Few challenges to the modern dream of democratic citizenship appear more daunting than the presence of severe ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions in society. From early on in the modern era, Western liberal theorists were pessimistic about the prospects for democratic governance in deeply plural countries. In the nineteenth century, no less colossal a figure than J. S. Mill wrote that “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist” (Mill 1958, 230). There is an irony here. Nineteenth-century liberals like Mill were eager to accommodate the plurality of utilitarian interests among buyers and sellers in the marketplace. When it came to public life and politics, however, these same liberals “were strikingly unready for a plurality of cultures” (Walzer 1996, 53).

In the years that followed the First World War, a few Western thinkers expressed confidence that democracy might yet be possible in multicultural societies. Ratified after the Great War, the charter for the League of Nations seemed a breakthrough in this regard, balancing the rights of cultural majorities with those of minorities. The racial and ethnic horrors of World War II, however, led to widespread disillusionment with formulas like these that acknowledged communal identities. Individually based rights came to be viewed as the only acceptable form of human rights, and the central issue toward which democratic protections should be oriented.
“Where these individual rights are firmly protected, liberals assumed, no further rights needed to be attributed to the members of specific ethnic or national minorities” (Kymlicka 1995, 2–3).

The years following the Second World War also saw a revival of the old pessimism concerning the prospects for democracy in deeply plural societies. The new consensus was canonized in the “modernization theory” that dominated Western political thought in the 1950s and 1960s. A key premise of the theory was that democracy is impossible without modernization, and modernization requires the homogenization of political culture. Where this ideological homogeneity is wanting, the state must take the lead in inculcating a common culture among its diverse citizenry. The influential Harvard political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, put the matter none too subtly when he declared that national integration requires “the replacement of a large number of traditional, religious, familial, and ethnic political authorities by a single, secular, national political authority” (Huntington 1968, 34). Without the state-promoted pruning of ethnoreligious solidarities, it seemed, democracy and civil peace are in peril.

For many observers, the difficulties democratic institutions encountered in some of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa in the 1960s seemed to confirm this pessimism. As a result of these and other developments, then, the problem of cultural pluralism faded from mainstream political theory, except for its occasional citation as an obstacle to democratic progress. Global developments since the early 1990s, however, have made it impossible to continue treating the issue in so offhanded a manner. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe raised new hopes for the spread of liberal democracy to former communist countries. As painfully illustrated in the Balkans and Caucasuses, however, most of the ex-communist countries were deeply plural, and the collapse was sometimes followed, not by a democratic peace, but by fierce ethnoreligious rivalries for control of the state. Unless we were to give up on the dream of democratization in these countries entirely, there seemed no way around the fact that policy makers and theorists had to come to terms again with the problem of pluralism and democracy.

Another development forcing the problem of pluralism back into democratic discussion in the 1990s and 2000s was a vast increase in immigration to Western countries. In the United States, the immigration was the largest seen since the Great Immigration of the 1890s; in Europe, the immigration was so massive as to be without modern precedent. Not insignificantly, the arriving population included a far greater number of non-Europeans than had historically figured in these countries’ immigrant pool. In addition, the immigration took place at a time of ethnic revival
in the advanced industrial societies and ethnoreligious resurgence in much of the developing world.² In Western Europe, the changing cultural and racial complexion of the immigration helped to revive the fortunes of the extreme right, which used attacks on immigrants and supporters of multicultural citizenship as a rallying cry (Modood 1997). The immigration forced more moderate, mainstream citizens to recognize that, if they ever had, they no longer lived in pristine nation-states huddled around a common ethnonationalist hearth. European nations, too, were becoming deeply plural, with ethnoreligious subcultures distinct from those hallowed in nationalist mythologies.

The United States, Canada, and Australia have always had a different policy on immigrants and national culture than the countries of continental Europe, a pattern that has come to be known in political literature as the “Anglo-American” or “Anglo conformist” model (Almond 1956; Lijphart 1977; Kymlicka 1995, 14). These were settler societies that had not hesitated to displace native inhabitants from their homelands. Consistent with the settler project, these countries were more willing than their continental counterparts to welcome foreign immigrants—as long as the newcomers were willing and able to assimilate to mainstream linguistic, cultural, and racial prototypes. However, the scale of immigration in the 1980s and 1990s changed the terms of the Anglo-American contract once and for all. The immigration made it easier for minorities, old and new, to resist mainstream demands for assimilation and assert their identities more boldly. As in Western Europe, minority boldness ignited the passions of the extreme right, and prompted even mainstream citizens to wonder about the possibilities of civic collaboration across deep cultural divides.

For these and other reasons, in recent years we have seen renewed interest in the problem of democracy and cultural pluralism or, to borrow a more precise phrase from Will Kymlicka (1995), “multicultural citizenship.” Unfortunately, however, most writers on the topic still take Western industrialized societies as the privileged point of entry to their discussion. In an era of galloping globalization, however, when not just some, but most countries are comprised of culturally diverse populations, it is helpful to remember that non-Western societies have their own history of pluralist challenge and their own need to devise meaningful formulas for its resolution. Of course, if, in the best tradition of normative political philosophy, we are merely concerned with determining “the extent to which society meets norms of justice, individual freedom and deliberative democracy” (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, 15), our gaze need not be decentered too far from familiar Western terrains. Although it shares much
with political philosophy, however, the sociology or anthropology of pluralism and democracy must be concerned, not merely with measuring a society’s conformity to a checklist of liberal ideals, but with understanding the cultural and sociological circumstances that make different responses to the problem of pluralism and citizenship likely. What conditions facilitate peaceful coexistence and inclusive participation in multicultural societies? What conditions undermine these goals? Must the political formulas for addressing the problem of multiculturalism and citizenship be the same in all countries? Or must they vary in a manner that requires us to engage local genealogies of knowledge and power?

The question of how to achieve civility and inclusive citizenship in deeply plural societies is today a near-universal one. An understanding of the conditions that facilitate its resolution is as urgently needed in non-Western societies as well as Western ones. This knowledge can enrich the Western experience even as it deepens our understanding of the possibility of democracy across cultures. The first aim of the essays in this volume is to contribute to just such a pool of comparative knowledge.

**Plural Societies, Created**

Few areas of the non-Western world illustrate the legacy and challenge of cultural pluralism in a manner more striking than the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. In Western political theory during the 1930s and 1940s, the colonial predecessors to these societies, then known as British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, were regarded as the locus classicus for the newly minted concept of “plural society.” In a series of widely read works prepared in the final years of Western colonialism in Southeast Asia (Furnivall 1944, 1948), the British administrator and political writer, J. S. Furnivall, introduced Western readers to the idea of plural societies, and identified the countries we today call Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as its most striking examples.

For Furnivall, a plural society is a society that comprises “two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit” (Furnivall 1944, 446). As with Chinese, Indians, and Malays in British Malaya, this combination of geographical propinquity and social segregation, Furnivall argued, is accompanied by a caste-like division of labor, in which ethnoreligious groups play different economic roles. This social segregation in turn gives rise to what Furnivall regarded as these societies’ most unsettling political trait: their lack of a “common social will.”
There was a larger logic to this last argument. Like many British scholars and civil servants in his time, Furnivall was an avid student of neoclassical economics. His studies of the economies of Burma and Indonesia remain among the finest written in the late colonial period. As an observer of European colonialism, however, Furnivall was also aware that economics alone can never grasp the full logic of human behavior or social organization. He remarked, for example, that Adam Smith and later economists “took for granted the existence and efficacy of social demand.” Furnivall defined social demand as the shared tastes, values, and identities that an individual “experiences as a member of that society and can satisfy [only] as a member of that society” (Furnivall 1944, 448). For Furnivall, the Smithian assumption of cultural homogeneity is an acceptable simplification in England, “with its conservative traditions and its stable institutions,” but it overlooks a critical problem in societies like those in insular Southeast Asia: how to facilitate peaceful and cooperative interaction in a society whose denizens have no sense of themselves as a people or culture. In settings like these, Furnivall believed, the ethnic and religious “sections” making up society are so different from one another that they have little in common than their market exchange.

The reason this is troubling, Furnivall argued (in a manner that echoed the great French sociologist, Émile Durkheim), is that the market and “interests” are fickle guarantees of civil peace. In countries whose inhabitants hold common values, “fellow-feelings” based on mutuality and shared identity help to guide citizens through the thicket of daily life, in a manner that keeps the pursuit of market interests in acceptable ethical bounds. In such felicitous circumstances, the division of labor that Adam Smith celebrated as the genius of the market does not obliterate the common will or create a war of each against all, but allows the pursuit of private welfare within a “standpoint of common citizenship” (1944, 451). The situation in a plural society, by contrast, offers no such softening of the all-too-visible hand of marketplace competition:

[T]he community tends to be organized for production rather than for social life; social demand is sectionalized, and within each section of the community the social demand becomes disorganized and ineffective, so that in each section the members are debarred from leading the full life of a citizen in a homogeneous community; finally, the reaction against these abnormal conditions, taking in each section the form of Nationalism, sets one community against the other so as to emphasize the plural character of the society and aggravate its instability, thereby enhancing the need for it to be held together by some force exerted from outside. (1944, 459)
Furnivall’s insights into what we might today call the culturally “embedded” nature of capitalism were useful correctives to the narrowly economistic understandings of markets and rationality widespread in his day (and, alas, still in ours). But there was an irony to Furnivall’s contrast between the plural societies of Asia and the “homogeneous” societies of the West. His model made no mention of the troubling presence of racial, ethnic, religious, or gender chauvinism in Western countries. All the more ironic, it did so at a time when European civilization was being ravaged by ethnic and racial hatreds more horrifying than anything ever seen in Southeast Asia. Furnivall’s model of Southeast Asian pluralisms also overlooked the way in which Europeans had imported chauvinistic customs into their colonial holdings (Gouda 1995; Stoler 1989). However strong their appetite for a liberal marketplace, European colonials showed a decidedly illiberal taste for reserving the commanding heights of politics, culture, and society for themselves.

To his credit, Furnivall criticized the racial ideologies of the European powers, describing them as “quasi-religious sanctions for the predominance of the European caste both in British India and in Netherlands India” (1944, 464). But he failed to develop this insight in a sustained manner, saying little about the ways in which at least some of the “segmentary” interaction he observed in native society was the product of deliberate European engineering. Instead of a sustained critique of colonial complicity, Furnivall fell back on a wistful paean for the passing of the colonial order. With the rise of native nationalist movements, Furnivall sensed, European colonialism’s days were numbered. In his view, however, Asian nationalisms offered no solution to the problems of identity and integration in these deeply divided countries. Nationalism, he believed, would end only by pitting one ethnic community against another, exacerbating rather than ameliorating society’s divisions. Unless some kind of formula for pluralist federation could be devised, Southeast Asian pluralism seemed doomed to a nightmarish “anarchy” (Furnivall 1944, 468–469).

Not long after Furnivall put his thoughts to paper, colonialism did come to an end in these three countries—in 1945 in Indonesia (formalized by a treaty with the Dutch in December 1949), in 1957 in Malaysia, and in 1959 in Singapore. Although the Europeans forfeited their role as colonial masters, independence did not quite push these countries into the abyss of anarchy Furnivall had forecast. The new native leadership proved more skilled at operating the machinery of government than Furnivall had imagined.

At least some of the concerns Furnivall had voiced, however, were confirmed in the postwar and independence era. Malaysia was swept by
fierce ethnic violence in the years following World War II and again in 1969. Chinese-dominated Singapore witnessed ethnic riots in 1964, and in 1965 was forced out of its two-year federation with Malaysia after a dispute over the rights of Malay and Chinese citizens. Indonesia saw outbreaks of communal violence in the late 1950s and 1965; more shocking yet, Indonesia was shaken by bitter ethnoreligious violence from 1996 to 2001. Less dramatic but heated debates over ethnic and religious policies have regularly disturbed the postcolonial peace in each of these countries. Faced with these troubles, each country’s leaders have had to scramble to devise workable programs for citizenship and nation. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, however, the formulas devised in each country have varied, in a way that reflects colonial histories, postcolonial legacies, and, most tellingly, contemporary contests among rival groupings in state and society.

What makes these countries’ experience all the more intriguing is that, despite their political problems, from the late 1960s to the beginning of the East Asian economic crisis in August 1997, these three countries enjoyed one of the most sustained periods of economic expansion the industrializing world has ever seen (Hefner 1998a). For the better part of a generation these countries saw annual rates of GDP growth of 6 percent to 8 percent. The growth brought a new middle class into existence and allowed dramatic increases in per capita income. Today Singapore is an affluent country by any standard. Barely on par with Ethiopia in the early 1960s, Indonesia today is in the upper ranks of low-income countries (a standing imperiled, however, by continuing political instability). Malaysia lies in-between its two neighbors.

Interestingly, however, this growth has not diminished the public’s preoccupation with ethnoreligious divisions, but has raised new questions concerning justice and participation. Is one ethnic or religious group disproportionately benefiting from the fruits of economic growth? Have the rules of the economic game been unfairly rigged in favor of one segment of the population? Should market processes be complemented by programs of affirmative action to assist those populations not yet enjoying their fair share of the economic pie? These questions acquired even greater urgency in late 1997 and 1998, as East and Southeast Asia descended into economic crisis. The crisis reignited debates on economic policy and social justice; in Indonesia, it gave rise to urban violence in which Chinese storekeepers became the target of mob fury.

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz once remarked that national independence stimulated ethnoreligious sentiments in the new nations because it introduced “a valuable new prize,” namely control of the state
The same is true in spades of modern capitalist development. When the market works in such a manner as to distribute its benefits evenly across cultural divides, it can reinforce democratic ideals of civic harmony and citizenship. However, when market processes concentrate wealth and power in the hands of one ethnic, religious, or other cultural segment, they are just as likely to exacerbate tensions and undermine the civic accommodations on which long-term prosperity depends. Any effort to understand the new face of ethnoreligious pluralism in these three Southeast Asian societies, then, must assess the impact of market-making and nation-building on existing and emerging social divisions.

