a policy of encouraging immigration into colonized lands. Furthermore, immigration in turn involved the creation of segregated socio-economic niches.

Certainly, the catalogue of names and related meanings were in most part removed from what was of primary significance and

meaning to the people so named. They may have been real to the orientalist administrator, scholar and so forth, but in many ways they were rather peripheral and insignificant in the realities of those they were used upon. Yet these irrelevant practices by which "races" were created became and continue to be important aspects of government today. As Said notes:

> The methodological failures of Orientalism cannot be accounted for by saying that the *real* Orient is different from Orientalist portraits of it, or by saying that Orientalists are Westerners for the most part, they cannot be expected to have an inner sense of what the Orient is all about.... Despite its failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper thin intellectual apparatus, Orientalism flourishes today... Indeed, there is... reason for alarm... its influence has spread to the "Orient" itself. (Edward Said 1979, p. 322)

Singapore in British Malaya

By 1819, the presence of the British Raj was well established in other parts of the globe, including the Indian sub-continent, the land mass that comprises modern China, and large parts of the Malayan peninsula and Penang island. Accordingly, the British had already recognized certain groups as being of particular relevance and interest to them. It is in relation to this that we have what is still a preferred history of the island: Raffles, it seems, landed on a piece of property whose value had not been understood and so left unexploited by its few inhabitants, who were primarily named as "Malay" and "fishermen".

One of Raffles' first formidable tasks then was to set about attracting inhabitants to his new site of interest. But he was not about to bring in just anyone: spaces were opened up for specific groups, who in turn reflected relevant British interests and orientations.

Raffles, following the rule established in those parts of British Malaya that were already colonized before 1819, recognized the Malays' inability to work in the at once British and modern economy — that is, from the perspective of the British, the Malays were laid back, or more bluntly, lazy. This evaluation derived from their uselessness as severely exploitable labour in tin-mines and rubber

plantations. The perspective that the Malays would have found it rather irrational to give up self-owned farms and their relative independence in such work was, of course, inadmissible.[1] In any case, the near slavery conditions that the immigrants could withstand became proof of their inherent natures. Thus, the Chinese ability to withstand the arduous conditions of the tin-mines, run by unscrupulous Chinese managers, underscored their industriousness. The "Klings and other Southern Indians" (the earlier names that the British gave to what would later become condensed into "Indian") who came to tap rubber in the British plantations were receptive to arduously repetitive tasks because of their "docile" nature. The British with their superior intelligence were more innately suited to the all-important work of governing and administering the colony.

In the main, then, with Raffles' expropriation of the island of Singapore came increasing waves of people from various parts of the region and even the world at large, as I shall show. At one dimension, spaces were created, as noted above, for specific groups that the British meaningfully recognized by the shorthand terms "Chinese" and "South Indians". The former signified "industry and economic genius" and the latter the ability to "labour" (Vlieland 1932, p. 8).

The island's "real" population increasingly comprised a much more variegated lot: those already there, long before the arrival of the European colonialists; those for whom movement into regional centres was an established practice befitting the traditional social maps of the area; those who were members of a variety of ethnic groups that were shaded by the categories "Chinese" and "Indian"; those who had newly discovered the East as their colonies; and so forth.

Who of these highly variegated groups of people, with their multiple memberships, were selectively named? By whom were they named? What are the larger socio-historical significances of this, if any? As a corollary to this, what meanings did these names harbour, notionally and/or specifically?

The major source regarding official and élite naming practices are limited to census reports, from 1871 to 1957, pertinent to Singapore as part of the larger realm of British Malaya and/or the Straits Settlements.[2]

There are important reasons for using the censuses, although these are limited insofar as they present to us one realm in which social categories pertinent to naming differences and instituting exclusions were and are achieved. But the focus is on the dominant group's naming and related meaning-making practices. However, at any given time the dominant group is in a dialectical relationship with the others that it controls: to some extent who they name is negotiated, affected, and limited by realities other than those that the élite would like to construct. Unfortunately, as it happens in many historical documents, voices of the ordinary persons are generally stilled — dismissed as too average to be recorded until fairly recently. Even the few British persons who may have entered the discussion, and particularly those who may have resisted it, are quieted. The censuses are the voices of a few British in control of some aspects of life in Singapore at that time. Yet these latter, as I shall show, had to devise procedures to ensure that their ways of naming were the only real and realized ones, specially in relation to discourses they held among themselves as the ruling élite. In this respect, the British pre-figure the work of the present élite in reproducing CMIO *vis-à-vis* the details therein.

Distinguishing "Races": From Tacit Name Gathering Practices to Orientalist Deliberations on the Other

The work of distinguishing "races" in the censuses involved a number of tasks, which were interrelated to each other. These included the collection of "race" names by the population concerned, the screening of such names for authenticity as defined by the census administrator, and the related refinement of such names linked to the construction of the rationale for differentiation, and thus the production of "race" names as potent symbols.

Therefore, there were firstly the names that the census population used on themselves. In daily life experiences, who we are is a matter of common sense, unproblematic. As we move between a range of social worlds marked by varieties of people socioculturally different from us, we have to deal with the issue of "us" and "them" unproblematically enough so that daily life can proceed fairly smoothly. In this respect, ethnic names are an important device —

shorthand references, typifications that immediately assign a complex of meanings without the need to state onerous and specific items attached to them. Which names surface and are socialized in some measure is dependent on the context in which the names are used. The context of the census is, in this respect, very revealing.

First, the census schedule comprised a single sheet of paper measuring 19 inches by 21 inches, with columns for 17 different entries, of which "race" is one. Each person is strained into one line in the schedule. This contrasts with the vastness of ethnicity in the real world, where there are, to begin with, a much longer list of "race" names — for "Us" by "Us", for "Us" as given by "Them", for "Them" as given by "Us", and so forth. Furthermore, these different "race" names are tied to shifting contexts, and hence complex and with shifting meaning systems. In this way alone, the organization of the census form clearly enforces an immense degree of oversimplification. Certainly, one can understand that such a device was and is necessary to suit the enormous task of doing censuses. However, the issue here is that the simplified names with their simplified meanings assume a social significance which has serious implications and consequences for contemporary Singapore.

To compound matters, the administration of censuses ensured that some ethnic references were made more visible than others. First, census forms were administered by male enumerators,[3] who filled in the form with respect to each person in every household. A number of questions easily come to mind. What race names, for example, would thus be omitted? For instance, in the 1947 census, the census superintendent bemoaned the larger than expected number of entries for "Hailam" women. "Hailam" women, he maintained, were subject to onerous customary restrictions which made it difficult for them to migrate. Consequently, Hailam men in British Malaya tended to marry Cantonese or other women. When the husbands filled in their wives' "race", they named them as Hailamese rather than Cantonese.

Secondly, the British favoured the use of specific "races" as enumerators. High on their list were European managers of rubber plantations. They employed large numbers of "South Indian" migrants. Census administrators, as I shall elaborate later, always assumed the European managers' ability to distinguish their labour along "race" lines.

Straits Chinese enumerators appeared to have been favoured highly, where Europeans were not available. They were perceived as more educated and intelligent than the other non-White enumerators. Malay enumerators were also favoured, probably because of the widespread use of Malay as a bridge language among the various ethnic groups of the time. A number of germane, even if unanswerable, questions must be raised. How would a Malay enumerator, for example, enter the "race" of a person? What "race" name would be simply accepted/acceptable and so entered? What "race" name would be "corrected" by him, because the enumerator accepted his own version over that of the householder's response? Alternatively, how would a householder filling in the form himself/herself name the "race" that he or another household member belonged to, *vis-à-vis* the enumerator he encountered? That is, would he or she use the name that is contextually relevant to, for example, naming "Us" in specific relationship to a Straits-born or Malay enumerator?

The case of "Bengalees and Other Natives of India" illustrates this point well. In the 1921 census, "Bengalees" and "Klings" were popular names for migrants from the North and South of India respectively. But these reflected names used on "Us" by those who were not "Indian". To "Us/Indians", "Bengalees" were from the Bengal Presidency. But to "Us/Indians" *when interacting with those "Them" who do not really know "Us/Indians"*, "Bengalees" referred to Indians from North India. Accordingly, as noted in the 1921 census for instance, Punjabis who would not refer to themselves as "Bengalees" when among other "Punjabis" especially, were inclined to do so when interacting outside strictly Punjabi networks and spaces. I should note, further, that within Punjabi networks and spaces, a more important mode of identification referred to village, caste, sub-caste and the like.

Thirdly, there are recorded instances of the hostility with which the Chinese viewed the census. For them, the census was but a tool of the British administrator who was engaged at that time to control and eliminate the Chinese secret societies that were prevalent then.

The Straits Chinese enumerators who were used to obtain census data were the same identifiable group used by the British as the necessary intermediaries via which the secret societies were policed. Given this scenario, what was the kind of information that the Chinese were willing to give, bearing in mind that the secret societies were importantly linked to ethnic identities?

