The Macho-Management of Religious Diversity in Singapore

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The title of this paper is taken from the description of Singapore as a 'macho-meritocracy' by Ezra Vogel in his chapter *A Little Dragon Tamed* (1989). There he is talking about the Singapore state's rigorous insistence on meritocratic criteria in the allocation of key political roles, and there is a close relationship between this principle and the managerial approach taken by the state to all aspects of its citizens' lives. What I want to suggest is that the same rigorous stance is taken in managing religious diversity - hence, 'macho-management'.

In examining the extension of controls by the Singapore state over religion during the late 1980s, it is first necessary to outline some historical circumstances in the emergence of the state, especially during the turbulent years of the 1950s and 1960s. The period before independence - particularly the 'Malayan Emergency' - and the contestation with left-wing trades unions and political opponents throughout the first years of independence have not only shaped the emerging social and political environment of Singapore but have provided the basis for a series of myths to which reference is made in mobilising public responses to contemporary events. The term 'myths' here is used not to imply the fabricated nature of the scenarios presented but rather to highlight the importance of their content in legitimating political policy and in initiating social action. In this sense the process of constructing myths is similar to the 'invention of tradition'(Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983); indeed one aspect of 'invented traditions' is especially appropriate to a discussion of Singapore, since they are seen to be 'highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the 'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:13).

Two of the most powerful myths are particularly important in managing the Singapore state's approach to religion: they derive from the official definitions of communalism and communism. The first identifies persistent underlying communal tension as a possible source of ethnic conflict; and the second points to an ever-present conspiracy by communist elements to subvert the state. The potential of these two perceived threats to undermine social cohesion was strongly emphasised by the state during the period which is examined here. And while this turbulent period can be partly understood in terms of Church-State (or more accurately, religion-state) discourse useful insights can be generated using concepts drawn from the

sociology of deviance. (For an account in these terms see O'Grady (1990:55-72)). Thus the following account will emphasise the central concept of moral panic and the related processes of crisis construction, amplification, and management in order to identify some of the factors involved in a series of exchanges between the Singapore state and a variety of religious groups. The account focuses especially on the print media of the period since this has been an important component of moral panics in other societies.

While there is not space to provide a full historical background, a number of key historical features require appropriate attention. First, Singapore's consolidation as an independent state can be characterised less in terms of a revolutionary overthrow of colonial rule than as a series of initiatives, unanticipated reversals, and exigencies to which the political leadership responded in overwhelmingly pragmatic terms. Secondly, most of the political leaders of Singapore in the period leading to the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 did not believe that Singapore could survive as a viable, independent nation: as early as 1957, for example, Lee Kuan Yew had said that in their contemporary regional context, 'island nations are political jokes' (Leifer 1988:344). The People's Action Party (PAP), Singapore's ruling party since 1959 (and the only party in parliament from 1969-81), always looked to linkage with Malaya as the country's only viable future option. The political leadership in Malaya, for its part, held strong reservations about the presence of Singapore in a proposed Malaysian Federation because Singapore's predominantly Chinese population would counterbalance the Malay ethnic numerical superiority. However, the neutralisation of left-wing militancy in Singapore - with its potentially destabilising regional effects - provided a decisive motive for federation (Yeo and Lau 1989:140), and the inclusion of Sarawak and Sabah - which had significant indigenous as well as Malay inhabitants - was seen as diluting the overall Chinese influence. Singapore acquired limited self-government in 1959, was incorporated into the Malaysian Federation in 1963, but then was expelled and gained full if reluctant independence in 1965. It would accurately represent the situation to say that Singapore's leaders found themselves in possession of a state they considered non-viable without a corresponding nation.

After the communist faction in the PAP finally split from the party in 1961, the moderates faced the task of constructing Singapore's future. Although they had originally espoused socialist ideals and the concept of a pan-Malayan nation, the shock of expulsion from the Federation in 1965, followed by the announcement in 1967 of the British military withdrawal - with consequent job losses and more precarious security - necessitated a new economic strategy of self-reliance. At the same time the political leadership had to articulate for its citizens the difficult circumstances in which the country found itself; and it is just such a recurring insistence by the elite on the precariousness of Singapore's status as a nation-state that has formed a central part of its nation-building exercise. The restatement of this motif as a major part of the state's legitimation of controls over religion is a key

theme of this paper: in practice it represents an 'ideology of survival' (Chan 1971).

One of the key functions of the modern state, which is constantly under challenge, is to provide a strong sense of security, affiliation and personal identity to its constituent population (Alter 1989:123). Furthermore, the stronger the perceived need for such affiliation and identity - which is decisively the case when the state can point to traumatic political and social upheavals in the past - the greater is the state's potential power in demanding compliance and extensive obligations on the part of its citizenry. One way of emphasising the citizens' dependence on the state is, paradoxically, to create periodic 'crises' which can then be employed to draw attention to the state's key arbitrating role. Such 'crises' may take an acute form, such as a moral panic or an alarm over security; or they may be part of a longer-term, more diffuse crisis over identity. The crisis of identity in many contemporary emergent nation-states - as indeed, in the emergent nation-states of nineteenth-century Europe (Bowles and Gintis 1987:38; Waldron 1985:428) - is focussed on the state's reconstituted definitions of nationality and ethnicity (Benjamin 1988:25). Both acute and longer-term types of 'crisis' can be identified in the initiatives taken by the state in Singapore to extend its control over the sphere of religion.

The management of religion which is considered here is based on the political elite's fundamentally Hobbesian presentation of the country's history in the 1950s and 1960s. In emphasising the 'crisis' and 'survival' motifs, the state constantly reminds its citizens that the alternative to its firm control over significant sectors of their lives is a reversion to what is portrayed as the anarchy and violence of its early days, a veritable 'state of nature'. This image is constantly reiterated, especially when there is a perceived need to remind the population - a growing proportion of whom have no personal recollection of the incidents that are rehearsed - of the dire consequences of disunity. In the aftermath of the 1991 election, for instance, when the election of four opposition MPs was seen as something of a rebuff to the PAP, the new Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong sketched a scenario of 'Unity in crisis' as the only viable option for the future (ST 30.11.91); and immediately before the 1997 election, when the PAP was targeting an opposition candidate whom they accused of Chinese chauvinism, a similar scenario was presented to university students under the headlines, *Rifts...Riots...and nation-building* (ST, 6.12.96).

The Hobbesian picture also reveals a lack of confidence on the part of the elite in their citizens, "who are thought not to have attained sufficient political maturity to appreciate just how vulnerable their material inheritance is" (Leifer, 1990:27).

