The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore

Michael Hill and Lian Kwen Fee
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Singapore has pursued a development track that some have seen as a paradigm for latecomers to the international capitalist market. It is a state that has firmly rejected welfarism but whose political leaders have maintained that collective values, rather than those of individuals, are essential to its survival.

Michael Hill and Lian Kwen Fee examine basic concepts of citizenship, nationality and the state in the context of Singapore’s arrival at independence. The theme of nation building is explored with emphasis on how the creation of a national identity, through building new institutions, has been a central feature of political and social life in Singapore. Education has been of great importance, specifically a system of multilingual education that is part of a broader government strategy of multiculturalism and multiracialism, which has served the purpose of building a new national identity. Other areas covered by the authors include family planning, housing policy, the creation of parapolitical structures and the importance of shared ‘Asian values’ amongst Singapore’s citizens.

The book offers a sociological account of nation building which is distinct from prevailing Western models as well as from routes taken by other post-colonial states.

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Preface

Singapore had statehood rudely thrust upon it. A new national identity had to be constructed speedily within a culture which had assimilated Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s conventional wisdom that ‘island-nations are political jokes’. In the wake of a traumatic separation from Malaysia, forging a new national identity began to be addressed through defining the role of citizenship so that it served the imperative needs of the vulnerable city-state. In this pioneering study, Michael Hill and Lian Kwen Fee have explored the promotion and significance in Singapore of an alternative conception of citizenship to the liberal individualist model common in Western societies. In Singapore, the status of citizenship has been more directly associated with duties and obligations than with rights. It is this signal feature of the Republic’s nation building process which is addressed across the range of social policy issues in a skilful and timely manner. This study is particularly timely because of the way in which spokespersons for Singapore have played such a prominent part in the international debate over the respective merits of ‘Asian values’ as the basis for the good society by contradistinction to those of the so-called Western world. This volume will provide an informed and scholarly perspective on that continuing debate as well as illuminating the nature of social order in an exemplar of what the World Bank has described as ‘the East Asian Miracle’.

Michael Leifer
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In a 1994 speech Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong referred to the family as ‘the centre of the universe’, and continued: ‘Without my family, I would lose my direction in life and life would become empty and void.’ This book is dedicated to our families.
Introduction

The sociological debate over the nature of citizenship was initiated in Europe during a period of expanding welfare provision in the years following the Second World War. Its revival in the past decade has been associated with the crisis of the welfare state in Western societies, which have since the 1970s experienced prolonged recession and an accompanying erosion of customary welfare provisions. The crisis in Western welfare systems has been heightened by the prevailing liberal individualist conception of citizenship as conferring rights and thus as expansionary, emancipatory and centred on the autonomous individual. Within this tradition, citizenship is a status which, once achieved, has to be maintained. In recent explorations of the citizenship concept, notably by Oldfield (1990), the potential of an alternative, civic republican model has been developed. In this model, citizenship is conceived as conferring duties and is rendered meaningful by the practice of those duties within a community of similarly responsible and participating citizens. In this second tradition of citizenship the goals of the collectivity, rather than those of the individual, take precedence, and the ‘active citizens’ are those persons who recognize, and acknowledge as their own, such communal goals. In the chapters which follow it will be shown that this second tradition provides a more viable account of the process of nation building, and with it the articulation of a concept of citizenship, in a state which has firmly rejected welfarism, and whose political leaders have constantly maintained that the values of the collectivity over those of autonomous individuals are essential to its very survival. That Singapore has simultaneously managed to sustain an impressive rate of economic growth indicates a potentially instructive comparative analysis of the civic republican tradition of citizenship against the more commonly assumed liberal individualist version.
The book begins by examining basic concepts of citizenship, nationality and the state in the context of Singapore’s arrival at independence. This was a traumatic process involving intense and often violent political contestation throughout the Malay peninsula and within Singapore. After a brief and unsettled period of federation with Malaysia, Singapore found itself abruptly and precariously independent, and its leadership very rapidly had to establish a viable state and confront such exigencies as the British military withdrawal. These events have been encapsulated in the mythology of the nation building process and the political leadership has had constant recourse to them, and to their implications for the survival of the state, over the succeeding years. The nation, it is argued, should be seen as a social construction rather than as representing some primordial actuality, and results from a protracted negotiation between its political leaders and a population which is increasingly educated into conceptions of legitimacy and citizenship. A similar process could be traced in the emergent nation-states of eighteenth— and nineteenth-century Europe and North America. Nor should the interaction between the political elite and the citizenry be seen as one way, since the possibility of missed cues and unintended consequences on the part of the latter may well result in reverses and delays in the process of nation building. The book labels this a ‘Return to Sender’ process.

One of the concerns of nation building in Europe was the principle of viability. An unscrambling of interspersed ethnic groups, for instance, was not always possible, and this led to some peoples becoming nation-states while others were subsumed within larger entities—sometimes retaining simmering aspirations to nationhood. An important feature of Singapore was that its leaders at the time of decolonization were firmly convinced that it could not survive outside Malaysia as an independent nation. When independence became a fact, they were faced with the infrastructure of a state without an accompanying nation—a not uncommon sequel to colonization. The process of nation building thus involved the construction of an identity which could accommodate ethnic and linguistic pluralism while simultaneously inculcating an overarching sense of nationhood. In the initial period of Singapore’s emergence as an independent nation-state, economic goals were pre-eminent, with employment and infrastructure (especially housing) as key priorities. Later, the cultural and symbolic dimensions of identity became prominent, with education policy and a search for national ideology receiving particular attention. Most recently, concerns with a more
participatory style of politics have been articulated, with debate over the nature of civil—or civic—society. All these can be seen, following Giddens, as developments in the different sectors of citizenship which are intimately bound up with the consolidation of a modern nation-state.

Contrary to a view proposed by some accounts of nation building in Singapore, the birth of nationhood began, not in 1959 when the colony was given self-government, nor in 1965 when it separated from Malaysia and became independent, but in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Malayan Union proposal of 1946. This had the goal of establishing a unitary state over the peninsula but it excluded Singapore. As a result of this proposal and together with political developments in China following the communist seizure of power, political consciousness on the island was aroused. Opinion about the future of Singapore was divided between the middle-class English-educated population and the Chinese-educated working class, known as the Nanyang Chinese. The former identified with Malaya and espoused the ideal of multiracialism, and consequently were more willing to accommodate Malay aspirations across the causeway; while the latter, the product of a China-oriented educational philosophy, championed Chinese language and culture and viewed Malay political dominance, with the collapse of the Union proposal, as a threat. The rise of the People’s Action Party (PAP) and its subsequent split in 1961 between the moderate and left-wing factions embodied these developments.

As a legacy of the founding of Singapore as a centre for free trade and movement of people, and of the predominantly migrant background of its population, citizenship laws and provisions there were more liberal when contrasted with the restrictionist policy on the peninsula. The merger with Malaysia in 1963 created two formal types of citizenship status, namely, Malaysian citizens who were also Singapore citizens and those who were not Singapore citizens. The distinction simply reflected a lack of consensus over what constituted a ‘Malayan nationality’ and nation. It eventually led to the separation of Singapore and for the next fifteen years, the PAP leadership struggled to wean itself from its emotional ties with the peninsula. Nation building began in earnest—it involved historical amnesia, looked towards the future and was integrated in institution building. It also reinforced the pragmatism of the PAP.

Political elites in states formed as a consequence of decolonization are left with the infrastructure, however rudimentary, of power and its coercive instruments but they are immediately faced with the task
of forging their legitimacy. This requires tackling simultaneously the cultural-symbolic and civic-instrumental tasks of nation building, as these are outlined by Breton (1988). Education is a potent instrument of nation building partly because it straddles the symbolic and instrumental dimensions and partly because education has the potential to transform one generation into sharing a common destiny. In multi-ethnic societies like Singapore language policy is a critical issue. Education under the colonial administration was expediently compartmentalized, with English available only to a privileged minority while the vernacular schools (Chinese, Malay and Tamil) served the majority. Of the vernacular schools, Chinese education was the most effectively organized and better funded, but it was oriented towards the nationalism of the motherland as interpreted by the Nanyang Chinese. Much of the political career of the PAP between 1954 and 1965 was occupied with countering the strength of a Chinese ethnie which had little sympathy for multiracialism and threatened any possible unification with the peninsula.

Following the disturbances of the Chinese middle schools in 1954, the All-Party Committee Report on Education affirmed the principle of according equal treatment to the four language streams and laid the foundation for a multilingual education system in Singapore, better known as bilingualism. The ideal of multiracialism was put into practice. On coming into power in 1959 the PAP introduced integrated schools with English as the lingua franca, while continuing to support the policy of a second language. In this way both the civic-instrumental and cultural-symbolic construction of nationhood was maintained. However, the former succeeded only too well and the economic advantage of English-medium education was significant in the decline of vernacular enrolments. The Goh Report on the Ministry of Education in 1978 was a response to the failure of the implementation of bilingual education and the fear of deculturalization. The revitalization of bilingualism, and in particular the aggressive promotion of Mandarin, has been viewed with apprehension by the non-Chinese ethnic communities.

