Social Interaction in Urban Areas: A Case Study of Mixed and Mono-Ethnic Neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRAK

Sebagai sebuah negara yang berbilang kaum, Malaysia sering menjadi tumpuan kajian-kajian yang menjurus ke arah memahami interaksi dan integrasi etnik. Kajian ini menerangkan pola interaksi sosial yang berlaku di kawasan kejiranan di Kuala Lumpur. Analisis dibuat dengan melihat kepada perbezaan interaksi sosial di kalangan penduduk kawasan kejiranan yang didiami oleh pelbagai etnik, dan kawasan kejiranan yang didiami oleh majoriti satu etnik sahaja iaitu Melayu atau Cina. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan dari segi pola interaksi sosial yang berlaku di mana kawasan kejiranan pelbagai etnik menunjukkan interaksi sosial yang melibatkan pelbagai kumpulan etnik manakala mereka yang mendiami penempatan yang tertumpu kepada satu etnik sahaja lebih kerap berinteraksi dengan rakan-rakan daripada etnik yang sama.

ABSTRACT

Malaysia has always been the focus of research towards understanding the social interaction and integration patterns of its multiethnic society. This study describes the social interaction patterns in residential neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur. The analysis was done to compare social interaction patterns between those who lived in mixed and mono-ethnic neighbourhoods, mainly Chinese or Malay. The findings suggested that there is a difference in the social interaction patterns where there were more socialisers, that is those who mixed with other ethnic groups, in mixed residential neighbourhoods compared to those who lived in mono-ethnic neighbourhoods.

INTRODUCTION

It is expected that by the year 2005, more than half of the world's population will be living in urban areas (Gottdiener and Hutchinson 2000). Dogan and Kasarda (1988) predicted that more than 500 metropolises with a population of more than 1 million will be created across the globe within the same period. Therefore, within the next few years, we will no longer be talking just about cities, but about megacities.

Urban sociologists regard space as a container of social activities. However, the factor of space does not only consist of social relations; people also alter space and construct new environments to fit their needs. This perspective

of the dual relationship between people and space is known as settlement space which refers to the built environment in which people live, and where their thoughts and actions have resulted in the creation of meaningful places (Gottdiener and Hutchinson 2000).

Urban areas, with their anonymity, heterogeneity and fast pace, may not be conducive to societal co-operation. The evolution of our built environment and, the ways in which we modify and interact with the natural environment, are a manifestation of our societal values. With the growth of the 'not in my backyard' attitude, we are exhibiting a belief in individualism, at the expense of public needs

and values (Beatley and Manning 1997). Blakely and Snyder (1995) summarized the 'forting up' phenomenon and the narrowing of our social contract and contact:

"What is the measure of nationhood when neighbours require armed patrol and electric fencing to keep out citizens? When public services and even local government are privatized and when the community of responsibility stops at the subdivision gates, what happens to the function and the very idea of democracy? In short, can this nation fulfil its social contract in the absence of social contact?"

The role of housing as a tool of social interaction and integration is not something new. Wirth (1947) in his discussion on how housing influences human lives sociologically explained housing as a social value. Many writers support the idea that housing can foster better social relationships between residents (Mann 1958; Gans 1972, Bassett and Short 1980). According to Mann (1958):

"When residents are brought together through the use of common recreational facilities, they come to know one another better and friendly reactions ensue. Existing developments with neighbourhood unit features have consistently produced face-to-face social conditions."

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to describe the patterns of social interaction in different types of neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. As a multicultural and multiethnic society, Malaysia has often been the testing ground of ethnic diversity and its effect on national integration. The paper will look into the social interaction patterns between Malays and Chinese residing in the three different types of residential areas. The rationale for investigating the social interaction between Malays and Chinese is that both ethnic groups form the majority in Kuala Lumpur, that is 38 % Malays and 45% Chinese (Dept. of Statistics 1990). For the purpose of this study, social interaction is defined as a process of communicating; the exchange of information and instructions and in the process, behaviour is affected (Rabushka 1971).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in selected neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur, which has a high concentration of Malays and Chinese