The names that referred to "Chinese" were broken down into only two types in the first census: "Chinese" and "Cochin Chinese". In the next three censuses, "Chinese" was used as an umbrella category under which separate names were given, such as "Cantonese", "Hokkien", "Hailam", "Kheh", "Straits-born", and "Teochew" tribes. In the 1921 census, there were additions to the latter names: "Hokchiu", "Hokchia", "Hin Hoa", "Kwongsai" and Chinese from the "Northern Provinces" of Shanghai, Beijing, and so forth (Nathan 1921, pp. 77–85). By this time, procedures had been established by which these names could be identified. These procedures were devised because the British census superintendent had learnt, through previous censuses, that the entries for race in the case of the "Chinese" had to be double-checked if they were to be sophisticated enough. I shall examine the practices involved later.

Thus far, then, as a means of collecting information on what "races" there were in Singapore, the census, at one level, was affected by the use of select enumerators and householders and thus their meaningful interpretations of "race". These interpretations can be described as a tacit means of collecting race names for census purposes — that is, such names as were given by enumerators and/or householders were the accepted entries in the census reports. In this way, naming the other involved a certain tacit reliance on common sense notions and related names. With time, as the censuses became documents to which others referred to, including especially other census superintendents, the tacit mode of giving "race" names gave way to more careful deliberations. Still, some characteristics of tacitness remained: deliberations centred on searching for those entries that were instituted because of the reliance on others, besides the "White races", particularly the British. Thus, the deliberations included a search for and use of experts. In relation to this, principles of organization began to emerge, namely, the device of the place and the device of language. Both devices are crucial in the explication of mother tongue ethnicities in contemporary Singapore.

To reiterate, common sense appears to have been the major mode of giving names in the census of 1871. Thus, with no commentary whatsoever, this first census unabashedly proclaimed the existence of the following "distinguishing races", named and ordered thus: Europeans, and Americans, Armenians, Jews, Eurasians, Abyssinians, Achinese, Africans, Andamanese, Arabs, Bengalis and other natives of India not particularized, Boyanese, Bugis, Burmese, Chinese, Cochin Chinese, Dyaks, Hindoos, Japanese, Javanese, Jaweepekans, Klings, Malays, Manilamen, Mantras, Parsees, Persians, Siamese, Singhalese, Military — British, Military — Indian, Prisoners — Local, and Prisoners — Transmarine.[4] The number of some of these mentioned groups was as small as one person, showing clearly that the list was not reflective of numerical presence alone. There was, at the same time, some attention given to numerical predominance; the population of the island at that time comprized "chiefly of Chinese, Malays, and Klings or immigrants from Southern India".[5]

Still, there were a number of apparent rules, designed by the census administrator, at work. Two main organizing principles appeared to have been used in ordering this list of "race" names. The first gave priority to occidentals and those closely associated with them, in descending order, reflecting perhaps the degree of closeness to the "real" source. Secondly, after these groups were named, the other names were arranged in order of the alphabet of the English language. In addition, the term "nationality" was restricted in use, to refer to the "European, American and Eurasian resident population in the Island"; while the word "races" clearly referred to "the native population".[6]

Ten years later, in the census of 1881, changes were introduced. Forty-seven peoples were distinguished in mostly alphabetical order; the alphabet being invoked after the Europeans and "races" closer to them were listed. These forty-seven types were reclassified in the preceding pages and tables under six main categories, referred to as "nationalities" and "other nationalities" — the first signifying the occidental, and the second signifying all others besides "Us".

These six categories were "European and Americans", "Eurasians", "Chinese", "Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago", "Tamils and other natives of India", and "Other Nationalities". Once instituted this way, these six divisions were retained in this form for the following two censuses.

Furthermore, under all these categories, with the sole exception of "Eurasian", differentiations were made, which — in some instances at least — clearly signified distinct separateness between the different groups named under the same genera. These different names that were listed remained essentially similar to the list of the 1881 census.

Thus, nineteen classes were distinguished under "Europeans and Americans". They included Americans, Austrians, Belgians, British, Danes, Dutch, French, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Maltese, Norwegians, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Spanish, Swiss, and Turks. The only changes made after 1871 were the exclusion of Maltese, Portuguese and Romanians; and the substitution of "Spaniards" for "Spanish". In 1901, the Portuguese and Romanians were reinstated, and "Bohemians", "Canadians" and "Swedes" were added to the list.

The term "Chinese" was clarified as comprising "Cantonese", "Hokkien", "Hailam", "Kheh", "Straits-born" and "Teochews". There was also the sub-group "Tribe not stated". The usage of "tribe" underscores the perception of a special underlying connectivity among the Chinese, which I shall be referring to later. The 1891 census omitted "Tribe not stated"; but it resurfaced as an item in the 1901 census, to which "Hokchiu" was also added.

This connectivity among peoples from the same land mass was distinctly missing in the categorization of "Tamils and *other natives* of India", which replaced the older version of "Klings and other Southern Indians". In this respect, there was an expansion of the list relating to the land-mass of India. Four groups were now admitted: "Bengalis and etc.", "Burmese", "Parsees", and "Tamils". There were no changes in the next two censuses, except for the addition of "16th Madras Infantry" in 1901.

The term "Other Natives" was also a marker used in the category "Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago", under which

all the decennial censuses from 1881 listed the Achinese, Boyanese, Bugis, Dyaks, Javanese, Jawi Pekan, Malays, and Manilamen. No changes were made at all in the next two censuses.

In the category "Other Nationalities" there was a wide variety that included Africans, Annamese, Arabs, Armenians, Japanese, Jews, Persians, Siamese and Sinhalese. "Egyptian" was added in the next two censuses.

What is important is not the race names *per se*, but the "nationality" classifications under which they were listed. To reiterate, they were "Europeans and Americans", "Eurasians", "Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago", and so forth. Ostensibly, these were in themselves "race" names: certainly they were at times referred to as such. There is an added dimension that should be clarified. This is that except for the category "Eurasian", which was never in any census deliberated upon and accordingly expanded, these classes arose from a particular reference to the globe. The world was cut up into a select number of blocs.

Thus, the different groups of "nationalities" and "other nationalities" sectioned the global map into identifiable areas: Europe and America; the Malayan Peninsula and the surrounding archipelago; mainland China; and the Indian subcontinent as a whole, incorporating also Burma. This first principle of organization, even if only implicit and possibly arising from the names that arrived in the filled-in census schedule form, was carried into the 1921 census. There was an apparently clearer sense of the notion of place that began to be developed from then on.

Before examining this further, I would like to reiterate that the race names under these six classes, and the six classes themselves, were mostly left unchanged throughout three censuses. But in 1921 there was a sudden rush of new peoples being identified that revealed that naming drew inspiration from searching for places within the territories previously identified. At the same time, in 1921 too, phrases such as "Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago" were replaced by the less cumbersome "Malays". Yet the corresponding use of these titles to name races indicates that "Malays" was a short form of "Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago". It is almost as if the longer names had been around for so long that they were

recognizable in the shortened way. Thus, there was no need to expand upon what "everyone" understood in the term "Malay" — that is, its broad reference could be tacitly achieved. The new shortened forms were still six in number but renamed "Europeans", "Eurasians", "Malays", "Chinese", "Indians" and "Others" — they were certainly much closer to the ethnic categories used in Singapore today.

Searching for Races with Proper "Expertise": The Devices of Places, Languages and Essential Characters

That the six new classes under which different "races" are now sorted are reminiscent of the 1881 categories is clarified by the broader range and related increase in the number of identifiable races that the 1921 and 1931 censuses developed. "(N)ot one of these (six classes) is one race", notes J. E. Nathan, the superintendent of the 1921 census. Thus, there is a sudden expansion of race names: from an average of forty names in the previous censuses, the 1921 census identified fifty-six races, of which twenty-eight were in "numbers exceeding 1,000" (Nathan 1921, p. 70). C. A. Vlieland continued this expansion, boasting that his deliberations had enabled him to name "over seventy races" in the 1931 British Malayan census (Vlieland 1932, p. 69).

How did this expanded list develop? Searching through all the censuses, and examining the record of debates on "race" that are to be found only in the 1931 and 1947 censuses, I worked out four devices that were used to name "races". It should be stressed that these four devices were used fairly haphazardly, with different emphases at different periods, and for different groups, depending on the superintendents' "expertise" (inclinations).

Before naming these devices, I should first clarify that the word "race"

> is used in a peculiar sense ... is used, for lack of a more appropriate term, to cover a complex set of ideas of which race, in the strict or scientific sense, is only one small element. It would be of little use to the administrator or the merchant .... An attempt at classification by "nationality" or more exactly by national status or political allegiance would be almost equally open to controversy and of little, if any, practical value. It is in fact, impossible to define the sense in which the term "Race" is used for census purposes; it is in reality, a judicious blend ... of the ideas of geography and ethnography, origin, political allegiance and racial and social affinities and sympathies" (Vlieland 1932, p. 73–74).