Multiracialism is one of the founding myths of Singapore. Its origins may be traced to the development of political consciousness among English-educated Malayans as a reaction to the emergence of a Malay ethnie and a Chinese ethnie, which were precipitated by Sino-Malay antagonism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Multiracialism constitutes a strong political tradition on the island, as exemplified by party politics of the period. The concept of multiracialism or multiculturalism is in fact cultural pluralism and
may be distinguished at three levels, namely, as ideology, as government policy and practice, and as a structural feature of society.

While Singapore was part of Malaysia the PAP practised the politics of multiracialism to blunt Malay extremism, which adopted an assimilationist stance towards other ethnic groups. On becoming independent in 1965 multiracialism was articulated in vague and general terms by the party, and subsumed within a political discourse which underscored economic development, competition and the meritocratic principle. Rex’s (1986) delineation of a multicultural society as practising equality of opportunity in the public domain and multiculturalism in the private domain is a most appropriate description of multiracialism as conceived in Singapore in the first decade of independence. Nevertheless, the government continued the colonial practice of ascriptive ethnicity: every Singaporean is also classified as Chinese, Malay, Indian; or Other. The practice of a hyphenated identity (national-ethnic) was adopted, reflecting the ideology of multiracialism and the construction of a national identity. Since the early 1980s the state has embarked on a revitalization of ethnicity as part of a broader strategy in countering what it perceived as the deculturalization of its population. The policy of public discussion of ethnic issues and the explicit encouragement of ethnic-based associations is a testament to its confidence as a sovereign state. Ultimately, the practice of multiracialism in Singapore serves to appease and contain ethnic demands, and in so doing contributes to the nation building process.

One of the most remarkable early achievements of the PAP government in Singapore was its public housing policy. This was closely meshed with its economic development policy and, because of the urgency of housing needs among the large majority of the population, the rapid provision of affordable housing gave legitimacy to the government’s political programme as well as affording it a most effective mechanism of social engineering. Historically, there had been a mounting problem of over-occupation and slum-dwelling which had not been effectively tackled under colonial administration. Furthermore, colonial policy had encouraged the growth of ethnically segregated urban localities or ‘islands of settlement’ which had the potential for intercommunal conflict. As part of an integrated policy of infrastructural development—especially the lowering of costs to both domestic and overseas capital—industrial estates and housing developments were established in tandem. Simultaneously, the government stimulated the development at residential level of a variety of organizations which would link the industrial working
class with government policy and initiatives. In the 1960s these developments were vigorously pursued, partly by implementing a stringent policy of compulsory purchase. Within a few years of the policy’s inauguration, home ownership was being encouraged through affordable provisions as a means of giving citizens a stake in their country and reducing the sense of transiency characteristic of a substantially migrant population. The linkage between citizenship and home ownership in Singapore can be compared with discussions of its significance in some Western societies.

During the 1970s, housing policy became a more refined adjunct of social engineering, with the encouragement of family support for the aged through various purchase schemes, the encouragement of new forms of community organization and the prevention of ethnic concentration through a quota policy within housing estates. Housing also provided an important mechanism for the maintenance of social control with the introduction of a neighbourhood policing system in the early 1980s. Coupled with enhanced means of surveillance in housing estates, a sense of residential security has been developed. One of the dilemmas of such an all-embracing system of housing provision has been that it has tended to politicize housing, with the result that unpopular changes in policy may have negative electoral consequences. The PAP government has attempted to limit the impact of this by distancing itself from its housing bureaucracy, though with only partial success. Another dilemma which results from the effective large-scale provision of housing is its tendency to inflate other demands for government provision and performance. This the government has tried to prevent by insisting that housing provision is not an automatic right and that it carries certain responsibilities on the part of residents—though again, if problems such as homelessness (which might necessitate some form of welfare intervention) are to be avoided, the logic of this policy cannot be pushed too inflexibly. From an initial concern with the need for adequate housing, through a more extensive concern with social and ethnic cohesion, the most recent initiatives in housing policy have been with environmental and quality of life issues—in other words, with the kind of symbolic issues which have become predominant in other areas of policy.

Two issues are central to a consideration of the relationship between the family and the state: the family as a mediating structure and as a source of moral values. As the most private of institutions, and arguably as one enjoying greater autonomy than other institutions in Singapore, policies which affect the family are treated
with caution—a lesson the state has learned after negative reactions to such policies as its eugenics campaign. Unlike the state in most liberal societies, where a reactive and supportive role in the sphere of the family is adopted, the PAP government—even before Singapore’s full independence in 1965—adopted a proactive stance. In 1961 it passed the Women’s Charter, outlawing polygamous marriages within non-Muslim communities. The fear of an overpopulated society, which would overtax economic resources and threaten living standards, compelled the government to institute a comprehensive family planning programme. This programme contained disincentives to fertility in an attempt to reduce family size to no more than two children. In succeeding years population growth declined so rapidly that by the late 1970s the government expressed concern that population increase was below replacement level. In 1983 the government diagnosed the procreation pattern as lopsided, in the sense that better-educated women were producing less children than those with low educational qualifications. The New Population Policy was introduced in 1987 to encourage families, particularly those containing mothers with education qualifications of O-level and above, to have more children.

From the 1970s onwards, state intervention in the family was largely concerned with restricting family size, as dictated by economic considerations, and in encouraging the formation of generational groupings which would secure the care of the elderly without the necessity of government welfare provision. In the 1980s, government policy paid more attention to the cultural-symbolic construction of the nation, and this entailed introducing a revamped bilingual education system stressing Asian values, followed for a brief period by an abortive Religious Knowledge programme in secondary schools and ending in a lukewarm response to its espousal of ‘shared values’. Its most recent initiative, in 1994, has been a statement of family values for public discussion. The family is now seen to play a Durkheimian moral role in society rather than existing as a mediating link between the individual and the state.

In its attempt to reconstitute community in line with the overarching goal of multiracialism, the Singapore government has deployed innovative parapolitical structures through which its policies can be disseminated and grassroots opinion tapped. The earliest of these structures, the Peoples’ Association and the Community Centres, arose mainly out of political exigency, when the radical faction in the PAP broke from the moderates and took much of the local party organization with it. From these beginnings,
however, an extensive system of community representation through a
variety of residentially based structures has evolved. To a certain
extent, these can be seen as a state-sponsored and more formal
equivalent of the ethnic community associations which emerged
during the colonial period both to represent and to control ethnic
localities. The ethnic associations have survived, even if their
functions have been partly displaced by the parapolitical
organizations and, since the late 1980s, they have experienced
something of a renaissance. The parapolitical structures, for their
part, have to some extent seen their social space occupied by more
spontaneous associational growths as part of the civic society debate.

Parapolitical organizations, however, still maintain a high social
profile and have at times been outspoken in representing the views of
their grassroots members to the political elite. In addition, the
availability of such channels for facilitating the two-way flow of
political information, and for providing environments within which
political skills might be learned and rehearsed, has meant that the
PAP does not require the potentially turbulent adjunct (as Malaysian
experience has demonstrated) of a highly developed party
bureaucracy. Certainly, the practice of civic virtue as contained in the
civic republican tradition—which, it is argued, has relevance for the
concept of citizenship in Singapore—would seem to require a form of
responsible participation in the various levels of community activity
which parapolitical organizations encourage.

In common with other aspects of nation building in Singapore, the
search for a common symbolic core in the form of shared values dates
from the mid-1970s, after the initial period of economic
consolidation had been successfully completed. The prevailing value
orientation of the post-independence period was pragmatic—it has
even been termed an ideology of pragmatism—and this has persisted
in political discourse. But from the mid-1970s there was an
expanding concern with what were labelled ‘Asian values’, and the
need was stressed to reinforce such values in the face of the allegedly
decadent materialism and individualism of Western values which, it
was claimed, were imported along with the English language and
Western technology. The concern with ‘Asian values’ was partly
stimulated by the interest of Western social scientists in the successful
economic transformation of East Asian societies—Japan and the
‘four little dragons’ of Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and
Singapore—all of which were attributed with their own version of
Confucianism. In the 1980s the concern with ‘Asian values’ was
largely transmuted into a consideration of the positive elements in
Confucianism, which were seen to be an encouragement of collective orientation and social discipline.

After two major government reports into education, it was proposed to introduce Religious Knowledge into the secondary school curriculum, and it became a compulsory subject in 1984, with options offered for each of the different ethnic groups, together with Bible Knowledge and Confucian Ethics. Religion thus became an adjunct of training in citizenship in an otherwise secular state. Very soon afterwards, however, the divisive potential of religion became evident, with questions being raised about the loyalty of Malay Muslims to the Singapore state. This was followed in rapid succession by the uncovering by the Internal Security Department of a ‘Marxist conspiracy’ involving Catholic social activists, by the commissioning of government reports into levels of conversion—especially, it was thought, by Christian fundamentalists of English-speaking middle-class Chinese—and in 1989 by the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the ending of the Religious Knowledge programme in schools. Thereafter the government sought to introduce a non-sectarian set of shared values which would secure social cohesion and a collective orientation. These have subsequently received little promotion though their influence can be observed in the promotion of a set of family values in 1994 and in the acceptance by the political leadership of new, consensus-oriented forms of social movement of the type envisaged by the Shared Values White Paper.

