STATE-INDUCED SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ETHNIC INTEGRATION: THE CASE OF *RUKUN TETANGGA* IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

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Proponents of social capital have argued that individuals bound together in dense social networks, infused with norms of reciprocity and trust, are better able and more inclined to act collectively for mutual benefit and social purposes as opposed to atomised individuals. This is due to the fact that the existence of social capital enables groups and individuals to deal smoothly and efficiently with various economic and social issues. Social capital is therefore seen as "sociological superglue" that holds society together. The social capital thesis, however, is based on studies done mainly in mature Western democracies where ethnic and racial cleavages do not figure prominently in the social structure. Questions such as what are the necessary requisites for social capital to flourish in a society that is divided along racial, ethnic, and religious lines and what are its repercussions (the existence or absence of social capital) have not been adequately addressed. Does the existence of social capital in such society have a moderating effect or will it polarise the society further? There is no doubt that norms of reciprocity and trust exist in all societies but do individuals in a highly polarised society trust other individuals from different ethnic or religious groups? In a modest attempt to address these issues, this article looks at the role of the state in generating social capital across racial, ethnic, and religious lines at the grass-roots level in the northern state of Penang, Malaysia. We argue that the creation of a "semi-autonomous" community organisations or a "state-induced social capital" plays a crucial role in fostering face-to-face interaction among individuals of different ethnic and religious lines in an otherwise a highly polarised society. This line of argument calls into question the

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social capital thesis which takes the existence of social capital as a given and cannot be generated by institutional conditions.

Keywords: *Rukun Tetangga,* ethnic, integration, racial

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have long speculated the basis of social bonds, and provided insights into the foundation that held society together. Aristotle has argued, for example, that it is human nature to band together, and associations have thus existed in all societies. Nevertheless, kinship, real or imaginary, has been the foundation of these associations as human beings feel at ease socialising with others that share the same cultural or biological characteristics. Nations and nationalism in the Western context can be said to be born out of the yearning for the creation of a geographical unit composing of individuals that share the same cultural or biological attributes (real or imaginary). Multi-ethnic societies therefore faced an uphill task of creating a national identity that supersedes primordial ties. This situation is prevalent in post-colonial societies where arbitrary boundary lines were carved out by Western imperial powers. These so called nations are often faced with instability due to ethnic warfare because invocations of "We the people" can lead to ideas of "organic democracy", in which the *People* are defined as a unitary bloc in terms of opposition to an "other", which comprises minorities of an ethnic or racial or political kind.

The list of nations beset by ethnic cleavages is long, and a common thread that lumps these countries together is the uphill task of promoting goodwill and understanding between the different ethnic groups. Malaysia stands out as a fairly successful middle income, multi-ethnic country where different ethnic groups have co-existed quite peacefully for the past fifty years since its independence. While one may argue that ethnic peace in Malaysia is fragile, and that sensitive issues can easily spark an ethnic strife, Malaysia can still be used as a model for a country that has effectively managed its ethnic relations. Having said that, there is no doubt that Malaysians are still divided along ethnic and religious lines but incidences of outward hostility between the different ethnic groups have been on the decline. Whether ethnic peace in Malaysia is largely maintained by the existence of a set of coercive laws is debatable

and will not be addressed here. While we agree that the Malaysian regime is "semi-democratic", and that consociationalism as practiced in Malaysia is flawed, we still maintain that the Malaysian state has been active in promoting inter-ethnic harmony.

The mainstream studies on social capital stress the importance of face-to-face interaction in generating the stock of social capital, this claim, we argue, is applicable in a homogenous society where ethnic and religious cleavages are not salient. In this era of globalisation and devolution, it is also fashionable to argue that the state should take a backseat, and let the private sector or the civil society take the lead in building communities. However, a less commonly asked but no less important question is this: What can the state do to encourage community building in an otherwise highly polarised society? This article explores this question, arguing that the Malaysian state promotes bridging (inclusive) social capital[1] by encouraging the formation of "semi-autonomous" community organisations that encourage face-to-face interaction among people across diverse social cleavages. In other words, we are bringing the state back in by stressing the fact that it can play a role in generating "bridging" social capital.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ASSOCIATIONAL LIVE