“Civil” Society Revisited

It was against this twin background, then, of renewed attention to the problem of pluralism in democratic theory, and of growing interest in the impact of two generations of nation-building and market-making on the pluralist landscape of these countries (complicated by the aftershocks of the Asian economic crisis), that the authors in this book came together in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during the first week of August 1999. The gathering was sponsored by the Ford Foundation as part of a research and training project I directed from 1998 to 2000 on, “Southeast Asian Pluralisms: Social Resources for Civility and Participation in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.” Although three small teams continued carrying out interviews and ethnographic work into late 2000, the August conference was the final get-together for most participants in the three-country project.

The project involved five multidisciplinary research teams (two in Indonesia, two in Malaysia, and one in Singapore), each responsible for carrying out field interviews; it also involved a smaller number of independent paper writers. With the exception of me as project director, all research participants were recruited from the three project countries. Hailing from sociology, political science, anthropology, and history, as well as a leading Muslim non-governmental organization in Indonesia, after some short training sessions the research teams set out in late 1998 and early 1999 to take the pulse of the new pluralism. They did so by conducting in-depth interviews in each country with one hundred to two hundred prominent actors in any of four social fields: religious organizations; business and labor; locally based non-governmental organizations (including the arts and media); and political organizations. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to content analysis. The independent paper writers also carried out a smaller number of interviews on their own, focused on a select segment of the pluralist population.
In examining the discourse and practice of pluralism across these four spheres, the project hoped to address a serious shortcoming in the current literature on citizenship and civic participation. As in Robert Putnam’s otherwise exemplary study of civic traditions in modern Italy (Putnam 1993), that literature rightly asserts that “civil society” organizations—voluntary associations and relationships located in the public sphere between the family and the state (Hall 1995; Hefner 1998b)—can serve as a kind of “social capital” that contributes to the development of a public culture of citizenship and inclusive participation. Formal constitutions and elections are simply not enough, as Putnam cogently puts it, to “make democracy work.” Formal democracy requires a societally based, informal politics of civility and participation if its institutions are to take hold.

These are important observations, consistent with the findings of the studies in this book. Much of the above-mentioned literature and much of the public activism surrounding the idea of civil society over the past ten years, however, proceeds from this sound premise to make two additional, more problematic, assumptions about the relationship of civil society to democratization. The first assumption is that civil society is a relatively homogeneous, undifferentiated thing, defined simply by the presence of self-organizing, “lateral” associations organized outside the family and apart from the state. The second assumption is that, whatever their location or purpose, civil society organizations are almost always “good” for democracy.

The problem with these assumptions is that, whether in Robert Putnam’s work or in the statements of civil society activists (including many in Southeast Asia), nary a word is said about how civic associations may be cross-cut by deep ethnic, religious, or ideological divides. Unfortunately for those who place all of their democratic eggs in the civil society basket, history shows us time and time again that civic associations can be organized in a manner consistent with existing ethnoreligious divisions in society. History also shows that, rather than serving as social capital for democracy, at times these divisions can engender debilitating social rivalries that diminish rather than enhance the prospects for civic decency. To put the matter bluntly, then, civil society is not always “democracy-good.” As with right-wing militias or the Klu Klux Klan in the United States, there is nothing at all unusual about certain “civil” organizations becoming, as far as citizenship and democracy are concerned, deeply “uncivil” in their behavior.

To state the matter in more sociological terms, the mere facts of structural “autonomy” and “self-organization” that theorists and activists celebrate as the essence of civil society do not in any sense guarantee that the attitudes or actions of civil society groupings will be inclusive or
democratic. As with the Christian and Muslim extremists active in religious violence in eastern Indonesia during 1999–2001, many associations that are “structurally” located in civil society are capable of promoting racism, chauvinism, or even violence (Hefner 1998b). Examples like these may be unpleasant, but, regretfully, they are not all that unusual. Contrary to a certain romantic mythology promoted on both the left and the right in the 1990s, “real-and-existing” civil societies are almost never homogeneous. Their constituent associations typically build on distinctions of ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and ideology operative in society as a whole. Inasmuch as this is the case, we shouldn’t be surprised to see that the “social capital” created by civic associations may at times be deployed in sectarian projects or civility-destroying rivalries rather than toward making markets efficient or making democracy “work.” To speak of a uniform “social capital” under such circumstances, then, is to assume that associational resources are a more or less universal currency always used as downpayment on liberal goods. Alas, history shows us that human relationships and organizations are responsive to a more varied array of passions and interests than these.7

But all is not lost with the concept of civil society. Public associations and interactions may indeed generate a “social capital” for civic peace and democratic development. However, if they are to do so, they must do more than display the familiar structural characteristics of “self-organization” and independence from the state. To play a democracy-enhancing role, the discourse and practice of people in public associations must be politically and culturally civil. What might this shamelessly overused term actually mean? Actors’ words and actions can be regarded as “civil” if, even when used to take issue with others in the public arena, they signal respect for the rights of other citizens and thereby contribute to a public culture of participation premised on freedom of association, speech, and participation for everyone regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or class. Only when this cultural quality of “democratic civility” is added to the structural reality of civic association can we say that “civil society” has begun to do the job of strengthening democracy (Hefner 1998b, 2000a; cf. Benhabib, 1996; Habermas 1991; Kingwell 1995).

It was with this cautionary lesson in mind, then, that these Southeast Asian researchers set off to examine the discourse and practice of actors in different social spheres in these three countries. The researchers hoped to determine whether the words and actions of people in these associations are helping to build a new, “post-plural societies” culture of universal citizenship or are merely putting a new face on old segregations. Some associations and relationships in civil society, we realized, may help to
build bridges over troubled ethnoreligious waters; others may aim to tear them down. Our goal was to assess which associations are doing what, and what all this means for the prospects for multicultural peace and participation today.

The story that these authors are able to tell is not a simple one. Something of its complexity will be immediately apparent in the essays that follow. Rather than a neatly regimented “civil society” marching brightly toward democracy’s triumph, all three of these countries are in the midst of an unfinished and deeply agonistic struggle to set the stage and write the scripts for participation in different public spheres. What makes the process particularly complex is that events are not everywhere working in tandem; political, economic, and religious developments can move in different directions, sometimes even contradicting each other. For example, in Malaysia during the 1980s and 1990s, state policies and market processes converged to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth across ethnic divides. On the evidence of the Malaysian team’s research, this has helped to mute ethnoeconomic tensions in the Malaysian middle classes, especially between Chinese and Malays (see the essays by Rahman Embong, Sumit, and Shamsul in this volume). Even as this progress has been made, however, at least some developments in the religious field have had a contrary influence. The influence of conservative Islamism in the Malay community has in some parts of the country diminished commensality across ethnic borders, especially between Chinese and Malays (Mutalib 1990, 101).

Even these facts do not yet convey the full complexity of influences on civic pluralism and public participation. Even in the same social field (the market, religion, etc.), there may be bitter contests among rival elites over how to deal with ethnoreligious differences. While some Malay Muslims want to use religion and the state to enhance their privileges to the detriment of non-Muslims, another wing in Malaysia’s Islamic resurgence has taken issue with government policies that distinguish Malaysians on the basis of ethnicity. These latter Muslims have sought to promote an ethничally undifferentiated citizenship. In a similar manner, in Indonesia since the 1990s, there has been a bitter struggle between the mainstream Muslim leadership, which affirms equal rights for all and opposes those who would reduce non-Muslims to second-class status, and a tiny but well-financed Islamist minority vociferously—and at times even violently—opposed to equal rights for Christians and Chinese (see Hadiz and Sulistyo in this volume, and Hefner 2000a). The second and more general aim of the essays in this book, then, is to assess the dynamics of ethnoreligious pluralism across and within the four fields in each of these countries, and,
from there, determine what all this might mean for civic pluralism and
democratic citizenship in years to come.

Although there are cross-cultural commonalities to the condition we
call “modernity,” and although “globalization” is indeed a force in our
age, there is no teleology to history nor a single path of political modern-
ization. Globalization does not bring with it an inevitable homogeniza-
tion of culture and politics, because the “global ecumene” stimulates dis-
tinctive localizations and contestations (Hannerz 1996). This fact makes
it more urgent than ever that we recognize the reality of contestive, alter-
native, or multiple modernities (Hefner 1998b; James 1995).

To begin to develop such an expanded sense of the age here in South-
east Asia requires that we stand back and reflect on the cultural and polit-
ical history that has made this region what it is. In the remainder of this
introduction, then, I review briefly the pre- and early colonial genealogy
of pluralism in the insular region that was eventually to comprise Malaysia,
Singapore, and Indonesia, in an effort to clear the analytic deck of certain
misconceptions as to the nature of “premodern” or “traditional” South-
east Asia. Having set this historical stage, I then attempt to gauge the
impact of postcolonial nation-building and market-making on these plu-
ralist legacies. In the essay’s conclusion, finally, I present a few preliminary
reflections on the lessons of these Southeast Asian examples for pluralism
and citizenship around the world.

Flexible Ethnicity, Canopied Pluralism

When European galleons first sailed into the Malayo-Indonesian archi-
pelago in the early sixteenth century, they found a world comprised, not
of stagnant societies lost in traditional slumber, but a bustling region well
into its second millennium of state rule and commercial dynamism. With
its vast trade in rice, cloth, precious metals, and, most important, spices,
the archipelago had long been, with the eastern Mediterranean, one of the
world’s great maritime emporia (Lombard 1990, 2: 16–30). It was largely
in response to trade opportunities that the first states had arisen in the early
centuries of the common era, as rulers responded to the trade by devel-
oping more centralized structures of power. It was this same commercial
expansion, not foreign armies or settler colonists, that brought the world
religions to the region. Hinduism and Buddhism came in the first cen-
turies of the common era. Mass conversion to Islam began in coastal ter-
ritories of the archipelago in the thirteenth century. Islam continued to
spread in a wildfire pattern that followed the major trading routes until,
by the seventeenth century, it was the religion of most coastal states, as well as some but not the majority of the region’s hinterlands.

When Europeans finally arrived in the archipelago in the early sixteenth century, the trade networks they discovered were not concentrated in one all-powerful kingdom, but were dispersed across this island expanse. The primary trade routes linked Muslim principalities in the east of the archipelago with larger ports in the west, including, most notably, the great entrepot of Malacca, “the Venice of Asia” (as early European visitors called it) on the southwestern edge of the Malay peninsula. From the perspective of a sociology of pluralism, the dispersed nature of the commerce is noteworthy for several reasons. First, although most of the region’s mercantile ports were Muslim principalities, “The Southeast Asian trading city was a pluralistic meeting-point of peoples from all over maritime Asia” (Reid 1993, 66). Its visitors included Arabs, Chinese (Muslim and non-Muslim), Indian Muslims and Hindus, tribal animists, some Christians, and even the occasional visiting delegation from Japan (Lombard 1990, 2: 31–48; Thomaz 1993, 77–82).

Equally important, although Malacca enjoyed the greatest share, trade throughout the region was not dominated by any single kingdom or principality, but was based on the networked collaboration of many small states. Here, then, was a pattern of economic “pluricentrism” that, in its cultural diversity and mobility, resembled if anything the booming trade of the eastern Mediterranean in the early modern era (see Braudel 1966). Even more than was the case in the eastern Mediterranean, this organization was conducive to interethnic collaboration and rich cultural exchange. One noteworthy consequence of this fact appears to be that the Malayo-Indonesian peoples involved in the trade developed cultural traditions that showed strong family resemblances across great ethnic and political expanses. Whether in matters of dress, dance, coinage, gong music, social etiquette, or slavery and bondage, most of the societies in this vast archipelagic region drew on a Malayo-Indonesian civilizational reservoir.

There was an interesting linguistic dimension to this pattern of what we might call “permeable ethnicity.” Once a local language spoken on the west coast of Borneo, the Malay peninsula, and the east coast of Sumatra, from the sixteenth century on Malay became the “pre-eminent language of scholarship, commerce, diplomacy, and religion” (Collins 1996, 23). In this it resembled Latin in medieval Europe, except that Malay was a popular oral as well as an elite literary language. Malay was spoken in virtually all of the major trading ports of Southeast Asia, including Thailand and Cambodia, although probably not Vietnam (Reid 1988, 233). The
ease with which the language spread says something important about the nature of pluralism in the region. Had ethnic divisions been strictly bounded or harshly oppositional, this linguistic diffusion would have been slower and less comprehensive. As is still the case today, rather than being harshly opposed, ethnic identities appear to have been canopied by a transethnic sense of Malayo-Indonesian civilization. As with European civilization in Christian Western Europe, of course, this multiethnic canopy did not prevent bitter political rivalries or even warfare between states. But it helps to explain how populations in disparate parts of the archipelago came to share so many similar cultural traits.

Religion was an integral part of this canopied ethnicity. Earlier, in the first millennium of the common era, Buddhism and Saivite Hinduism (with Vishnuite elements) had made their way to court centers throughout the region, becoming the preferred religion of state in most of the archipelago’s kingdoms (Wolters 1970). Although Arab-Muslim traders made their way across island Southeast Asia as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, there was little settlement until the late thirteenth, when a Muslim town was established in north Sumatra as an entrepot for the trade with India and Arabia (Reid 1993, 133). Shortly thereafter, a Muslim presence was established in port towns along Java’s north coast (Drewes 1968; Robson 1981). Ruling elites in the Malay peninsula were converted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and those in coastal Sulawesi and much of the southern Philippines were won to the faith in the seventeenth century. As with the Malay language, the primary impetus for this conversion was not conquest or religious warfare, as had been the case in Islam’s early expansion in Arabia and North Africa, but trade and interethnic intercourse. The growth of international commerce from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries moved large numbers of people out of localized societies into a multiethnic macrocosm, and Islam became an important support in the macrocosm’s canopy (Reid 1993, 144; Robson 1981; cf. Hefner 1993a).