At this point it is necessary to examine some of the conceptual underpinning of the account. The term 'moral panic' originated with Jock Young (1971) who, importantly for the present argument, introduced it in the course of discussing the process of deviance amplification. The concept was taken up by Stan Cohen (1973) in his book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, where it was given considerably greater precision. While incorporating popular rumours and anxieties of the type associated with urban legends, Cohen was much more directly concerned with the role of the

media and with what he called 'the manufacture of news'. This is how he defines the concept of moral panic:

> Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten,...at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way a society conceives itself. (Cohen 1973:9)

Some of the features which Cohen identifies in this quotation will be clearly evident in the events outlined below; others are either absent or appear in a greatly modified form. More recent analyses of the dynamics of moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Thompson 1998) offer additional insights on the ways in which moral panics have been generated, mostly in Western societies, and include some observations that would correspond with the distinctive features of the Singapore context.

Examining more closely Cohen's analysis of the media construction of a moral panic, there are four components which seem to play a highly important role. They are:

1.   EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION: This includes overestimating the numbers involved and exaggerating the seriousness of incidents reported. Very often rumour and urban legend are drawn on and substitute for factually-based accounts. For instance, the portrayal of rates of youth offending can be exaggerated by graphical presentations which change the scale of presentation and thus increase the perceived magnitude of the problem. Of course, 'exaggeration' and 'distortion' are attributes that are open to competing interpretations; thus it might be preferable to use another flawed but less loaded term such as 'disproportionality' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:36) to indicate scepticism about the claimed magnitude of the problem.

2.   SYMBOLISATION: Symbols and labels are used to create images that are 'sharper than reality', and these are important in identifying 'folk devils' who can be blamed for the stigmatised behaviour. Symbolisation is also important in mobilising a societal reaction. For instance, in the 1970s in Singapore the 'hippie' became a much-publicised 'folk-devil' as a symbol of Western decadence (Roth 1985:564). In the moral panic over religion in the 1980s symbolisation focussed on the two areas of heightened anxiety - communalism and communism - with

appropriate icons and images being deployed in the media to highlight their 'sharper than reality'characteristics.

     3.   MANUFACTURING NEWS: Events and individuals are selected for news reporting on the basis of their conformity with previously-established images and stereotypes. In their reporting of the perceived danger of religious disruption, the Singapore media had constant recourse to previously established images since they reiterated 'crisis' scenarios of past history and used these as frames within which to locate current events. Prediction is, of course, an important component of Cohen's inventory of moral panics (Cohen 1973:38-40) since it supports "the implicit assumption... that what had happened was inevitably going to happen again"(Cohen 1973:38-40) and would therefore justify the state's 'nipping in the bud' any perceived threats. In Singapore this form of historical restatement was seen as particularly necessary for a population which is increasingly distant from the traumatic episodes concerned, and the educative role of such 'reminders'was reiterated by the political elite.

     4.   REACTION AND CONTROL: Cohen identifies this final stage of a moral panic when, in response to the public anxiety thus created, agents of social control - the police, the judiciary, legislators, and in Western societies groups such as social workers, and mental health workers - are called on to manage the deviant group. This may even leave a lasting trace in legislation, and such a trace may not always be of an obviously linked kind: for example, in Britain after the James Bulger murder, demands were made for controls to be tightened over violent videos (Newburn 1997:648). In Singapore, because the state is more closely involved in the rehearsal and management of crises, the process of reaction and control is more closely integrated into the overall sequence of events. The progress of a moral panic is punctuated by the state's insistence on the need for control and on the legitimacy of the initiatives taken, however draconian they might appear. As will be seen, the eventual outcome of legislative control follows an extensive process of legitimation and consensus-building.

     The element of consensus is seen by Goode and Ben-Yehuda as a key indicator of moral panic. They point out that shared sentiment may be fairly widespread or specific to certain groups in a society - in other words, moral panics differ in extent - but that strong public concern is a necessary ingredient. They also refer to conspiracies that are 'engineered' or 'orchestrated' by the powers that be, but argue that these often fail to materialise or 'simply fizzle out' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:34). Certainly the construction of the moral panic over religion in Singapore can be viewed as a variety of the 'elite-engineered' theory, though without incorporating the Gramscian element on which some accounts are premised (Hunt 1997; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). It is important to note that the Singapore government closely monitors the public mood in response to moral panics by commissioning opinion polls and engaging in sophisticated social scientific research, as detailed below. One further aspect of consensus-building is evident in the media

treatment of moral panics and that concerns the status given to claims that were reported. In the Singapore media, claims made by official agencies, such as the Internal Security Department, are reported as disclosures rather than allegations, thus privileging their status as factual; by contrast, in the Malaysian media, reports about the same events were always presented as allegations.

This suggests that we should make a basic distinction between the origin and progress of moral panics in a Western and a Singaporean context. In most but not all Western examples the 'ownership'of the problem is dispersed among moral entrepreneurs as claimsmakers, the media as amplifiers of imputed deviance (though sometimes the media provide sceptical commentary on such claims (Jenkins 1992)), and the authorities as ultimate repositories of reaction and control. In the Singapore context it would be more appropriate to see the state as 'owning' the moral panic because it acts in the role of moral entrepreneur and deviance-amplifier - assisted by the media, which are largely state-controlled - and subsequently as the legitimate source of solutions to the problem. Thus, while in the West the focus of analyses of moral panics has been on public concern at the existence of some problem or threat (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:98), in Singapore the process has been more one of the state creating public concern in order to justify policies which are seen as necessary to meet some putative problem.

The sequence of crisis-production in Singapore, as this paper's detailed analysis will show, contains the three following stages which involve statements by government, their encoding and rehearsal in the media, and responses by the relevant agencies of social control.

1.   THE RAISING OF SPECTRES: In alerting public consciousness to impending disruption, key events or persons (especially the latter) in the country's history are identified, their status as folk devils is reaffirmed, and their enduring presence as threats to public order is stressed;

2.   THE STATE'S PRECARIOUSNESS: That the folk devils thus identified constitute a genuine danger is emphasised by references to the state's short history, its turbulent origins; and its weakness and vulnerability as an island state in a volatile region;

3.   THE PREEMPTIVE STRIKE: In its constant vigilance over the protection of its citizens' security, the state must anticipate such dangers and wherever possible prevent their occurrence by any means available: however draconian the latter may appear they are necessary and legitimate. Reference is made to the need to 'nip in the bud' any such threats.