Del Tufo, who used the word "race" in like fashion, suggested that perhaps "community" was a better term, although even this was "not free from objection" (del Tufo 1949, p. 71). In sum, as both make clear with similar examples,

> "What is your race?" ... is ... of the same nature as ... "What is that man?" ... In such circumstances, we should be surprised, and possibly annoyed, to be told that a Madras Indian was British or Dravidian, when we wanted to know whether he was a Tamil or a Telegu .... (Vlieland 1932, p. 74).

> (W)e do not want an Englishman to describe himself as, say, Anglo Saxon: we want English; nor do we want a Tamil Brahmin to describe himself as an "Aryan" or a "Brahmin" ... And do not for instance enter "British" because this term describes one's national status, and ... such different peoples as natives of New Zealand, British India, or any Crown Colony" (del Tufo 1949, p. 71).

Thus, a close examination of the censuses shows an increasing if implicit reliance on, first, the six classifications as six blocs of places on a global map, highlighted by the particular conditions, that is, perceptions, values, concerns and such, of the world to the British in Malaya. Secondly, these blocs were clearly further subdivided into more specific places, within which varying conditions sharpened some aspects of these places *vis-à-vis* others. Their precise distinctions depended on which blocs of places were being examined.

Thirdly, there was the added dimension of distinguishing these places as origins of a racial group by the association of place with language: the dominant language in a particular place named a racial space. The primary place was, of course, British Malaya itself, in that it is the peoples that populated it who were the focus of attention in all the above places and spaces: but the naming of these peoples involved a search backwards in time, a search that focused on the named principles by which race became identifiable.

However, British Malaya as a place was also used as a differentiating principle in a highly specific way. Thus, fourthly, the economic and sometimes political spaces within which the differentiated population was located in British Malaya became the means by which essential characteristics were marked out, which in turn acted as further proof of the reason for making the distinctions.

The specifics of how the device of place, language and essential characters which rationalized the creation of racial categories in the censuses differed with respect to the idiosyncracies of each census superintendent. These variations were, moreover, tied to the availability of expertise on different peoples that the census superintendent assumed he had, as well as the experts that he consulted. Hence, the most crucial device, the use of "expert" knowledge, resulted in

> a series of attitudes and judgements... (which) send the Western mind, not first to Oriental sources for correction and verification but rather to other Orientalist works... (therefrom utilising and adding to) a common discourse, a praxis, a library, a set of received ideas, in short of doxology, common to everyone who entered the ranks." (Edward Said 1979, p. 121.)

I should note that an important aspect of using "real" knowledge included the development of procedures by which entries for "race" that were "not correct" were screened out. For, in the words of C. A. Vlieland, the superintendent of the 1931 census, "Oriental peoples have themselves no clear conception of race" (Vlieland 1932, p. 74).

Sources of Verification and Correction

The "Who's Who" list of acknowledged experts is revealing. J. E. Nathan, "Malayan Civil Service, Superintendent of the 1921 Census, British Malaya" was perhaps one of the first in the region — at least where censuses are concerned — to avail himself of the services of orientalist scholars of varying distinctions. Thus, this 1921 census superintendent availed of "Dr. R. O. Winstedt, D. Litt.", deemed to be an expert on the "aboriginal races" and "Chinese" and "Indians" in British Malaya; "Mr. A. M. Pountney, a Chinese scholar"; and a Mr. Shellabear's specialized knowledge on Malacca Babas and the

Baba Malays (Nathan 1921, p. vii). Apart from this, there were also documents such as "The Handbook of British Malaya, the introductory paragraphs of annual Administrative Reports, the Colonial Office List and other publications... written... from the point of view of the historian, the ethnographer and the philologist..." (Vlieland 1932, p. iv).

This later list was cited by the next census administrator. To this he added the expert advice of L. J. B. Turner, Director of Statistics, Ceylon; Professor J. Van Gelderen, Superintendent of Census for the Netherlands East Indies, to whom he was especially grateful for the consequent suspicion he harboured against certain groups of enumerators; and Mr. V. W. W. S. Purcell, M. C. S., Assistant Director of Education (Chinese). To top all this, there were the special credentials he himself brought to the task. For "C. A. Vlieland, M. C. S." was well skilled, by his admission, in "modern scientific geography" that, again by his reckoning, enables, among other things, a better understanding of "race" characteristics. Thus, for example, he explains that the term "Malays" refers to a people who live in a "marine-equatorial climate" — a term that better captures the geography of the region, compared to the terms "tropical" and "monsoonal". In such a climate, the impenetrable forest forces people to live along the coastal regions. Here nature provides them with a bounty that "disinclines" them to labour; one should note, however, that Vlieland graciously submits that this has led many to mistakenly perceive the Malays as lazy!

Vlieland was also the first to come up with a "Manual of Enumeration Procedure for District Assistant Superintendents". This was used up to the last census conducted in 1947, and was one of the few documents in British colonial offices that were not destroyed by the Japanese during the Occupation. (The Japanese found in these records the ideal paper with which to make cigars). "M. V. del Tufo, M. A. Cantab., Malayan Civil Service, Barrister-at-Law of the Inner Temple" cited this as "a discovery of great value" to himself as the 1947 census superintendent.

All these experts were students of the "Other"; there was no need to call upon experts on the Europeans nor the Eurasians. Additionally, most of these experts' knowledge was of the Chinese

and Malay, but the fact of their expertise on one area was rather elastic. Pountney, the Chinese scholar, divided the peoples from Sumatra into groups that could be considered "Malays proper" and those that should be treated separately. He was also called upon to help in the classification of "Indians". Winstedt was grandly knowledgeable about aboriginal races, the Chinese and the Indians. Indeed, it did not take much to be an expert, as I have mentioned. Thus, the most important experts on the "Southern Indians" were European managers on rubber plantations, who from early on had "correctly" identified the "South Indians" as comprising Tamils, Telegus and Malayalis. Del Tufo was the only one of the census superintendents who realized in 1941 that he should prepare to learn more about the "Indian" category. To this end, he consulted "Mr. Y. M. Yates, ICS, Superintendent of the All India Census of 1940". But his work had to be postponed because of the Japanese Occupation of British Malaya. By 1946, political events in India signalled the weakness of the once invincible rule of the British Raj there, and this did not enable him to enforce the assistance of Yates. Nor did it enable him to obtain the census list of races in India. Del Tufo saw this as a disadvantage, but nevertheless assumed, again, that the knowledge of the "Southern Indians" as a race was sufficient from the European and other managers. Instead, he concentrated on expanding the list of races that comprised the "Northern Indian" component of "Indians", and noted his apparent satisfaction with the improvements he had done.

Searching for Places of Origin, Language Areas and Essential Characters

The experts' contribution to the racially different groups under each of the six classes, as noted, expanded the list contained within them. In the CMIO categorization that is in force today, the major headings condense differences, and even obliterate them. The major headings at that time, in British Malaya, were certainly not used in this way. The experts cited were consulted precisely to clarify these major headings. They were used, in effect, as references to places they had to "return" to, figuratively speaking, to legitimate whether particular persons belonged to this or that major racial group.

Clarifying "Europeans"

"Europeans", a shortened form of the older version "Europeans and Americans", guided the superintendents to countries within Europe and America. The European countries included Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Holland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Norway, Poland, Russia, Roumania, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey. Sweden was added to this list in the following census and thereafter. More "races" were distinguished when Great Britain became subdivided further into Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and, of course, England.

There was a recorded resistance from those who preferred the name "British" to these subdivisions. The superintendents, however, merely noted this as frustrating to them, and unlike the case with the other groups, did not furnish a list or use any procedure to enforce conformity. Indeed, the notion of resistance itself is interesting, for it implied that the entries were made wilfully and not out of ignorance. One superintendent remarked that the problem was that the British were too intelligent! Perhaps it was this assumption of intelligence that ensured that no mention of the need for or the lack of knowledge about the European peoples was ever made in the deliberations that marked the last three British censuses.

Clarifying "Malays"

With the Malay world, the focus of attention was on peninsular Malaya and the surrounding "Malay archipelago". The actual places within them that were named were the Malayan peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, Bawean, and Celebes. There were two distinct ways of identifying places within this bloc, with a corresponding shift in the races that were thus considered distinguishable.

First, in 1921, Nathan considered peninsular Malaya and parts of Sumatra as associated places, separated from other parts of Sumatra as well as other islands in the archipelago. The connection was to be found in his glib statement that "Sumatra is originally the home of the Peninsular Malay". Accordingly, he used the term "Malays proper" to refer to the peoples of Malaya, whom he saw as originally coming from the island of Sumatra, and the peoples of select districts in Sumatra, namely, "Sumatran Malays" from Jambi, Kampar,

Siak, Menangkabau and Rawa. In this way, all the other "allied races" could be named. Thus, Java is the original home of the Javanese; Benjermassin, a district in the south of Borneo accorded the Banjarese their separate place, although it was noted that they had "long emigrated to Sumatra" (Nathan 1921, p. 75); Bawean Island as the original home indicated the Boyanese, as did Celebes of the Bugis. Achinese, Korinchi and Mendeling, albeit traced to Sumatra as their original home, were considered separately. The Achinese were described as having a language of their own, and being at war "for independence against the Dutch" (Ibid., p. 72). Korinchi were simply noted to "have characteristics peculiar to themselves" (Ibid., p. 72). No mention was made as to what made the Mendeling distinctive.