The cultural mobility and hybridity seen across this vast island region illustrates once again that its constituent societies were not changeless, traditional entities hermetically sealed from their neighbors. On the contrary, although the archipelago lacked the looming imperial presences seen in nearby India and China, most of its constituent societies drew on elements from a common, Malayo-Indonesian civilization. The flow of ideas and customs across the region also reminds us that, however much ethnicity everywhere builds on some elementary imagining of descent (Keyes 1976), ethnic traditions vary greatly in the vigilance of their “boundary maintenance” (Barth 1969) and their tolerance of cross-cultural imports.
For a comparative sociology of ethnicity and plurality, the “permeable ethnicity” seen in the archipelago certainly ranks as one of the most distinctive features of Malayo-Indonesian tradition. As Denys Lombard (Lombard 1990) has observed, the archipelago was one of the world’s great “cross roads of civilizations.” It developed a pattern of permeable and canopied ethnicity to go with it.

From the beginning, however, there were clear limits to this pattern of flexible ethnicity, an appreciation of which is vital if we are to understand the cultural divides that mark the region today. As Anthony Reid has written, the Southeast Asia (“sea”) “region was manifestly better integrated by the warm and placid waters of the South China Sea” than were the Mediterranean, the Levant, and North Africa (Reid 1988, xiv). As this observation hints, however, the integration was above all a maritime phenomenon. Once one moved inland, roads were poor or non-existent, and the sheer density of jungles, swamps, and mountain ranges made inland travel more daunting than in most of Western Europe. In premodern times, population was also sparse—half that of Western Europe and one-sixth of that of China (Reid 1988, 15). As evidenced by items as varied as gong musical instruments or Hindu religious terms (such as the ubiquitous term for deity, *dewa*) among remote populations like the Karo Batak of Sumatra or the Toraja of interior Sulawesi, fragments from the Malayo-Indonesian cultural canopy made their way into archipelago hinterlands. However, the penchant of coastal kingdoms for slave-raiding and pillage in the interior ensured that the passage from coastal to inland or lowland to upland often coincided with a less open or permeable ethnic boundary (see B. Andaya 1993; Kipp 1993; Volkman 1985). Along with these troubled crossings came an often stronger sense of oneself as a people apart from those of the coasts or lowlands. Many of these divides remain rough points of cultural passage to this day (Hefner 1985; King 1993; King and Parnwell 1990; Russell and Cunningham 1989).

Under European colonialism, this stand-apart quality of highland and interior populations made them tempting targets for Christian missionaries. Both the Dutch and the British discouraged Christian missionization among established Muslim populations, recognizing that it might well undermine the “security and order” necessary for European enterprise (van Akkeren 1969; Hefner 1993b; Milner 1995: 71–76). As Dutch rule penetrated even remote hinterlands of the archipelago in the late nineteenth century, however, the state gave the green light to missionizing. It did so to aid in the territories’ pacification, but also to carve out Christian enclaves in an otherwise continuous Islamic expanse (Hefner 1985; King 1993, 142; Kipp 1993). With their rule in Java secure after the
mid-nineteenth century, the Dutch even tolerated a modest mission presence among the nominally Islamized or abangan populations of the Javanese hinterland (Van Niel 1984, 83). Its impact was limited, however, not least of all by the perception among natives that Christianity was, in effect, a “Dutch” religion. Not coincidentally, the scale of Javanese conversion to Christianity was miniscule in the colonial era, but accelerated significantly after independence, when stewardship of local churches passed from European to Indonesian hands (Hefner 1993b; cf. Kipp 1993 for Sumatra).

The British adopted a similar policy on Christian conversion with tribal, non-Islamic populations in their Borneo territories (Andaya and Andaya 1982, 235; King 1993, 149–150). On the predominantly Islamic Malay peninsula, however, their actions were more cautious, delegating authority in matters of Islam and custom to local Muslim rulers. Quite unlike the Dutch pattern in Java, the British actually strengthened the linkage of the Malay courts to Islam. The British “found it difficult to conceive of a ruler who did not rule,” and so “elevated the sultans to positions of real as well as ritual authority . . . by effective centralization of power within each state and by emasculation of the independent authority of district chiefs” (Roff 1967, 14; Ackerman and Lee 1988, 175).

As they consolidated their power in the final years of the nineteenth century, the British not only accorded Malay rulers prerogatives in Islamic and customary matters, but provided them with the bureaucratic and legal machinery to implement their directives in a more systematic and invasive manner than ever before in Malay history. One reason native rulers chose to exercise these prerogatives so “liberally” was that this allowed them to fend off challenges to their authority, not least of all from reform-minded modernist Muslims known as kaum muda, “the young group.” The “young group” Muslims were unimpressed by the idea that the interests of Islam were best served by aristocratic rulers (Roff 1967, 56–90; cf. Abdullah 1971). The young reformists had an only marginal effect on the sultans’ power, however, and the colonial linkage of state and Islam was to have a profound influence on the postcolonial evolution of religious pluralism in Malaya.

Another exception to this archipelagic pattern of flexible ethnicity was the presence of immigrant ethnic groups who had a bounded sense of themselves relative to their Malayo-Indonesian neighbors. With their ideas of exclusive religious affiliation and racial superiority, the Europeans were at the extreme in this regard. In everything from the marriage of their daughters to the profession of their faith, the Europeans—with the partial exception of the mestizo-izing Portuguese, and perhaps some of the Dutch settlers in seventeenth-century Batavia (present-day Jakarta, see
Taylor 1983)—made themselves a people apart. When, in the late nine-
teenth and early twentieth centuries, European domination was reaching
its peak, this stand-apart quality was given even greater cultural leverage
with newly ascendant notions of biocultural evolutionism and racial supe-
riority (Gouda 1995; Stoler 1989).

However bizarre their rationalization of the practice, the Europeans
were not alone in advocating ethnocultural segregation. Although in the
premodern period many appear to have integrated relatively easily into
indigenous society, as modern colonialism took hold Arabs, Indians, Chi-
nese, and others among Southeast Asia’s mobile minorities tended to hold
themselves apart from native society, resisting the more porous pattern of
Malayo-Indonesian ethnicity. Some did so, and do so still today, because
they were “entrepreneurial minorities” (Dobbin 1996) whose very busi-
ness success depended on tightly coordinated networks of partners and
kin (see Hefner 1998a; Mackie 1998). Others held themselves apart for
reasons of religion, marital custom, affinal exchange, patriarchal author-
ity, or descent purity.

Among the Asian immigrants to Southeast Asia, the Chinese had a
special position. They were the most numerous of the archipelago’s “non-
Malayo-Indonesian” minorities. At least after the coming of the Euro-
peans, but probably well before, they were also the most economically
powerful. Chinese had been important partners in the revival of trade that
underlay the “Age of Commerce” in the archipelago from the fifteenth to
seventeenth centuries (Reid 1993, xiii). Some among the Chinese were
already Muslim, and many in pre-European times were culturally close to
archipelagic natives. One telling illustration of the earlier cultural frater-
nity is the fact that several of the Muslim “saints” (wali) identified as hav-
ing brought Islam to Java were Chinese or part Chinese (de Graaf and

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the
sheer scale of immigration by Chinese, their remarkable economic success,
and their role as designated intermediaries for European enterprises, all
reduced the incentives for Chinese to accommodate to Malayo-Indones-
ian ways (Skinner 1950, 1996; Reid 1996). In the Indies, Dutch colo-
nial policy reinforced this segregationist tendency. The enclave societies
established by the Dutch “provided a milieu that discouraged assimila-
tion” (Reid 1993, 313). The Dutch collaborated with some of the more
absolutist-minded local rulers, most notably in Java, to curb the activities
of independent indigenous traders, transforming the multicentered trade
into a monopoly licensed by native rulers to the Dutch. Because they were
unlikely to make common cause with disaffected natives, and because they
had a long tradition of enterprise, Chinese were often given the lion’s share of these Dutch-managed concessions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Dutch also began to give tax farms to Chinese, including those central to the lucrative opium trade. The policy drove indigenous entrepreneurs even further out of commerce and widened the divide between native and Chinese (Carey 1984, 24; Rush 1990). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as Europeans began to think of cultural differences as rooted in race, the Dutch crowned their policies on colonial pluralism with the introduction of laws that made it a crime to appear in public “attired in any manner other than that of one’s ethnic group” (Rush 1990, 14; see also Gouda 1995, 168–173). With extensive European assistance, the “plural societies” of Furnivall’s age were taking shape.

British policy in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, all acquired at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; see Andaya and Andaya 1982, 106–124) and the “federated Malay states” (brought under British authority in the late nineteenth century) was less coercive than the Dutch on matters of ethnoracial segregation. But the British impact on ethnoreligious pluralism was no less far-reaching. With its vast forest expanses and relatively small Malay population (concentrated in the peninsula’s few fertile rice-growing regions), the Malay peninsula offered easy access to rich jungle and mineral resources but an inadequate supply of labor. The British could have opted, of course, to force the Malays out of agriculture and into mine and plantation labor. But the political costs of such a strategy would have been high. The less expensive tack on which the British finally settled was to import hundreds of thousands of Indian and Chinese laborers for colonial enterprise. The result changed the face of peninsular society forever. By the early 1920s, Chinese outnumbered Malays in the peninsula. In 1931, Chinese in the Malay states subject to direct rule (the four so-called federated states: Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang) comprised an astonishing 64 percent of the total population. (In the other, “unfederated” states, they represented 29 percent of the total; see Milner 1995, 227). The scale and rapidity of the migration, and the fact that it was regulated by the British, not Malay rulers, removed all remaining incentives for Chinese to accommodate to Malay ways.

In an essay on modern political change written a generation ago, Clifford Geertz observed that “A simple, coherent, broadly defined ethnic structure, such as is found in most industrial societies, is not an undissolved residue of traditionalism but an earmark of modernity” (Geertz 1973b: 308). Nowhere was this truer in the archipelagic world than in the Malay peninsula. In the span of just a few decades, Malays from around
the river valleys of the peninsula, who as late as the mid-nineteenth century may not have thought of themselves as having common ethnicity (Milner 1995, 14) and certainly did not think of themselves as a “nation” or people, came to refer to themselves in just such terms, as “Malays” (orang Melayu) and a “people” (bangsa). As long as they were Muslim and willing to adopt Malay airs, even the Javanese and Sumatrans who migrated to the peninsula well into the twentieth century (and do so illegally still today) were identified as “Malay” in the newly homogenized ethnic structure (Roff 1967, 111). Meanwhile, Chinese and Indian immigrants created enclave communities in accordance with their own traditions and the colonially mandated division of labor.

As the assimilation of Javanese and Sumatrans to Malay ethnicity indicates, the fluid and permeable pluralism of the early modern archipelago world had not disappeared entirely. However, with European help, the divide between Malays and non-Malays was taking on the strongly oppositional quality canonized in Furnivall’s “plural society.”

Alternative Pluralities

In the Malayo-Indonesian world, then, the Europeans did not create a plural society where previously there was none; nor were they, however, merely passive witnesses to a uniquely endogenous evolution. European colonial policy was central to the emerging politics and culture of pluralism in the region. The Europeans seized the commanding heights of an already plural civilization, expanding and expropriating its wealth while reorganizing and segregating its constituent Asian communities. They laid down the territorial boundaries within which all national leaders were to operate in the postcolonial era. In Muslim regions, they effected a partial secularization of the political order, in a manner that differed, however, from the Dutch East Indies to British Malaya or, in British Malaya itself, from the Malay sultanates to the direct-ruled Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, Malacca). Finally, in assigning different ethnic groups to specialized positions in everything from agriculture to the opium trade, the Europeans crystallized the most essential of supra-ethnic categories: the distinction between indigenous Malayo-Indonesian “children of the soil” (Malay, bumiputra, Indonesian, pribumi) and “non-indigenous” or immigrant Asians (Indians and, especially, Chinese).

This latter distinction was to be one of the most enduring categorical legacies of the colonial era. But it was also still far from stable in its meanings or policy implications. The binary opposition of indigenes to Chinese
was given substantially different weight by the three groups of reformers who appeared on the scene in the late colonial period intent on transforming native society and redefining the terms of its cultural pluralism.

The first group of native social reformers was that organized around the proponents of Islamic reform. To the degree that the Malayo-Indonesian world had had a dynamic, cosmopolitan component, it had always been grounded, not in its courts (least of all those, as in Java, oriented toward rent-seeking on agrarian estates), but in its bustling centers of maritime mercantilism. As the Europeans became politically dominant, the maritime classes became a ready target of colonial expropriation. The commercial middle class or orang kaya (lit., “rich” or “powerful” person; see Lombard 1990, 2: 144–150; Reid 1993, 114–23l) that had occasionally challenged aristocratic power and promoted more individualistic social styles, then, were the first victims of the European order. Although the Chinese and Indians developed an entrepreneurial middle class during colonial rule, the reappearance of a Malay or pribumi business class would have to wait until the late twentieth century.11

The archipelagic world of which the merchant class had been part, however, contained one sector that escaped the full weight of colonial controls: Islamic education and pilgrimage. The peace facilitated by European conquest allowed a great expansion in trade, internal migration, and steamship travel (especially after the middle of the nineteenth century). These three developments greatly increased the opportunities for Muslim students to make the pilgrimage (haj) to the holy land and to travel to religious schools around the archipelago or in the Middle East (Vredenburg 1962). European enclave settlements like Batavia, Singapore, and Penang also provided a fertile breeding ground for the recently arrived ideas of Islamic reform. With their polyglot populations, detraditionalized hierarchies, competitive enterprise, printing presses, and European schools, these cosmopolitan environments proved congenial to the critical and individualistic spirit of Islamic reform (Milner 1995, 153–161; Roff 1967, 43). In Malacca as early as 1821, Christian missionaries lamented that “‘Mohammedism’” had ‘much revived’ since the arrival of the Christian missionaries” (Claudius Thomsen, cited in Milner 1995, 153). The regional and international network comprised of these Islamic institutions served as a channel for the dissemination of new religious ideals, and became one of the three nexuses around which a class of native reformers emerged intent on creating an alternative to the Europeans’ “plural society” (Azra 1992). This Islamic nexus was oriented, not to the creation of a new “nation,” but to the expansion and revitalization of the Islamic community of believers or ummat. As such, of course, it would
pose a special challenge to those in the colonial and postcolonial landscape who happened to be non-Muslim.