The eminent political scientists Robert Putnam (1993) and Francis Fukuyama (1995) argue that social capital is, by and large, the product of cultural and historical legacies. Compared to persons or communities not well endowed with social capital, the existence of an ample stock of social capital within a community, region or even a nation can contribute to effective governance and multiple social and economic issues. Development, democracy as well as community peace, it is claimed, stand to benefit in situations of high level of social capital. Putnam and Leonardi (1993), for example, trace social capital to medieval Italy, explaining how, in the south, Norman mercenaries built a powerful feudal monarchy with hierarchical structures, whereas in the north

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[1] Bridging social capital is inclusive and can not only generate broader identities and reciprocity but also reach out to unlike people in dissimilar situations. In addition, bridging social capital is outward looking and encompasses people across diverse social cleavages (Field, 2003: 42).

communal republics based on horizontal relationships fostered mutual assistance and economic cooperation. Putnam seeks to demonstrate that the "civicness" of the north survived natural catastrophes and political changes. In addition, he points out the civic regions were not wealthier to in the first place. These conclusions are well accepted by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD), and therefore have tremendous policy implications. The repercussions of this view have left many social scientists and policy makers dissatisfied. If the amount of social capital in a society is so strongly path dependent, then there would seem to be very few policy options available to stimulate the development of social capital. It is more likely that governments, and particularly oppressive regimes, can damage and destroy social capital, as the examples of the Norman kingdom in southern Italy and of several authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in southern and eastern Europe show. The most pessimistic view would be that societies that are low on social capital are simply stuck in a quagmire of distrust, and there seems to be little that can be done about it. However, in his later work Putnam makes clear that we need to make a distinction between short-term and long-term institutional influences on social capital. It might be true that generalised trust as well as forms and density of social interactions are shaped through historical forces, but present day social and political institutions and local, regional and national governments are also able to make an impact.

Putnam and neo-Tocquevillean scholars who privileged using data sets such as the General Social Surveys have relied on the existence of voluntary associations, in any societal context (mostly Western), as an indicator of the level social capital; in particular, they see participation in the organisations of civil society as producing the patterns of individual behaviour and social interaction necessary for healthy democratic governance. According to scholars from this persuasion, associations function as "learning schools for democracy" (Putnam & Leonardi, 1993). The claim is that in areas with stronger, dense, horizontal, and more cross-cutting networks, there is a spillover from membership in organisations to the cooperative values and norms that citizens develop. In areas where networks with such characteristics do not develop, there are fewer opportunities to learn civic virtues and democratic attitudes, resulting in a lack of trust. In this account, social

capital is seen as important because it benefits the functioning of democratic institutions. At the micro-level, this entails the relationship between an individual's membership in associations and networks, and an individual's values and attitudes. These norms and values, in turn, help resolve dilemmas of collective action and smooth economic and political negotiations (Coleman, 1988). In addition, associations broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "We" (Putnam, 1995: 67). They thus foster what Tocqueville termed "self-interest properly understood," as well as a wider sense of community and social purpose.

While the neo-Tocquevilleans might have it right in positing a positive relationship between membership in associations and its attendant effects for democracy, the critical flaw emanating from this understanding is that all associations are looked upon as having the same decisive consequences for democratic consolidation. So far the social capital school has mainly used membership in associations or other types of networks as the indicator of social capital, assuming that such groups and associations function as a school for democracy in which cooperative values and trust are easily socialised. It is generally taken as a given that associational life generates trust. In other words, we do not have empirical proof of this function, more so in highly polarised societies. As Paxton (2002) has rightly noted, different associations need not have equivalent effects on democracy. Some associations might even be detrimental to democracy and can exacerbate existing social cleavages. For example, ethic based associations could reduce the levels of tolerance and thereby undermining democracy. More importantly, neo-Tocquevillean scholars fail to recognise that civil society can often serve to weaken rather than strengthen a democratic regime. Because they are unable to differentiate between the positive and negative consequences of a vibrant associational life, neo-Tocquevilleans are unable to predict or account for situations where civil society produces inauspicious patterns of individual behaviour and social interaction. As such, a significant question about the relationship between associations and democracy remains unanswered.