In the wake of the Shared Values White Paper, and very much associated with the more participatory political style espoused by the new, second-generation leadership, there has been an extensive debate on the nature of, and constituent elements within, civil society. Beginning in the late 1980s, but with increasing variety in the 1990s, a series of spontaneously generated associations have developed to represent ethnic, cultural and interest group goals. Such associations have adopted a low-key, non-confrontational approach and have achieved recognition by government to the extent of being consulted on policy or co-opted into the formal political process. They have been seen by key figures in the PAP leadership as evidence of increasing ‘space’ between the state and the private sphere within which independent initiatives might develop. While political activity remains the preserve of formally constituted political parties—and is as such constrained by the PAP’s hegemony over the political process—new associations have had some success in influencing government. This has occurred even when they have competed with
officially sponsored parapolitical organizations, for instance in pressing ethnic agendas.

While the survival motif of the early years of independence still features in political legitimization—for instance, in emphasizing the pivotal role of the political elite and the need for highly skilled and rewarded new recruits to it—Singapore’s material base has now been substantially secured. The most recent phase of development has seen an emphasis in government policy, and in popular participation, on artistic and creative pursuits. The concept of Singapore as a centre of artistic excellence in Southeast Asia has been advanced, not only as a source of economic benefit, but also as a domain of aspiration for a new generation of citizens. This may well provide a crucial pointer to Singapore’s future, because as expectations of material success begin to approach the ceiling of realistic outcome, the availability of alternative fields of participation and fulfilment will become a more pressing agenda. To adopt the analogy of a prominent government minister, will Singapore be able to render itself to its citizens as less of a ‘hotel’ and more of a ‘home’?

In addressing this question, the PAP government has advanced policies which can be seen as compatible with the civic republican tradition of citizenship. The culture of political management in Singapore is authoritarian and interventionist, and while the government maintains a large and robust public sector (Low, 1993), it has steadfastly rejected the growth of a welfare state. Hence the discussion of citizenship in a Singapore context has a different point of departure from that of recent Western debates, where claims of an ‘overloaded’ welfare state have been the common concern of a range of political perspectives (Marquand, 1991:331). In contrast with the liberal-individualist tradition, where it is commonly assumed that the interest of the citizen may conflict with the interest of the community (Marquand, 1991:338), the ‘civic society’ envisaged in Singapore is one in which individual interest and community interest are equated. The necessary conditions for the practice of civic republican citizenship include not only the degree of material security required for adequate public participation—thus the potential problem of a disadvantaged working class developing in Singapore society has been canvassed in recent years (see ST 12.9.91; 8.2.92)—but also a strong component of training and motivation to enable citizens to make their active contribution to the community.

As the book will show, the danger of ‘free riders’ pursuing hedonistic goals in an environment of expanding economic opportunity has been a constant preoccupation of the Singapore
government. The ‘crisis’ and ‘survival’ motifs of the early and traumatic years of independence have not been entirely abandoned—the former being identified in 1987 with a ‘Marxist conspiracy’ and the latter being more recently expressed in terms of a ‘Darwinian process of mutation, competition and selection’ (Yeo, 1990:102)—but their resonance has weakened within a generation of citizens which has not experienced the bitter struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Faced with the possibility of motivational entropy, the PAP leadership, especially from the late 1970s, has repeatedly and by means of a variety of projects sought to inject the requisite values into its citizens. The stated intention of the government to inoculate its population against the claimed decadence of Western values has been implemented in a succession of public campaigns, educational initiatives and values projects, the most recent one being the Family Values project. An important aspect of this policy has always been pragmatic, especially its avoidance of welfarism by stimulating citizen-based initiatives, but its concern to instil a style of motivation characterized by disciplined obligation to the community has been an equally important feature. In the following chapters, nation building in Singapore is seen as the construction of an appropriate institutional and motivational setting for the practice of citizenship conceived less in terms of rights—as enshrined in the liberal-individualist tradition of Western societies—than in terms of community-defined duties. In Chapter 1 these concepts are examined in greater depth.
1 The state, citizenship and nationality in Singapore

We ask ourselves, what is a Singaporean? In the first place, we did not want to be Singaporeans. We wanted to be Malayans. Then the idea was extended and we decided to become Malaysians. But twenty-three months of Malaysia—a traumatic experience for all parties in Malaysia—ended rather abruptly with our being Singaporeans.

(Lee Kuan Yew, cited in Chan, 1971b:29)

In 1990, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia on 9 August 1965, footage was shown on Singapore television of the Prime Minister breaking down in tears in response to this traumatic event. It was shown to Singaporeans to remind the younger generation on the country’s National Day that the birth of Singapore had been a painful one. And despite, if not because of, the economic success achieved over the previous twenty-five years, a new generation of Singaporeans was being reminded that they should not forget the origin of their nation. Twenty-three months after the inauguration of Malaysia, Singapore had found itself on its own. August 9 was a fateful day in this history and, in the sense in which Anthony Smith (1988) uses the term, symbolically encapsulates the ‘myth’ of the modern nation.

This book explores the concepts of citizenship, nationality and the state, and how these have been articulated within a city-state such as Singapore which came into existence despite its leaders’ deep-seated conviction that it did not constitute a viable entity. It is argued that state-society relations are problematic and that concepts like nationality and citizenship cannot be taken for granted in examining such relations. Attention is drawn to the need to theorize the relationship between the state, sovereignty and nationality in order to
understand how citizenship is perceived and practised. In taking this approach, it will be demonstrated that the relationship between the modern state and its citizens is at best negotiable and uncertain. Even when the state has achieved a high degree of surveillance and ‘reflexive monitoring’ (Giddens, 1985:206)—as is demonstrably the case in Singapore—it needs constantly to address the unpredictable responses and demands of its citizens.

**THE NATION AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION**

A number of writers have emphasized that nationalism and nation building, rather than exposing deeply embedded primordial loyalties, are fundamentally synthetic processes. The point has been made very succinctly by Alter, who notes that, with few exceptions,

the nation is a goal rather than an actuality. Put simply, nations are not creatures of ‘God’s hand’, as post-Herder prophets of nationalism often claimed: instead they are synthetic—they have to be created in a complicated educational process.

(Alter, 1989:21)

He draws on Barthes’ view of nations as a political myth. The process of nation building is seen as being engineered by intellectual minorities, though aimed at the whole social group. As such, nation building is a protracted process of political integration that always remains unfinished, even when the nation has gained its own independent state. The political consciousness required effectively to contain internal conflict does not result from a unilinear process of evolution but rather is a disjointed series of reverses and delays.

One such element in the forging of political consciousness—which will be demonstrated on several occasions in this book—is a mechanism we have labelled the ‘Return to Sender’ process. Stated succinctly, this is a process in which the definition of citizen vis-à-vis the state has to be repeatedly renegotiated. The concept was devised as an extension of Gellner’s evocative Wrong Address theory of nationalism (the Marxist contention that ‘the awakening message [of history] was intended for classes, but by some terrible postal error was delivered to the wrong nations’ (Gellner, 1983:129)). The origin of the idea that the policies and doctrines enunciated by the leaders are modified as they become part of grassroots reality has its basis in classical sociology, and especially in Weber’s study of the gradual reformulation of Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, as Calvinist
leaders were forced constantly to readdress the concerns of lay members confronted by its psychological consequences (Weber, 1976:98–128; Hill, 1973:104–22). In the process—which Weber termed elective affinity—some of the unintended consequences of the original doctrine contributed to a major episode of economic and social change; and, Gellner maintains, it was the ‘trick’ of Calvinist salvation anxiety that produces the ‘civic spirit’ of contractual obligation underlying modern rational capitalism (Gellner, 1991:501). The Return to Sender dynamic emphasizes an interactive relationship between the political elite and citizens, between policies and their public resonance, in contrast with the ‘top-down’ approach of the corporatist model. As a result attention is focused on the way in which political leaders, in consolidating their control and legitimacy, require of their citizens a consciousness of themselves as citizens: this is important in confirming the regime’s claim to internal legitimacy. Citizens can in turn convert this consciousness into a basis for negotiation. The political leadership ‘educates’ its population into identities appropriate to its political agenda; but these identities take on an autonomy which cannot always be anticipated—and may well be unintended—so that the elite then has to readdress them. In the case of Singapore, political discourse has been articulated and encoded in such a visible fashion that the logic of the Return to Sender process is strikingly revealed.

In the establishment of political consciousness in the way we have just outlined, the leaders who initiate a process of nation building rely on a series of myths. Commonly, as Gellner shows, these myths invert reality: the elite claims to be defending folk culture while propagating high culture; to be preserving significant elements of the old folk society while simultaneously assisting in the construction of an anonymous mass society. In the particular case of Singapore, multiracialism can be seen as one of the Republic’s founding myths and as a central element in what Benjamin calls Singapore’s ‘national culture’ (Benjamin, 1976:116). But as he goes on to demonstrate, this myth involves a recreation of culture in an attempt by the elite to prevent the erosion of what they perceive as desirable collective and socially cohesive components of an allegedly discipline-oriented Eastern culture by the individualistic emphasis of Western values. The latter are seen as an inevitable accompaniment of the importation of Western technological and economic innovations. One of the tasks of the book will be to scrutinize the construction of such cultural artifacts as part of the process which Breuilly (1982) terms the politics of cultural
engineering. By this he means the attempt to create a sense of national identity in cultural terms, and he finds the process located principally in the areas of education and communication.