Another pole for the reconstitution of society was that of the native rulers and aristocracy. In the early phases of their colonization, both the Dutch and the British had preferred to retain as much as they could of the native aristocracy, if and when the local rulers showed a willingness to collaborate with European overlords. In enclave societies like Dutch Batavia, the British Straits Settlements, and other areas of direct rule, of course, European rulers saw little need to bother with concessions to native elites. Outside these enclaves, however, the Dutch and the British typically preferred to retain elements of the indigenous aristocracy so as to cloak foreign rule in native garb.

Over time, of course, the Europeans subjected native rulers to varying degrees of control, in a manner that reflected the changing requirements of enterprise and administration. Again, in the Malay peninsula, the British enhanced the rulers’ authority in matters of Malay custom and Islam. Whereas the Dutch always viewed Javanese rulers as only superficially Islamic, the British viewed the Malay rulers and chiefs as “Muhammadan Monarchs” from the start. Consistent with this view, the British sought to maintain “intact, so far as was compatible with other aims, the internal structure of Malay authority and social organization” (Roff 1967, 11), even while effecting massive economic change in society as a whole.

This colonially leveraged linkage of royal and religious authority had a profound effect on the subsequent transformation of Malay-Muslim culture and, with it, Malaysian pluralism. The sultans’ authority over Islamic education and organizations limited the opportunities for religious experimentation, with the result that the Malay kingdoms experienced less of the reformist ferment seen in the Straits Settlements or the Dutch East Indies. Colonial authorities colluded with native rulers against independent-minded Muslims. The 1904 Muhammadan Laws Enactment in British Malaya forbade public teaching on Islam without the sultan’s approval in writing. An amendment to the enactment in 1925–1926 provided “severe penalties for anyone printing or publishing literature concerning the Islamic religion without the written permission of the Sultan in Council” (Roff 1967, 80). The associational vitality of Muslim civic organizations was also severely circumscribed. Although Qur’anic boarding schools (pondok) played an important role in Muslim social life in the Malay states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah (as well as across the border in Thailand, in the Malay-dominated province of Patani; see Maddmarn 1999), they never developed the vast, para-institutional structure associated with such schools in the Dutch Indies (Dhofier 1999). Later
too, in the early twentieth century, religious schools in the peninsula showed little of the civic-organizational dynamism seen among Indies Muslims. In the Dutch colony, organizations like the modernist Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 (Alfian 1989), and the neo-traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama, founded in 1926 (Feillard 1995), provided Muslims with powerful vehicles for social and religious reform. Only in the 1970s, with the rise of modernist student organizations like the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM, see Nagata 1984, 87–104), would Malaysia witness the emergence of Muslim organizations with a degree of political independence comparable to Indonesia’s Muslim associations. Even then, however, with memberships numbering in the tens of thousands, the Malaysian organizations had a limited social penetration compared to their Indonesian counterparts, whose members number in the tens of millions.

The colonially reinforced linkage of ruler and religion, then, worked to give Malay-Muslim culture a more conservative, statist mien than was the case in the East Indies, and served to limit the development of a diverse religious public sphere. If the voices of Islamic reform were more restrained in British Malaya, the same is even truer of secular critics of Islamic traditionalism. Malaya heard little of the “full-blooded satirizing of shariah [Islamic legal-] mindedness” so widespread in late colonial Java (Milner 1995, 150).

The Malay rulers and their political proxies, then, exercised a far more decisive influence on public religious discourse than their counterparts in the Indies. Equally important, as this Malay elite came to see themselves in competition with immigrant Chinese and Indians, they gave their profession of the faith an even narrower, “ethnic” expression (Nagata 1984; Peletz 1998). To be Malay was explicitly marked as being Muslim; but it was also implicitly marked in opposition to Chinese and non-Muslim Indians. Malays came to use Islam, then, as an instrument of ethnic rivalry and state control. As Hussin Mualib (1990) has argued, the tension between the ideals of ethnic exclusivity and universal Islam goes far back in Malay history. However, in the late colonial and postcolonial period, competition with non-Malays for control of the state exacerbated the tension, and led some Malays to “dispense with Islamic values” of a universalistic sort (Mualib 1990, 1). Some visualized their faith as “an ethnic cocoon . . . protected by a veneer of religion” (Muzaffar 1987, 25).

The ability of native Malay aristocrats to cloak themselves in the garb of both Islam and ethnicity allowed them to position themselves in the front ranks of those vying for the few positions of influence offered to natives in the colonial state. The aristocrats’ success also diminished the dynamism of the third of the native groupings hoping to reshape indige-
nous society, the popular nationalists. In his masterful *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, the historian William Roff notes that the aristocrats’ criticism of the British “took the form of special pleas for continued Malay privilege, not of anti-colonial nationalism.” He adds tellingly, “The group that stood to make the most immediate gain was the traditional elite itself” (Roff 1967, 236). The conservative alignment of *raja* and Malay identity had a restrictive influence on Malay nationalism. “The concept of a Malay ‘nation,’” Roff observes, “existed less as an ideal polity than as a defensive community of interest against further subordination to or dependence on ‘foreigners,’ in particular against the domiciled Asian communities now so firmly entrenched in the states and settlements. . . . In this situation, the role in which the British were cast continued, paradoxically enough, to be that of guardian of Malay rights” (1967, 235).

Under the twin influences of aristocratic hegemony and ethnic rivalry, then, the nationalist movement in Malaya acquired a mono-ethnic, Malay-first emphasis rather than a multiethnic one. Threatened by Indian and, especially, Chinese immigration, the Malay elite saw little point in making common cause with Asian newcomers. In the 1910s, when the Chinese community first began to press for citizen rights, the Malay elite responded with fierce opposition (Roff 1967, 111). They did so again from 1946 to 1948, when, in the face of a British plan to provide equal citizen rights for Chinese and Indians, Malay politicians mobilized their constituency and succeeded in winning concessions institutionalizing Malay privileges (Omar 1993, 34–61). Many of these were later enshrined in the 1957 constitution granting Malaya independence (Mutalib 1990, 28). The constitution also preserved the arrangement whereby Malay sultans assumed primary responsibility for the administration of Islam.

There were always a few Malay nationalists who appealed to their fellows to open their movement to people of non-Malay and non-Muslim background. But the siege mentality among Malay elites doomed these inclusively pluralist efforts. Although Arab and Indian Muslims had been among the first to champion the plight of the Malays in the early years of the twentieth century, in the 1920s and 1930s Arabs and Indians were marginalized from the Malay-rights movement by Malays resentful of non-Malay leaders (Mutalib 1990, 21). When, in 1951, one of the founders of the dominant Malay political party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), proposed to open the party to non-Malays, he was summarily driven out of the party (Mutalib 1990, 21).

For those few ardent Malay nationalists who sought the reconstitution of an independent polity along multiethnic lines, the more common rallying cry was, not unity with Indians and Chinese, but alliance with the
massive movement for nationalist liberation taking shape in the Dutch East Indies. Although popular in nationalist circles in Java and Sumatra, the idea of a federated, Malayo-Indonesian nation never made much progress in peninsular Malaya, except among a handful of (mostly) left-leaning Malays. Prior to the Second World War, Malay society was still predominantly rural and unschooled, and the hold of the aristocracy on the Malay population still strong. Only 10 percent of the population of the peninsula’s three biggest towns was Malay. “The Malay, for the most part, remained a peasant cultivator” (Roff 1967, 30). Most urban, educated Malays were more preoccupied with their own socioeconomic marginality than with marching to the distant drum of Indonesian nationalism. The key concept around which aspiring nationalist leaders rallied, then, was not multiethnic nationalism, but bangsa Melayu, the “Malay people” (Omar 1993). Inasmuch as Chinese and Indians figured in this formulation, they did so largely negatively—as foreigners who threatened to marginalize Malays in their homeland.

**Indies Agonistes**

The balance of power between native aristocrats and popular nationalists in the Dutch Indies differed dramatically from that in British Malaya. While the British had taken pains to maintain the appearance of Malay royal authority, Dutch policy in Java in the decades following the Dutch-Java War (1825–1830) had so emasculated royal authority that the nobility and their aristocratic allies (the priyayi; see Sutherland 1979) became identified in much of the public’s mind with European domination. To speak of colonial or postcolonial Javanese courts as “exemplary centers” to which ordinary Javanese looked for their models of cultural excellence (as some Western specialists of Java still do), then, is to overlook the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century the courts’ authority over much of the population had been massively compromised. Java’s royalty did not enjoy anything comparable to the political and cultural hegemony of their counterparts in late colonial Malaya. As the Indonesian historian Sartono Kartodirdjo (1972) observed long ago, the rural leadership of Islamic boarding schools, as well as popularly based mystical leaders, were the primary beneficiaries of the aristocrats’ declining legitimacy. In the twentieth century, these Muslim leaders would compete with popular nationalists to fill the vacuum left by the aristocrats’ decline.

Outside Java, Dutch attitudes toward native rulers also varied more widely than did those of the British rule in the Malay peninsula. In some
regions, like Aceh, the native rulers were eliminated altogether (Bowen 1991). Elsewhere, as in Bali, a policy not unlike that of British “indirect rule” in the Malay states was implemented (Robinson 1995, 24–32). Whatever the similarities between Dutch and British rule in these territories, the postcolonial outcome was entirely different. When, in 1949, the Dutch attempted to negotiate a federal United States of Indonesia that kept many of their aristocratic allies in power, the proposal was bitterly and, in the end, successfully resisted by Indonesia’s nationalist leadership (Ricklefs 1993, 233). After the independence war, the role of local aristocrats in the new government was formally abolished everywhere except in Yogyakarta in central Java, where the sultan had been a hero of the popular nationalist struggle. These events proved disastrous for the aristocratic stream in independent Indonesia. From this point on, aristocratic traditions might be mined for symbols of a neo-traditional patrimonialism, as was common under the dictatorial rule of President Suharto (1966–1998). Outside enclave-Yogyakarta, however, the aristocracy as an institution played almost no role in the struggle to define the new Indonesian nation.

The position of the popular nationalist leadership in the Dutch Indies on matters of ethnoreligious pluralism was also different from that of its Malayan counterpart. Indians had an only tiny presence in the Indies. Chinese were more numerous, but still comprised only about 2 percent of the population in 1900 (Mackie and Coppel 1976, 4) and only 2.7 percent by the time of Indonesia’s independence. Despite their small numbers, the Chinese exercised a disproportionate influence on the colonial economy, and this imbalance led to heated debates among native nationalists as to how to deal with the Chinese problem. One of the most important antecedents to the nationalist movement, the Sarikat Islam (si; Islamic Association), arose in central Java in the 1910s after bitter clashes between Muslim and Chinese merchants (Shiraishi 1990, 41–79). Tellingly—and again in marked contrast to the situation in British Malaya—in just a few years the movement foundered as it became factionalized between Muslim and left-wing popular nationalists. Elements of the latter were eventually expelled from si and went on to form the Indonesian Communist Party. Although its leaders at times identified the Chinese with the ills of capitalism (Suryadinata 1979, 11) and disagreed over whether to recruit Chinese to the party (McVey 1965, 226–227), the Communist Party was to become one of the earliest and more consistent supporters of equal rights for Chinese after Indonesian independence (Suryadinata 1997, 36–38). Prior to Indonesian independence, Muslim and popular nationalist parties tended to exclude Chinese from membership. Chinese were
also conspicuous by their absence from the list of people invited by young nationalist leaders in 1928 to take the “Youth Oath” (Sumpah Pemuda) swearing allegiance to the goals of an independent and unitary Indonesia.

After independence, most of Indonesia’s political parties, Muslim and popular nationalist, changed their official policies on Chinese membership. Chinese who were locally born and Indonesian-speaking, known in Malay-Indonesian as peranakan (lit., “local-born non-natives”), were officially welcomed into most parties. Unofficially, however, there was still a good deal of resentment toward Chinese and suspicion of their national loyalties. “Pribumi leaders, with the possible exception of those associated with the defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), perceive total absorption of local Chinese into the Indonesian population as the solution to the Chinese policy. . . . Pluralism has been applied by pribumi Indonesian leaders to their fellow pribumis, but not to the Chinese minority” (Suryadinata 1992, 4).