Since neo-Tocquevilleans have stressed that involvement in associations generates social capital, the nature of social relations, and the cultural traits of a given community are among the factors, which play important roles in determining the likelihood that, at the micro-level, individuals

would look upon civil society organisations to pursue specific interest. In the Southeast Asian context for instance, the immigrant communities have displayed greater proclivity in forming voluntary associations. As for the indigenous socio-cultural system, it is more typical of loosely-structured and village centered pattern. Hsu (1963) supports this contention by positing that predominant forms of secondary social structure express basic cultural principles. Indian (Hindu), Chinese, and American cultural communities thus have their philosophical biases of hierarchy, kinship, and contract, respectively, manifested in caste, clan, and club organisations. If this observation is correct, plural societies will exhibit differentiation in the levels of social capital in that the cultural traditions of one ethnic group could very well be compatible with associational life as opposed to that of another. It follows that an ethnic group that is well-endowed with social capital could be well off economically, and is more likely to cooperate in achieving common goals. On the other hand, an ethnic group that has a low level of social capital is more likely to be poor, suffer from endemic corruption and ineffective public administration, and has weak and inefficient business sector. When both groups co-exist within the same political boundary, the differentiation in inter-ethnic levels of social capital could lead to a high degree of mistrust between the diverse ethnic groups. This, in its turn, will reverse the causal flow of social capital: Inequality in the levels of social capital between different groups could well lead to instability. Lin (2001), for example, has noted that inequality of social capital occurs when a certain group clusters at relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic positions, and the general tendency is for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics. Depending on the process of historical and institutional constructions, each society structurally has provided unequal opportunities to members of different groups defined over race, gender, religion, caste, or other ascribed or constructed characteristics (Lin, 2001: 787). The inability of social capitalists to explain the types of voluntary organisations that are compatible with democracy and how associations of the "bonding" kind might have adverse effects in a plural society continue to cloud our understanding of how inequality in social capital might have an adverse affect in the well being of the community as a whole. If social capital can bring out peace, democratic consolidation, and economic advancement then the lack of social capital or differentiation in the levels of social capital could possibly lead to instability, authoritarianism, and economic regression.

THE STATE AS A SOURCE OF "BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL"

According to social capitalists, one important method through which trust, and hence social capital, can be increased is via participation in voluntary social organisations. As we have mentioned at the outset, it is often taken as a given that associations, no matter what the basis for its existence, will overcome the collective action problem. Social capitalists have also overlooked the fact that in a highly polarised society, associations of the "bonding" kind are the norm. Putnam (2000) has pointed out that bonding social capital is "inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups" (Putnam 2000: 22). It also follows that in a highly polarised society, ethnic differences are often reinforced by class divisions, and more often than not, associational life will tend to generate social capital of the bonding kind. This is due to the fact that the general tendency is for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics. In addition, scholars such Lin (2001) and Portes (1998) have advanced the enclave-economy hypothesis arguing that ethnic economic enclaves afford opportunities for entrepreneurs and labourers to gain a foothold in the economy. Even though this observation has been challenged, the basic premise that such a market is largely built on kin and ethnic networks has been generally acknowledged.

In a plural society, we can expect that vertically divided groups will tend to take on political significance when some social groups develop clear perceptions of the differences and conflicts between themselves and other social groups. Herein lies the role of the state. While the state can either accentuate or moderate ethnic conflict by opting for policies that can either aggravate social cleavages or promote inter-ethnic harmony, we will, for the purpose of this study, assume that the state is "benign". Totalitarian states, for example, will attempt to atomise society so that people become isolated and mistrustful of one another and hence unable to concert their efforts in organised political activity (Kornhauser, 1959). In other words, the state has the ability either to create or destroy social capital. Since we are working on the assumption that the state is "benign", we will attempt to construct a model that will explain the central argument of this article: Provision of a rule-governed environment in which the state promotes national integration and social organisation to take place appears to be the most basic way in which to

generate "bridging social capital" in an otherwise a highly distrustful society.