It is important at this stage in our argument to emphasize that the process of synthetic nation building has not been confined to those post-colonial states which are now engaged in political consolidation. There is much evidence to link these contemporary agendas for nation building with those of various European states in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. Bowles and Gintis show that the development of citizenship as a key force in stabilizing and legitimating the nineteenth-century nation-state required the securing of a sense of national identity and this was achieved through ‘providing universal education, inventing public ceremonies, and mass-producing public monuments’ (Bowles and Gintis, 1987:38). Hobsbawm sees the key period in the invention and mass production of tradition as the thirty or forty years before the First World War, and links the process with the unprecedented problems faced by states attempting to maintain, or even to establish, the loyalty and cooperation of their subjects (Hobsbawm, 1983:263, 265). Even more important was the development of an alternative ‘civic religion’ to replace more traditional forms of ritualized collectivity. Thus there can be observed consciously planned attempts to generate the sense of national identity among populations of territorial states.

On the other hand, there is much to suggest that this was only ever a partially successful process. Waldron believes that the whole trend of research into nationhood in Europe has been to weaken the notion that nationalism is an essential accompaniment of industrialization and modernization, a view which is associated with the work of Gellner. What the research shows is the great diversity that existed in historical nations quite recently: for instance, there was little national feeling in France in the nineteenth century, and ‘the national identity’ had to be imposed gradually from the centre.

In 1864, schoolchildren in the relatively remote Lozere could not answer the question whether they were Russian or English. A number of historians have traced the processes—ranging from the distribution of tricolors, the introduction of new textbooks, and the popularization of a new image of the past, to the development of mass armies—that contributed to the gradual knitting together of France as a nation.

(Waldron, 1985:428)
In Poland, in censuses taken in 1919 and 1931, most inhabitants of the Pripet Marshes responded to questions about nationality with such statements as ‘local’ or ‘from here’. A similar localism seems to have been apparent in Italy: in 1860—a time when national feelings were supposed to be rife—only 2.5 per cent of inhabitants spoke what eventually became the standard language (non-standardized languages being labelled ‘dialects’), a common feature of the way in which states appropriate domains of life in the process of nation building (Benjamin, 1988:40). ‘Italian’ reluctance to participate in the process of nation building has been shown to persist to the present day, for it has been noted of Italian migrants to Australia that ‘Italian Catholics do not normally have a strong, national sense of being Italian. Instead, their strongest tie is to their paese; that is, their village of origin and surrounding area’ (McKay and Lewins, 1991:173).

The above illustrations are meant to temper the assumption, which so often accompanies discussions of nationalism, that there is something categorically distinct about the processes of nation building in the primary nation-states (those which had been emerging in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) in comparison with secondary nation-states (many of which have arisen from decolonization in the aftermath of the Second World War). One of the implications of this approach is to refocus attention on the essentially political characteristics of nation building in general, an implication which Waldron is quick to seize:

Instead of emergent historical nations beginning to stir, and to cast up nationalist leaders who call them into being, it seems that it is the politicians who strive to create the nations. And to what end? One is tempted to say: in order to rule them.

(Waldron, 1985:428)

However, a major concern of those involved in the nation building process in Europe was the principle of viability. Where nationalities were so interspersed on the same territory, a purely spatial unscrambling of them was seen to be unrealistic (Hobsbawm, 1990:33–4). An independent or real nation also had to be a viable nation in terms of resources—the ‘threshold principle’ as Hobsbawm calls it. The conventional understanding of nationality (based, for example, on a common language, religion or ethnicity) had to be weighed against the viability of ‘nations’ to stand on their own feet. Consequently, some peoples were destined to become nation-states while others were swallowed by more viable nations.
Most of the political leaders of Singapore in the period leading to the formation of Malaysia in 1963 did not believe that Singapore could survive as an independent nation. The People’s Action Party, the ruling party of Singapore since 1959, for example, had always been pan-Malayan in its orientation, partly for pragmatic reasons and partly because many of its leaders were born in Malaya and had strong emotional ties there. The Alliance government in Malaya deliberated over the inclusion of Singapore into the proposed Malaysian Federation. One consideration was the prospect that Singapore’s predominantly Chinese population would offset the ethnic balance in which Malays would remain the numerical majority. In the end, geopolitical considerations were a decisive factor. The activity of left-wing militants in Singapore impressed upon Alliance leaders the conclusion that unless Singapore was accepted into an anti-communist Malaysia, it could become a base for communists to subvert the mainland (Yeo and Lau, 1991:140). To offset the Chinese population, Sarawak and Sabah—which had significant indigenous as well as Malay inhabitants—were included in the Malaysian Federation.

STATE AND NATION

In referring to the relationship between the nation and the state, Gellner (1983:6) demonstrates that states have emerged without the help of a nation, and nations have emerged without the blessing of their state. It is a separation well worth keeping in mind as a counterbalance to those theories which tend to overemphasize the significance of ethnicity in the development of the nation-state. An example of the latter would be Smith’s formulation of the ‘ethnic origins of nations’ (Smith, 1989:352). He argues that while the state was necessary for the formation of national loyalties, its operations owed much to the presence of core ethnic communities around which these states were built up. However, states which were a direct consequence of colonization were imposed on peoples whose leaders, at the time of independence, were left solely the infrastructure of a state. Rarely was this accompanied by a common identity which could be utilized in the process of nation building, as Singapore amply demonstrates. Counter to Anthony Smith’s argument that the state is built around an ethnic community, rather the development of nationhood had to contend with the presence of ethnic communities.

It is therefore useful to draw attention to the two variants of the ‘nation’ discussed by Hobsbawm (1990:22). For nationalists, the
creation of a political entity was seen to be derived from the prior existence of a community, for example of an ethnic type, distinguishing itself from foreigners. However, the revolutionary-democratic notion of the state, as in post-revolutionary France, could only be understood as the response of a populace attempting to liberate itself from the control of absolute monarchies. When the revolutionary democrat appealed to a sense of patriotism or national loyalty, it was state-based rather than nationalist (Hobsbawm, 1990:87). Such an appeal related to the idea of a sovereign people in the name of whom the state exercised power. Ethnicity or other elements were irrelevant to ‘the nation’ in this sense, and a common language was significant only on the pragmatic grounds of coordination and communication. The emergence of nationalism in the last third of the nineteenth century posed a potential threat to states (Hobsbawm, 1990:89–90). The state was forced to confront nationalism as a political force separate from it. If nationalism could be tamed and become a central emotional component of loyalty to the state, then it could become a powerful asset of government.

States in Southeast Asia, which have been formed as a consequence of decolonization, are not the products of popular uprisings in the sense that revolutionary-democratic states could be seen to be. They were independent states created out of territories under colonial administration. Their boundaries were drawn, as Hobsbawm (1990:171) portrays it, without any reference to, and sometimes without the knowledge of, their inhabitants. The formation of such states had no significance for their populations, except, perhaps, for their colonial-educated and Westernized native elites. Having inherited the state, such elites were subsequently faced with the problem of creating nationality. Singapore’s emergence as an independent state vividly illustrates this process. Singapore was given limited self-government by the British in 1959, incorporated into the Malaysian Federation in 1963 and gained independence reluctantly on expulsion from Malaysia in 1965. Its leaders found themselves in possession of a state but without a nation.

Although one option in the process of independence and decolonization after 1945 was the assertion of a primordial identity, the general movement was towards identification with socialist/communist anti-imperialism, as Hobsbawm shows (1990:149). As such, many decolonized and newly independent states declared themselves to be in some sense ‘socialist’. The PAP leadership in Singapore was no exception to this broader tendency, but was inhibited from embarking on a radical socialist programme for a
number of compelling reasons. From the beginning, the English-educated moderates within the party adopted a strong and militant anti-colonial stance demanding immediate national independence through peaceful constitutional means (Yeo and Lau, 1991:130). However, despite their constitutionality the moderates could not be seen as overtly anti-communist since they needed the help of the Chinese-educated communists, an influential group within the PAP, to maintain communication with the Chinese-educated (and Chinese-oriented) population. The major ethnic communities in Singapore had strong affectual ties with their ‘motherland’; the Indians with India and the Malays with Malaya. The Chinese in the 1950s identified strongly with China, which had become a communist state in 1949. Consequently, the communist faction within the PAP had considerable support from working-class Chinese. When the left-wing leaders finally split from the party in 1961 to form the Barisan Sosialis party, the PAP moderates were left to chart their own course for Singapore. While initially committed to socialist ideals and a pan-Malayan nation, the shock of expulsion from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, followed in July 1967 by the announced withdrawal of British military forces from Singapore and Malaysia, required the PAP not only to formulate a new economic strategy of self-reliance, but also to articulate for its citizens the difficult circumstances in which it found itself as part of a nation building exercise. This has been variously characterized as the ‘ideology of survival’ (Chan, 1971a), an ‘ideology of pragmatism’ (Chan and Evers, 1973) and a ‘garrison mentality’ (Brown, 1994). By the PAP leaders themselves it was seen as building a ‘rugged society’.