(mono-ethnic areas) and an almost equal proportion of Malays and Chinese population (mixed). This information was obtained using the 1991 census district data from the Department of Statistics 8 districts were found to fulfil the criteria for mono-ethnic areas, and 3 districts were found to have an equal proportion of both ethnic groups (mixed). Housing estates within the selected census districts were then selected. In order to control the effects of physical layout design and density on social interaction, only terraced residential developments (low, middle and high cost) with a minimum of 200 units and built at least 5 years ago were selected. A total of 27 housing estates were selected and 223 residents responded to the survey. A questionnaire was used to gather the information on social interaction patterns. The questions covered aspects on the how well they know their neighbours, their knowledge and participation in neighbourhood associations, the extent of their daily interaction like borrowing items or exchanging food and involvement in social activities.

FINDINGS

The first task was to establish the current social interaction patterns between the Malay and Chinese respondents. The respondents were asked to respond to the statement 'Other than your family members, your current friends are:

a. mostly Malays
b. mostly Chinese
c. mostly Indians
d. mixed (Malays, Chinese, Indians, others)

For the purpose of analysis, social interaction patterns between the ethnic groups will be discussed under the category of 'socialisers', that is individuals whose social interaction pattern is extended to those from other ethnic groups, and 'non-socialisers' to describe individuals whose social interaction pattern is strictly with members from the same ethnic group. This will provide a general socio-economic profile of those who socialised with other ethnic groups and those who did not.

Table 1 shows the percentage of socialisers (respondents who stated that their current social interaction patterns included other ethnic groups-Chinese, Indian and mixed) and non-socialisers (respondents who claimed that they socialised only within their own ethnic group).

Based on Table 1, it was found that there was a significant difference at p<0.05 in terms of social interaction patterns between Malays and Chinese. There was a greater proportion of non-socialisers in both ethnic groups (78% Malays and 71% Chinese) compared with socialisers.

Types of Residential Area and Social Interaction Patterns

The next stage is to investigate the form of social interaction patterns between Malays and Chinese residing in the different types of residential areas.

Social Interaction Patterns

The responses from the respondents based on the types of areas are shown in Table 2.

Although more than 82% Malays and about 68% Chinese socialised with mostly members from the same ethnic groups, 18% of the Malays and about a third of the Chinese in mixed areas socialised with members from other ethnic groups including Indians (socialisers).

As in the mixed areas, about 26% of the Malays in mono-ethnic Malay areas can be considered socialisers. The socialisers were mostly those who were within the middle to upper income group, earning between RM 2000-3000 and were employed in the professional, administrative and clerical and sales sectors. They were also employed in the private sectors (Nobaya Ahmad 1999). On the other hand, 81.4% of the Chinese in homogenous Chinese areas were non-socialisers compared to 18.6% socialisers in Chinese areas.

Compared with the Chinese in mixed areas, a slightly small percentage of the Chinese in mono-ethnic Chinese areas socialised with the Malays. This group of socialisers were mostly in the sales and clerical sectors, earning between RM1500-2000 (Nobaya Ahmad 1999). Most likely, they socialised with people they met as part of their work, considering that more than two thirds of them were employed in the private sector and about half of them worked with Malay colleagues.

TABLE 1
Social interaction patterns

Social interaction pattern	Malays (%) n=146	Chinese(%) n=77
Mostly Malays	78.1	2.6
Mostly Chinese	2.7	71.4
Mostly Indians	-	2.6
Mixed (Malays, Chinese, Indian)	19.2	23.4
	100.0	100.0
chi-square : 0.000,p<0.05		

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

TABLE 2
Social interaction patterns based on residential types

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays	Chinese
Socialising Groups	Malays (%) n=78	Chinese (%) n=34	(%) n=68	(%) n=43
Mostly Malays	82.1	5.9	73.5	2.3
Mostly Chinese	2.6	67.6	2.9	81.4
Mixed (Malays, Chinese, Indians)	15.4	20.6	23.5	16.3
Mostly Indians	-	5.9	-	-
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square : 0.212, p>0.05,				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

Closest Friends

When asked to identify their closest friend, that is someone they could confide in during times of need, all the respondents, both Malay and Chinese stated that their closest friend came from the same ethnic group. This indicated that although their social interaction patterns were multiethnic, all respondents confided in people of their own ethnic groups on matters of a confidential nature. A larger portion of the people they confided in consisted of their family members (Table 3).