As Figure 1 indicates, the state can realise its capacity to generate trust among citizens by encouraging face-to-face interaction between people of diverse backgrounds. This could be accomplished by establishing an outfit at the local level that supports integration and participation of citizens. The mobilisation of state resources and institutional approaches, in its turn, can inspire societal responses. More specifically, the state can encourage cross-cultural activities in order to foster social relationships that can generate "bridging social capital" as it has the ability not only to foster capacity building but also make trust possible by establishing contacts among otherwise highly distrustful groups. This model stresses the importance of structures and state institutions in providing channels and incentives for people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely from a different ethnic group, thus enabling people from diverse backgrounds to interact with one another.
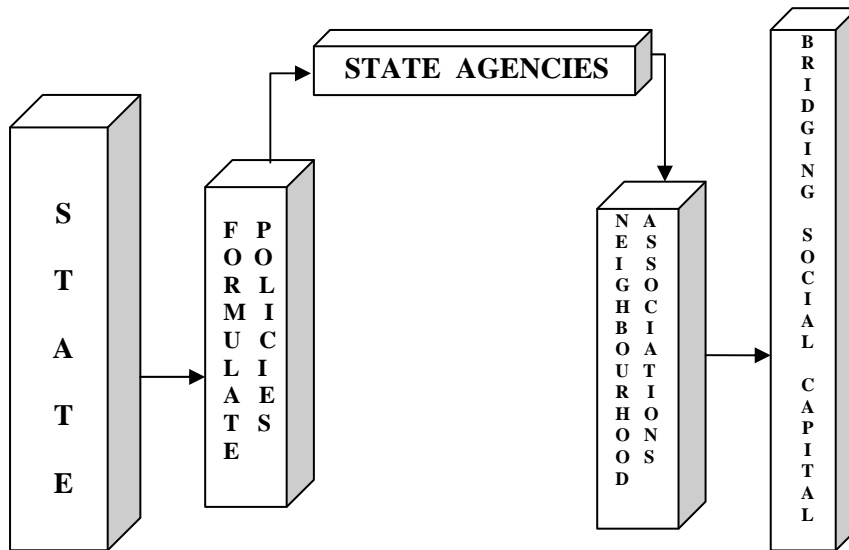
Figure 1: The Role of the State in Generating Bridging Social Capital.

Where states have provided the necessary infrastructure for untrusting citizens to associate freely, face-to-face interaction among groups of diverse backgrounds is likely to occur. Put differently, the design of public institutions can either impede or facilitate the levels of "bridging social capital". This model also problematises the question of the generation of social capital as a by product of the incentives deriving from social structures and state institutions. While Putnam (2000) considers social capital as exogenous and path dependent, we argue that the generation of social capital, especially of the "bridging" kind is endogenous and dependent. This is due to the fact that in a highly polarised society, the spread of generalised trust, and norms of reciprocity and social participation are complex phenomena, and cannot be explained by involvement in civil society per se. Whereas the concept of social capital has traditionally been located in the realm of civil society, we are suggesting that it should be broaden to include various types of social interaction – this model is postulating that "bridging" social capital is deeply embedded in the triangular relationship among the state, the family, and civil society. The important aspects of civil society that have been highlighted by the rise of social capital concept, such as generalised trust, social interactions, civic engagement, cooperation, tolerance, are all closely related and not separated from state institutions and family life. In other words, civil society organisations which are organised along group and class lines rather than across them, particularly in a multicultural society, can be destructive to inter-ethnic relations, more so if one group is dominant politically or economically. While civil society should be strong enough to prevent the monopolisation of truth by the state, it should not deter the state from "fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests" (Gellner, 1996: 5). On that account, the state can facilitate and promote the conditions necessary for the evolution of a civic community, and a scaling up of broad-based horizontal networks of trust and reciprocity.