Westernized political elites in newly independent countries have faced the task of shedding their colonial or neo-colonial identities and replacing them with available alternatives. In Southeast Asia, there were two such alternatives (Chan and Evers, 1973:303–4). One was to resort to a ‘regressive’ identity by reviving a long and proud cultural tradition through an appeal to the ‘golden past’. The other was a ‘progressive’ identity, embodying an ameliorative programme of building a society by discarding its feudal or colonial shackles: one such option lay in establishing a socialist state. However, neither of these alternatives was viable in the context of Singapore. A progressive identity was too strongly identified at that time with support for Chinese socialism. Events in the early 1960s which caused Tunku to fear a communist take-over of the Singapore government and the creation of Southeast Asia’s ‘Cuba’ (Busch, 1974:26) was still fresh in the minds of the Singapore leaders, who
were most concerned to attract foreign investment consequent upon its separation from the mainland.

A return to the ‘golden past’, which would have nurtured an ethnic revival, had potentially divisive consequences given the ethnic composition of Singapore. In 1970, over 76 per cent of the total population were Chinese, 15 per cent Malays and 7 per cent Indians (these proportions have remained virtually constant up to the present). A socialist identity, sanctioned by the PAP elite in the initial struggle for independence, was no longer acceptable in the 1960s as Singapore found itself having to squeeze every advantage it could get from the international economy for its mere survival. It had been first and foremost a trading centre. After the 1965 expulsion from the Federation and the 1967 announcement of impending British military withdrawal, the Singapore state embarked on an ambitious industrialization policy, which in turn meant attracting foreign investment. Socialist ideals were articulated for domestic consumption while foreign policy was geared towards encouraging overseas capital.

The intimate connection between nation building and industrialization which can be traced in Singapore is fully consistent with Gellner’s argument that the nation emerges in the process of industrialization (1983:55). Because a modern economy requires a mobile labour force and communication between individuals, a common public education system is necessary. Therefore, the homogenizing tendency of a modern industrial society would, out of sheer necessity, overcome the divides and particularistic identities which separate individuals and groups. As a consequence, intended or unintended, a nation is created. And it is a central argument of this book that the analysis of nationality and citizenship in Singapore must acknowledge the key role of the state.

In conceptualizing the state, three essential features have been identified: centrality, territoriality and control (Mann, 1984:188–9). What these characteristics have in common is that they all concern the exercise and deployment of power. In the case of the modern state, what is relevant is the exercise of infrastructural power by institutions of the state. Mann refers to infrastructural power as the capacity of the modern state to penetrate and implement political decisions throughout civil society. Such powers, he argues, are immense. They include taxing income, storing and retrieving a massive amount of information about its citizens, influencing the economy and directly or indirectly providing subsistence for most of its inhabitants. The modern state, in the view of Mann and Giddens,
The state, citizenship and nationality

penetrates everyday life to a much greater extent than did any historical state. There is in their accounts little hiding place for the individual from the infrastructural reach of the modern state: this, it might be noted, is in contrast to the Durkheimian paradox—which is examined in the account of intermediary structures—that to some degree the individual ‘eludes’ the state (Durkheim, 1957:63).

However, the ability of the state to exercise control and ensure an orderly functioning of society cannot depend on coercion alone; the state requires the practical consent of its tax-paying citizens. In the past, and to a large extent in the contemporary world, the military role of the state has been critical in exercising control over territory. Taxation was necessary to fund military service and warfare, both of which functions of the state have contributed to the development of citizenship (see Smith, 1981b; Turner, 1986). The more the state penetrated society and reached a greater number of people, the more it had to legitimize its power. As a result of regular contact, government and subject or citizen (with an historical progression from the former to the latter) were linked by daily bonds as never before (Hobsbawm, 1990:81). Unlike the traditional state in which the relationship between subject and sovereign was subordinate and passive, government and citizenship demanded active co-operation from all in the modern state. As Hobsbawm depicts the process:

It became equally obvious, at least from the 1880s, that wherever the common man was given even the most nominal participation in politics as a citizen—with the rarest exception the common woman remained excluded—he could no longer be relied on to give automatic loyalty and support to his betters or to the state.... Obviously, the demoralization of politics, i.e. on the one hand the growing extension of the (male) franchise, on the other the creation of the modern, administrative, citizen-mobilizing and citizen-influencing state, both placed the question of the ‘nation’, and the citizen’s feelings towards whatever he regarded as his ‘nation’, nationality or other centre of loyalty, at the top of the political agenda.

(Hobsbawm, 1990:83)

The state had no guarantee of security—nor could passivity be expected from its citizens—as emergent political parties sought to mobilize constituencies within the overall population on the basis of national, non-national or alternative national appeals (Hobsbawm, 1990:44). The rhetoric of nationhood became an essential political
strategy of the modern state as it sought to neutralize competing appeals from ethnic and non-ethnic groups.

It is appropriate here to identify two dimensions in the construction of the nation, the cultural-symbolic and the civic-instrumental (Breton, 1984; 1988). The rhetoric of nationhood involves the generation of cultural-symbolic capital in society, and the restructuring of collective identity and its symbolic contents. The development of such an identity is important for individual members of society because ‘individuals expect to recognize themselves in public institutions. They expect some consistency between their private identities and the symbolic contents upheld by public authorities, embedded in the societal institutions, and celebrated in public events’ (Breton, 1984:124–5). However, any attempt to articulate a collective identity, or to change it, results in an allocation or reallocation of social status or recognition among various segments of the society (Breton, 1984:126). The cultural-symbolic construction of the nation in Singapore is clearly illustrated in subsequent developments in the PAP’s policy on bilingualism, multiracialism and national values—all of which have been differentially received by the ethnic groups in the Republic. The civic-instrumental dimension, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the material and the utilitarian, and the problems of administration and resource control (Breton, 1988:87). The government of a newly independent state is almost immediately confronted with maintaining its infrastructure while at the same time devoting sufficient effort to the construction of its symbolic order.

The construction of the nation also requires the use of power, and this is distinguished in three forms (Bobbio quoted from Poggi, 1990:4). Economic power is exercised by the state through incentives and rewards, occasionally penalties, to influence the conduct of the population. Ideological power is based on the use of ideas and values to mobilize the inhabitants. Political power is the use of coercion. All three types have been used throughout the period the PAP has been in government as the following chapters will show; only the emphasis has changed. Thus, while economic power has been most consistently applied, ideological power can be seen as a marked feature of the period 1975–91, and coercive political power was especially evident in the early years of independence. The marked difference is that the first-generation leadership led by Lee Kuan Yew has been particularly effective in persuading Singaporeans of the wisdom of its policies. This was greatly aided by the dominance of a single political party which exercised an overwhelming hegemony after independence.
through such agencies as education, the media and grassroots organizations—Community Centres, Citizens’ Consultative Committees, and Residents’ Committees.

The PAP government, on taking office in 1959, consolidated its position in the administrative structure by exposing senior bureaucrats to party ideology (Chan, 1991:162). The politicization of bureaucrats together with the establishment of a network of party-related organizations at the grassroots level ensured its monopoly of the political ground. The PAP was thus left largely free to set its own agenda for nation building and identity-construction, occasional challenges from representatives of ethnic extremism notwithstanding. Despite its dominance of the discourse on national identity, the PAP has had constantly to regenerate and renegotiate the process as it was confronted by unanticipated contradictions and by the logic of the Return to Sender process. Nevertheless, the Singapore state, in penetrating deep into the lives of its citizens, offered them a stronger sense of security, affiliation and even personal identity—certainly more so than any other alternative source (Deutsch cited in Alter, 1989:123). The greater the perceived need for such affiliation and identity in the face of past political and social upheavals, the greater the potential power of the state in demanding citizenship responsibilities. Paradoxically, the security and identity of citizens have to be reinforced by the creation of recurrent ‘crises’ which draw attention to the state’s key arbitrating role, a process which will be analysed in subsequent chapters, for instance, in relation to the visit of the Israeli President in 1986 and the reaction this provoked in Malaysia (Leifer, 1988). In this way, the state demonstrates the necessity of its citizens’ recognition of and compliance with its own definitions of identity and political reality.

However, the political skills of the first-generation leaders of Singapore in using the powers of persuasion may be found wanting in the second-generation leaders. This has been succinctly described by Vasil:

The first generation leaders, having recruited technocrats devoid of political skills as their successors, had tended to consider the important political tasks of dealing with the common masses and mobilising their support for the government as their domain, their special responsibility; they had made no special efforts to train and tutor the second generation in the art of political management and given them opportunities to experience the rough and tumble of competitive politics. They had been left mostly to preoccupy
themselves, as functionaries of the regime, with the administration and management of social and economic change. Their background, attitudes and functions and activities were not vastly different from those of senior civil servants. 

(Vasil, 1992:203–4)

Thus, to the three types of power may be added a fourth, the power of competent authority in which the claim to influence is based on the expertise and technical competence of the political elite. This is the hallmark of the second-generation leadership led by Goh Chok Tong.