The state's responses do not always follow this clear chronology. In those situations characterised as acute crises, for example, the pre-emptive strike may precede the other stages. Moreover, with the emergence of an increasingly educated citizenry, an intervening phase has been inserted into the process as a means of establishing the validity and authenticity of the state's diagnosis. Since this stage was clearly evident in strategies adopted towards religion in the period 1986 to

1991, and since it entails the contributions of academic social scientists, it is of particular interest. This stage can be labeled:

      4.   VALIDATION AND OBJECTIFICATION: In order to demonstrate the existence and extent of the crisis, the state commissions research by university sociologists and political scientists whose reports are extensively covered in the media; while concurrently it seeks to establish a consensus - that a problem exists which needs to be addressed - among the representatives and leaders of groups thought to be involved.

      So far most of the conceptual material has been drawn from the sociology of deviance, but it is worth emphasising that the process of crisis-management has resonances with some of the strategies employed by charismatic leaders, both in producing and amplifying crises among their followers and potential followers (Tucker 1968:751; Hill 1987:169), and in emphasising their followers' dependency (Hall 1989; Johnson 1979)). Tucker makes some interesting comments on this process of crisis-production and amplification which are appropriate to the Singapore context: "[Charismatic leaders] address themselves in one way or another to the predicaments that render masses of people potentially responsive to the appeal of a movement for change and offer some diagnosis of these predicaments. Indeed, they characteristically strive to accentuate the sense of being in a desperate predicament...". (Tucker 1968:751). He then goes on to suggest that crisis-production is not only a strategy of charismatic leaders but also a tactic of a variety of consciousness-raising movements. In relation to the state's efforts at consciousness-raising, Leifer has drawn attention to the distinctiveness of Singapore in a broader Asian context in its emphasis on constant 'maintenance' - by which he means not only maintenance of the natural environment and physical infrastructure but also of the social and motivational domains: "In the way that the environment of Singapore is constantly subject to maintenance, so its citizens are constantly instructed and harried in order to prevent the political jungle from returning" (Leifer 1990:27).

      Furthermore, there is direct evidence that Singapore's political elite is fully aware of the potential functions of crisis-production, particularly in persuading younger Singaporeans - who have been socialised in an environment of economic success very remote from that of the traumatic period of early independence - of the precarious world they inhabit. 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 [the citizens] will change" (Betts 1975:141). Crisis-management can be seen as a central component of the ideology of survival, which has formed a 'cornerstone concept' of nation-building since 1965 (Regnier 1991:229-232). It is still fully operational, as the outcome of the 1997 debacle between Malaysia and Singapore shows. Under the headline, *Singaporeans now more aware of vulnerability,* the Sunday Times (11.5.97) reported as follows: "One silver lining has emerged from the diplomatic cloud hanging over Singapore-

Malaysian relations. Singaporeans now have a keener appreciation of the nation's vulnerability and achievements...".

In its claims to geopolitical vulnerability, the Singapore state can point to the fact that both of its close neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia, have predominantly Muslim populations: in addition, the closest neighbour geographically and historically is Malaysia, which has a significant Chinese community. The multiracialism which Singapore has attempted to institutionalise as part of its process of nation-building has as one of its principal goals the prevention of ethnic polarisation, which would have inter- as well as intra-state ramifications. Although such polarisation might be argued to have been largely nullified or at least contained, the possibility that it might occur is one of the prompts with which the state constantly alerts its citizens. And in the absence of any overt evidence of inter-communal hostility, religion has become a symbolic focus around which such anxieties have been mobilised.

One final element of descriptive background is necessary before turning to the analysis of state-religion relationships, and that is to delineate the main contours of ethnic and religious diversity. Ethnically, Singapore society has for the past three decades contained a relatively stable mix of some 75 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malays and 7 percent Indian, and because of the PAP government's policy of multiracialism such an ethnic identity must be carried in tandem with Singaporean citizenship: in other words, one cannot simply be a 'Singaporean', one has to be a 'Singaporean X/Y/Z'. Among the Chinese, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are the major belief-systems or religions; Malays are almost exclusively Muslim; while Indians, who are mostly of Tamil origin, are predominantly Hindu (with a small number of Hinayana Buddhists who are tend to be Sri Lankan and Thai in origin). Buddhism has recently become more intellectualised, in part as a result of Japanese reformist influences, and may see some revival among the younger population; but it is Christianity that has shown the most rapid recent growth, especially among younger, more highly educated Chinese from wealthier, English-speaking backgrounds; so that Christians in 1988 were thought to comprise between 13 and 18 percent of the population, compared with just over 10 percent in 1980 (Kuo and Quah 1988a; Kuo and Quah et al 1988b; Tong 1992:277), while the Muslim and Hindu proportions in the population remained stable (ST 14.12.88). Conversionism has been a strong motif of the evangelical and charismatic churches (whose activities are particularly prominent on the university campus) and it seems very largely to have been successful among young Chinese, having had minimal impact on the Muslim community (Kuo 1987; Kuo and Quah 1988a; Kuo and Qua et al 1988b; Tong 1989).

In the following sections of the paper a number of phases in the construction of and response to the 'crises' of religion in Singapore will be identified. These phases overlap and sometimes merge, but they can be broadly summarised thus:

1.   LATE 1986 TO LATE 1987: a partly diffuse, partly acute crisis in which concerns about fundamentalist Islam and the allegiance of Malay Muslims to

the Singapore state were rehearsed;

2.   MID TO LATE 1987: an acute crisis when a group of young, educated, Roman Catholic professionals was found by the Internal Security Department to have been involved in social action programmes as part of what became encoded as a 'Marxist conspiracy', reactions to which continued into 1988;

3.   LATE 1987 TO EARLY 1989: the government drew attention to the combined problems of religion and ethnicity and religion and politics, and commissioned research by a team of sociologists at the National University of Singapore into religiosity, religious conversion, and anomie within the local population, the reports from which were presented in late 1988 and reported extensively in the media in the early part of 1989.

4.   MID 1989 TO LATE 1990: the government intimated that legislation to control religious activities might be necessary, elicited a consensus over the issue among religious leaders, and introduced a White Paper on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony which went through the formal stages of a parliamentary Bill, and was finally passed into law as the *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act* in November, 1990.

Accompanying the later stages of these initiatives was a government project to institutionalise a form of national ideology which became known as the 'Shared Values' policy. This was explained as an attempt to impede – once again in the interests of national survival - the advance of Western individualism. The project will not be discussed in the present paper, but an account of it can be found in our book *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (Hill and Lian 1995:chap. 8).