Consistent with unofficial attitudes, Indonesian authorities periodically implemented vigorously discriminatory policies against Chinese. In the early 1950s, there was a small, corruption-ridden program of government licensing and export controls devised in response to Chinese commercial dominance (McVey 1992, 11; Suryadinata 1992, 130–132). The regulations brought an entire class of indigenous license-holders into existence, who illegally “rented” their permits to Chinese businesspeople in silent partnerships known as “Ali-Baba” arrangements. The practice continued in a different guise under the Suharto regime, when the largest of the so-called cukong (wealthy Chinese partners of indigenous officials) were tethered even more tightly to Suharto and the New Order leadership (Mackie 1992; Robison 1986, 272; Suryadinata 1992, 142). In 1959, the minister of trade in the Sukarno cabinet, an official from the Islamic Nahdatul Ulama (NU) party, issued a regulation banning foreign-born Chinese retailers from rural areas and requiring they transfer their business assets to Indonesian citizens (Robison 1982, 86–88; Suryadinata 1992, 135). Although officially the regulation did not affect Chinese-Indonesian citizens, and although enforced in a haphazard manner, the regulation was symptomatic of the way in which economic nationalism in Indonesia typically took on anti-Chinese overtones.

Although in 1946, at the height of the independence struggle when they needed to court Chinese support, nationalist leaders had announced a Citizen Act extending equal citizen rights to all Chinese born in Indonesia, during the 1950s the republican government reversed course, tightening residence rules and requiring Chinese Indonesians to actively repudiate Chinese citizenship (Suryadinata 1992, 113–115). The resulting
lack of legal clarity created rich opportunities for unscrupulous government officials to exact cash payments from Chinese.

The changing winds of elite opinion in Jakarta also led to policies on Chinese culture and religion far more repressive than those in nearby Malaysia. There had been a great expansion of Chinese-medium schools in the late 1940s, some of which had actually begun to “re-Sinify” Indonesian-born *peranakan* (many of whom could not, and still today cannot, speak Chinese). In 1957, however, the minister of defense banned Indonesian citizens from attending “alien” schools, thereby abolishing Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools serving Indonesian Chinese (Suryadinata 1992, 151). The last remaining Chinese-medium schools were closed in late 1965, in the aftermath of a failed left-wing officers coup; Suharto propaganda blamed the coup on the Communist Party and Chinese. In 1974, the Suharto government imposed a ban on Chinese language instruction in *any* Indonesian school; literature and signs in Chinese characters were also forbidden (Suryadinata 1992, 158). In striking contrast to the Indonesian example, and despite some restrictive regulations (such as the requirement that they also teach Malay), in nearby Malaysia Chinese-medium schools flourished. So too did the use of Chinese language and characters in public signs and writing (Tan 2000; Tang 2000).

In all these matters, we see a fundamental contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia on the issue of postcolonial pluralism. The idea of differentiating citizenship along ethnic lines, especially as regards indigenes versus Chinese, was discussed at the time of the Indonesia’s founding. But an exuberantly republican ideology, as well as the exigencies of anti-colonial mobilization, resulted in policies that were officially inclusive and non-discriminatory. As long as Chinese Indonesians were willing to renounce their Chinese citizenship, Sukarno declared, they should be welcomed as citizens. Similarly, although a Department of Religion was established in 1946 and Indonesia’s many indigenous religions were not included among those that citizens could profess, the popular nationalist community campaigned successfully against the establishment of Islam as the state religion and against the application of Islamic law to Muslim citizens. Until 1966, then, most Chinese Indonesians were quietly able to profess the religion of their choice, even though the Department of Religion did not provide special resources for their religion.

However, the economic and political crises of the 1950s and 1960s, the continuing economic dominance of Chinese, and, perhaps most important, the lack of a settled consensus among the Indonesian elite on the terms for citizenship and constitutional governance all ensured that
Chapter 2: Ethnically Differentiated Citizenship

Indonesia was tragically prone to periodic “foundational” crises. During these periods—the elections of the 1955, the abolition of parliamentary democracy in 1958–1959, the anti-communist massacres of 1965–1966, and the final months of the Suharto dictatorship—all of the constitutional and ideological grounds of the state were put in question. Worse yet, in an effort to outflank rivals, some among the ruling elite were tempted during these crises to make sectarian appeals to ethnicity, race, or religion to advance themselves against enemies. Today, at the beginning of a new millennium, Indonesia is again in the midst of one of these foundational crises. The result is that the sweet promise of inclusive and egalitarian citizenship expressed in so much of Indonesia’s nationalist heritage has yet to be realized.

Ethnoreligious issues were, of course, central to political debates on citizenship and constitutionalism in Malaysia. Moreover, these issues have typically been resolved in a manner that, unlike Indonesia, officially differentiates citizens along ethnic and religious lines. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was created in 1946 in opposition to British proposals to grant expanded citizen rights to long-resident Chinese. During 1963–1965, the question of Malay rights and Chinese citizenship scuttled efforts to bring Chinese-dominated Singapore into the Malaysian federation. This failure was testimony to the determination of the Malay elite to use ethnically differentiated citizenship as the groundwork for promoting their party and their (Malay) people. The great irony here is that, whatever its democratic shortcomings, the very strength of this formula, and the security of the UMNO hold on government, have allowed Malaysia to steer clear of the foundational pitfalls that have plagued Indonesia, and, slowly but surely, to make progress in ethnic relations.

Ethnically Differentiated Citizenship

In British Malaya, then, the colonial order stimulated a three-sided competition among aristocrats, Islamists, and popular nationalists. But there was little doubt in the late colonial period as to which of these cultural streams was to be dominant. Royalty and aristocrats controlled the top leadership posts in Malay political organizations. In the postwar period, they assumed the lion’s share of key posts in UMNO, the party that has led the coalition that has ruled Malaysia since independence. Only with the election of Mahathir Mohamad (a non-aristocrat) as prime minister in 1981 was aristocratic dominance seriously challenged. Mahathir would go
on to curb aristocrat privileges, shifting the balance of power in UMNO away from the old aristocracy to the new Malay middle class (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 30–39).

There was little doubt, too, as to the nature of citizenship in an independent Malaysia. It was to be an asymmetrically differentiated citizenship, which accorded basic citizen rights to Chinese and Indians in exchange for special legal, political, and economic rights for Malays. Under the terms of the constitutional agreement worked out in 1957, Chinese and Indians who met certain residency requirements were given citizenship rights in exchange for accepting Malay dominance in politics and culture. Islam was declared the religion of state, but, not without some ambiguity, freedom of religion was promised for the followers of other religions as well. Malay was declared the national language, but Chinese-medium schools, newspapers, and signs were also still allowed. The constitution’s Article 153 also had special, if vague, provisions for Malay educational scholarships, land reservations, and set-asides in the civil service and military (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 16).

Consistent with these emphases, and in striking contrast to Indonesia, all of the successful political parties in Malaysia have been “constructed along ethnic lines” (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 16). Malaysian citizenship, then, was premised not on universal individual rights but on what political theorists have come to refer to as “differentiated citizenship” (Parekh 1991, 192, 772), in which group rights are recognized alongside individual rights. Unlike the Western European “consociational democracies” to which the Malaysian system is sometimes compared (Lijphart 1977), however, the group rights accorded Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic minorities are distributed in unambiguously asymmetrical fashion. In theoretical terms, as Milne and Mauzy (1999, 18) have observed, the Malaysian system is a kind of “hegemonic consociationalism” (cf. Lijphart 1977, 5), in which Malays enjoy constitutionally sanctioned advantages over non-Malay citizens.

The constitution’s vaguely worded provisions for Malay affirmative action were to become the basis for far more ambitious programs of Malay affirmative action after the disastrous “race” riots of May 1969. This was the one moment in its independence history at which Malaysia seemed on the verge of a foundational crisis of Indonesia-like proportions. According to official figures, almost two hundred people died in the violence, the majority of them Chinese. The violence was prompted by tensions between Malays and Chinese on the heels of a national election in which opposition parties identified with non-Malay interests had made gains at the expense of the ruling National Alliance.
The most important postriot initiative was the formulation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP sought to tackle the economic imbalance between Malays and Chinese. (Forming about 8 percent of the national population, the bulk of Malaysian Indians worked on agricultural estates during the colonial period and were as poor or poorer than Malays. But Indians were excluded from affirmative action programs.) In its first years the program’s educational and business set-asides so antagonized some Chinese that it prompted immigration by a few of the best and brightest of Chinese youth. Even in the Malay community, critics charged that the program’s contracts and subsidies were being unfairly channeled to the UMNO elite and not to the Malay poor or deserving businesspeople (see Gomez and Jomo 1997). This led, in turn, to widespread accusations that the new Malay capitalism, like that of the Suharto-linked elite in Indonesia, was an “ersatz capitalism” that would wither on the vine if ever state protections were removed (Yoshihara 1988).

From the start, however, the UMNO leadership made no secret of its ambition, not merely to reduce Malay poverty, but to bring a new class of Malay capitalists into existence. Cronyism appears to have been rampant, but there can be little doubt that the NEP succeeded in reducing Malay poverty and achieving impressive educational gains for Malays. Between the early 1970s and 1993, the Malay middle class rose from 18 percent to 28 percent of the population, and the industrial working class tripled from 7.8 percent. During roughly the same period, the agricultural population (predominantly Malay) fell from 65.2 percent to 33.5 percent (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 62). The NEP had the good fortune, of course, of coinciding with the Asian economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s. It is also true that it was plagued by sufficiently high levels of cronyism to bring about the spectacular collapse of several large investment schemes. Itsfailings acknowledged, however, the program succeeded in diminishing ethnic inequalities in wealth. During roughly the same period, inequalities between prabumi and Chinese in neighboring Indonesia were getting worse. Indeed, compared to similar programs in other countries, and evaluated purely in terms of its impact on ethnic economic imbalances (not fairness or freedom from cronyism), the NEP ranks as one of the more successful programs of ethnically based affirmative action of the late twentieth century.

One intriguing, if especially controversial, feature of the program has been its impact on ethnic relations. As noted above, the program in its early years exacerbated tensions between Malays and Chinese (Muzaffar 1987, 24). As time went on, however, Chinese with strategic ties to UMNO and the Malay elite did well as NEP business partners, and the attitude of
much of the Chinese elite changed (Gomez 1999, 153; Searle 1999). Given the impressive breadth and duration of Malaysia’s economic boom, the Chinese middle class has prospered too, although this has not prevented many ordinary Chinese and Indians from feeling they are a lesser category of citizen. Nonetheless, although the findings must be regarded as tentative, the essays by Rahman Embong, Sumit, and Shamsul in this volume, as well as other studies (Embong 1999; Searle 1999), suggest that the rise of the so-called “new Malay” middle class (Melayu baru) has been accompanied by a lessening of ethnic tensions, especially between Malays and Chinese. By comparison with contemporary Indonesia, it is notable that there is a significantly lesser incidence of minority-baiting in Malaysia. Indeed, in the late 1990s, there were signs that some in the highest echelons of the ruling elite were contemplating stepping back from the “Malay-first” emphases of the nep toward a new emphasis on a more symmetrical pattern of multiethnic citizenship.

The latter transition is preliminary to say the least, however, not least of all because recent changes in government, the economy, and society seem potentially at variance with this trend. The religious field, for example, has seen a notable relaxation of ethnic and religious borders between the two dominant minorities, the Indians and Chinese. Some individuals in each of these ethnic communities have migrated out of old ethnoreligious enclaves into new, multiethnic religious movements and denominations; the most prominent of these interethnic religious associations are charismatic Christians and Hindu-inspired mystics like the Satya Sai Baba movement (Ackerman and Lee 1988). Equally important, even among Chinese and Indians who affiliate with the old, ethnically segregated religious organizations, state policies in favor of Malays and Islam have helped to create an “undefined sense of solidarity . . . that they are not Muslims” (Ackerman and Lee 1988, 5).

Although there is increasing commensality between Chinese and Indians, however, the Islamic resurgence and state set-asides have fortified the Malay versus non-Malay divide. The fact that a major stream in the Islamic resurgence has been colored by ethnic chauvinism has “inhibited interethnic and interreligious relations and widened social distance between communities” (Mutalib 1990, 101). In many towns, the resurgence at first decreased the incidence of everyday civilities like greetings or the sharing of meals (see also Anwar 1987). Nonetheless, as the essays by Shamsul, Rahman Embong, and Sumit in this volume testify, there is another stream in contemporary Malay culture and the Muslim resurgence. This stream emerged only in the 1990s, and any estimate of its future influence, therefore, must be tentative. Nonetheless, a segment of the Muslim middle class
today seems to be experimenting with a less exclusive sense of their faith and a more multiethnic vision of market and nation.

Again, however, the public spheres that make up a society do not always develop in tandem, and the general trend in Malaysian society is as yet unclear. Whether the lowering of ethnic barriers seen in some societal fields will continue depends on, among other things, ongoing political contests. Not the least of these is the rivalry between the Mahathir government and the political opposition dominated by the theologically conservative Islamist party known as PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, or the All-Malaysia Islamic Party). Although founded in the 1950s as a populist party only slightly more Islamic than UMNO, in the 1980s PAS veered in a more theologically conservative direction under the leadership of a new generation of “young Turk” (as they were known) militants (Muzaffar 1987, 55–66). Populist in its economics and vehemently opposed to corruption, PAS is nonetheless deeply conservative in matters of Islamic law and ulama (Muslim scholar) leadership of the party and government. As Zainah Anwar’s essay in this volume explains, PAS advocates the establishment of an Islamic state, based on a strict application of Islamic law, including harsh hudud penalties (such as amputation of limbs) for designated criminal acts, the death penalty for Muslim apostates, and severe limitations on the rights of women in matters of divorce, inheritance, and court testimony (see Ismail 1995; Othman 1994). Although it tends not to play up the matter, the party is also committed to the conservative Islamist notion that citizen rights in a Muslim-dominated state should be differentiated by religion. Among other things, this means that, as “protected minorities” (dhimmi), non-Muslims must accept Muslim dominance or face prosecution as enemies of Islam (see Awang 1994).