**SOVEREIGNTY**

This discussion of the government-citizenship relationship has touched on the ‘internal’ legitimacy of the state. Whether a government is able to reflect the wishes of its citizens and mobilize their support is in part a question of political representation, but also in part it rests on the state’s ability to deliver an acceptable standard of living. A significant example of this process in Singapore is dealt with in the chapter on housing policy. One of the tasks of this book will be to show that this has important implications for the theory of citizenship. In addition to its internal legitimacy, the state has to be legitimated externally. This requires that its sovereignty be recognized by other states. Interstate tensions may be heighten by two often contradictory criteria by which such claims to sovereignty might be made (Poggi, 1978:90). One is the principle of ‘nationality’. The other criterion is the declaration of ‘natural borders’ or physical boundaries which render states militarily defensible and economically viable. The governing elite in Singapore did not view its present borders as ‘natural’ until forced to do so by separation from Malaysia in 1965; and there are still anxieties expressed about the ‘narrowness’ of Singapore’s geography (see Lee Kuan Yew, ST, 5.10.91). Using these criteria, it was possible to advance a claim on the basis of nationality while rejecting a competing state’s appeal to ‘natural borders’. Conversely, a claim could be made on ‘recognized borders’ as a means of rejecting arguments of nationality.

One of the legacies of colonial rule in Southeast Asia was the tacit recognition of spheres of influence and the respect for borders as a means of avoiding confrontation between the French, British and Dutch in both mainland and island territories. Claims over islands, frequently viewed as a no man’s land, are more complicated: for instance, there is ongoing debate between Malaysia, Vietnam, China,
the Philippines and Brunei over the designation of the Spratly Islands, just as there is between Malaysia and Singapore over Pedra Branca (Pulau Batu Putih). Where states are preoccupied with claims over sovereignty in terms of physical boundaries, nationality may become exclusivist, emphasizing a distinct if not superior identity (Giddens 1985:217–18). Governments then become more defensive about the categories of persons they recognize as citizens rather than with their political capacity to respond to the interests and needs of their citizens. Consequently, in situations of disputed sovereignty, citizenship rights—especially civil and political rights—are likely to be poorly developed.

Internally, the legitimacy of the state revolves around the construction of nationality; externally, it requires the skilful management of interstate relations. Both aspects of nation building are analogous to the maintenance of the ethnic boundary; for it is the boundary which defines the ethnic group, not the cultural content that it encloses (Bauman, 1992:678). Nationality and physical borders constitute the imaginary and real boundaries of the nation respectively, and they may be viewed as ‘discourses in which identities and counter-identities are conceived and through which they are sustained’ (Bauman, 1992:678) in the construction of the nation. The greater the need for such boundaries to be maintained the more exclusivist citizenship and membership of a nation-state will be.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATION BUILDING

A valuable distinction has been made between radical and formal citizenship (Turner, 1986:67). Radical citizenship is the outcome of class struggles, war, migration and egalitarian ideologies. The revolutionary-democratic states of nineteenth-century Europe which emerged from popular uprising generated a form of citizenship that was ‘real and expansive rather than formal and defensive’ (Turner, 1986:67). This has been seen by various theorists as a bottom-up process, resulting in a dispersion of political decision-making among a wide group of citizens, a form of what Giddens calls polyarchy. Polyarchy, as Giddens depicts it (1985:199), is rule by the many, and involves the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens considered as political equals. A polyarchic society, in theory, should generate a citizenry which is participatory and responsible in terms of civic obligations. By contrast, citizenship as a formal status—that is, primarily focused on the question of who qualifies to be a citizen—is used by governments defensively, as a
means of exclusion and control. It is not surprising, given the chronic of failures in the implementation of polyarchy in most non-Western societies, that Southeast Asian governments are more circumspect about the practice of democracy and the fostering of civil society. As the final chapter reveals, the discussion of the concept of civil society—in the sense of a set of institutions independent of the state yet capable of collective mobilization—is of very recent origin in Singapore. The ramification for the development of citizenship is that it is viewed by such governments as a formal status, that is, as an exclusionary strategy. This has been particularly evident in the political formation of the Federation of Malaya and subsequently Malaysia, where the state faced the task of defining in the clearest possible way the criteria of inclusion and exclusion—a consequence of Sino-Malay polarization precipitated by the British proposal to establish a unitary state. The development of citizenship is naturally related to political developments in the peninsula; and one consequence, it will be seen later, is the evolution of liberal citizenship laws on the island.

The original concept of Singapore citizenship introduced in 1957 had only nominal significance (Goh, 1970:1). Aliens could own property and do business without any restrictions. With the introduction of an elected Legislative Assembly in 1959, only those who were citizens could vote. Prior to 1965 and Singapore’s full independence, aliens could work for anyone who was prepared to employ them. Singapore’s population was made up of large numbers of immigrants who were non-citizens. With the introduction of work permits and travel restrictions at the Johore causeway which links Singapore with the Malay peninsula—a development which was consequent on the expulsion from Malaysia—Singapore citizenship was of greater consequence to all who lived there. Non-citizens no longer had the automatic right to work and were required to apply for a work permit. Those having no documentary proof of their birth in Singapore were thereafter treated as non-citizens. The onus was on individuals to establish their status as Singapore citizens.

The foregoing discussion illustrates how governments in new nations commonly regard citizenship as a matter of status and as a means of exclusion from membership of a political community. Analytically, this implies that citizenship and nationality bear no simple relation to each other. Just as states can exist without nations and vice versa, so inhabitants can be formally recognized as citizens without maintaining any symbolic identification with the collectivity. For the political leadership of new nations, citizenship is an
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administrative problem, consequent upon inheriting a state. In its origins, citizenship carried no connotations of sovereignty and the development of nationality. Within the geopolitical circumstances in which Singapore found itself, nation building was—and in the view of politicians remains—a long-term prospect.

In summary, the nation-state is the product of two parallel processes and its legitimacy is viewed at two levels, external and internal, associated with these processes. Between states, sovereignty hinges on the question of nationality, which can be defined in terms of whether individuals and groups are perceived as identifying with the state; and sovereignty also depends on establishing the principle of mutual recognition of borders. Whether states can sustain their sovereignty depends on the viability principle to which Hobsbawm alludes, and which may be seen both in political and economic terms. Within states, nationality cannot be taken for granted. It is dependent on the question of whether individuals and groups identify with the state. This in turn is conditioned by the extent to which governments are willing and prepared to accommodate the interests of constituent groups (which may be ethnic or non-ethnic; for example, they may be age-based) within their populations, while simultaneously balancing such interests against the capacity to deliver a certain minimum standard of living, economic welfare and security. In return there is the question of whether individuals are willing to fulfil the obligations that government may, from time to time, require of them. The legitimacy of the nation-state is determined by the extent to which the two parallel processes converge. Both processes, we propose, are articulated within the development of citizenship. Only within this framework of ideas can we appreciate how the state, nationality and citizenship impact on each other.

CITIZENSHIP AS CONTESTATION

We can now discuss citizenship proper. Any discussion of citizenship within a sociological context must acknowledge Marshall’s seminal essay on ‘Citizenship and Social Class’ (1950), which was first delivered as a lecture in 1949. In this presentation, citizenship is seen as being constituted by three elements (Marshall, 1965:78). The civil element refers to the rights of the individual—freedom of speech and faith, the right to own property and to justice. The political element is portrayed as the right to participate directly or indirectly in the exercise of political power. The implementation of this right pertains to political representation. The social element contains the right to
economic welfare and security and to share in the social heritage and an acceptable standard of living. Marshall (1965:90) then proceeds to trace the development of citizenship in England. Civil rights were first secured at the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries, followed by political rights, expanding throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, and culminating in social rights, the establishment of which spans the period between the development of public elementary education in the mid-nineteenth century and the introduction of social benefit entitlements in the post-Second World War period.

The evolutionary development of citizenship which Marshall portrays has been a focus of critical appraisal. Giddens, for example (1985:205), cites the case of nineteenth-century Germany, in which Bismarck conceded welfare rights to the working class in order to prevent the extension and realization of political rights. Another example of the open-ended development of citizenship rights can be provided by the case of Malaysia. While those of Malay origin were accorded unconditional citizenship and therefore political rights after independence in 1957, the Chinese had access to citizenship under certain restrictions such as a specified period of residence and language competence in Malay or English. Yet it may be argued that the Chinese, by virtue of their dominance in largely urban and commercial occupations, were able to secure economic and educational advantages, and therefore social rights, far earlier than were the Malays. This illustrates the point made by Barbalet (1988:21) that while citizenship rights can be exercised by all who possess them, they serve members of different classes—and, we may add, ethnic groups—differently. While it is tempting to regard citizenship as a means of social and political integration, citizenship rights can equally be viewed as a site of social conflict (Barbalet, 1988:81). As such, the question must then be raised as to the type of citizenship rights which have been most favourable for the maintenance of social cohesion. Barbalet (1988:91) suggests that while much overt contestation may occur around the question of civil and political rights, the significance of social rights in citizenship lies precisely in their tendency to remove illegitimate inequalities from society. Thus he would see the fulfilment of social and economic citizenship as performing a key integrative function.