Secondly, Vlieland drew a separate conclusion. Indeed, he renamed the heading "Malays" as "Malaysia" (Vlieland 1932, p. 75). This signalled a different way of looking at the bloc from which the races that comprised it were named. This "Malaysia", then, constituted the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago. To some extent, his "modern scientific geographer" mind would not let him ignore that the Indonesian archipelago was the property of the Netherlands Indies Government (Ibid., p. 76). With this division, indigeny in the Malay peninsula, which he attributed to the aborigines, classified them as one racial class (Ibid., p. 75). Those who were born in British Malaya, but not originally from outside Malaysia, were "Malays". Thus, a Sumatran Malay who was born in British Malaya was Malay; but her or his parents, if they were born in Sumatra, were classified as "Malaysian" (Ibid., p. 76). All the others — namely, Javanese, Sumatrans, Boyanese, Banjarese and Bugis — were separated from the "Malays" and came under the common classification "Malaysians".

Thirdly, and coming after Vlieland, del Tufo (1947) reconstructed the heading as "Malays and Other Malaysians". He treats British Malaya as a major component *per se*: Malays then must incorporate all peoples "of the soil". In this respect, the reference "Malay" is considerably broadened. It re-incorporates the claim of 1921, in which "Malays" were perceived as "to a large extent, descended from the East Coast of Sumatra from whom (and particularly the Malays from Menangkabau, Jambi, Rhio, Siak and Kampar) they are

ethnographically indistinguishable" (del Tufo 1949, p. 72). To this he added "aboriginal stocks" for their "affinity" with Malays, noting also that "settled aborigines" identified themselves as "Malay" (Ibid., p. 72). But the incorporation of British Malaya as part of the archipelago was clear in the term "*Other* Malaysians", who consisted of "Javanese", Boyanese", "Menangkabau", "Other Sumatran peoples" (for example, Batak, Lampongan, Nias, Banjarese and Bugis) (Ibid., p. 74).

Clarifying "Chinese"

Perhaps the most revealing case under the heading "Chinese" is the "tribe" "Straits-born", later renamed "Baba Chinese". The "Straits-born" appeared in all censuses from 1881 up to the 1921 census when they disappeared, possibly under the term "Hokkien". Based on the expertise of Shellabear, it was agreed that these distinct peoples were the result of a long association between China and the Malay Peninsula, dating as far back as the 1300s (Nathan 1921, p. 77). They comprised immigrants from Amoy, who married Malay women and made the peninsula their home. In this respect, they could well have been grouped under "Malay" or "Malaysian". Alternatively, they could have been incorporated under "Hokkien", as they appear to have been.

Three clear aspects for their presentation as a separate tribe clarify the way the factors of place and language enable a separate "race" to be named. First, the place of origin of the Baba Chinese was traced back to Amoy, despite the long years of settlement and cultural assimilation. Secondly, the lack of facility with Hokkien, and its replacement with "Baba Malay", described as "a wonderful pidgin", set them apart from other Hokkiens (Nathan 1921, p. 77). Thirdly, in contrast to all others in the category "Chinese", they stood out as "the best educated and wealthiest and most intelligent" (Ibid., p. 78).

China, as the place of origin, was broken down into specific provinces and districts, with specific reference to the Chinese population in British Malaya. This is not to say that the average "Chinese" was consulted as to who he really was. Indeed, the reverse was true. Over the years, there was an awareness that the Chinese, as has been mentioned, were not very co-operative with the census

enumerators. Furthermore, there was concern about the enumerators' ignorance of the Chinese. Unlike the Indians on estate plantations that were largely run by Europeans, the Chinese were not in any setting where a similar group of supposedly responsible persons could be asked to clarify their distinctions.

The availability of experts, particularly Pountney, "the Chinese scholar", changed this considerably. With him came first the understanding that the word "tribe" was problematic, an understanding that further explains the reliance on language for naming a people as a separate race. Thus, via Pountney, Nathan set a pattern that was largely emulated by his successors. He noted the mistaken use of "dialects" for what were "principal languages" and the dialects of these languages. The uniting factor was the "one uniform character employed in writing" (Nathan 1921, p. 78). It is arguable that it is this conception of language, now reduced to uniform script, that led to the heading "tribe" for those listed under "Chinese". Pountney also made it clear that to ascertain the constituent tribes it was necessary to trace a migrant back to a particular province within China. In sum, Nathan devised:

> Two particulars connected with the question of race ... the translation of the Chinese headings being "What district or Protectorate man are you?" and "When you were young what language did you speak in your family?" to act as checks on each other ... (and) jointly supply all that was necessary for the proper subdivision of the local Chinese population into its constituent tribes (Nathan 1921, p. 78).

Armed with this information on province and district, and language, Nathan compiled a new list of "tribes" under the category "Chinese", one in which old groups remained, but new ones were "discovered". Thus, the list was expanded from Cantonese, Hokkien, Hailam, Kheh, Straits-born (now Baba Chinese), and Teochew. It now included Hokchiu, Hokchia, Hin Hoa, Kwongsai, and Chinese from Shanghai, Beijing, and the more northern parts of China (Nathan 1921, pp. 77–85). It should be noted that Vlieland compiled these names with the apparent omission of "Hin Hoa" and "Baba Chinese", and "Hakka (Kheh)",

> a list of tribes recognized for census purposes, written euphonically in Malay and in English and also in Chinese character.... Many Chinese who cannot be said to be in any full sense literate, can recognise the written character denoting their "tribe" and the enumerator could often solve the difficulty of an individual's tribe by showing him the list, making him point to the characters representing his "tribe", and entering in the schedule the Malay or English equivalent written against it. (Vlieland 1932, p. 79).

This list was used again in the 1947 census, with the reincorporation of the Hin Hoa, now referred to as Henghwa.

A search through the recorded discussion pertinent to these names reveals, once again, the reference to places within China as a bloc, using languages and essential ideas about groups of persons drawn especially from the economic niche they occupied in British Malaya as the basis for dividing the "Chinese" in the manner just described. It should, however, be noted that del Tufo, writing, significantly, in the pre-war era, and at a time when the invincibility of the Empire was no longer taken-for-granted, bemoaned the essentialist notions that his predecessors had accepted unquestioningly. Thus, he wrote:

> It has been the fashion, since Mr. Nathan set it in 1921, to dilate upon the distribution of the several tribes throughout Malaya and the predilections and aptitudes for this way of life or that which largely determine their distribution. Quite apart, however, from the fact that the writer lays claim to no specialist knowledge of the Chinese he feels that it is pointless to dogmatise upon social and occupational habits, originally brought from China, which are in a process of constant modifications by long residence in Malaya and ...which... owe much to the accidents of history.... (del Tufo 1949, p. 297).

Even so, del Tufo went on to make statements about the occupational preferences of the different Chinese "tribes" in ways reminiscent of his predecessors. In any case, the list that had been compiled was used by superintendents who were not afraid of their dogmatic notions.

Hokkien and Cantonese applied "in local usage" to inhabitants of "certain areas only" of Kwangtung, Fukkien (Hokkien), and Kwongsai Provinces. "Strictly" everyone from these three areas should have been named "Hokkien" or "Cantonese" (Vlieland 1932, p. 78).

Khehs or Hakkas were not traceable to any one part of these different provinces but were rather distributed over several of them: in any case, they are "a race apart", with "their own language and characteristics" (Vlieland 1932, p. 78). These Roman Catholic planters (Nathan 1921, p. 80), "the most rural inclined of all the tribes" were dominant, together with the Cantonese, in tin-mining (del Tufo 1949, p. 78).

The Cantonese were admired for their greater versatility: they could participate in agriculture, urban life and tin-mining. There was in fact a "predilection, if they have one, for mining" (Vlieland 1932, p. 80; and del Tufo 1949, p. 76). Cantonese women were singled out for the observation that the percentage of women in this tribe was "considerably higher than that of any other Chinese tribe, (which) is due in some measure to the fact that practically all the Chinese prostitutes are Cantonese" (Nathan 1921, p. 80).

The Hailamese were from the island of Hainan, which is part of the province of Kwangtung, but their language was "very different" from the Cantonese and their "characteristics" set them apart (Vlieland 1932, p. 78). They were mainly engaged as domestic servants, particularly in European households, or engaged in shopkeeping, when they lived in the towns (Nathan 1921, p. 84; and del Tufo 1949, p. 77).