Although most of these theoretical notions have little direct appeal among the Malay public, disaffection with UMNO and Prime Minister Mahathir, not least of all after the sacking of the popular vice premier Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 (see the Shamsul essay in this volume), may continue to put wind in PAS’s sails, giving it a political influence disproportionate to its ideological resonance in society. In this instance, rivalries in the political field are affecting culturo-ideological developments in the religious field. Recent events have boosted the influence of theologically conservative Islamic organizations committed to ideals of asymmetrical citizenship. This has occurred at precisely the same time that, as a result of (among other things) improvements in the economic field, some in the mainstream Malay leadership appear inclined to downplay the Malay versus non-Malay divide.
Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has not hesitated to exploit non-Muslim fears of conservative Islam and ethnic violence. During the election campaign of November 1999, the prime minister used the publicity surrounding anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia to remind Chinese that, without his leadership and the **NEP**, violence like that seen in Indonesia might well have occurred in Malaysia. At the same time, however, people who know the prime minister (and whom I interviewed in October 1999) point out that Mahathir now believes that it is important to take Malaysia beyond its manufacturing base toward an information-based, “knowledge economy.” To achieve this goal requires the enthusiastic participation of Chinese Malaysians. Recognizing this, the prime minister believes measures must be taken to reassure Chinese that they are full partners in the Malaysian nation. On several recent occasions, Mahathir has even spoken of the need to build a multiethnic “Malaysian nation” (**bangsa Malaysia**), a notion that implies equality among Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. (In subsequent statements, the prime minister made clear that this symmetrical citizenship is something to be achieved in the future, ideally by 2020.) As with his newly initiated Malaysian Multimedia Super corridor (designed to promote software and multimedia industries), Mahathir has also gone out of his way to recruit highly skilled Malaysian Chinese to new programs, including some who had previously migrated to California’s Silicon Valley.

In this same regard, it is interesting to note that, at the beginning of the Asian economic crisis in 1997–1998, Mahathir appealed to Malaysian Chinese to purchase shares in Malay-owned businesses threatened with bankruptcy. The contrast with Suharto of Indonesia could not be more striking. In the final months of 1997 and early 1998, Suharto and his children responded to the growing economic crisis by accusing Chinese Indonesians (as well as “Jews,” the CIA, and the Vatican; see Hefner 2000a) of having masterminded the economic crisis so as to bring Suharto down. They did so, this propaganda claimed, because Suharto is a Muslim and because these “enemies of Islam” do not want a majority-Muslim country to become strong. In February 1998, as Indonesia’s economic crisis worsened, Suharto proxies also accused Chinese shop owners of driving up prices by hoarding staple commodities. In the same month, Suharto’s minister of interior, Syarwan Hamid, referred to the Chinese as “rats” who were destroying the nation. In the weeks that followed, regional government officials joined this shockingly racialist campaign, accusing Chinese storeowners of manufacturing the food shortage. A short time later, as if on cue, Indonesia witnessed incidents of urban
violence in which hapless Chinese storeowners were the targets of cruel crowd violence.

All this is to say that Indonesia in the late 1990s and 2000 was in the throes once more of a foundational crisis of citizenship and governance. In this instance, the shameless efforts of old regime elites were jeopardizing the great pluralist achievements in the religious field. There, just prior to Suharto’s fall, Indonesia had seen the emergence of the world’s largest movement for a civil-democratic Islam.

Religion and Citizenship

Although through the din of recent anti-Chinese racialism it may be difficult to remember, the question that has animated citizenship debates in independent Indonesia has less frequently focused on whether citizen rights should be differentiated by ethnicity, as in Malaysia, but whether they should be differentiated by religion. And the majority opinion during the first fifty years of the republic was a firm, if still contested, “no.”

In the months preceding the Indonesian declaration of independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesian leaders worked furiously to formulate a tentative constitution for their planned republic. The most contentious issue on which the leaders could not agree had nothing to do with Chinese or indigenous rights, but with whether the state should impose different rights and duties on citizens according to their religion. The question was raised in relation to the so-called Jakarta Charter, a proposed amendment to the Indonesian declaration of independence (not included in the declaration’s final version) that required the state to implement Islamic law (shariah) for all Muslim citizens (Feillard 1995, 42). Supporters of the charter presented it in purely religious terms, as a right and duty of Muslims to conduct their religion as its laws specify; the issue was neither explicitly nor implicitly motivated by a desire to assert pribumi rights over Chinese. In the 1950s, the issue was revived again, this time through a debate in the Constituent Assembly that pitted proponents of an Islamic state against an odd alliance of military conservatives and left-leaning popular nationalists committed to non-confessional nationalism (Lev 1966).

Although initially their electoral support was equal to that of their nationalist and communist rivals, Muslim parties who advocated an Islamic state lost ground to popular nationalists and communists during the final years of Sukarno rule. The single greatest cause of their decline was an impressive campaign of agrarian mobilization conducted by the
Indonesian Communist Party in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Mortimer 1974, 276–328). Angered by the communist success and their own marginalization, Muslim parties collaborated with the Indonesian military in the violent destruction of the Communist Party in the aftermath of a failed left-wing officers coup on October 1, 1965. As reward for this cooperation, the Muslim leadership looked to the military-dominated “New Order” government to revive the Jakarta Charter and, with it, introduce religious differentiation into the terms of Indonesian citizenship.

However, the conservative military nationalists around General Suharto were adamantly opposed to any such concession to Muslim interests. In fact, during the first twenty-some years of his rule, Suharto was a staunch promoter of a conservative interpretation of the state ideology known as the “Five Principles” or Pancasila (Ramage 1995). The Pancasila steers clear of any recognition of Islam as the state religion. However, at least as interpreted by Suharto’s proxies, the Pancasila also rejects the Western liberal idea that religion is merely a matter of private personal belief. In so doing, it opens the door to a small but important measure of citizen differentiation by religion.

Under the Suharto regime, the state recognized five national religions—Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—and required all citizens to profess one. From kindergarten to college, students were (and are still) required to study the tenets of their religion (as interpreted by state-appointed experts) for two hours a week in government classrooms. An individual’s religious identity is also one of the few items of personal information recorded on the identity cards that all citizens carry. Complicating this pattern of citizen differentiation by religion was Suharto’s inconsistent conduct on religious matters. However pluralist the Pancasila to which he claimed allegiance, in practice Suharto skillfully exploited religious tensions, pitting one religious community against another. This left a bitter legacy of state meddling in religious matters, and, by posing religious communities against each other, left relations among communities deeply troubled.

As the essays by Hermawan Sulistyo and Vedi Hadiz in this volume indicate, in the final years of his rule, Suharto dropped all pretense of neutrality and actively courted ultraconservative Muslims who, just a few years earlier, had figured prominently in the opposition (see also Hefner 2000a, chs. 5–7). Suharto’s courtship of this small, hard-line community represented a decisive break with his earlier support for Javanist mysticism and Pancasila pluralism against Muslim organizations (Ramage 1995). This tactical shift was motivated by the president’s determination to undermine the growing democratic opposition by splitting it along religious lines.
This strategy was initially devised in 1995 by conservative Muslim intellectuals in think tanks established by members of the first family and a small, “green” (i.e., Islamist, see the Sulistyö essay in this volume) faction of the military. To achieve this goal, Suharto’s supporters also had to discredit Muslim members of the pro-democracy opposition, including leaders of Indonesia’s two largest Muslim organizations, Abdurrahman Wahid of Nahdlatul Ulama and Amien Rais of Muhammadiyah.

Ultimately, of course, Suharto’s strategy failed; democratic Muslim leaders were at the forefront of the multireligious alliance that drove Suharto from power in May 1998. Unfortunately, Suharto’s departure changed little in regime culture itself. Despite new press freedoms and the courage of a few civilian and military officials, to this day most of the state remains unreformed. Sadly, as Sulistyö’s essay hints, recent evidence indicates that hard-liners from the regime have also been behind some of the outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence that have plagued Indonesia since Suharto’s fall (Hefner 2000b; Tomagola 2000).

The fate of interethnic and interreligious civility in Indonesia will greatly depend on efforts to dissipate this bitter legacy and forge a new consensus on citizenship and pluralism in the post-Suharto era. The elections of June 1999, the first free and fair national elections since 1955, were extremely hopeful in this regard. The results indicated that the country in the 1990s had experienced a great convergence toward a democratic and pluralist center. Whereas, in the 1950s, the majority of Muslims advocated the formation of an Islamic state, in the 1999 elections the overwhelming majority voted for pluralist parties.

Most Indonesians, and most Indonesian Muslims, appear comfortable with some measure of state support for religion in public life. In this sense they appear more “civil-pluralist” than “liberal” in their understanding of the relationship between religion and democracy (Hefner 1998b). It is helpful to remember, however, that most European democracies have historically allowed, and still allow, limited state support to religious organizations (see Monsma and Soper 1997). The American and French patterns of vigorous “disestablishment” are, in fact, more the exception than the Western democratic rule. As long as such state support is equally available to all confessions, there is nothing intrinsically undemocratic about it. Indeed, as Tariq Modood has recently observed, the aim of a democratic multiculturalism should not be to drive religious actors or discourses from the public square, but to work for “the inclusion of marginal and disadvantaged groups, including religious communities, in public life” (Modood 2000, 192). The key thing as far as the public sphere is concerned is that religious actors respect the ground rules of democratic
citizenship. This means extending freedoms of speech and association to all citizens, including dissident members in one’s own community.

The critical issue as far as contemporary Indonesia is concerned is that the great majority of Muslims demonstrated through their voting that they see their religion as thoroughly consistent with democracy and constitutionalism. Most reject, too, political reforms that would relegate non-Muslims to the status of second-class citizens. Unfortunately, however, it is precisely because of this lack of “primordial” divides that defenders of the ancien régime have had to work so hard to turn local tensions into raging national battles. The murder of Muslim preachers in eastern Java (see the Sulistyo essay in this volume, and Hefner 2000a) and the skillfully orchestrated bombing of some fifteen churches on Christmas Eve 2000 (an event that occurred as this book was in press) illustrates the callous determination of those who would poison inter-religious relations so as to turn back political reform.

The stakes in this contest are high. The violence threatens not only Indonesia’s proud tradition of national citizenship, but also that which has been most remarkable in the cultural heritage of Indonesian Muslims: their spirited commitment to the dream of a multiethnic and multireligious nation. Elite-instigated developments in the political field are running roughshod over progress toward civility and tolerance in religion. In light of the enormity of Indonesia’s crisis and the resources of ancien régime extremists, the long-term outcome of this struggle is far from clear.

Singapore’s Search for Nation

Although linked during its colonial history to peninsular Malaya, today Singapore’s political and cultural situation differs significantly from that of its Malaysian neighbor, and all the more from Indonesia. Whereas Malaysia and Indonesia are predominantly “indigenous” and Muslim, Singapore is an overwhelmingly Chinese (77 percent) society in which no religion enjoys a hegemonic influence. After the aborted attempt at federation with Malaysia (1963–1965), the Singapore elite, under the guidance of President Lee Kuan Yew, scrambled to ensure the cultural and economic survival of their resource-poor country. Although Lee and the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) are often portrayed in the Western media as authoritarian bullies, and although “some seriously anti-democratic legislation” has been put in place by the PAP, “the legitimacy and longevity of the PAP government from 1959 to present is built on a strong ideological consensus with the people around ‘economic pragmatism’”
What Francis Kok Loh Wah in his essay on Malaysia in this volume calls “developmentalist ideology” has for much of Singapore’s postcolonial history enjoyed significant legitimacy, as a result of the populace’s concern for their country’s survival. Today, however, this same ideological legacy may be working to create citizen aspirations unintended by the PAP leadership, and considerably more complex than developmentalism alone.

The ruling party in Singapore has promoted a policy on citizenship and ethnoreligious pluralism strikingly different from that of its two neighbors. Reacting to the failed effort at federation with Malaysia in 1965 (which broke down over the question of Malay communal privileges), the PAP leadership was at first unstinting in its emphasis on meritocracy and ethnically undifferentiated citizenship. Consistent with its origin in the 1950s as an alliance of British-educated professionals and left-leaning social democrats (the latter marginalized after Lee Kuan Yew’s consolidation of power in the early 1960s), early on the PAP had promoted secularist policies on religion and citizenship (Tamney 1996, 25). In the early 1960s, for example, the PAP leadership rushed through legislation aimed at privatizing ethnic and religious affiliations. Despite subsequent shifts in party policy, the “Religious Harmony” bill passed in 1990 preserves key features of this policy, prohibiting, for example, the use of religion for political ends and mandating severe penalties for anything deemed “extremist” (see Siddique in this volume, and Chua 1995, 26). On matters of ethnicity, too, PAP policies at first resembled those the party applied to religion. In 1972, Lee Kuan Yew’s advisers had described the Chinese extended family as incompatible with modern market rationality, because (he claimed) it frustrates the development of individual initiative. Even as late as 1981 Lee had described Singaporeans as individualistic achievers whose background as immigrants had led them to throw aside the collectivist shackles of Chinese tradition (Chua 1995, 27).

With the growing affluence of Singapore society, and in the face of middle-class restlessness over government controls, however, Lee and his aides appeared to have second thoughts in the late 1970s and early 1980s about this emphasis on individualistic merit to the exclusion of communal affiliation. PAP officials began to speak of individualism as a Western notion corrosive of “Asian values.” They also retreated from their earlier emphases on ethnic integration, English-language education, and non-communalism. After 1979, the government’s “Speak Mandarin” campaign promoted Mandarin rather than English as the mother tongue for Chinese-Singaporeans. Around the same time, the government began to emphasize communal self-help rather than individual
achievement or (least of all) state welfare as the preferred means of dealing with poverty, crime, and drug abuse (Li 1998, 165–169; Tamney 1996, 93).