For the Malays in mono-ethnic Malay areas, when asked about the people they confided in times of need, all of them stated that their closest friends were Malays and 76.4% stated that they turn to their family members in times of need. Hence, family relationship still plays a significant role in the lives of the Malay respondents. Similarly, when asked about their closest friend, the Chinese in mono-ethnic areas also stated that they had close relationships with

their family. 61% of them stated that they confided in family members and 35% confided in their best friend. All of them stated that their closest friend were of the same ethnic group. Table 4 compares the residence of the closest friend for respondents from the three types of areas.

Most of the closest friends of the Chinese respondents from the mixed areas resided in different neighbourhoods within Kuala Lumpur. Since a majority of them were former residents of the city, this indicated that they still maintained a close link with family members residing in other areas. This pattern was also found among Chinese in homogenous Chinese areas. Most of their closest friend lived either in the same neighbourhood (42%) or in a different neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur (33%). This was hardly surprising considering the fact that less than 10% of the respondents came from outside Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, the closest friends of the Malays in mixed areas lived

TABLE 3
Closest friend

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays	Chinese
Closest friend	Malays (%) n=78	Chinese(%) n=34	(%) n=68	(%) n=43
Family members (including immediate and extended family)	80.8	88.2	76.4	60.5
Office colleagues	-	11.8	11.8	4.7
Best friend	19.2	-	11.8	34.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Nobaya Ahmad, 1999

TABLE 4
Residence of closest friends

Residential Types	Mixed			Malays	Chinese
	Malays(%) n=43		Chinese(%) n=20	(%) n=23	(%) n=15
Same neighbourhood	21.8		17.6	17.6	42
Different neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur	17.9		44.1	61.8	33
Different state	60.3		38.2	17.6	25
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
chi-square:0.0135,p<0.05					

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

outside the capital, but this was not found to be the case for the Malays in Malay areas.

Participation in Organisations

One of the key indicators of social interaction process at neighbourhood level was the involvement of residents in neighbourhood activities. The respondents were first asked to identify the presence of certain neighbourhood organisations that were quite common in residential areas in Malaysia. Participation in organisations at a higher level than the neighbourhood is another indicator that can be used as a measure of social contact, provided that the organisations are multiethnic. The social interaction that occurs will be informal and will not involve competition in terms of work promotion and the like, which means there is likely to be less conflict between the ethnic groups.

The organisations were the Residents' Association (normally set up by the residents with the support of the Ministry of National Unity and Community Development), The Parent-Teacher Associations, local neighbourhood associations, local religious associated associations (normally set up by the local religious groups) and Rukun Tetangga or Neighbourhood Watch (a body set up by the Department of National Unity). Apart from the religious associations, the other organisations are usually multiracial. Table 5 provides the responses given by the respondents with regard to the presence of the above-mentioned associations in their residential areas.

Overall, there seemed to be a lower level of awareness among the Chinese, compared with the Malays, about the presence of the organisations in their neighbourhoods. Chinese respondents, especially in the Chinese areas, seemed unaware of the existence of associations in the neighbourhood other than the Resident's Association and Rukun Tetangga. Most of these respondents were new residents of the housing areas and amongst the Chinese respondents, only 28% of them had children of primary school-going age (between 7-12 years) compared with the Malays (42%). The choice of schools where parents send their children may also be a reason why there was a lack of participation in the local neighbourhood school's association. Parents have a choice about where to send their children and some may have chosen Chinese

medium schools or schools near their workplace, far from their home.

With regard to participation in organisations in neighbourhood areas, both ethnic groups did not seem to participate actively in the organisations. Only 18% of the Malays and 6% of the Chinese respondents in mixed areas participated. The organisations that the Malays were involved in were mostly Residents' Association, Religious Association and the Neighbourhood Watch whereas the Chinese were involved in mostly the Residents' Association and Neighbourhood Watch. The lack of participation in organisations reflected the sample where overall participation seemed to be lacking in both ethnic groups.