Malay Ethnicity and the Crisis of Islamic Fundamentalism

The recurring issue of Malay ethnicity and religion - Islam having always been a decisive element in Malay nationalism (Firdaus 1984) - became a particular focus of concern in late 1986 and early 1987. There had been previous debacles in this area: for instance, at the time of separation from the Federation in 1965 a Malay-language newspaper accused Christians of converting Muslims, precipitating the intervention of the Prime Minister and declarations by Christian leaders that such conversion had never been their practice (Ling 1989:693). This incident later became one of the spectres that could be raised at times of religious dispute. The occasion that signalled intense concern in 1986 was the invitation by the Singapore President to the President of Israel to visit the Republic. Israel had for many years provided military advisers who assisted the training of the Singapore Armed Forces, so there were practical relations between the two countries which justified a courtesy invitation; and there were also symbolic links, for Lee Kuan Yew had once claimed in support of Singapore's federation with Malaysia that in the absence of such an association, the country would become 'South-East Asia's Israel'. (Leifer 1988: 342). Full accounts of the events of 1986 have been given elsewhere (Lee 1987; Leifer 1988), but of

particular interest in the present context is the response to them in Malaysia and the Singapore government's utilising of this response.

In the face of resurgent Islam within Malaysia its Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, had adopted an anti-Zionist, even an anti-Jewish stance, and his rhetoric was at its height at the time the Israeli Embassy in Singapore announced its President's forthcoming visit. What was seen as a personal slight to Mahathir, coupled with a more general resentment in Malaysia of Singapore's economic success, led to a deeply hostile response in the Malaysian media, including the suggestions that Singapore's fresh water supplies, which are piped across the Johor causeway, should be cut off; and that the air services agreement between the two countries should be revoked. Of particular significance is the Singapore government's use of such material, because it shows clearly the process of crisis-production.

By longstanding convention, newspapers in Malaysia and Singapore are not circulated openly on a reciprocal basis in the two countries. The political furore expressed in newspaper comment in Malaysia was deliberately carried across the Strait of Johor as an act of policy by Singapore's government. Articles from the Malay and English language press in Malaysia savagely critical of Singapore were reproduced in a press highly sensitive to the priorities of government. For several weeks, the newspaper reading public of Singapore was fed on a diet of Malaysian invective, including the suggestion that Singapore Airlines would be vulnerable to PLO inspired acts of sabotage. It was suggested early on in the episode in an article from the Malay language Utusan Malaysia [reproduced in Singapore's Straits Times] that "it is important for Singapore leaders from time to time to frighten their people'" (Leifer 1988: 348).

Simultaneously, the Singapore government was concerned to test the opinions of its own Malay population and commissioned opinion polls both before and after the Israeli President's visit: these showed some degree of disaffection among this section of the population (O'Grady 1990:26).

The occasion for such a raising of spectres and reminder of vulnerability was the concern of the Singapore government at a substantial decline in the PAP's popular vote in the 1984 general election together with a sense that they were losing touch with the electorate. This led, among other things, to the establishment of a Feedback Unit in the Ministry of Community Development in 1985: it was the same Ministry which initiated research into religion in the late 1980s. There was also evidence that younger Singaporeans were becoming complacent about the country's independence.

Within Singapore itself, it should be noted, Islam has been fully incorporated into the state. Under the Administration of Muslim Law Act - in force since 1968 - there is a supreme Islamic Council, the Majlis Ugama Islam, Singapura (MUIS) which advises the President of Singapore in matters relating to the Muslim religion in the country. Its President is appointed by the President of Singapore. It contains the Mufti of Singapore (also appointed by the President of Singapore in consultation with the MUIS), five members appointed by the President of Singapore on the

recommendation of the government, and at least seven other members appointed by the President of Singapore from a list of nominees. Hence consultation between the government and Muslim authorities is facilitated at the highest level, and is also encouraged at the grassroots level through the agency of community leaders. Such consultation was embarked upon in the aftermath of the Israeli President's visit, with a forum of Muslim and Malay organisations in January 1987 calling for greater government sensitivity towards Malay Singaporeans, coupled with more open and mature discussion. One Muslim leader insisted that religious loyalty need not be at odds with a Muslim's duty to the nation (ST 18.1.87). Such moves were welcomed in newspaper editorials as evidence of growing maturity in the relationship between Malay Muslims and the Singapore state (ST 23.1.87) and as a welcome entry of the Muslim community into the mainstream of national life (ST 5.2.87).

Almost immediately, however, the issue was reopened by Lee Hsien Loong, a Senior Minister in the government and son of Lee Kuan Yew, who replied during a constituency tour to the question why there were no Malay pilots in the Singapore Armed Forces in the following way: "If there is a conflict, if the SAF is called upon to defend the homeland, we don't want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may come in conflict with his emotions for his religion, because these are two very strong fundamentals, and if they are not compatible, then they will be two very strong destructive forces in opposite directions" (ST 18.3.87). The statement attracted considerable adverse comment in Malaysia, with one political representative in Malaysia accusing the PAP leadership of chauvinism (ST 1.3.87).

The Singapore government's response, articulated by Malay members of the PAP, was to view with grave concern interference by foreign (Malaysian) politicians in Singapore's internal affairs. Both the assiduous encouragement of the reporting of foreign comment, as in the visit of the Israeli President, and the outraged dismissal of it, as in the SAF controversy and in various alleged incursions of the United States into Singapore's internal politics, have the function of securing the legitimacy of the state; on the one hand by highlighting the external threat and on the other by emphasising the government's ability to act independently. At all events, this latter aspect was re-emphasised in a further statement by Lee Hsien Loong in which he recounted the history of ethnic distribution in the Singapore Armed Forces, argued that despite intensive efforts at nation-building Singapore society still was not fully integrated, as evidenced by reaction to the Israeli President's visit, and concluded: "This is a Singapore problem. We will solve it ourselves. Only Singaporeans can determine our own future and destiny" (ST 18.3.87).