In 1979, the PAP leadership also proposed reforms to public education that would allow moral educational curricula into public classrooms. The program the government eventually devised aimed to teach basic “Religious Knowledge” in an effort “to provide the cultural ballast to withstand the stresses of living in a fast changing society” (Straits Times, March 15, 1979, cited in Chua 1995, 27). Since Singapore’s population includes Indians (Muslim and Hindu) and Muslim Malays as well as Christians, Buddhists, and religiously unaffiliated Chinese, the school-based “Religious Knowledge” (RK) program stipulated that members of each community were free to choose a religious track consistent with their own convictions (Tamney 1996, 25). Seven tracks were made available for students: Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Islam, and Sikh.

At this stage Lee and his advisers seemed confident that the world religions all have “a common core of ethical values, which would undermine the negative values associated with hippyism” and other pernicious Western habits (Tamney 1996, 26). Most in the PAP leadership are also said to have expected that, despite its recognition of seven religious tracks, the RK campaign would give the biggest boost to the conservative, étatist Confucianism popular in PAP circles. However, to the government’s surprise, the majority of students enrolled in RK programs opted not to follow the Confucian track. The greatest number went into Buddhist (44 percent) and Bible (21 percent) studies. Some 18 percent chose Confucian studies, just slightly more than the number who chose Islam (13.3 percent; Tamney 1996, 38).

Even worse, as far as the government was concerned, Singapore’s Muslim and Christian minorities responded to the RK program by intensifying programs of religious outreach in their respective communities. Echoing their liberal and left-leaning counterparts in Indonesia, some Christian youth began to adapt progressive, liberation theology themes in their profession of their faith. Although a minority in Singapore’s politically cautious Muslim community (see Siddique in this volume), Muslim activists, too, ran afoul of government policies when they complained that the PAP’s emphasis on community self-reliance only guaranteed Muslims’ continuing marginalization (cf. Li 1998; Rahim 1998, 39–43). Contrary to the government’s intent, then, the RK program did not so much provide an antidote to Western individualism as bring religious difference back into the public square.
Sensing the RK program was getting out of hand, the government in 1989–1990 pulled back from the campaign, citing a report that the program was intensifying religious fervor and deepening ethnoreligious divides (Chua 1995, 30). In 1988 the government appointed a National Ideology Committee, headed by one of Lee’s sons, to examine the question of devising an official national ideology, in effect as an alternative to the RK program. The committee eventually released a report recommending the socialization of “Shared Values” which, at least on the surface, had nothing to do with religion. The values were supposed to express in a religiously neutral fashion an “Asian” emphasis on individual sacrifice and social harmony rather than Western individualism (Tamney 1996, 19).

In practice, however, the ostensibly non-ethnic, “shared values” bore a striking resemblance to the étatist Confucianism many in the ruling party had earlier hoped to inculcate through the Religious Knowledge program. The government White Paper described the values as “placing society above the self, upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contentions, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony.” The first principle was later reworded “as ‘nation before community and society above self’ to reflect the multiracial composition of Singapore” (Chua 1995, 32).

In the face of similar pluralist challenges but a different ethnoreligious balance, then, Singapore has moved toward citizenship policies quite unlike those of its two neighbors. Religion and ethnicity remain central to official formulations of citizenship in Malaysia. The Malaysian constitution identifies Malays as the beneficiaries of special state programs. It also defines a Malay as someone who, among other things, professes Islam (Mutalib 1990, 8). Religious education in Malaysia’s schools is mandatory for Muslims but not for non-Muslims. In Indonesia, communal identities are given little recognition in the constitution, with the notable exception that the 1945 constitution stipulates the president must be indigenous. Nonetheless, many state programs have been premised on the distinction between indigenes and Chinese. In matters of religion, there is no single state religion but, at least since 1966, every citizen is obliged to adhere to one of the five religions officially recognized by the state. In the last years of the Suharto regime, finally, the government’s neutrality on the five religions gave way to open courtship of regime-friendly Muslims.

Having flirted briefly with a program of religious education, the Singapore government quickly pulled back, opting for policies that present religion as first and foremost a private matter. Meanwhile, the state foreswears any and all programs for ethnically based affirmative action. It
does allow ethnocommunal organizations to play a public role, but this is limited to self-help in such fields as education, family counseling, and delinquency control. Meanwhile, the state publicly promotes what it claims is an ethnically invisible program of “shared values.” In reality, however, the shared values are based on the government’s long-standing and selective reinterpretation of Confucian values in a manner that emphasizes loyalty to the state and capitalist self-discipline.

Beng-Huat Chua (1995) and Joseph Tamney (1996) have both expressed doubts about the long-term prospects of this government-mandated values program. As Chua and Kwok emphasize in their essay in this volume, Singapore’s economic success has greatly diminished the siege mentality among the population. The growing differentiation of tastes and lifestyles among the country’s large middle class has not engendered a militant anti-PAP opposition. But it has stimulated a deep public appetite for individual expression and personal freedom. Chua and Kwok’s essay also shows that the government continues to impose strict controls on formal politics. The sociologist Robert Tamney (1996, 61) goes further than these authors do, speaking of an “absence of an independent civil society” in the island nation. Nonetheless, he too shows that, at a less formal level of public action, many in the Singaporean middle class are voting loud and clear for personal freedom and multicultural tolerance. The “developmentalism ideology” about which Francis Kok Loh speaks in his essay on Malaysia seems here in Singapore to have ushered in something not anticipated by government handlers: a public thirst for participation and civil decency. Shamsul A.B. sees hints of a similar trend among the Malaysian middle classes.

These changes in Singaporean society still fall far short of institutional democratization. The government maintains extensive controls on the press and political activity, and requires all non-governmental organizations to be officially registered. Public criticism of the government exacts a high price; in the case of public associations, it brings swift deregistration. However strict these controls, the economic and cultural vitality so apparent in the essays by Siddique and Chua and Kwon in this volume show that Singapore’s citizens are developing an appetite for public participation and multicultural dialogue. As in Indonesia, of course, history shows that ruling elites can ignore trends in civil society and do violence to those who would promote a democratic alternative to established ways. However, Singapore is not plagued with Indonesia’s deep foundational divides, and the PAP elite is vastly more savvy than the Suhartoist clique. With a little luck, civility-enhancing trends in this society may yet allow the tightly wound PAP leadership to loosen up and trust its citizens.
Conclusion

What conclusions might we draw from the history and politics of these Southeast Asian pluralisms? The three countries remind us, first of all, that the Western world did not pioneer the tasting of the forbidden fruit of cultural pluralism. As in Southeast Asia, other parts of the world have their own rich histories of diversity and participation. No more than the West, in premodern times none of these Southeast Asian societies devised formulas that democratic-minded people would today find acceptable for coordinating citizenship across deep cultural divides. But elements of the earlier legacy remain, and, at the very least, its best elements have to be engaged if the effort to promote a more participatory pluralism is to resonate with local actors and organizations.

A second, related lesson concerns the impact of Western colonialism on this Southeast Asian heritage. Because some Western scholars still portray the West as the world-conquering carrier of pluralist tolerance, it is important to remind ourselves that, in these three Southeast Asian societies as in much of the colonial world (cf. Cohn 1996; Mamdani 1996), the immediate impact of Western colonialism was the exacerbation and rigidification of ethnoreligious differences. Where before there had been a canopied civilizational identity that facilitated easy cultural exchange among many (although never all) of the region’s ethnic groups, European colonialism laid the foundation for the rigidly oppositional identities of “plural societies” fame. Where before there had been a multietnic, multi-religious, and open system of maritime commerce, European conquest segregated the economic system along ethnic lines. Aspects of the economic system changed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Europeans promoted a shift from colonial to liberal capitalism. Although a few attempts were made at cultural liberalization as well, most colonial segregations remained firmly in place. They were left intact because, as Furnivall sensed but did not adequately emphasize, the Europeans used the “lack of a common will” to their political and economic advantage.

After two generations of nation-building and market-making, the face of pluralism in these three countries is much changed. No more than in the West (experiencing its own multicultural anxieties), there is no historical teleology pressing these societies to an inevitably democratic outcome. But there are some interesting, even promising trends. As their economies have grown and their societies differentiate, we see a proliferation of new societal organizations and relationships. In political theory in the 1990s, extra-state arrangements like these—roughly, “civil
society”—were celebrated as the golden road to democracy. Civic associations may indeed facilitate heightened and equitable participation. However, by themselves these associations fall far short of guaranteeing citizen equity and inclusivity. The Malay ethnic organizations that took shape in British Malaya during the first half of the twentieth century were an important forum for articulating Malay interests. Threatened by Chinese urban skills and economic dynamism, however, the Malay elite used the organizations to block Chinese efforts to secure citizen rights. Similarly, under the Suharto regime (1966–1998), conservative business groups used their networks to collude with the military and bureaucratic elite to limit access to the marketplace. More recently, the Indonesian jihad (lit., religious “struggle”) groups funded by old regime conservatives to do battle against “Christians” in Maluku (Hefner 2000b; Tomagola 2000) show many of the traits of self-organization and voluntarism we associate with civil society. But their cultural impact on citizenship and religious relations is anything but civil.

In these and other examples, we are reminded that, rather than always “making democracy work,” associations in civil society can promote uncivil, sectarian interests. Originating as they do in diverse societies, civic associations may sometimes be used to promote the interests of one social grouping against another rather than for the democratic good.

This complexity acknowledged, civil society must still be regarded as part of what is needed to strike this difficult balance of democracy with multicultural civility. For these latter ends to be realized, organizations in society must do more than merely provide a space for voluntarism and self-organization apart from the state. They must also contribute to the generalization of a distinctive political culture: a culture that enjoins people to be citizens, extending rights of participation to all members of society, especially to weaker individuals or minority groups who might otherwise be barred from full participation. Even this, however, is not yet enough. Once the citizen-making dynamic begins in society, its best principles must be “scaled up” (Evans 1996; Hefner 2000a) into the ideals and actions of the state. Rather than running against civil forces in society, the state must work with them.

It is on this last point that the three countries discussed in this book have the most to tell. All three countries have seen significant growth in incomes, civic organizations, and public dialogue since the early independence period. In fact, by most measures, civil society and the public sphere in all three countries have matured considerably more than has the state. In Singapore, the majority of citizens were willing during the early years of independence to sacrifice personal freedoms for the sake of economic
growth and, equally important, the security of their vulnerable nation. As Singaporeans have become wealthier and better educated, few want to give this up for radical political change. Most share with the government a keen interest in giving their small country the cultural edge it requires to remain economically competitive in an era of globalization. All the same, there is a sense among many citizens that their patience and moderation have been ignored by a government that seems too sure of itself and too distrustful of its people.

All the same, Singapore offers grounds for cautious optimism. Although the Muslim minority is, by comparison with the country’s other populations, marginalized from mainstream politics and education (Rahim 1998), Muslims, too, show the same level-headed moderation as Singapore’s other ethnic communities. This example gets to the heart of what most inspires confidence in Singapore’s future. The island nation has none of the foundational divides that, in nearby Malaysia or, especially, Indonesia, threaten to put the entire framework of public participation and governance in question. A secure foundation for nation and participation has been laid, even though some in government continue to act as if this were not the case.

As Joseph Tamney (1996) has observed, most of what the Singapore government promotes as Asian values are not particularly “Asian”; they are variations on pro-market and stability-first themes once emphasized by conservative governments in the West. Singapore’s citizens have demonstrated a shrewd skepticism toward the government’s values campaign. Proud of their multicultural heritage and their economic success, most feel that the values claimed by the government as necessary for Singapore’s future don’t do justice to the complexity of society or the sophistication of its citizenry. Tamney (1996, 194) is probably right to conclude that the culture war between the government and its citizens will continue. There are clear signs, however, that the government is losing this war; the “shared values” campaign, one suspects, will eventually fade into inefficacy. Barring some governmental intemperance, Singapore seems a good candidate for a slow but steady evolution from conservative statism toward a more civil state and society.

In Malaysia, there are still serious foundational questions being asked about the terms for nation and citizenship—especially among the country’s politically dominant but deeply divided Malay population. All the same, recent years have seen substantial progress on ethnoreligious matters. However checkered their achievement in terms of justice, equity, and transparency, state policies have succeeded in boosting the incomes and confidence of the Malay population and thereby diminishing economic influences on ethnoreligious tensions.
Religion is never just a proxy for economic forces, however, and since the 1980s the Islamic resurgence has acquired a momentum of its own, complicating the progress achieved in the economic field. Some of the motivation for the resurgence does appear to have originated in Malays’ “closing of ranks against the non-Malay” (Nagata 1984, 234). But others in the resurgence, even some strict-constructionist conservatives in the Islamist party, PAS, have criticized Malay-first programs as un-Islamic. Other pious Muslims, such as the middle-class professionals represented in Chandra Muzaffar’s Justice Party (mentioned in Shamsul’s essay), have given this critique a progressive twist. For them, Malay set-asides are not merely un-Islamic, but, unless explicitly justifiable in democratic terms, corrosive of the inclusive citizenship that Malaysia needs now more than ever.

There are signs that even some in the ruling party, UMNO, have begun to think in these terms. They are doing so, not just because of some sudden conversion to the idea of a “Malaysian nation,” but because the sophisticated among the Malay elite, and there are many, have a keen understanding of the nature of global capitalism, with its greatly increased mobility of knowledge, actors, and capital. Many, too, have developed genuinely close ties to Chinese Malaysians. On the basis of these experiences, then, this segment of the new Malay middle class has come to understand that Chinese Malaysians must be made to feel that they have a full and equal share in the project of Malaysia if the country is to make the transition from a low-wage manufacturer to a knowledge-based economy.