Of the 24% of the Malays in mono-ethnic areas who were involved in organisations at neighbourhood level, 63% were members of the religious association, 25% were members of the Resident's Association and 12% were involved in the Parents Teachers Association. Again, the low level of participation in neighbourhood organisations may be due to the age group of the respondents most of whom were within the 26-35 years of age and only 38.3 % of the respondents had children in the primary school-going age. Cultural and religious factors explained the higher rate of participation in religious associations. For the Chinese in mono-ethnic areas, only 13% participated in neighbourhood activities, mostly in Neighbourhood Watch (71%) and Residents' Association (20%).

The higher percentage of Malays involved in local neighbourhood activities can be explained by cultural and religious factors. Part of the religious requirement for the Malays is the need for congregation in certain matters like daily prayers especially Friday prayers, weddings and funerals. Hence, the Malays felt the need to establish local neighbourhood facilities earlier in their residence as part of the responsibilities in the community. However, Malays and Chinese in mixed areas seemed more aware of organisations in their neighbourhood than those in mono-ethnic areas.

In terms of participation in organisations at levels other than the neighbourhood, only 17% of the Malays and 15% of the Chinese respondents were involved in organisations. Table 6 describes the types of organisations. The Chinese seemed to be more involved in

TABLE 5
Knowledge on organisations at neighbourhood areas

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays	Chinese
	Malays (%) n=78	Chinese (%) n=34	(%) n=68	(%) n=43
Neighbourhood Association				
Yes	47.4	17.6	26.5	4.7
No	19.2	38.2	20.6	11.6
Don't know	33.3	44.1	52.9	83.7
chi-square:0.008, p<0.05				
Residents' Association				
Yes	59.0	58.8	64.7	18.6
No	15.4	17.6	5.9	11.6
Don't Know	25.6	23.5	29.4	69.8
chi-square: 0.943, p>0.05				

	Mixed		Malays(%)	Chinese(%)
	Malays(%)	Chinese(%)		
Rukun Tetangga				
Yes	33.3	55.9	17.6	23.3
No	38.5	5.9	38.2	25.6
Don't know	28.2	38.2	44.2	51.2
chi-square: 0.0085, p<0.05				
Parents' Teachers Association				
Yes	64.1	35.3	47.1	44.2
No	20.5	-	14.7	-
Don't know	15.4	64.7	38.2	55.8
chi-square: 0.0000, p<0.05				
Religious Association				
Yes	44.9	88.3	32.6	
No	25.6	38.2	2.9	2.3
Don't know	29.5	61.8	8.8	65.1
chi-square: 0.000, p<0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

TABLE 6
Mixed areas - Types of organisation at state level

	Malays(%)	Chinese(%)
Charity/Social Organisations	46.2	17.1
Sport and Recreational Organisation	23.1	20.6
Professional Organisations	30.8	62.3
	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.0246,p<0.05		

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

organisations at higher levels than the Malays. Similar to the mixed areas, the participation rate of the respondents in Malay areas was very low. Only 24% stated that they were involved in an organisation at neighbourhood level and 12% in organisations at higher level than the neighbourhood.

There are significant differences in terms of their involvement in the types of organisations. The Malays were mostly involved in social organisations set up at the work place. Most of the Chinese respondents were involved in professional organisations related to their employment. On the whole, although the respondents in these mixed areas were considered to be in the upper income group, participation in organisations at the neighbourhood and higher level seemed to be lacking. Hence, other than at the work place, social interaction between members from other ethnic groups at other social spheres was minimal.

The lack of participation in organisations at higher levels than the neighbourhood for the groups under study may be due to the stage of their life cycle where most of the respondents were within the age group still in the process of 'climbing the corporate ladder'. It was expected that more Chinese than Malays will be involved in organisations other than the professional and those related to the workplace.

Of the 12% involved in organisations at the district or state levels, 50% were involved in associations related to their profession like Institute of Engineers and Malaysia, Association of Nursing 25% were involved in associations set up at the work place and 25% were involved in associations related to recreational and sporting activities like badminton and football associations.

In the Chinese areas, none of the respondents interviewed were involved in any of the organisations at the state level.