The ethnic dimension of the religious problem was further dramatized in June 1987 with the announcement that on April 24, four Malays had been arrested under the Internal Security Act (under which detention orders without trial for up to two years can be issued) for spreading rumours of impending racial clashes on or around May 13 - the anniversary of the 1969 racial riots in Malaysia and Singapore. The

announcement of their arrest was delayed until June 3 to forestall disturbances on May 13 and because of other Muslim observances at the time (ST 4.6.87). In televised confessions two of the four spoke of their involvement in both Malay martial Arts groups and Islamic education. The report of the arrest provided an opportunity for the Straits Times to raise the spectres of three previous occasions of inter-ethnic and religious violence, which it did with the headline, "3 tragic reminders" (ST 4.6.87). The accompanying article cited the Maria Hertogh riots of 1950, when a legal wrangle over the Eurasian child of Roman Catholic parents who was either adopted or fostered by a Malayan woman and subsequently brought up a Muslim led to accusations of enforced Christian conversion of a Muslim and riots in which eighteen people died and 173 were injured. Aggression was directed against Europeans, and the riots were inflamed by strong anti-colonial feelings (Clutterbuck, 1984; Firdaus 1985; Hughes, 1982; Maideen, 1989). The Maria Hertogh case has become something of an icon in the Singapore state's presentation of its history and was to be revisited on subsequent occasions as an instance of the destabilising potential of religious conversion.

The second series of riots occurred in 1965, when Singapore was still part of the Federation of Malaysia, and began with a mass religious procession by Muslims out of which erupted inter-communal violence between Chinese and Malays: 36 people were killed and 563 wounded. In 1969 racial riots in Malaysia arising from election results which the indigenous Malays interpreted as a threat to their traditional position spilled over into Singapore, with four dead and 80 wounded. In cataloguing these three historical episodes, the newspaper was framing the current incident within a broader scenario of civil disturbance, thus justifying pre-emptive action on the part of the security authorities.

It is appropriate to note that in relation to ethnicity and religion the response on the part of the parties involved was to seek some form of consensus over religious issues. The different religious groups continued to address themselves to a variety of problems (as indeed they had done since the formation of the Inter-Religious Organization in 1949): Muslims met Christians to discuss the issue of over-zealous evangelism (ST 9.7.87); and MUIS set new rules regulating the invitation of foreign religious teachers after an Indonesian religious teacher had given a series of public lectures which were regarded as misleading and inaccurate (ST 20.7.87). However, as will be seen later, the government's response was to warn about the dangers of mixing religion and politics, and in August the banning of four Muslim preachers was one of the topics alluded to by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the National Day rally (ST 17.8.87). In the following week the First Deputy (and now) Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, publicly announced that the government was considering taking action on religion and minority issues (ST 23.8.87).

At this stage we can summarise the sequence of events by saying that during the first part of 1987 the problem of religious identification and its implications for social stability was managed principally in terms of a debate about loyalty to the

state and of possible conflicts in relation to Malaysian ethnicity and its identification
with Islam. From the middle of 1987 the problem of religion was more sharply
focussed on the perceived links between Christianity and political subversion.

The Crisis of Christianity and the 'Marxist Conspiracy'

In extending state management and control over religion, one of the most
remarkable precipitating events was the 'Marxist conspiracy' which was identified
by the government in May 1987: the label is one which was immediately attributed
to the persons and events involved, and it remains the one which is used officially,
for instance, in the index of Singapore Parliamentary Debates. A brief summary of
the events is necessary.

On May 21, 1987, sixteen people were arrested under Singapore's Internal
Security Act on the grounds of their alleged connection with a clandestine communist
network: one of the sixteen was a member of the Law Society council. It is worth
repeating that in dealing with incidents of this kind the Singapore press does not
qualify government-supplied information with terms such as 'alleged', and thus it
privileges the state's version as apparent objective fact: by contrast, in reporting
Singapore-based accusations, the Malaysian press employs qualifiers such as 'alleged'
and 'claimed'. Initially no details of age, sex, or occupation of those arrested were
given, only a list of their names (ST 22.5.87), and it was five days before a detailed
account of the circumstances was provided. Then, the Home Affairs Ministry
presented a fully constructed presentation of the case against those arrested within
the context of a Marxist conspiracy. The mastermind of this conspiracy was claimed
to be Tan Wah Piow, a former student activist who had fled Singapore in 1976 after
being convicted and sentenced to one year's jail for unlawful assembly and rioting.
An icon of Wah Piow appeared at the head of the newspaper account (ST 27.5.87),
and was to reappear in subsequent newspaper reporting of proceedings. In this way
the public could be reminded of the subversive nature of reported events under the
leadership of this distant figure.

The Ministry report contained a diagram showing an alleged network involving
as its main locally-based organiser Vincent Cheng, a full-time Catholic lay worker
(ST 27.5.87). He was claimed to be co-ordinating a variety of groups, including the
Student Christian Movement of Singapore, the Young Christian Workers' Movement,
the National University of Singapore Catholic Students' Society, Singapore
Polytechnic Catholic Students' Society, the Justice and Peace Commission of the
Catholic Church, and a Catholic Welfare Centre whose main activity was to run a
refuge for Filipino maids. Other groups presented as being part of the network were
the opposition Workers' Party and a theatre group, Third Stage, which presented
plays focussing on satire and social comment. The Ministry report also laid
considerable emphasis on the fact that the majority of those arrested were graduates
and professionals, and it maintained:

Singapore now has to contend with new hybrid pro-communist types who

draw their ideological inspiration not only from Maoism and Marxist-Leninism, but also from the ideas of contemporary militant leftists in the West. They augment traditional CPM (Communist Party of Malaya) tactics with new techniques and methods, using the Catholic church and religious organizations. This marks a new phase in the unceasing communist efforts to subvert the existing system of government and to seize power in Singapore (ST 27.5.87).

If we adopt a social constructionist approach to the media's revelations about a 'Marxist conspiracy' - bearing in mind that constructionist analysis always looks carefully at the claimsmakers' interests, asking what they stand to gain from making the claims and having them taken seriously (Richardson et al. 1991:5) - we find a process bearing close similarity to that discussed by Cohen in relation to the 'creation of news' in a moral panic. As previously noted, the four stages he identifies are:

1.　　EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION: which includes overestimating the numbers involved and the seriousness of incidents;

2.　　SYMBOLISATION: or the use of symbols and labels to create images which are 'sharper than reality';

3.　　MANUFACTURING NEWS: events and persons are selected for news reporting on the basis of their conformity with previously-established images and stereotypes; and finally,

4.　　REACTION AND CONTROL: as social control agencies (the police, the courts, and other powerful interest groups) are involved in managing the deviant group: this final process forms the substance of the latter part of the paper (Cohen 1973).