For attitudinal changes like these to have a broader impact, however, they cannot remain the idle suggestions of a few; they must be scaled up into the policies and programs of the state. The tragically short-sighted prosecution during 1998–2000 of the former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, shows that intraelite rivalries can override trends in society, not to mention the better judgment of many in the governing class. With its impressive advances in education, infrastructure, and poverty alleviation, Malaysia in the late 1990s seemed like a dazzling example of a mature society in need of a civil polity to consolidate its social and economic progress. The prosecution of Anwar and the subsequent crackdown on pro-democracy dissidents was a serious setback in this regard. The example reminds us that, however impressive the gains in society, a democratic polity remains incomplete, indeed impossible, without a civilized state.

This, of course, is also the gist of the problem in contemporary Indonesia, although there it is true several times over. Of the three countries examined in this book, Indonesia began its political career with the most brightly republican of constitutions and the most inclusive charter for citizenship. Today Indonesia deserves every democrat's praise for having created the largest movement for a democratic Islam in the world.
Sadly, however, Indonesia has long had difficulty getting elite political practice to match high ideological ideals, even where those ideals have been shared by much of the population. This has proved to be especially difficult during the foundational crises into which Indonesia has regularly fallen. During these unhappy moments, all the progress of previous years seems forgotten, and the grounds for nation and citizenship are put in question again.

What makes these political fits dangerous is not the intensity of ideological argument per se, but the intemperate political maneuvers attempted by a few among the political and military elite. The all-too-familiar pattern to crises like these has been for segments of the elites to break out of the impasse at the center by reaching out into society and mobilizing violent, para-political vigilantes against rivals. It was just such a dynamic that gave Indonesia the awful violence of 1965–1966, in which Muslims and others joined forces with the conservative military to strike at the Communist Party, massacring hundreds of thousands of hapless peasants in the process (Cribb 1990; Hefner 2000a). As Geoffrey Robinson (1995, 11) has observed in an excellent study of the state and violence in Bali, “the roots of the political conflict and violence from 1945 to 1966 may be located in the actual participation of elements of the state—or the use of state institutions—on either or both sides of various political struggles.”

Unfortunately, all signs are that this vicious circle of state factionalization and para-political violence did not end in 1966. Whatever his pluralist reputation in the West, Suharto never missed a chance to exploit ethnoreligious divisions for his own purposes. In a similar manner, some of the ethnoreligious violence afflicting Indonesia today bears the telltale signs of elite provocation, instigated or abetted by allies of the former president. Sadly, in unleashing these un-civil forces, Indonesia’s ancien régime threatens to destroy the great reservoir of civility long found in Indonesian society and in the even more remarkable movement for a democratic Islam.

The roads to democracy and civic pluralism are necessarily varied. In an earlier and more naive age, some observers trumpeted the working class as the key to democracy’s possibility. Others placed their bets on the middle class. Sobered by the painful evidence of modern history, we now realize that the middle and working classes are as diverse as everyone else. If they are to become a force for democracy, these classes have to get their house in order on matters of citizenship and multicultural difference. To do that, much more is required than the faithful pursuit of some alleged “class interest.” A public sphere of democratic participation premised on a culture of inclusive citizenship must take shape. Even this is not enough.
The achievements of societal participation and inclusivity come to nothing if their best principles are not at some point projected up from society into the structures of state. This is to say that democracy depends, not just on civil society and not just on formal political structures, but on a synergy of state and society that deepens the democratic dispositions of both.

There is a final corollary to this pluralist perspective on democracy and multicultural citizenship. Where whole segments of a society are barred from public participation by poverty or historical discrimination, we should not be surprised to see some members of the disadvantaged group press for special measures to endow them with the resources needed for fuller participation. As with African Americans in the United States or Malays in Malaysia, this may well lead to calls for a “differentiated citizenship” (Parekh 1991)—institutional distinctions among citizens by ethnicity, race, gender, or whatever, so as to provide disadvantaged groups with special services to improve their station.

Market liberals may wince at such claims, and certain simplistic democrats may decry what they see as the imposition of “group rights” over “individual rights.” However, few statements generate more heat and less light when it comes to citizenship than this clumsy opposition between group and individual rights. Contrary, for example, to the discourse of “Asian values,” most of what we call “individual rights” are not selfishly atomized possessions exercised at the expense of others. On the contrary, as with the right to speak or associate freely, they are “typically used to sustain a wide range of social relationships” (Kymlicka 1995, 26). In so doing, these individual rights contribute to the development of vital public goods. Not the least of these is a culture of civility that extends equal citizens rights to others.

If, contrary to Asian values claims, individual rights have inherently social or collective benefits, it is equally true that the effective exercise of individual rights requires the provision or maintenance of public resources and opportunities. Where, as a result of historical accident or deliberate discrimination, a segment of the population has been denied those opportunities, there is nothing undemocratic or unjust about targeting resources for the improvement of the life chances of that disenfranchised population. There is no contradiction between democratic citizenship and affirmative programs like these if their purpose is stated loudly and clearly as leveling the playing field so as to create the conditions for equitable participation. In other words, an ethnic-, religion-, or gender-differentiated citizenship may be a fair way station on the road to full participation for all.
Programs like these raise more troubling questions, however, where they are presented, not as way stations on the road to equality, but as permanently differentiated rankings. Officialized hierarchies may not have posed a serious problem where the communities making up society lived “side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit” (Furnivall 1944, 446). Today, however, in an age of unprecedented spatial and social mobility, it is difficult and costly in human terms to segregate individuals by ethnicity, religion, or gender. At some point, we will begin to hear calls for more symmetrical forms of citizen participation, even in societies long regarded as the locus classicus of “plural society.” The normative power of such appeals has been strengthened by the high costs of segregation and, conversely, the clear benefits of fair play and collaboration among all citizens. The power of these appeals is also strengthened by the desire of growing numbers of residents in old ethnoreligious villages to be allowed to stroll out onto open cultural avenues, experimenting with new lifestyles and creating “hybridic” identities, rather than remaining cloistered behind the thick walls of a single ethnic tradition (see Modood 2000).

A generation ago, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz observed, “Thus, in apparent paradox . . . the move toward national unity intensified group tensions within the society by raising settled cultural forms out of their particular context, expanding them into general allegiances, and politicizing them” (Geertz 1973a, 245). Market-making and nation-building in the countries discussed in this book have indeed removed ethnic and religious solidarities from their old settings, and projected them into new political arenas. As Geertz feared, in some places the process has unleashed what appear to be civility-destroying contestations. Elsewhere, however, the process has convinced more and more people of the importance of forging civil polities and inclusive citizenship.

There is no teleology to history, and the outcome of struggles like these is as yet unclear. What is certain, however, is that these three Southeast Asian societies stand at a critical threshold in their modern history. The achievements made possible by pluralist interaction in education, the market, and public culture have been impressive. For some actors, these changes invite a comparable transition in politics, toward a more inclusive practice of citizenship. As the recent history of these three countries shows so well, however, the domains that comprise modern society do not always develop in tandem. No less significant, the interests to which elites in state and society respond are, to say the least, more varied than market efficiency or democratic participation alone. In an age of heightened human, cultural, and capital mobility, however, the social costs of anti-civil policies will continue to be high. Despite the protestations of certain conser-
ervative rulers to the contrary, then, we can be certain of one thing: that many citizens will come to regard the ideal of an equitable and inclusive citizenship, not as a “Western” invention, but, rightly, as their own.

Notes

1. Although the mainstream agreed with Huntington, there were variable views at the margins of modernization theory. A well-respected anthropological exponent of modernization theory in the early 1960s, Clifford Geertz took a less jaundiced view of democracy and ethnoreligious pluralism. Although he made clear that democracy requires a “civic culture” that stands above the “primordial sentiments” of religion, ethnicity, language, and race, he took pains to emphasize that this civic culture “does not require the simple replacement of primordial ties and identifications by civil ones. . . . What it does demand is an adjustment between them” (Geertz 1973b, 308). Curiously, although highlighting the need for this overarching civic sensibility, Geertz, like most in political science at this time, admitted he had few insights into how this civic culture developed in the West, or might yet emerge in developing societies. “Again, however, though we have at least a general idea of the nature of civility and the range of forms through which it is materialized in industrial states, very little is known about the processes by which the present patterns have come to be what they are” (Geertz 1973b, 309).

2. On the challenge of the ethnoreligious revival to secular nationalism, especially in developing countries, see Juergensmeyer 1993.


4. Furnivall was not alone, of course, in this idealized portrayal of the West. As the Dutch political theorist Arend Lijphart has observed in another context, there has long been a tendency in Western political theory to make an “overdrawn contrast between the first and third worlds” (Lijphart 1977, 21). The contrast presents Asian and other non-Western societies as seething with primordial incivilities, while presenting the West as homogeneous and civil. In good evolutionary manner, the model then assumes that political development involves a movement from the former state of primordialism to something more like the West.

5. Singapore was granted self-government in domestic affairs in 1959, but became formally independent from Great Britain in 1963, when it joined with the former British colonies of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo to enter the Malaysian Federation. Singapore was expelled two years later, after disputes with Malay authorities in Kuala Lumpur over Chinese and Malay citizen rights.

6. For logistical as well as intellectual reasons, not all participants in the initial phase of the project contributed in the end to this volume. Consistent with the Ford Foundation’s charter for the project, the project sought not only to engage senior Southeast Asian scholars in research and writing on pluralism and citizen participation, but also to heighten general public discussion of the same issues in the mass media and non-governmental circles. Several project fellows
were active in such undertakings during and after the research period. In Indonesia, two of the participants had to withdraw so as to pursue commitments in the pro-democracy movement. A Malaysian participant had to withdraw from the project as a result of problems surrounding the political crisis of 1998–1999.

7. Kathryn Woolward has raised this same point with reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s equally flawed concept of symbolic capital. Bourdieu’s model, she notes, also assumes a more or less perfect integration of social, symbolic, and economic “marketplaces.” See Woolard 1985, 239–243.

8. Prior to the great “Forward Movement” of British colonial authority into the peninsula in the 1870s, the London Missionary Society had attempted some missionizing among Malays and Chinese in the Straits Settlements. From 1874 on, the British officially upheld the status of Islam in the Malay states and effectively discouraged any further missionizing among Malays (Ackerman and Lee 1988, 30).

9. Dress restrictions on natives had been applied by the Portuguese as early the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; like their counterparts in premodern Europe, native rulers across the archipelago had also imposed dress restrictions on their populations. What made the nineteenth-century Dutch policies so distinctive is that they were linked to a putatively “scientific” theory and racial and ethnic distinctiveness.

10. Anthony Milner argues that the category of “Malay” (Melayu) was a colonial-era invention, not applied to the disparate peoples of the peninsula’s varied sultanates until well into the late nineteenth century. The historian Barbara Andaya (personal communication) challenges this claim, noting that “the term ‘bangsa Melayu’ is found on a piagem [charter] from fifteenth century Palembang, and there are innumerable other references to orang Melayu [Malay people] in later sources.” Whatever the precise status of this controversy, it seems clear that, prior to the late nineteenth century, the concept of “Malay” was more variegated in its usages than it was to become. More to the point, it carried with it little of the modern, proto-nationalist sense of a “people” with shared destinies and entitlements.

11. There were exceptions to this pattern, such as the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, where native Minang merchants held their own against Chinese merchants throughout the whole of the colonial period. See Kahn 1993; Peletz 1998.

12. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, locally born and Indonesian/Malay-speaking Chinese, known as peranakan or, in Malay, Baba, are distinguished from foreign-born, China-oriented, and Chinese-speaking immigrants, often referred to as totok (see Suryadinata 1992, 2). With the flurry of excitement and the flush of pride that accompanied the emergence of the nationalist movement in mainland China in the early 1900s, many in the Indies and Malayan Chinese communities, both peranakan and totok, identified with the homeland struggle and distanced themselves from political campaigns in the European colonies. However, from the 1910s on, some in both peranakan communities, especially in Indone-
sia, placed themselves alongside the indigenous nationalist community and sought to acquire equal rights as citizens. After independence the overwhelming majority of peranakan in both countries shifted their sights away from China and identified with the struggle for citizenship and equality. Faced with the reality of indigenous dominance in the state, and pressured by new state policies discriminating against resident aliens, even many totok at this time joined with the peranakan in seeking citizen rights. Nonetheless, some in the totok community continued to identify with China. In part, no doubt, the totok attitude reflected anxieties about their long-term prospects for integrating into Indonesian society. However, the totok view also showed the influence of the People’s Republic’s official policy on Indonesians of Chinese descent. Until the signing of a dual nationality treaty with Indonesia in the 1960s, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) officially regarded Indonesians of Chinese descent as Chinese nationals (Suryadinata 1992, 119). On the attitude of Chinese-Indonesians toward the Indonesian nation and the Indonesian state toward Chinese, see Suryadinata 1992. On the changing situation of the Chinese in twentieth-century Malaysia, see Lee and Tan 2000.

13. The eating example is, however, a complex one. A pious reform Muslim critical of the ethnonationalist coloring in so much Malay Islam, Hussin Mutalib (1990, 164) notes that the ethnic emphasis seen in Malaysia’s Muslim resurgence has resulted in a “noticeable decrease in social interaction among the country’s ethno-religious plural polity,” not least of all in the sharing of meals. Since the mid-1990s, however, one has also begun to see an interesting counter-trend in the middle and upper-middle classes, visible in both upscale and modest Chinese restaurants in Malaysian cities. Namely, some Chinese restaurants have stopped serving pork and started preparing their fish and meats in a halal (religiously proper) manner, in an effort to appeal to Malay customers. In these establishments, it is not unusual to see Malay and Chinese customers eating together. On this resurgence of everyday commensalities, see also the essay by Rahman Embong in this volume.


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