OVERVIEW OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA

The state of ethnic relations in Malaysia is, depending on your premise, can be categorised somewhere in between stable existence and crisis. It therefore come as no surprise that an alarmist would paint a bleak picture of a continuous state of ethnic tensions whereby the country is

almost always on a brink of an impending ethnic conflict. Following this line of thought, a Malaysian specialist has remarked that conflict in the country is managed through "coercive consociationalism" (Mauzy 1993: 106). For those who adhered to this school of thought, it is immaterial that, in historical terms, "plurality" has characterised Southeast Asia even before the arrival of the Europeans. Nonetheless, we have to caution that in spite of their long-standing contact and relationship, spanning a period of more than a hundred years, the Malays and the non-Malays have not interacted much. Compounded with that is the British, who was largely responsible for bringing in the Chinese and Indian immigrants, had long sown the seeds of ethnic conflict through its divide-and-rule policy. While the situation in Malaysia is not as bad as that of in Sri Lanka or Rwanda, the repercussion of the colonial policy had inadvertently accentuated ethnic prejudices. As Mohamad Abu Bakar (2001) has noted, the colonial practices, undergirded by a racial ideology of innate or inherent differences, had caused the preservation and institutionalisation of perceived differences among the races.

Malay nationalist struggle and subsequent formation of ethnic based political parties had not only nurtured ethnic awareness among Malaysians of different racial origins but also minimised inter-ethnic interactions. Incidences of racial clashes had occurred immediately after World War II, and the most severed took place in May of 1969. The Malay dominated government responded to the latter crisis by introducing a two pronged affirmative action policy — eradicating poverty and restructuring society to achieve inter-ethnic parity, thus promoting national unity. Some segment of the population especially that of the Malaysian Chinese, are of the view that the aforementioned policy, popularly known as the New Economic Policy (NEP) has the revered effect of promoting national disunity as the measures taken were highly in favour of the Malays who lagged behind economically. Some of the mechanisms used to achieve the aims of the NEP were improving the access of the poor to training, capital and land; changing education and employment patterns among the Malays through the introduction of ethnic quotas favouring the Malays for entry into tertiary institutions; requiring companies to restructure their corporate holdings to ensure at least 30% *Bumiputera* (sons of soil) ownership; and allotting publicly listed shares at par value or with only nominal premiums to *Bumiputera*. While Malaysia is still struggling to find the right solution to promote inter-ethnic unity, "some observers believe that in pure statistical terms,

there have been more ethnic clashes in Britain, Germany, and France in the last five years than in the last 45 years of Malaysian post-war history" (Shamsul, 2005: 5). Malaysia therefore has been rightly described as a country that has always been "in a state of stable tension" (Shamsul, 2005: 5).

That the state has been active in promoting ethnic integration is a well known fact. While few studies have been done to gauge the effectiveness of Malaysia's National Integration Policy programs, it does not alter the fact that the state has taken steps to promote national unity. Malaysia's second premier, Tun Abdul Razak, for example had advocated participation in voluntary associations in order to encourage integration (Straits Times, 10 October 1969). Nevertheless, voluntary associations in Malaysia are still drawn along ethnic lines and current trends have shown that this pattern is likely to persist (see Table 1).

Table 1: Registration Under the Societies Act 1966.

	National	State	Total
Religious	7, 203	1,400	8,603
Social welfare	5,629	1,533	7,162
Social/Recreational	6,158	567	6,725
Women	372	1,142	1,514
Culture	1,716	1,428	3,144
Mutual benefit	2,121	8	2, 129
Trade	3,360	767	4, 127
Sport	3,226	3,79	3,605
Youth	3,157	6,421	9,578
Educational	367	171	538
Political	46	51,129	51,175
Employment	1,104	515	1,619
General	7,100	2,247	9,347
Total	41,559	67,707	109,266

Source: New Straits Times, 26 September 2007.