Symbolisation was particularly rich in the initial presentation of the 'Marxist conspiracy' in the media. A battery of phrases was employed to establish the context within which events were to be interpreted: reports were replete with terms such as conspiracy, plot, agitator, penetration and manipulation of groups, radicalising, mastermind, subversive, chaos, indoctrination, activists, and infiltration (ST 27.5.87). The diagram showing the network of alleged linkages - which always included Tan Wah Piow as external mastermind and a Singapore resident, Victor Cheng, as local coordinator (ST 27.5.87) - is similar to those presented in accounts of Special Branch operations in the 1950s during the communist Emergency under British rule (Clutterbuck 1984), and the headlines confirm the overall interpretation of reported events, signalling a "Red threat" (ST 27.5.87), and speaking of "The triumvirate" (ST 28.5.87) - a reference to the three key organisations infiltrated by Tan and Cheng as they attempted to stir up social unrest, two of which had a religious base: the Jurong Industrial Mission, the Student Christian Movement of Singapore, and the National University of Singapore's Students' Union. The media also raised the spectres of former folk devils who had attempted to stir up left-wing opposition: a 1970s Euro-communist was recalled, together with a 1970s student activist who had links with the Workers' Party (ST 27.5.87). Alleged communist 'infiltration' of the Workers' Party in the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s was further reported (ST 30.5.87).

The Home Affairs Ministry, which contains the Internal Security Department and which maintains ongoing surveillance over religious organisations, also reported Vincent Cheng's disclosures that he had used the Catholic Church for political ends.

The issue was extended further into a critique by leading government spokespersons of Liberation Theology, which was explicitly linked by these spokespersons with events in the Philippines. At the same time the firm actions of the state were justified as an examples of the 'pre-emptive strike', with the headline, "Government acted to nip communist problem in the bud..." (ST 2.6.87).

The consequences of the discovery of the 'Marxist conspiracy' went on for over a year. They included televised confessions by those arrested, disciplinary action by the Catholic bishop, retractions of their confessions by several of those initially detained, further televised retractions of the retractions, and actions against others associated with the accused. The political aspects of these events have been widely debated. The state's claim to be fragile and vulnerable to threats from communist agitators was part of its wider process of legitimation, and was cited as grounds for its response by government spokespersons. (See, for example, the letter by the Press Secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs in the Far Eastern Economic Review, 18.2.88:7). The Hobbesian scenario was rehearsed under headlines such as 'Network for chaos', once again using icons of Tan and Cheng (ST 30.6.87).

The other agenda which was closely interlinked with these events involved the transition in political leadership from the first generation leadership under Lee Kuan Yew to its second generation successors under Goh Chock Tong. In terms both of internal PAP politics and of wider legitimacy, it was important for the new leadership to show that it was capable of the type of pre-emptive strike which had characterised Singapore's first-generation leadership: the incoming Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong publicly justified his use of the Internal Security Act, and Lee Kuan Yew was at pains to point out that he had left decisions over the conspiracy to the younger leaders. Goh himself had no compunction about driving home the political message. In a speech to the National Trades Union Congress in 1988, for instance, he promised wage rises, but not without political stability. If the political conspiracy somehow succeeded, he said, 'you can kiss your wage increases for this year goodbye' (Asiaweek 13.5.88: 8). At the same time as this warning was being given, further emphasis was placed on the historical dimensions of the crisis, on the one hand by explaining the origins of the Internal Security Act in the upheavals of the 1940s and on the other by raising the particularly powerful spectre, at least for the first generation leaders, of 'The Plen'. The Plen, or Plenipotentiary, was leader of the Communist Party of Malaya in the 1950s and represents a potent folk devil of pre-independence history: he is still seen as the archetypal subversive (Han et al. 1998:54).

The identification of alleged subversion within one of the two varieties of Christianity which had experienced rapid growth in Singapore, namely a more socially activist form of Catholicism (the other being evangelical Protestantism, which the state regarded with suspicion because of its conversionist activities, with their potential

for inter-ethnic strife) can be seen as an attempt by the state to control autonomous mediating structures. These, in the state's view, contain the unacceptable possibility of independent political initiatives, especially since they recruit from the more educated sections of the population. Thus the Singapore government has sought to exercise control over religious groups within the republic while simultaneously encouraging their detachment from international contact. In late 1987 the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) - a Protestant body similar to the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission - was expelled from Singapore on the grounds that it was encouraging 'radical political activities'. In 1988 the Anglican Church in Singapore cut its ties with the group, partly because it saw the CCA as supporting liberation theology, and later the same year the Singapore Methodist Church did the same on the grounds that the CCA was offering a political challenge to government. As evidence it was pointed out that the CCA's May 1988 newsletter had referred to Lee Kuan Yew, his son Lee Hsien Loong, and incoming Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong as "father, son, and holy Goh" (Asiaweek, 28.10.88:30). Singapore's Anglicans had been debating whether they had much in common with the Church of England any more, and there had been discussion of breaking away from Canterbury and creating an autonomous Anglican Church of Singapore (Far Eastern Economic Review 2.7.87:63).

The Demarcation of the Religious Sphere and Sociological Research

Concern about the implications of increasing religious fundamentalism - Islamic, Christian, and Buddhist (the latter influenced by the more intellectualised movements of Japanese origin as well as by the creation of Buddhist texts for inclusion in the secondary school curriculum) - together with deep-seated fears about the disruptive potential of conversionism, particularly when it concerned Christian conversion of Muslims, but also when Hindus were a target - had been well articulated by mid-1987, and government action had been mooted. To this was then added the existence of an activist form of Catholicism which was interpreted by the Singapore government as an illicit invasion by religion of the political sphere. The response was the commissioning by the government of research into religion and religious revivalism, to be conducted by a group of sociologists at the National University of Singapore.

One of the concerns behind the commissioning of the reports was a feeling among political leaders that the pace of social change in Singapore had outstripped the capacity of many people to make sense of their new surroundings - the 'homeless mind' phenomenon depicted by Berger, and seen by Benjamin as a strategy of leaders of modern secondary nation-states (Berger et al. 1974; Benjamin 1988:31). The perceived problem was conceptualised using a combination of Kornhauser's (1961) theory of mass society (Far Eastern Economic Review 10.3.88: 25) and Durkheim's (1933) concept of anomie. The concerns are encapsulated in Prime Minister Lee's,

Eve of National Day Speech, of August 1987:

> Religion has helped many Singaporeans to keep their bearings in the midst of
> rapid changes in their lives. Growth and progress have made life materially
> much better. But the speed of change has caused disruptions. About 80 percent
> of Singaporeans have been resettled into new homes in new towns. Their new
> homes are better. But they are living in the midst of strangers and in totally
> unfamiliar new surroundings. They miss their relatives and old neighbours and
> friends. They are disorientated. Some feel stress, many feel a sense of loss, a
> rootlessness, a void in their lives. Over time, new ties of friendship and a new
> sense of community will be established. We have now achieved enough of the
> material basics of life to be able to give more attention to socio-psychological,
> and spiritual needs. We must match our economic progress with advances in
> the moral, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of our life (Speeches, 11:4 1987:26).