Social Interaction Patterns at Neighbourhood

In order to provide a broader understanding of the social interaction patterns at the neighbourhood level, respondents were asked questions about the presence of friends or family members in residential areas and the frequency of their visits. On the average, about 68% of the respondents in mixed areas did not have relatives living in the same neighbourhood. Only 27% of the Malays and 35% of the Chinese had relatives living in the same neighbourhood. The frequency of visits also varied between Malays and Chinese with more Chinese visiting than Malays. This pattern was also reflected in the overall sample. In general, there was only a marginally significant difference between the visiting patterns of Malays and Chinese residing in mixed areas. In Malay areas, most of the respondents were born and brought up in the city. However, only 44.1% of them had relatives residing in the same neighbourhood and 57% visited them about once a month.

This pattern was the same in mixed areas. Like the Malays, the Chinese were also in close contact with their family members and relatives. A majority of the respondents in Chinese areas were permanent city dwellers. However, only 26% of them had relatives living in the same neighbourhood. 45% of them visited their relatives at least once a week invariably. Maintaining family relationships was still important for both ethnic groups. Table 7 provides a detailed breakdown of the frequency of visits.

TABLE 7
Frequency of visiting relatives

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays	Chinese
	Malays(%)	Chinese(%)	(%)	(%)
Always	28.6	64.3	33.3	45.0
Sometimes	42.9	35.7	56.7	55.0
Rarely	19.0	-	10.0	-
Never	9.5	-	-	-
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.0451,p<0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

With regard to friends from other ethnic groups living in the same neighbourhood, 62% of the Chinese and 47% of the Malays had friends living in the same residential area. However, there was a higher frequency of visiting by the Chinese compared with the Malays. There was also a higher percentage of Chinese having friends of other ethnic groups in the mixed area than in the overall Chinese sample. Hence, there was more opportunity for Chinese in mixed areas to have friends from other ethnic group, compared to the Chinese sample as a whole. Table 8 shows the breakdown.

With regard to visiting friends from the same ethnic group (Table 9), there did not seem to be any difference between the Malays and Chinese residing in mixed areas. Most of the respondents from both ethnic groups had friends from the same ethnic group residing in the same residential area. In terms of visits, nearly half of them visited their friends at least once a month.

79% of the Malay respondents in Malay areas had friends of the same ethnic group living in the neighbourhood. 50% of them had friends of different ethnic groups living in the same neighbourhood. Most of them responses reflected similar patterns of visiting friends of the same ethnic group and different ethnic groups about once a month. 59% of the Malay respondents had visitors during the period of the survey. 80% of the visitors were family members who were Malays. More than half of the visits were personal and family related. However, for the Chinese in mono-ethnic areas, 93% of them had friends of the same ethnic group residing in the neighbourhood and only 35% had friends of other ethnic groups residing

in the same neighbourhood. The frequency of visiting friends of the same ethnic group and of different ethnic groups was similar to the respondents that was residing in Malay mono-ethnic areas who were about once a month.

Inter-ethnic visits seem to occur more amongst the Malays residing in both mixed and mono-ethnic areas. However, Chinese in mixed areas showed a higher frequency of inter-ethnic visits compared to Chinese in mono-ethnic areas (Table 10).

Identifying Neighbours

One would expect that a neighbour is someone who can be relied upon in times of emergencies at home. When asked to identify their immediate neighbours, only 3% of the Malays and none of the Chinese in mixed areas know all their neighbours. For the Malays in mono-ethnic areas, more than half of them can identify at least 50% of their neighbours.

Despite their lack of attachment to the neighbourhood, more than half of the Chinese respondents in Chinese areas claimed that they could identify at least half of their neighbours. This was much more than the Chinese in the mixed areas who could only identify less than a quarter of their neighbours. Table 11 provides the details.