The Hokchiu, Hokchia and Hin Hoa (later Henghwa) were really "branches of Hokkiens" (Nathan 1921, p. 79). However, the Hokchiu were specifically associated with Fuchow, the capital of Fukien, and the Hin Hoa were from the districts of Fukien (Vlieland 1932, p. 78). The Hokkien *per se* were also from Fukien. The separation could have been in terms of specific places of origin within China and the different occupational niches.

It was noted that the Hokchiu and Hokchia were rickshaw-pullers (Nathan 1921, p. 78) while the Hokkien in the towns were shopkeepers and traders (Ibid., p. 79; and Vlieland 1932, p. 80) — indeed they had a "genius for trade and shopkeeping" (del Tufo 1949, p. 76). The Hokkien were also considered to have a "tendency to permanent settlement", as the case of "Baba ... originally of Hokkien extraction" evidences (Vlieland 1932, p. 80).

The Kwongsai were distinguished in terms of place, having come from the province between Canton and Yunnan (Nathan 1921, p. 84). The Chinese from the Northern Province were also placed by location of origin, as understood in these censuses: they were described as being chiefly tailors, washermen, dealers in silks and skins (Nathan 1921, p. 85).

Clarifying "Indians"

> The correct division of the Indian population into its constituent races is, as it has been on previous occasions, a matter of no little difficulty. This appears to be mainly because the racial divisions are not understood locally. To the average Malay or Chinese enumerators then, every person of Indian nationality falls into one of two classes, Kling or Bengali (Nathan 1921, p. 85).

Nathan's lament underlines a lack of scholars whose expertise on "Indians" could be called upon. Certainly, Pountney provided some assistance, as did Winstedt, but these men were described as experts on Chinese, and on Chinese and Indians in British Malaya, respectively. In this case, however, to name a race involved tracing the peoples back to British India. Unlike the Chinese situation, where references to protectorates could and were made, the references to British India did not correspond to the map that the British had in mind. As colonial rulers, the latter's map referred to names they had compiled for the land-mass they were ruling. Thus, as Vlieland (1932, p. 84) said,

> It is of little use to instruct an English-speaking enumerator to ask an Indian what "Province" he comes from or instruct a Malay enumerator to enter "Madras, Panjab dan sa bagai nya" (Madras, Punjab, and etc.) in the birthplace and "bangsa" (race) in the race column. As to the birthplace, the result of asking (say) an Indian from the United Provinces where he was born is highly unlikely to be the appearance in the schedule of a recognisable equivalent of "United Provinces". The entry may be a village name, a district name or an actual error, but is still more likely to be an unrecognisable jumble of Roman or Arabic letters, which constitute the enumerator's attempt at representation of a half caught wholly unfamiliar sound. As to race, most Asiatics in Malaya, and certainly the vast majority of those available as enumerators, only recognise two classes of Indians — i.e. "Klings" or Southern Indians of whom the Tamil is taken as a type, and "Bengalis" including all

> others. This, in spite of the fact that the Bengali proper is rare in Malaya, and there seems no good reason for classing (say) natives of Calcutta with Punjabis who are numerous in Malaya, and differ markedly in appearance and characteristics from the true Bengali. Even a native of the United Provinces, an Afghan or a Punjabi, if he has been any length of time in Malaya, is as likely as not to describe himself as a "Bengali" in speaking to a Malay enumerator; if on the other hand, he tries to give us what we want, the enumerator will generally write down, in despair, something quite unintelligible, or fall back on the one term he knows — i.e. "Bengali". (Vlieland 1932, p. 84.)

Thus, the lack of access to a place-name within the bloc constituted by the subcontinent of India created a problem that was difficult to overcome. There was an apparent reference to places as markets used by the Indians themselves; but such places did not fit in with the map of British India — they were thus not "what we want". It will be recalled that, to get what they wanted in the Chinese case, the question "what Protectorate man are you" was devised. This was tied to a list that involved euphonic sounds in Malay and English; and in characters distinguishable to the Chinese. This was simplified by the uniform script that the Chinese, regardless of language, used. The "Indian" case was not so easily resolved. What kind of list could be developed that could be used by the Malay or Chinese enumerator for the "Indians"? The former recognized only two main names, and the latter spoke languages that did not involve a common script. Most of all, there was a lack of real expertise, from among the White races, which compounded the problem.

The lack of expertise meant that the only procedure used to elicit a correct answer was the general statement, "Enter the province of birth of natives of India". There was also the instruction, "Enter the race as English, French, Tamil, etc." (Vlieland 1932, p. 83). These instructions were issued in the 1921 census. Consequently, the following race names emerged: Tamil, Telegu, Malayalee (also collectively referred to as "South Indian"); Punjabi (Sikh and Other Punjabi); Bengali; Hindustani, referred to as "a somewhat vague term"; Pathan, Gujerati, Maharatta, Burmese, and Gurkha.

The correlation assumed to exist between the White races and their knowledge of other races is markedly clear in the ease with

which the problem was solved for the whole of South India. Thus, from 1921 the "kindred races" from South India were named as "Tamil", "Telegu" and "Malayalee". This compilation of race names was based on the confidence given to "(European) managers of estates who could generally be relied upon to classify them satisfactorily" (Vlieland 1932, p. 83).[7]

Indeed, so definite was the legitimacy given to their knowledge that no effort was made to question these race names in subsequent censuses. This was so even when the geographer in Vlieland enabled him to further differentiate according to place. Thus, Vlieland was the only superintendent to see the place "South India" as having more than racial space within it. Tamils were Madrasis, signalling here the Madras presidency. Telegus "originally came from the hill country of the Eastern Ghats", Malayalee were located in their "racial home ... the Western or Malabar coast" (Vlieland 1932, pp. 82–86). Vlieland also pointed out that immigrants from Coorg, Mysore and Travancore were variously classified as Tamil, Telegu and Malayalee. But, as with Nathan, the trust in the enumerators involved in entering these races in the schedule and, the recognition given to South India as a more relevant place of focus, ensured that this use of the three races to name all South Indians was "tolerably (acceptable)" (Ibid., p. 82).

The problem was with the Indians from the north. How were they to be racially identified when the people themselves made errors in giving proper answers? To compound matters, there was the problem of the ignorance of enumerators who failed to record those proper answers that may have appeared. Certainly, Nathan's device clarified important differences that should be identified. However, the basis for division was not clear enough. Places and spaces were still too vague, still traced through the voices of enumerators and the people themselves without the intervention of proper expertise.

Vlieland's answer was, as in the Chinese case, to devise two particular questions that he believed would provide him with proper place names from which his work could proceed:

> Now while it is useless to question the average northern Indian in English as to his "race" or the "State", "Province", "Presidency" or

> "District" in which he was born, or in Malay by any of the nearest equivalents of these terms (many of which are not in common use) there are two words which are easily mastered by either a Malay or English speaking enumerator, and have a definite meaning for the average northern Indian — they are *"Zillah"* (approximately = district) and *"Suba"* (approximately = Province). If we could get these data regarding each individual with certainty, a sound classification could be produced (Vlieland 1932, p. 84).

Unlike the Chinese case, Vlieland found it too difficult to construct a list that the enumerators could use — a list by which a point of the finger could provide the right answer with little room for mistakes either by the householder or the enumerator. The Chinese case involved one script; the Indian case involved just too many "various vernaculars" (Vlieland 1932, p. 84).

Thus, there was still need for expertise — the "invaluable" advice and assistance of the Inspector General of Police of the Straits Settlements, the police force being one major niche towards which some North Indians gravitated. To this, Vlieland added his geographical map of North India. Hence, the name "Punjab, etc." which identified Northwest India as an area within which were located the Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan; "United Provinces" which identified people from there; "Burmese" which maintained the distinctiveness of people from the whole of Burma; "Bengal, etc." which named the people originating from Eastern Bengal and Assam; "Bombay, etc." which included people from Sind, Bihar and Orissa; "Nepal" which named the "Nepalese"; while the rest were neatly swept into the practical "Other and Unidentified" (Vlieland 1932, p. 83).

Language was clearly not used as a marker to differentiate those races under the category "Indian". Vlieland especially, but also his predecessor, legitimated the different groups in this category with reference to the distinct economic niches which they occupied in British Malaya.

The Tamils, Telegus and Malayalees were seen as originating from the "great Tamil emigration port — Negapatam (Negapatnam)" (Nathan 1921, p. 87). The majority of these peoples worked in rubber estates, and the labour for this was importantly supplied by "the

chief Tamil recruiting centers in Madras" (Nathan 1921, p. 88). Vlieland also acknowledged that their presence in Singapore at the time of the 1931 census was due to the demand for labour in the construction of the Naval Base and general municipal and development work (Vlieland 1932, p. 86).

For Nathan (1921, p. 89), the Punjabis and Sikhs were recognized as occupying military and semi-military jobs, as well as agricultural work, and bullock cart driving. The Bengalis were seen to be employed as clerks, artisans and shopkeepers; the Pathans were seen to be watchmen, bullock cart drivers, or in the police force. There was no word on the occupational niches of the Maharattas, Burmese and Gurkhas.