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CASE STUDY OF *RUKUN TETANGGA* IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

This section provides the empirical evidence to support our claim that the state can indeed play a role in generating bridging social capital. In the Malaysian context, the state, through the National Unity and Integration Department, which is under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Department, has been active in organising communities at the local level. This neighbourhood associations, known as *Rukun Tetangga* (RT) are "semi-autonomous" in that while they are set up by the state, they are none the less given a free hand in running their day-to-day affairs. While some scholars may argue that the RTs are no different from GRINGOs (government run/initiated NGOs which act as conduits for government and aid funds), we would like to stress that the main thrust of these associations is to promote goodwill and understanding among the different ethnic groups in the country. In what follows, we provide a detail case study of the kind of activities undertaken by RTs in Penang which can generate bridging social capital.

The RT was introduced in August of 1975, under the Essential (*Rukun Tetangga*) Regulation 1975, (P.U (A) (279/75). Through this scheme, the state's aim was to promote unity and harmony among the population in the residential areas by encouraging face-to-face interaction which, in its turn, could foster a spirit of co-operation in the community. The focus and orientation of the RT therefore is to build "trust" among the different ethnic groups. This objective is implemented through the establishment of RT committee at the local level (Figure 2).

In Penang, the number of RT areas has increased from 107 in 1996, to 237 in 2006. Every RT is headed by a committee, and its members are selected among local residents. The committee acts as a voluntary body that plans and organises neighbourhood and goodwill activities[2]. Here

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[2] As a mechanism in managing the ethnic relation, RT committee is responsible to:
   a) Carry out welfare, recreational, educational and security activities for everyone's benefit.
   b) Understand and identify the problem and the need of the local people and try to find a solution.
   c) Bring up the problem that can't be solved to the party concerned according to the issues.

we will review some the activities that were organised by the RT which
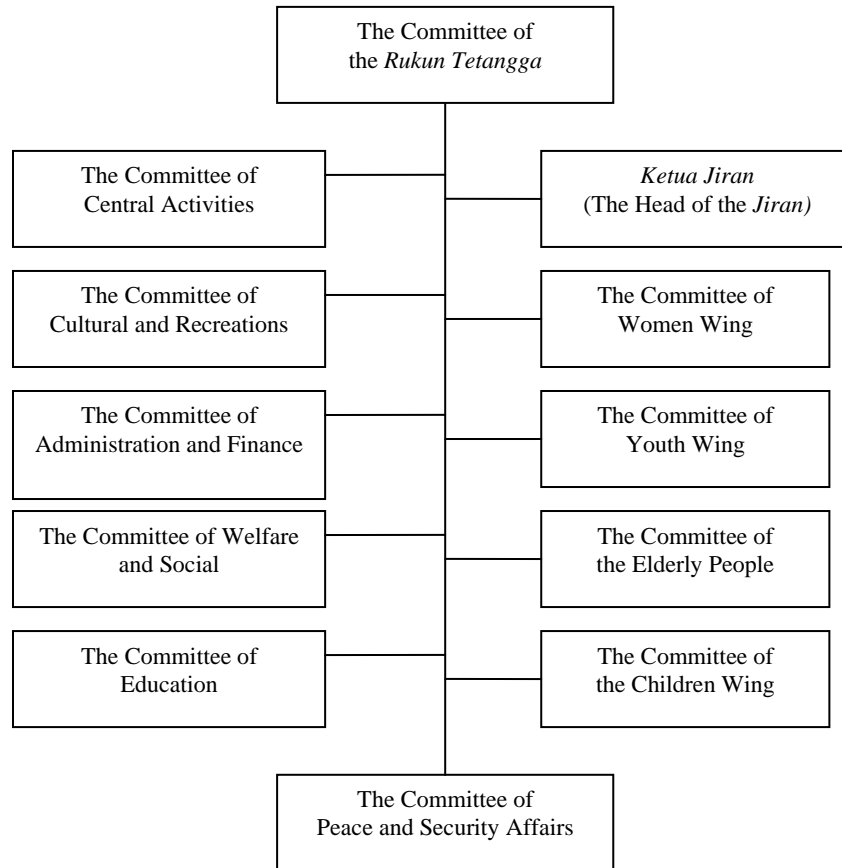have the potential to generate bridging social capital.