In the same month a university research team was commissioned to carry out
a study of religion and religious revivalism in Singapore, and as well as an
investigation of Christian revivalism and conversion the research specifically included
anomie as an area of concern.

The chronology of subsequent events is important because it offers significant
pointers to the rationale behind the government's approach to religion and to the
wider question of securing a set of shared core values. Religion was seen to be
servicing social needs generated by the rapid changes which had occurred in the
Singapore economy and society. However, its role was viewed by the political
leadership as problematic in two senses: first, because it might provoke communal
friction through conversionist encroachments between groups, especially, it was
thought, as a result of Christian conversion attempts on Muslims which might
engender inter-ethnic strife. But second, the potential for religion to become involved
in the area of political action, as claimed in the case of the Roman Catholic social
activists, brought it into an arena which had previously been substantially monopolised
by the dominant political group and by grassroots associations associated with it.
The government's response was twofold: on the one hand it established clear
parameters to the allowable activities of religious groups and personnel; on the other
it set out to construct a secularised 'civil religion' to provide a state-sponsored source
of shared national values.

As mentioned above, in August 1987 the Ministry of Community Development
commissioned a research team from the National University of Singapore (NUS) to
conduct a research report on religion and religious revivalism in Singapore. The
year-long study involved a literature review (Quah 1987), an analysis of 1980 census
data (Kuo 1987), case studies on religious revivalism (Kuo and Quah et al 1988b),
and a national survey (Kuo and Quah 1988a). Between December 1987 and October
1988 a series of six reports were submitted by the NUS researchers to the Ministry,
and three key ones were released to the press between February and April 1989.
Their reporting in the press was substantial, with attention being drawn to the

important influence wielded by Christians, together with the argument that religious trends needed 'careful handling'and a specific focus on evangelism and religious switching. Overall, the research findings showed a renewed vitality in Christianity and Islam, and they reported some concern among both political and religious leaders. Christians in particular were thought to have grown substantially in number, especially those belonging to charismatic churches, but there was a significant growth in those professing 'No religion' also. In fact it was later to emerge that the figure given by the researchers for Christian growth - from 10.3% in the 1980 Population Census to 18.7% in the 1988 survey - was inflated as a result of sampling problems, and the 1990 Census figure out the Christian percentage at only 12.8 (Tong 1992:277). While Islam was in a relatively stable state, there was evidence of a trend towards revivalism in Buddhism. Christian conversionist activity was a particular focus of concern on the part of members of other religious groups, and given the adoption of Christianity by higher-status, English-educated Chinese the problem was seen to be one of continuing importance: "They are exerting an influence, politically socially and economically, far greater than the number they represent in the population" (Kuo et al. 1988b:11).

The study's response to the question of whether a high level of anomie in Singapore society might account for Christian conversion was negative (Kuo and Quah et al. 1988b:18). Using an anomie scale, the researchers found that Singapore had a generally low level of anomie and that religious revivalism could not be attributed to this factor. (The reporting of this finding in the Straits Times must be one of the few occasions when the usually meticulous deployment of appropriate social scientific concepts in the print media stumbled, because a journalist failed to observe the distinction between 'alienation' and 'anomie' (ST 18.4.88)).

But the report did recommend the creation of an Inter-Religious Council, and it was this proposal which led to the final stage in the management of religion, namely reaction and control through legislation.

Maintenance of Religious Harmony

In April 1989 Lee Hsien Loong mooted the possibility of legislation to preserve religious harmony (ST 1.5.89) and shortly afterwards it was reported that several religious leaders were in favour of laws to control religious harmony (ST 10.5.89). Here can be seen the process of consensus-creation in the later stage of the moral panic over religion, and it should be noted that one important function of the Singapore media is to report and construct consensus in relation to major policy issues.

The sequence of events leading to the passing of the *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act* (1990) will be summarised briefly, drawing attention to some of the significant features in the light of the framework adopted in this paper.

In late December, 1989, a White Paper on Religious Harmony was released (ST 29.12.89). The Internal Security Department had compiled a Report - which was annexed to the White Paper - illustrating the problems caused by over-zealousness

in religion, and this was fully reported in the media. Again, the theme of nipping problems in the bud was reiterated in the Report. In response to the White Paper's stated intention to demarcate between religious and political activity, the Catholic Archbishop and the Mufti called for a clearer definition of 'politics' (ST 11.1.90), though there was also evidence provided in the media of broad acceptance by religious leaders of the need for legislation (ST 11.1.90).

The *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill* was first introduced to parliament on January 16, 1990, and it later became clear that Christian groups would express their reservations to the Select Committee. During the debate on the Second Reading of the Bill Prime Minister Goh explained that its origins lay in a 1986 report from the Internal Security Department about aggressive proselytism by some religious groups. A full account of the twin problems of conversion and subversion was canvassed in the debate (ST 24.2.90). During Select Committee hearings in September 1990, two points were constantly reiterated. The first was the need for legislation to prevent the kind of riots and public disturbances which had occurred in the past: in this context the Maria Hertogh case of 1950 was especially emphasised, with debate between government members and the sole opposition member of the Select Committee over whether the Hertogh riots were political and anti-colonial - implying that they were irrelevant to the current legislation - or, as the government maintained, were essentially religious. Secondly, it was stressed that the Bill incorporated less severe penalties than the use of criminal law, since it contained the provision that the first response to an alleged infringement was cautionary rather than punitive. It was pointed out that the decision which sparked off the 1950 riots had in fact been made by a judge, so that the argument that the judiciary rather than a government Minister should be the arbitrator of decisions over the appropriate boundaries of religion was flawed. Another motif which clearly emerged when younger Singaporeans appeared before the Select Committee was their awareness of the violent potential of religious disruption, despite their not having lived through the traumatic episodes to which reference was constantly made.