Vlieland (1932, p. 86) appears to have used the same economic spaces but rearranged them. "North Westerners", who included the Punjabis and Sikhs of Nathan's class, were seen to form a "considerable proportion in the Police Forces. Apart from this they were also extensively employed as watchmen". The group also tended to combine money lending with their other pursuits. The "principal avocation" of peoples listed as "United Provinces" was "milk selling and dealing in bread and other foodstuffs" (Vlieland 1932, p. 86). The "Burmese", he clarified, made up an entire regiment in Taiping.

Despite Vlieland's recorded satisfaction with the new list of groups identified under "Indians", del Tufo was appalled by what he saw as a purely geographical mode of making up this list. His basis for contention in this respect was the use of yet another expert, Mr. M. W. Yates, ICS, Superintendent of the All India Census of 1940.

Yates had devised "lists of *zillahs* and *riasats* as well as principal communities known to emigrate to Malaya". These lists were "printed in phonetic English and Malay as well as in the vernacular script in commonest use in the locality from which each group came... in much the same ways as the lists of Chinese tribes". Del Tufo was confident that with this list he could "secure a reasonably precise classification of Indian race-groups and a more ambitious classification of Indian birthplaces" (del Tufo 1949, p. 77). But del Tufo had to relinquish his plans as events of 1940 quickly overtook him. By 1942 the Japanese had occupied British Malaya. He returned to his

work on the census in 1947, after the war. The political events in post-war British India forced him to rely on his own knowledge, "which concerning all but the Southern Indians is trivial" (del Tufo 1949, p. 77).

Again, the assumption of the superiority and sufficiency of knowledge of the South Indians compared to that of the North Indians ensured that only the latter group was screened. But del Tufo poured scorn on Vlieland's presumption of expertise. His predecessor, as was just noted, had placed a great deal of satisfaction in the use of the terms *zillah* and *suba*, albeit without actual lists of these. Accordingly, he claimed that he had got more important information by which the North Indians were duly differentiated. Del Tufo insisted that Vlieland's knowledge was worthless. It did not make such a list available. He was also particularly unimpressed by the collections of peoples and related names such as "United Provinces", which merely reduced race/community to geography.

He preferred the expertise of Nathan instead, and reverting to the earlier census, drafted a list "of principal communities (that) was given to enumerators who were directed to ascertain which of them the person enumerated belonged" (del Tofu 1949, p. 77). This list

> as re-drafted originally comprised Bengalis, Dogras, Gujeratis, Maharattis, Marwaris, Parsis, Pathans, Punjabis, Rajputs, Sindhis, and "Other Northern Indians", but at a later date Dogras, whose numbers here are in any case very small, were replaced by the Sikhs.... (del Tufo 1949, p. 77)

Yet the period after the Japanese Occupation of Singapore was a crucial time in British Malayan history. During the Occupation, the Japanese had ruled the country harshly. What kinds of communities and related identities and affiliations were forged? Additionally, the harsh treatment of the Chinese was particularly remembered and recorded, in part because of the long-standing enmity between China and Japan.

At the same time, the invincibility of the British Raj in India was clearly shaken, to say the least. Events in India, shaped by the aftermath of colonialism, were the context for newly emergent ethnic identities and affiliations. Indeed, del Tufo was furnished with ample

proof of this in many of the entries in which the enumerated, as he called them, failed to order their entries against the list he had supplied. In its place were entries such as "Indian", "Pakistani" and "Dravidian" (del Tufo 1949, pp. 78–79). For del Tufo, these were a bother, a failure even, as they had to be swept under the cover of "Other and Indeterminate" when they should have fitted in neatly with his so painstakingly worked out orientalist scheme.

The Disciplinary Potency of Race Names

By now it should be clear that two sets of race names had been created. First, each of the six categories provided the means by which an expanded list of race names was drawn. In this respect, especially in comparison with the CMIO of today, they comprised elaborated race names. It must be stressed, however, that these names were themselves selected and narrowed ethnicities. Each person was assigned one racial name. This ignored the multiplicity of identities and affiliations a single person could have in a plural society, even in the course of a single day.

Secondly, this first list was, as shown, drawn up according to six names that mainly identified blocs of places on a global map. These six place names were also used as highly condensed race names.

Thus, "Malays", "Buginese", "Baweanese" and so forth signalled different races, distinct from each other. Their grouping under "Malays" potentially homogenized them. In this homogenization, they all shared place and space within the bloc "Peninsular Malaya and the surrounding archipelago". Simultaneously, the "Malays" as a particular race comprised the numerical bulk in this group. Solely on the basis of size, the word "Malays" became the condensed race name for all the others from this area of the world.

In the case of the "Chinese", the elaborated race names signified differences between them. Again, "Chinese" was used as a means to homogenize all the variants therein. In this respect, too, the bloc "China" is the unifying term. The essential character draws from the Hokkien genius for trade and shopkeeping, now extended to "Chinese" generally. The language factor added strength to the valid use of the highly condensed name of "Chinese". Different languages,

even when recognized as such, retain the notion of being different dialects — a notion that draws strength from a common recognizable script. This quality of the language is not at all like "our" understanding of languages.

In addition, the reality of ethnic tensions and conflicts between Hokkiens, Cantonese, and so forth had been recognized as disastrous for political disciplining. Since the 1900s, reform and revolutionary movements in China had worked to construct similarities by which the differences could be effaced or at least attenuated. Yet at the ground level these differences were crucial: the first racial riots in Singapore were precisely riots between the various "Chinese tribes". Allegiance to "Chinese" as an identity was particularly valuable as a means of constructing a political base. Politicians like Sun Yat Sen understood that their distinct differences could reduce the kind of mass support they could otherwise work towards, without which, in Sun Yat Sen's case for instance, the support would be fragmented to merely a Cantonese base. Lee Kuan Yew's Hokkien/Baba Chinese background, added to his Western-educated background, would have reduced his base considerably if the "Chinese" distinctions were played up over and above the condensed and unifying version of "Chinese".

Concerning the "Indians", despite this condensed name, a strain is evinced and retained till today. Marked by Britain's own social map of India, even the condensed version of "Indian" marked a large labouring pool of South Indians from a smaller, especially prominent by its presence as policing assistants to the British in Malaya, pool of army personnel and policemen from North India. This division marked the Indian subcontinent as almost two distinctive places of origin.

Of the two sets of race names, the more condensed list is mostly used today. At this point, a short summary of the arguments in relation to their further development would be useful.

It should be clear by now that race names are special categories designed from the perspective of an élite "Us" to differentiate, analyse and compare "the Others" with the Western self, and "the Others" among themselves. In this way, race names tame everyday life ethnicities. In everyday life usage, ethnicities — identities and

affiliations that claim their bases in primodialities — can be multiple, fluid social phenomena. They partition but do not enclose as rigidly as race names attempt to do. Race names are thus an "apparatus of knowledge" (Foucault 1979, p. 126), applied to multiple identities. Consequently, the multiplicity is ranked and/or erased. The ranked ethnic identities are enclosed into a single class, with their fluid meanings condensed into specific items and sharper details that enhance disciplinary work through them. "Discipline", as Foucault states, "is a political anatomy of detail" (1979, p. 139).

With respect to this, let us now examine the disciplinary potency of the condensed race names that continue from the details they present/specify, namely, the detail of "origin"; the detail of "contribution"; the detail of "essential characteristics" (which co-exist with the vagueness of customary differences); and the detail of language. These details are imbued with meanings, which are important because of "the hold (they) provide for the power that wishes to seize it" (Foucault 1979, p. 140).

The Detail of Origin

"Origin" simultaneously locates peoples in blocs and places within these blocs. By this detail, the population of British Malaya was subdivided into those whose home was originally here and those who came as sojourners or permanent settlers. As British Malaya was a place located in the bloc "Malayan Peninsula and the archipelago", two original peoples were nameable:

First, if the peninsula proper was used as the place of origin, then the only original people were the "aboriginal races". If the peninsula was treated within the bloc it was located in, the "original people" included immigrants from selected districts of Sumatra, or the (Sumatran) Malays, with the all important bracket around Sumatra. Permanent settlers were "of the soil" in this way only by way of their origin from at least within the bloc, as the globe was divided according to British interests.

Origin did not, however, signify rightful occupation of all spaces within British Malaya. Correspondent to the detail of origin was the notion of "indigenous spaces". Aborigines were enclosed within the forested interiors of the peninsula proper, while Malays were placed

along the coastal and riverine regions, where they fished and planted rice for their consumption.

In this way, the map of the area left a great variety of unoccupied spaces — imaginary and physically real. European, or British, appropriation of place did not displace. Indigenous peoples had their indigenous spaces. The British penetrated virginal spaces and enhanced their meaningfulness and value by their superior foresight and administrative skill. Conversely, indigenous peoples did not have the requisite qualities to enable optimal use of a place.