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   The Committee of   │
                    │  the Rukun Tetangga  │
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                               │
   ┌──────────────────────┐    │    ┌──────────────────────┐
   │  The Committee of    │    │    │     Ketua Jiran       │
   │  Central Activities  │────┤    │ (The Head of the Jiran)│
   └──────────────────────┘    │    └──────────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────────────┐    │    ┌──────────────────────┐
   │  The Committee of    │    │    │   The Committee of    │
   │ Cultural and Recreations│─┤    │     Women Wing        │
   └──────────────────────┘    │    └──────────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────────────┐    │    ┌──────────────────────┐
   │  The Committee of    │    │    │   The Committee of    │
   │ Administration and Finance│┤   │     Youth Wing        │
   └──────────────────────┘    │    └──────────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────────────┐    │    ┌──────────────────────┐
   │ The Committee of Welfare│  │    │   The Committee of    │
   │   and Social         │────┤    │   the Elderly People  │
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   │  The Committee of    │    │    │   The Committee of    │
   │     Education        │────┤    │  the Children Wing    │
   └──────────────────────┘    │    └──────────────────────┘
                               │
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                    │   The Committee of   │
                    │ Peace and Security Affairs │
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Figure 2: Management Structure of the *Rukun Tetangga.*

Rukun Tetangga's **Activity**

The RT has been given the primary task of implementing programs that
are formulated by the National Unity and Integration Department. As
mentioned before, the main aim of the RT is to encourage inter-ethnic
interaction at the local level. These tasks are carried out through various
social development activities such as recreation, education, sports,
environment, economy and religion. Table 2 shows the RT's overall

activity in Penang according to sectors, and Table 3 shows the number of participants according to ethnic group. Up to December 2006, a total of 18,139 activities had been carried out. This involves 902,121 people of whom 382,947 were Malays, 385,826 were Chinese, 111,050 were Indians and 411 were from other races. From the activities mentioned, we will look briefly at some of the activities that were organised by the RT.

Table 2: Implementation of RT's Inter-ethnic Activities in Penang According to Sector.

Field Activities	Number of Activities (2006)
Sport	1596
Recreational	4286
Social	947
Welfare	523
Culture	611
Education	3199
Security	2877
Health and Environment	1816
Economy	570
Religion	1710
Others	4
Total	18,139

Source: Department of National Unity, Penang 2006.

Table 3: Participants According to Ethnic Group.

Ethnic Group	Number of participation (1997)
Malay	382,947
Chinese	385,826
Indian	111,050
Others	411
Total	902,121

Source: Department of National Unity, Penang 2006.

Religious Festivals Celebration

A variety of festivals which reflect the country's multi-religious character indirectly/directly have served as a mechanism to foster a spirit of co-operation, tolerance and goodwill. Each festival provides an opportunity for different ethnic groups to strengthen their co-operation and relationships. During each festival, it is very common for most Malaysians regardless of their ethnic background to hold "open house" for their relatives as well as friends of various ethnicities.

> For the Muslims, the three most important religious festivals are Eid ul-fitri (*Hari Raya Puasa*), which concludes a month of daily fasting during the month of *Ramadhan*; Eid ul-Adha (*Hari Raya Haji*) celebrated on the 10th day of the 12th moon in the Muslim calendar when Muslims perform the last phase of the *Haj* (pilgrimage) to the holy city of Mecca; and the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*Maulid ul-Rasul*) which falls on the 12th day of the 3rd moon in the Muslim calendar. Malaysians of Chinese descendence celebrate Chinese New Year on the first day of the Chinese lunar calendar which falls in January or February every year. Another Chinese festival is the *Moon Cake Festival* which falls on the 15th day of the 8th Chinese lunar month (normally September). As regards to Hinduism, in the month of *Aippasi* (October-November), Hindus celebrate *Deepavali* (or Festival of Lights). This is to celebrate the triumph of good over evil and the light over darkness. Another most important Hindu festival is *Thaipusam* which falls in January. This is the festival to commemorate the birthday of Lord Subramaniam. On December 25, as well as in other parts of the world, Christians in Malaysia celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. Buddhists in Malaysia celebrate *Wesak Day*, the birthday of Lord Buddha. The Buddhists subsist on a vegetarian diet for the day.[3]