The Bill was finally passed in November 1990 (ST 10.11.90). Its first main provision was the creation of a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony containing a majority of representatives of the major religions in Singapore, its function being to monitor religious matters and to consider orders made against individuals. The second main provision was to empower the Minister to issue restraining orders against an official or member of a religious group who was suspected of causing antagonism between such groups, or engaging in activities to promote a political cause. Breaches of such restraining orders rendered a person liable to a fine or term of imprisonment or to both.

Conclusion: State Management of Religion, Instrumental Rationality and Spheres of Competence

This paper has shown how the state in Singapore has constructed a number of

key myths in order to legitimate political policy and to mobilise social action, especially with the goal of creating consensus. These 'inventions of tradition' have provided symbolic points of reference in the periodic episodes of crisis-management in which the state has been engaged. The concept of moral panic, previously deployed only in Western contexts, provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of such episodes. In particular, the 'ownership' of moral panics and their deployment by the governing elite as a strategy of social 'maintenance' and policy-formation has been highlighted. It remains to set this analysis in a broader context by linking it with some key underlying features of Singapore as a managerial state, and to point to some strong resonances with Weberian notions of bureaucratic rationality.

Singapore's culture is dominated by instrumental rationality and its government pursues overwhelmingly pragmatic policies. For instance, when policies reveal unintended consequences they are rapidly thrown into reverse, as happened with the religious education policy in the 1980s (Hill 1997). We have labelled this a 'Return to Sender' process (Hill and Lian 1995:13-140). Instrumental rationality contains a well-articulated notion of 'spheres of competence' and of rule by experts. These principles have been most clearly stated in Lee Kuan Yew's strictures on academic freedom which, he argues, is founded upon three principles:

> First, that the teacher was a technical expert in his field. Second, that his search for truth and knowledge was disinterested. Third, that teachers in a university did not just transmit knowledge to successive generations: they were expected to advance the frontiers of human knowledge and widen the dominion of man's mind...Within his province, his freedom was supreme. But his special status did not extend to fields where he was not the competent disinterested explorer. And one of those fields was the heat and dust of the political arena (Josey, 1974: 72).

The coincidence of these views with those of Max Weber on 'ethical neutrality' are immediately striking. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949:5) Weber notes: "Today the student should obtain, from his teacher in the lecture-hall, the capacity: (1) to fulfil a given task in a workmanlike fashion; (2) definitely to recognise facts, even those that may be personally uncomfortable, and to distinguish them from his own evaluations; (3) to subordinate himself to his task and to repress the impulse to exhibit his personal tastes or other sentiments unnecessarily"; in his essay 'Science as a Vocation' (Weber 1970:146) he notes: "The task of the teacher is to serve the students with his knowledge and scientific experience and not to imprint upon them his personal political views".

Weber indeed thought that university teachers had the same opportunities as other citizens for pursuing their ideals through political action, and should not demand further privileges. The professorial chair is not a 'specialised qualification for personal prophecy' (Giddens 1971:144).

There is complete consistency in the Singapore political elite's notion of politics as an area of specialised expertise, since the selection of PAP candidates for election entails a scientific screening, to which since 1980 have been added an IQ test and other psychological tests with the goal of eliminating candidates who are self-interested (Clutterbuck 1984:352). Vogel had this in mind when he characterised the political system in Singapore as a 'macho-meritocracy' (Vogel 1989:1053).

The principle of specialisation of function is applied in exactly the same way to religious institutions, which are seen as having no legitimate role in political debate and activity. The values conveyed by religious institutions are seen as appropriate to the private sphere only, and thus the operation of such institutions as mediating structures is substantially curtailed. As Lee Kuan Yew has expressed it:

> A religion looks after the spiritual, moral and social well-being of its followers. But religious organisations should leave the economic-political needs of people to non-religious groups, like political parties. This is because if any religious group tries to define the socio-economic agenda of Singapore and mobilises the grass-roots by 'social action programmes', other religious groups will do likewise. Once people are mobilised on socio-economic issues on the basis of religious loyalties, the consequences will be bad for all (Lee 1988:13).

Given this degree of demarcation by the state over the permitted sphere of competence of religion, one response on the part of religious groups has been in the direction of increased intellectualisation and rationalisation. Tong suggests that the abandonment of traditional forms of Chinese religion by younger, better-educated Chinese has been motivated by the belief that traditional forms are superstitious and illogical (almost, one might paraphrase, untidy). By contrast, Christianity may well be seen as more orderly and systematic (Tong 1992:284-291). In a similar way, Buddhism has been able to maintain its appeal by becoming more rationalised and canonical (Tong 1992; Kuah 1991).

Part of the reason for the preference shown by younger Singaporeans for more rationalised forms of the world religions has been the impact of more systematic versions taught as part of the school curriculum (Tong 1992:290); but these in turn have been influenced by the concern on the part of the state to establish a specialised and constrained sphere of competence for religion. This is entirely consistent with its rationalised approach to other areas of economic, legal, political, and social life.

In tracing the extension of the state's capacity for surveillance and social control into areas of private commitment which might legitimately claim autonomy, we are manifestly looking at a process which should not be regarded as the exclusive preserve of a managerial state. An entirely similar response has been identified in Western societies, especially in response to the growth of New Religious Movements. Beckford, citing Robertson, has observed that in the United States there is a growing contradiction "between, on the one hand, the long-standing assumption that acceptable forms of denominational religion are functional for national identity or integration

and, on the other, the emerging idea that religion is best understood and practised as a matter of private conviction. It is as if religion is tolerated only on condition that it is civic-minded and confined to private spirituality" (Beckford 1993:131).

Hence, if New Religious Movements in the United States put their religious convictions into political, social, or economic practice, they are open to the charge that they have breached a putative wall between religion and politics. "Collective expressions of religion, below the level of some overarching civil religion," he continues, "have allegedly become problematic" (Beckford 1993:131). This assessment of the paradox facing religion in a Western context could be transposed in its entirety to the religious environment of contemporary Singapore. In that environment not only are religious movements of a novel or sectarian kind regarded with mistrust and sometimes proscribed, but more 'mainstream' forms of religion are seen as containing a potential for problematic forms of collective activity and therefore as requiring surveillance and regulation. The conversion and subversion motifs of the moral panic surrounding religion in Singapore in the late 1980s have their counterparts in other societies in which the contemporary global revitalisation of religious fundamentalism and proselytism have intruded upon religion-state relations (Kepel 1994).

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Note: The reference ST in the text is to the *Singapore Straits Times* or *Sunday Times*, both of which closely represent Government opinion.

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