The Detail of Contribution

Optimal use of British Malaya required the rule of the superior White races. These Whites, mainly men, were epitomized in individuals like Stamford Raffles: with imagination and courage they harnessed superior knowledge and reconstructed dormant places into vibrant spaces. Thus, in contemporary Singapore, Raffles remains a figure not of a colonial past that we would critique, but a man to whom we owe our present circumstances.

The vision of the British, however, required the labour of those who could be so yoked. Again, race provided the means. Chinese and Indians, arriving from very difference blocs of origin, opened up new, useful spaces: they developed, they modernized; in a word, they were economically productive. Of the two, the Chinese were singled out as exceptional in their contribution. In part, the Indian contribution was seen as enclosed in the rubber plantations that lay outside the domain of Singapore *per se*. Furthermore, while their labour was acknowledged, the British admiration for the Chinese focused on the trading activities of the Hokkiens in particular. The condensed "Chinese" race name thus obliterated not only differences within the groups that constituted it. At the same time, the different races were ranked in a fairly clear order of contribution: the Chinese were way ahead of the others, particularly the Malay peasant who was seen as not really having laboured, given the bounty of a "marine-equatorial" climate.

The notions pertinent to "origin" and "contribution" present different legitimations concerning the presence of different peoples in different spaces — legitimations that must be renegotiated as the

larger historical context shifts British Malaya as colonial property to a nationalist place. But to whom should the colonial property be transferred?

The Tension Between "Origin" and "Contribution"

In nationalism, "origin" is used to reclaim spaces that are seen to have been wrongfully appropriated, rightfully owned by an indigenous "Us". Where the British once harnessed a place in which indigenous spaces continued beside the new spaces they developed, these new spaces are now seen as exploitative, of having denuded and appropriated indigenous spaces. The myth of "contribution" is laid bare. But a twofold orientation arises. The British are clearly distinguished as the appropriators and must be sent home. The non-European races, particularly those condensed as "Chinese" and "Indian", were not so easily replaced in their original countries. At one level, there is the commonality of being yoked to the Occident. At another level, there is the experience of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, through which a sense of community may well have been forged. This needs further exploration.

In sum, while the British were relatively easily displaced out of the emerging nation, and would in time become placed with the "Others", the Chinese and Indians, and in the Singapore context, the Chinese in particular, posed a problem, precisely because they received notions of "Us" and "Them", and, relatedly, "origin" and "contribution".

The tension then between the right to space via origin and the right to space via contribution is a tension couched in racial terms, even if implicitly. Contribution relates to work that only the "outsiders" did to begin the process of development and modernization. This work is given new lease in the very items that arise in the conceptualization of "nation" in third-wave nationalising countries. Thus, nationalism buys into the image of the "Other" as requiring modernization for a modern economy. The "Other" stares at itself via a borrowed mirror.

In this borrowed mirror, two spaces are imagined: indigenous/traditional spaces within which are prominently located the original peoples of the place; and useful/modernized spaces, within which are the immigrant populations, namely, the "Chinese".

A word about origin and immigrant is necessary. The "Baba Chinese" and "Jawi Pekan" afford a glimpse into the negotiability of origin. Their homeland certainly is Malaya itself. The perpetuation of these communities required in-migration. Back in China and India, these communities could fairly easily have been swallowed up and re-assimilated, or re-asserted themselves, for instance, as a Hokkien community and a Tamil community, respectively. The strict and enclosed meaning given to origin denies tracing place and space in terms of actual birth-place. Thus, in my terms, my birth-place, my homeland, my origins are Singapore. The procedures by which I am racially classified, even today, trace my origins to India. In all seriousness, it could of course go beyond time and place. It has me locked to one single place in a map designed in colonial times. In an important sense, this ensures my status as a sojourner: there is the potential uneasiness as to where home really is. In this respect, the door to emigration from Singapore is always left open to some extent among sufficient numbers of Singaporeans to cause governmental concern.

This uneasiness also perpetuates an uneasy alliance with place, despite the long generational presence of the various "races" in Singapore. This is clarified in a number of instances, not least of which is the rewriting of Singapore history by which the myth that Raffles landed on a sparse island, waiting to be occupied, is perpetuated. So is the need to retain the invisibility of the contribution of the Malay peasant to the region's economy even at the time of British rule. Additionally, there is the maintenance of the notion of the Malay in Singapore, particularly as an immigrant, including immigrants from the Peninsula, thus divorcing the historical links by which Singapore is inextricably tied to the land north of it. Simultaneously, indigeny among Malays, which remains difficult to erase completely, is associated with their long-standing place in the Peninsula and on the island (remembering the few fishermen Raffles found here in 1819). Accordingly, much work has been done to establish that the Chinese have had as long-standing a presence in the island: the artifacts that archaeological work in Fort Canning has thrown up have been used as proof of this.

Thus, instead of redrafting the question of who "We" are in our terms, we have stayed too close to significant items in the

orientalist texts. This perpetuates a tension that must be disciplined. If origin remains an issue of legitimation, however implicitly, then contribution must be given as much, if not greater, legitimation than ever before. At the same time, if origin is an issue, then it too must be dealt with, given its space to perpetuate itself.

Disciplining Differences: Correcting Racial Flaws, Enhancing Race-ness

Paradoxically, the promise of nationhood is conjoined to the presence of and the further development of those spaces that were made possible by the efforts of precisely those who did not originate from within the larger place. This marks an essential character flaw in the indigenous peoples: thus, we still have the image of the economically backward Malay in sharp contrast to the economically forward Chinese. This image is not restricted to the island, but affects the style of perceiving the region and thereby regional economics too. At this time, however, my comments will be confined to the island of Singapore *per se*.

The problem in racial terms then is that if economic growth is a nation-building desideratum, the "economic genius" of the Chinese is to be encouraged and given the space to grow. At the same time, the economic backwardness of the Malays must be corrected, via education and changes in orientation. Thus, the underdevelopment of the "Malays" under a colonial economy is both bracketed and perpetuated to some extent, in no small part because racially inherent characteristics can be corrected only so far.

More crucially, the orientalism that undergirds economics as a science and evaluative knowledge is disguised. The question as to what kind of economics we want, indeed what kind of economics we have inherited, never arises. Different orientations to production and consumption may not be stated, or when stated they take on the guise of economic irrationality rather than ethnic difference. In some ways, these irrationalities, when associated with particular ethnic groups, further underscore racial flaws that are in need of correction and therefore disciplining. Indeed, they also signal a continued failure to contribute.

Simultaneously, the continued exclusion of certain races from certain spaces arises from the perceived flaws inherent in a race.

These flaws, because they are racial in nature can never be fully corrected. This acceptance of flaws in the race require the peoples so named to correct them and thus, the mechanism of discipline is achieved. For the races themselves who want to participate in the economy, and judge their performance as a collective along economic dimensions, and failing to see in these judgments the fact of "Us" examining "Them", they perpetuate their need for policing so that they can better develop as a people.

To sum up, orientation to a particular ideology of production and consumption is ethnically differentiable: class and ethnic perspectives overlap in an important sense, but class overrides the omnipresence of racial meanings that underlie it. The ideology of production and consumption is thus divorced from its orientalist texts/roots: it is a human desideratum, and therefore supposedly devoid of its male and ethnic biases. Thus, a different orientation to production and consumption and so productivity as a measure of worthiness is dismissed as traditionalistic — a presentation of a self that will not adapt to modern times.

Thus, for instance, Islamic revivalism in Singapore arose as one counterpoint to an economics that was considered to be alien and alienating, contemporary economics having its roots too in colonization and then modernization. In this revival, the dominance given to the valuation of individuals and collectives in economic terms was questioned. Instead of enabling discourse about the material versus the spiritual, the quantitative versus the qualitative, these questions became a mark of Islamic fundamentalism — that is, economic irrationalities.[8]

In this sense, in implicit and explicit political and social discourse, a collective that opposes production and consumption ideology in whatever way is marked out as a trapped race: work must be done to liberate them from economic irrationality. The different ethnic orientations to a particular economic paradigm must be homogenized. At this level, the disciplinary work involves mitigating racial characteristics, as against enhancing them.

Mitigating the harshness of such disciplinary work is more gratifying as a source of positive qualifications, as knowledge if accessed would empower individuals. Here, attention is directed

towards the loss of culture through modernization and the related loss of self — a racial self. Accordingly, race is in this sense to be protected. Protection involves disciplinary work by individuals.

Each individual is part of a collective but each individual must be on constant guard against losing his or her place in the collective. The accomplishment of work in this direction begins with the reference to the detail of language. All races in Singapore have an associated official mother tongue, such as "Chinese" which is used synonymously with "Mandarin", Malay, or Tamil. English is, in this respect, not a mother-tongue language. This meaning of "mother tongue" is inextricably linked to a place of origin. Regardless of whether a person first learnt to speak another language, or the person speaks and identifies with the languages he/she knows, that person is open to being judged with reference to her/his facility in a Beijing dialect of Mandarin, or a standardized Malay that is somewhat removed from everyday life Malay, or a similar standardized Tamil, which are supposed to correspond to her/his mother tongue as "Chinese", "Malay" or "Indian" respectively.