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[3] For details of these festivals, see; The Government of Malaysia, Official Year Book 1994, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; also, The Government of Malaysia, *Negara*, The Department of National Unity, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1990, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In the case of the RT associations, each festival would be celebrated in the form of *gotong-royong* (voluntary co-operation) which would be held in the *Balai Rakyat* (community hall) or *pondok Rukun Tetangga* (Rukun Tetangga Hall). These kinds of activities have become a routine event for most of the *Rukun Tetangga* organisations.[4] The primary objective of these activities is to encourage residents from the various ethnic backgrounds to interact.[5] It is hoped that inter-group interaction would have a positive socialisation effects.

Unity Telematch

This activity is a type of recreational sports that is quite popular among Malaysians, and was therefore identified as one of the methods used by the RT committee to form a harmonious society. Three elements have been incorporated into the telematch:

a) Ensuring that all committee members are aware that tolerance and cooperation are important elements in achieving success.
b) Give an opportunity to people across all levels of society to interact and to engage in face-to-face interaction.
c) Reduction of feelings of ethnocentrism.[6]

 Since the objective of this program is to utilise sports as a mechanism to promote unity among the different ethnic groups, the events in the telematch were deliberately designed so as to inculcate the spirit of cooperation. The main objective of the telematch is, however, still inter-ethnic participation.

Goodwill /Cross-community Trips

Cross-community goodwill trips between one RT sector to another is one of the programs formulated to enhance inter-ethnic interaction. The rationale of having the goodwill trip/cross-community trip is to expose

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4 Government of Malaysia, *1994 Annual Report*, The Department of National Unity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
5 The Government of Malaysia, Program and Activities of the Neighbourhood Consensus Movement, *op.cit*, p. 28.
6 Report of the *unity telematch* program, Department of National Unity Penang, 21 September 1997.

the multi-ethnic society to multiculturalism. Through this trip, the participants would be exposed to various cultural practices of the various ethnic groups in the country. Here, inter-ethnic face-to-face interaction is likely to enhance greater understanding within and between the communities.

CONCLUSION

Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1995). This definition includes three conceptually different aspects of social capital–norms, networks, and consequences. The advantage of the definition is that it combines three aspects of social capital in an interesting and provocative way; the disadvantage is that it runs different concepts together that should be separated. Here we call into questions the assumption that the level of social capital is path-dependent. In a multi-ethnic society, political structure and political context are critically important and can go a long way toward shaping both the kinds of organisations represented in society and their impact on the behaviour and attitudes of citizens. We argue that the generation of social capital is context dependent and that the state is also a source of social capital. In other words, the level of social capital can be altered through induced structural change. While social capital exists in all societies–be it homogenous or plural societies, empirical evidence has pointed out that social capital of the bonding kind is the most prevalent in either a homogenous or a plural society. Put in a different way, people who are alike, for expressive reasons, tend to interact with others who are like themselves. Bonding social capital therefore has an inverse relationship to ethnic integration. Even though the state has the ability to induce people of different ethnicity to interact and thus generate bridging social capital, the prevalence of ethnic enclaves in Penang has somewhat diluted the effectiveness of the RT. This is due to the fact that ethnic integration and bridging social may only flourish in a mix neighbourhood. The central argument in this study is that the state has the ability to provide an infrastructure for people from different background to interact and a by-product of this interaction is bridging social capital which will inevitably lead to a higher degree of ethnic integration. While the state might not have total autonomy from societal

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forces, state elites might also act independently in carrying out the RT programs in that the programs might be a conduit for a social control mechanism. This, however, by no means cancels out the fact that the state has the capacity to "induce" bridging social capital by co-opting social elites from different ethnic groups to interact and the one of the trickle down effects is a higher level of ethnic integration. Nevertheless, we are not assuming that that every individual or collective actor utilises all available social capital or the "use value" of the bridging social capital generated by the state. More importantly, while the state can induce bridging social capital, the effective use of the resource and the program formulated to promote inter-ethnic integration have yet to be determined.

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