Recent discussions of the nature of citizenship suggest that it is perhaps most useful to view the concept as identifying three arenas of contestation—legal, political and social/economic—rather than as signifying an evolutionary schema (Giddens, 1985:205). It is also
important to view citizenship as a concept implying reciprocity. As individuals and groups compete for citizenship rights and put pressure on the state to deliver these rights, they are in turn monitored by the state and its bureaucracy. Individuals and groups are to be viewed not only as right-bearing units but also as duty-bearing units, the latter being an aspect of citizenship explored by Oldfield (1990) which is discussed below.

This is what the present chapter—as a means of encapsulating the surveillance and communication functions of the modern state—has termed the ‘Return to Sender’ dynamic of citizenship. This can be explained by returning to the discussion of Giddens: he points to the generic association between the nation-state and polyarchy—or government by the many, a term preferred to democracy—and depicts this as a continuing responsiveness on the part of government to its citizens’ preferences (1985:199). Since the modern state extends its administration in the form of surveillance over its constituent population, this both marginalizes its control over the deployment of violence as a mechanism of rule and simultaneously increases the reciprocal relationship between governors and governed. In consequence of this, the rights associated with citizenship have been enhanced in the three sectors (though not necessarily stages) of civil, political and social/economic rights. Each of these sectors should be seen, argues Giddens, as an arena of conflict linked to distinct forms of surveillance, and he offers the following typology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship sector</th>
<th>Surveillance mode</th>
<th>Institutional locale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>civil</td>
<td>policing</td>
<td>law courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td>‘reflexive monitoring’</td>
<td>parliament/council of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic</td>
<td>‘management’ of production</td>
<td>work-place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each form of citizenship rights is double-edged in the sense that it can be employed to expand the control of the dominant group over the subordinates, while simultaneously being used by the latter as a lever of struggle against such control. The Return to Sender dynamic occurs because in order to extend its administrative surveillance into the day-to-day activities of its population the modern state requires a ‘public’ which is aware of its membership in a common polity and can respond to the state’s initiatives. Such responses constitute an ongoing source of feedback by means of which the state is able to
formulate further initiatives, which will in turn induce further responses.

One implication of recent non-evolutionary accounts of the different forms of citizenship is that rights in one sector may be relatively unsynchronized with those in another. This is because the different elements of citizenship have different institutional bases and different histories. They also bear different relations with distinct social groups and with each other (Barbalet, 1988:6–7). For example, Turner (1986; 1988; 1990; 1991) refers to the differential impact of citizenship rights on status, both in terms of ethnic group membership and of life-cycle fluctuations in the availability of certain rights. Ethnic minorities, the aged or unmarried mothers may not enjoy the full benefits of citizenship. Refinements of this kind are reminders that the distinction should always be made between de jure and de facto conditions in the allocation of and access to citizenship rights and obligations.

CITIZENSHIP AS MEMBERSHIP OF A COMMUNITY

Barbalet (1988:87–8) draws attention to an important aspect of citizenship discussed by Marshall. Citizenship is not merely about formal rights; it is about participation in social life and therefore contributes to the integration of society. In its most developed form, it is real membership of a real community, based on loyalty to a civilization (the content of which he goes on to elaborate) commonly shared. Hence citizenship has a normative component which includes the acceptance of national and societal values. This is described as realizing the cultural content of full citizenship (Turner, 1991:216). Such a notion of citizenship, referring as it does to membership of a community, is closely related to the problematic process of creating nationality. As Barbalet explains:

the looser the notion of the common civilization shared by citizens the more likely it is that citizenship will be a successful source or support of social integration; the vaguer the idea of a common civilization the greater the range and diversity of interests and values to be accommodated by it.

(Barbalet, 1988:88)

In multi-ethnic societies like Singapore, membership of a community is articulated in supra-ethnic terms. As debate over the 1991 White Paper on Shared Values demonstrates, the articulation of a set of
national values has been possible only when those values have successfully transcended ethnic identifications and loyalties. The articulation of a common set of values of a general and succinct kind—a project similar to Rousseau’s delineation of civil religion (Rousseau, 1973:276)—is examined in Chapter 8.

It is apparent that ‘nation building’ in Singapore since 1965 has revolved around the concepts of multiracialism (or effectively multiculturalism), meritocracy and multilingualism. Multiracialism is defined by Singapore leaders as the practice of cultural tolerance towards the various communities; acceptance of differences in religious practices, customs and traditions of the different communities; and according each community equality before the law and equal opportunity for advancement (Chan and Evers, 1973:308–9). Meritocracy is appropriate to multiracialism since it facilitates social mobility by dint of hard work and gives no special advantage to any single ethnic community. The practice of multilingualism, while formally recognizing Malay, Chinese and Tamil as official languages, nevertheless accords English the status of lingua franca. The practice of bilingual education requires that all students learn English as well as their ‘mother tongue’ which, for practical purposes, is their second language.

Multiracialism can be seen as one of the founding myths of the Republic of Singapore (Benjamin, 1976:116). The other founding myth is meritocracy. Because of the relatively short history of Singapore and the presence of several ethnic communities, Singapore’s leaders cannot rely on a ‘golden past’—or Chan and Evers’s ‘regressive identity’—in searching for the myths of nationhood. Instead they have to look towards the future and the importance of economic achievements to articulate their conception of the nation. For example, it has recently been stated as official policy (ST, 14.10.91) that the government plans to make Singaporeans as rich as Americans by the year 2030, and one can find many instances of similar appeals to economic success as a measure of the state’s performance. Such universalistic appeals are intended to override the development of ethnically based nationalism, since nationalism in multi-ethnic societies is a divisive force if it is identified, as it often is, with a particular ethnic identity (see for example, M.G.Smith, 1986). If citizenship, as membership of a community and a common civilization, can be developed in the loose and vague sense that Barbalet suggests, it may provide an alternative to more particularistic forms of nationalism.

In a speech in 1968, Foreign Minister S.Rajaratnam stated that the
nation building in Singapore does not consist, as one might expect, of the cultivation of ‘nationalist’ feelings but rather the practice of citizenship in the civic-republican tradition, as outlined by Oldfield (1990). He points to the tradition of liberal individualism which defines citizenship in terms of rights and status and counterposes the tradition of civic republicanism in which the individual becomes a citizen through performing the duties of the practice of citizenship:

Within civic republicanism, citizenship is an activity or a practice, and not simply a status, so that not to engage in the practice is, in important senses, not to be a citizen. Second, civic republicanism recognizes that, unsupported, individuals cannot be expected to engage in the practice.

(Oldfield, 1990:5)

Hence individuals have to be given opportunities to perform the duties associated with the practice of citizenship and also be given sufficient motivation to practise them. The appropriateness of this concept of citizenship within a Singapore context is further addressed in subsequent chapters.

The ideology of multiracialism as nurtured and practised in Singapore should also be viewed in the context of interstate relations and sensitivities. Both her neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia, have predominantly Muslim populations. Furthermore, Singapore’s closest neighbour, Malaysia, with whom there are strong historical ties, has a substantial Chinese community. Multiracialism is an effective counter to the possibility of ethnic polarization within Singapore which, if it were to occur, would have negative consequences for interstate relations. Multiracialism, as enunciated and practised in Singapore, is sufficiently vague and encompassing—emphasizing as it does a depoliticized and culturally defined notion of ‘race’—to be an effective strategy in defining a Singaporean nationality and facilitating social integration.

The policy of ‘multiracialism’ in Singapore has been deployed in
order to depoliticize ethnic issues. In common with multicultural policies in an ethnically plural society such as Australia, the ‘culture’ in multiculturalism refers to the ‘interesting’, ‘colourful’ and personal ‘lifestyles’ which belong to the private domain of family and religious belief (Castles et al., 1988:121). It may also refer to folk art, dance, craft and music but they are all kept distinct from public or national issues which are the responsibility of the state. As part of its articulation as a founding myth, multiracialism has a depoliticizing function and prevents potential ethnic divisions from developing in the realm of public politics. Citizenship in Singapore is viewed, implicitly, as membership of a ‘multiracial’ community and the responsibilities that go with it. As long as multiracialism is defined and perceived loosely (in the sense in which Barbalet uses this term) and the practice of ‘ethnicity’ is confined to the private domain, it is an effective instrument of social integration. When, however, the state has embarked upon a more explicit articulation of ‘culture’ or ‘identity’ as it did during the 1980s in attempting to introduce Confucian ethics in schools and in propagating its Speak Mandarin campaign publicly, many sections of the population, including English-educated Chinese, expressed misapprehensions.

Multiracialism, meritocracy and bilingualism as the conceptual apparatus for creating a national community offer significant insights into the development of citizenship in the modern state as portrayed by Giddens (1985:210). Citizenship was absent in traditional states, he contends, because the sovereign-subject relationship was a passive one. If it existed at all, most people were unaware of it, since the consciousness necessary to conceptualize such a relationship was undeveloped. However, the more the administrative state penetrated the everyday activities of its subjects, the less this was true.

The expansion of state sovereignty means that those subject to it are in some sense—initially vague, but growing more and more definite and precise—aware of their membership in a political community and of the rights and obligations such membership confers.