As with the official accomplishment of "race", it is difficult for the average Singaporean to escape the fact of her/his mother tongue. Every schooling child must offer the mother tongue language in school. This formulation in the school programme affects home life considerably. Every family in Singapore who has a school-going child is thus forced to some extent to pay attention to the reality of a state-defined mother tongue.

The meaning of the mother tongue is not just language. Language is the vehicle by which one knows one's roots, one's culture — that is, language measures a person's closeness to her/his race. In an important sense, language is like the notion of racial blood. Just as racial blood can be watered down by "interracial" marriages, language can be watered down by not learning it and thus being able to speak only other languages.

In this respect, the English language is a dominant language. This dominance is seen to be necessitated by economic considerations — in the same sense in which I have just noted, that is, the economy in turn being explicated as separate from racial considerations. But if the language of English is not counterbalanced by a mother tongue

language, then the person has lost his or her racial self — the person has become "Westernized". The mother tongue, then, trains a person to be of her or his race:

> The chief function of the disciplinary power is to train ... in order to levy and select all the more. It does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it ... makes individuals ... which functions as a calculated but permanent economy (Foucault 1979, p. 170).

This individualization is effectively achieved in that while race places one in an exclusive group, each person in a race group has varying degrees of race-ness. A Chinese, a Malay and an Indian are differentiated by the fact of "origin" in the sense already described. The same Chinese, Malay and Indian can also be observed along a continuum of Chinese-ness, Malay-ness and Indian-ness. This is measured by his or her facility in her or his mother tongue language. In this respect, race is almost always available for hierarchical observation. These are the key instruments by which successful disciplinary power is reproduced (Foucault 1979, p. 170).

Thus, a person can be asked about, if not asked to speak in, the mother tongue in a myriad of settings. The school is the most obvious. Children who are "Chinese", "Malay" or "Indian" must study the official mother tongue. Consequently, children who are studying Mandarin, Malay or Tamil but are not perceived to be Chinese, Malay or Indian can be painfully excluded by both the "race" group whose mother tongue language they study, and the "race" group whom they are supposed to singularly belong. The policing is spread out from the state, the Ministry of Education, the teachers and so forth, down to the students.

In the school setting, furthermore, there are trained mother tongue language teachers to supervise the learning of the language. The supervision includes continuous assessments that culminate in three term-end examinations, instituted since 1969. Outside school, at any time, one can be confronted by the lack of communicative competence in one's mother tongue language — in a taxi, by one's neighbour, when out shopping, when applying for a flat. At any

time during a day, a person can encounter another who feels he/she has the right to question your facility in your mother tongue language, and praise, exhort or shame you as the case may be. As one then sixteen-year-old schoolgirl put it:

> My neighbours, once we were just talking about this second language. He asked me what was mine and I said Malay. Then he said, "But you can speak Tamil at home, can't you?". And then I said, "No". And I felt so ashamed and he asked me, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself if you can't speak your mother tongue." And then I felt quite bitter towards my parents for giving me Malay when I was an Indian (as quoted in PuruShotam 1988, p. 217).

If race encloses mother tongue languages, then it furthers the reproduction of spaces for different peoples. As I have noted elsewhere, acceptance of Mandarin as the proprietary language of ethnic Chinese excludes access to it by both the "owners" of the language and those who share a sense that it is not "their" language. At the same time, however, economic opportunities via Mandarin are increasing considerably, not just because of the move towards capitalism in China today, but even within Singapore. Bilingualism has become an important aspect of employability. Not surprisingly, given the dominance of the Chinese in Singapore, not all English–mother tongue language combinations are equal. It is English-Mandarin that is the most functional combination of all (PuruShotam 1989, p. 512).

Conclusion: Antidote to Disciplined Difference

Until I was twenty-one years of age, I had never been to India. Yet my country and my people had categorized me as "Indian". It was a categorization that I did not think much about as I was growing up. There are several reasons why I did not: the discipline of race then was not as effective as it is today. I had no cultural resources to term myself by an enclosing race name and a mother tongue to be measured by. Indeed, my mother's cultural resources were those that precisely avoided tight definitions of ethnicity, language and value systems. For instance, recognizing that I was a child of a larger world than my family, she sent me to an English medium school, learned and passed on "bazaar" Malay as a necessary means

of conversation in multicultural Singapore, provided us with some knowledge of Tamil, albeit insisting on the rule of Telegu at home as our "family" tongue. We were also taken to a variety of temples (Hindu, Chinese, Buddhist) and churches (Protestant and Catholic), places which were useful for teaching us values, including stories of her favourite deity Lord Krishna, and visits to the grotesque plaster-of-Paris hell of Chinese mythology, the Haw Par Villa.

Today, to teach my child the same multicultural values I have had to refuse to let him learn Tamil: it is a mark of enclosure in the "Indian" "race". I have had to agree not to let him learn Mandarin as he became a museum piece in his pre-school for his initial enthusiasm and quick learning of it. I have had to avoid sending him to schools run according to the Ministry of Education's specifications, in which "race" and "mother tongue" are essential elements. I use my other cultural resources to avoid the frames: some of them are special to myself and my family, like my husband's American citizenship, and my sociological interest in ethnicity. I am not necessarily unique. Disciplining differences is a real aspect of life in Singapore, but passive acceptance of it, regardless of the commonly held image of Singaporeans — an image, again, of "The Other" without recourse to their own narratives — is not. There are myriad ways of resisting the discipline — turning it on itself in ways that come back to crack the frames that try to tailor discourse to the state's formulation of it. That too derives from the history of race naming and the consequences of received knowledge that some of us are struggling, seriously, against. I must conclude by noting that there is another face to this discipline: anti-discipline,[9] that needs to be worked out too.

Notes

1. I have examined this in a separate unpublished paper, written in 1976, and titled "The Lady Malay: An Exploration of a Stereotype from the Perspectives of the Stereotyped". At that time there was no language of post-colonialism. I chose the topic after a gut level reaction to an "expatriate" professor from then West Germany, who taught us Development Sociology. In a discussion on the economic history of the region, he referred to the Malays' lack of economic initiative, somewhat in the frames of the infamous need-to-achieve thesis of McClelland that was in favour then. According to this, some groups of people lacked the N-Ach, as he called it, that blocked their route to development. When I challenged him to his perspective on the Malays, I was asked to examine the issue in my term paper. After writing the paper I presented it at a seminar at which my teachers were present: the main reaction was one of disbelief that, seen from the perspective of the Malays, entering the so-called modern economy would have been akin to ambitiously pursuing downward mobility. I found that no attention was given to my data or my methodology: these I could well have defended. There was only reference to the sub-text that "we all know that the Malays were less economically motivated; even lazy."
2. The first of these was conducted in 1871. Thereafter, decennial censuses were taken until 1931. This flow was apparently disrupted by the war and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45). In 1947, two years after the Japanese surrendered to the British, another census was conducted. Their last census of 1957 is not considered here as its categorization and analysis was left for an independent Singapore to do.
3. Except in 1947, when "few women were used, only men were employed as census enumerators."
4. "Return of the population of the Straits Settlements, 2nd April 1871", in *Straits Settlements Census Reports and Returns 1871*, p. 7.
5. Ibid., p. 7.
6. Ibid.
7. See Vlieland (1932, p. 83). Vlieland's assessment mirrored his predecessors' almost word for word. Thus, Nathan wrote: "With regard to the Southern Indians far less trouble was experienced as the bulk of Tamils, Telegus and Malayalis, being employed on estates under European or other responsible management were enumerated by the managers and correctly returned" (1921, p. 86).
8. See, for instance, Mariam Mohd. Ali (1993).
9. See de Certeau (1984).

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chapter four

ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND ERASURE
Chinese Indonesians in Public Culture

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Ethnicity and nationality have been irrevocably problematized in the contemporary social sciences and in the relatively new area of cultural studies. As Joel S. Kahn indicates in his introduction to this volume, a variety of "constructionist" perspectives articulate the problems of these modern subject identities. While adopting some of these "constructionist" insights, I will retain some degree of empiricism in discussing the changing political significance of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia. Obviously, a constructionist theorist could offer somewhat different insights than those presented here. My limited purpose is to show that ethnicity is already overtly problematic (fragmented, ambiguous, unstable) in the practical experience of post-colonial subjects, to whom the elegantly intellectual problematizing of ethnicity as a concept is unheard of. Even among Indonesia's academic élite, ethnicity is widely accepted (that is "constructed") as existentially "given" and conceptually unproblematic. Yet, something beyond theorists' constructs and constructionists' theories asserts itself in the everyday life of ordinary people.