(Giddens, 1985:210)

The simple act of voting attests to this. ‘A state can only be sovereign,’ Giddens states, ‘if large segments of the population of that state have mastered an array of concepts connected with sovereignty’ (Giddens, 1985:210). Multiracialism, meritocracy and bilingualism, in our view, are just such concepts and are internalized by
Singaporeans through a variety of mechanisms of socialization including education, public ceremonies and the media. They have contributed to the development of sovereignty and the sense of nationality in Singapore.

In order to communicate effectively with the rest of the population, leaders in Singapore, as in other states engaged in a process of post-colonial consolidation, must generate a common cultural mode (Benjamin, 1988:19): this is the common view of several recent accounts of citizenship (Barbalet, 1988; Giddens, 1985; Turner, 1986). Given that no common culture was already in existence, the political leaders were obliged to synthesize one out of whatever elements were available, a process which has been outlined above as incorporating such elements as multiracialism and meritocracy. From time to time, the mass media are mobilized to engender personal identity crises in the citizenry so that the leaders can then present themselves as possessing the means to solve people’s crises and provide them with a certain ‘identity’ (Benjamin, 1988:22). In this way the ‘boundary’ of the nation may be maintained (Bauman, 1992:678). This strategy is used quite openly and with the conscious goal of enhancing the sense of dependence on the state. For example, a minister in the Singapore government in 1970 expressed it in the following way:

And one of the things we can do to get a little further down the road a little faster is to raise the spectre of total disaster as the alternative....Within this context, sooner or later they [the citizens] will change.

(Betts, 1975:141)

In the absence of war or any other crisis by which the citizenry is tested and nations are built, it is arguably the only effective strategy available to leaders in peacetime and in a buoyant economy. The dynamics of crisis construction and crisis management in Singapore have been well analysed by Regnier, who emphasizes their constant rehearsal by the political elite: ‘After the crisis of 1963–5, the PAP continued to keep up an atmosphere of psychosis, in direct relation to the perpetual challenges of shaky external events’ (Regnier, 1991:230).

Throughout this book the ruling party, the People’s Action Party (PAP) is treated as being largely synonymous with the state, and this requires some explication. The relationship between the party and the state in Singapore has been variously described in the literature as a
dominant party system (Bellows, 1970), as the administrative state
(Chan, 1989) and as the corporatist state (Brown, 1994). While these
labels capture significant aspects of the operation of the state and
serve heuristic purposes, their limitations are worth noting. Bellows
(1970:8), writing in the late 1960s, a time when the PAP began to
establish its dominance after a prolonged period of often competitive,
if not debilitating, party politics, understandably described Singapore
as having moved from a multiparty system to a dominant party
system. The relationship between party and state is not addressed in
this formulation. It certainly is not a one-party state in the sense that
it is party-driven, or that there are formal constitutional checks on
the emergence of opposition parties. Brown (1994:69), in developing
the corporatist state model, draws attention to corporatism as a
strategy employed by Third World states to curtail the divisive nature
of mass politics, and thus to enable the state elite to concentrate on
the management of economic development. His model is restricted to
the management of ethnic relations in Singapore, a fuller discussion
of which is given in Chapter 4. However, in constructing the model of
the corporatist state Brown inflates the monolithic nature of the state.
Chan’s model of the administrative state (1989:78–82) presents its
goal-orientation, efficiency and effectiveness as being vital to
economic growth. For this reason the political arena is clearly
defined, open politics is discouraged, and the ambit of decision-
making in the bureaucracy is expanded. While the political
leadership—an elite group comprised of personnel with a proven
track record—is responsive to popular needs, it is essentially
paternalistic. It decides what is desirable for society and is not
accountable to the public except in a formal sense (Girling, 1981:51).
Drawing on the various elements referred to in this discussion the
polity in Singapore may be summarized. At the apex is the state elite,
the members of which are mostly recruited, in the case of the second-
generation PAP leadership, from the military, bureaucracy, business
and tertiary institutions. The PAP and Parliament, which is
dominated by PAP members, clearly constitute the demarcated sphere
of political activity. At the lowest level are parapolitical institutions
and grassroots organizations, which provide feedback to the elite
after the information gathered has undergone a filtering process.

SUMMARY
This is a point at which some of the conceptual material in this
chapter and its relevance to the nation building process in
Singapore can briefly be summarized. It has been argued that in order to accomplish successfully the process of nation building, the state must make itself ‘meaningful’ to its citizens in ways which have been detailed above. The process is one of establishing legitimacy and is necessitated by the state’s need not only to secure internal stability but also to demonstrate to other states, especially those in close proximity, that it possesses sovereignty over a given territory. This is particularly important when linguistic and religious groups which are dominant in a neighbouring state exist as minority ethnic groups in the state claiming such sovereignty. In such cases, the need to demonstrate a shared ‘national’ identity becomes acute, and the response of a number of newly emergent states has been to construct such identities around a core of shared values. These, like the notion of a common civilization (Barbalet, 1988:88), need to be phrased at a high level of generality in order to fulfil their task of generating social integration, particularly since they are required frequently to overarch the cultural values of a diversity of groups.

Reference was made earlier to the argument of Chan and Evers that there have been two major alternatives for elites trying to shed a colonial or neo-colonial identification: one is to adopt a regressive identity, focusing on a ‘golden age’ in the past as a source of identity; the other is to adopt a future-oriented progressive identity, rejecting the past in favour of a new model of society, which has often been seen in socialist or communist terms (Chan and Evers, 1973). These alternatives may be regarded less as discreet options than as points on a continuum between which a ‘mix’ of traditional and progressive elements may be assembled. Hence, states in the process of nation building tend to be Janus-faced, selecting from the past and reconstituting those elements which are identified as possible sources of cultural ballast and therefore of stability while simultaneously orienting citizens towards the achievement of future goals in terms of which certain key value-components of identity can be highlighted. The concept of ‘cultural ballast’ is one which frequently appears in analyses of Singapore’s multiculturalism and bilingualism, and it refers to the state’s policy of stabilizing the identities of citizens by means of an input of ‘Asian values’ in response to the seemingly irresistible tide of Western materialism and decadence (see, for example, Benjamin, 1976:124; Quah, 1990:57). As will be shown later, nautical metaphors have played a significant role in political discourse—perhaps appropriately so given Singapore’s location and origins. In terms of our Janus-faced depiction, it can certainly be
maintained that the mix of traditional and progressive elements has become more apparent during the 1980s.

In this respect the situation of Singapore can be seen as open-ended, as the prefacing statement of Lee Kuan Yew indicates. The initial identification with Malaya, then Malaysia, is still evident in such practices as the singing of the national song in Malay: the latter is not without controversy, since the claim that some people do not understand it—and therefore, in the words of one critic, lack ‘strong emotions’ when they sing it (ST, 26.7.91)—is periodically made. With the forced separation of Singapore from the Federation in 1965 the political leadership faced the dilemma of what identity to select in order to facilitate nation building in a multiracial state. A regressive identity was not a viable option, since with a population containing a significant proportion of recent migrants, 76 per cent of whom were Chinese, the only major tradition available for appeal was Chinese; but the proximity of a ‘third China’ would be wholly unacceptable to Indonesia and Malaysia. The option of a progressive identity incorporating a socialist or communist model was vitiated both by the presence of Western forces in significant numbers (remnants of the British and Commonwealth military presence are still a prominent aspect of Singapore’s urban geography) and by the necessity of attracting foreign capital and trade to ensure economic survival. It would also have had to confront the ‘third China’ objection. The solution to the dilemma was to create an identity based on an ‘ideology of pragmatism’, an ideology so successful, suggests Chua, that it has penetrated the political consciousness of the population and provided the parameters for their common-sense knowledge (1983; 1985). More than this, the ideology has been so fully articulated that it is seen even by social scientists as the only rational choice and therefore as ‘non-ideological’ ideology (Chan and Evers, 1978:122; Chua, 1985). And the end goal for which pragmatism supplies the means can be encapsulated in the word ‘survival’; indeed, the survival motif has taken on the status of an evolutionary fiat. As cabinet minister George Yeo, addressing a preuniversity students’ seminar in 1989 argued: ‘Our Darwinian duty is to survive and prosper, as an independent nation, to the year 2050, at least, when most of you will still be around’ (1989b:84).

In terms of our ‘Janus-faced’ depiction, we would characterize the ideology of pragmatism as the progressive component in the ‘mix’ of identity, utilized most fully in the public and especially political sphere of life. Acting as a counterbalance, and regarded by the state as an essential stabilizing element, is the regressive component of
multiracialism. It is regressive in the sense that it highlights identities that are essentially traditional and primordial, though the state has been careful to encode them in ways that are non-conflictual. Thus racial identity is seen by the state as appropriate to the private and especially familial sphere of life, and is meticulously defined in apolitical, cultural terms (when expressions of multiracialism overstep these parameters they become ‘communalism’, which is proscribed as socially and politically disruptive). Bilingualism represents the communicative dimension of these two components - English as *lingua franca*, associated with the progressive adoption of Western technology; ethnic ‘mother tongue’ as a regressive Asian ‘brake’ on overidentification with Western ideas and as a stabilizer in a rapidly changing social environment. Additionally, and with increasing assiduousness since 1988, the state has engaged in a search for a core set of distinctively Singaporean values which would have the function of fusing the two components and of realigning identity in the face of distortions perceived to have resulted from the ideology of pragmatism.