More than half of the respondents said that they did talk to at least one of their neighbours not less than a week ago. Hence, there was contact between neighbours although infrequent. However, most of the contact between neighbours tends to be just a formal exchange of greetings because 92% of the Malays and none of the Chinese had been involved in any

TABLE 8
Frequency of visiting friends from other ethnic groups

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays (%) n=34	Chinese (%) n=13
	Malays (%) n=37	Chinese(%) n=23		
Always	-	-	5.9	-
Sometimes	27.0	65.2	76.5	15.4
Rarely	37.8	17.4	17.6	53.8
Never	35.1	17.4	-	30.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

chi-square: 0.0038,p<0.05

Source: Fieldwork,1999

TABLE 9
Visiting friends from same ethnic groups

| Residential Types | Mixed | | Malays(%) | Chinese(%) |
	Malays (%) n=62	Chinese(%) n=21	n=54	n=43
Always	9.7	-	25.9	39.6
Sometimes	54.8	47.6	63.0	48.8
Rarely	25.8	42.9	11.1	11.6
Never	9.7	9.5	-	-
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.1264,p>0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

TABLE 10
Frequency of visiting friends from other ethnic groups by area

| | Mixed | | Malays(%) | Chinese(%) |
	Malays(%) n=37	Chinese(%) n=23	n=34	n=13
Always	-	-	5.9	-
Sometimes	65.2	27.0	76.5	15.4
Rarely	17.4	37.8	17.6	53.8
Never	17.4	35.1	-	30.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

TABLE 11
Know the neighbours

| Residential Types | Mixed | | Malays | Chinese |
	Malays (%)	Chinese (%)	(%)	(%)
All of them	2.6	-	14.7	-
More than 75%	32.1	11.8	32.4	25.6
50-75%	9.0	29.4	20.6	23.3
25-49%	15.4	8.8	5.9	30..9
Less than 25%	38.5	50.0	26.5	30.2
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.812,p>0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad,1999

sort of social activities like picnics with members from the same or different ethnic groups. Exchanging goods like borrowing of tools, magazines, or exchanging food from members of the same ethnic groups was less frequent amongst the Malays (32%) and more common amongst the Chinese (59%). However, when asked about the possibility of exchanging items with neighbours from different ethnic groups, 84% of the Malays said they would not want to do it but 53% of the Chinese were willing to exchange items with neighbours from other ethnic groups. Table 12 provides the information

TABLE 12
Exchanging goods between neighbours of same ethnic group

| | Mixed | | Malays | Chinese |
	Malays(%) n=37	Chinese(%) n=24	(%) n=30	(%) n=32
Always	12.8	-	2.9	-
Sometimes	19.2	58.8	58.8	51.2
Rarely	38.5	5.9	17.6	34.8
Never	29.5	35.3	20.6	14.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.0000,p<0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad 1999

regarding exchanging of goods between neighbours of the same ethnic group.

It was found that exchanging goods with neighbours from the same ethnic group happened more often Malays who resided in Malay areas than Malays who resided in mixed areas. This may indicate a deeper sense of neighbourliness amongst the Malay in mono-ethnic areas than the Malays in mixed areas. The spirit of community present in rural villages may still be lingering in these Malay urban areas, despite undergoing urbanisation. However, most of these Malay areas were formerly 'Malay kampungs' in the city and had only recently been undergoing development.

However, when asked about exchanging goods with neighbours from different ethnic groups, only 29.4% of them would consider doing it. Again, religious barrier and ignorance of the implications of a pluralistic society may be influencing the attitude of the Malays. Despite the frequency of exchanging of items in the neighbourhood, other social activities were found to be lacking. When asked about whether they had picnics together with their neighbours, 82.4% of them stated that they had never done so. The relationship was probably not close enough to enable the respondents to interact socially outside their home environment. None of them would consider going out socially on a picnic with a neighbour from a different ethnic group.

For the Chinese in mono-ethnic areas, about 70% claimed that they had recent contact with their neighbour that is they had talked to their neighbour within the last few days. More than half of the respondents had exchanged or borrow things from their neighbours from the same ethnic group. Considering that a majority of them had friends residing in the same neighbourhood, it was not surprising that exchanging goods took place, despite most of the respondents being male and single. However, when asked about the possibility of exchanging goods with neighbours from different ethnic group, only 9% of them expressed willingness to do so.

Although the respondents were a relatively young group, social activities like picnics between neighbours of the same ethnic group were rare. 86% of them stated that they had never go for a picnic with their neighbours.

Visiting Patterns during Festivals

As a multicultural society, Malaysia is rich with diversities in terms of the religious and cultural celebrations. Since the 1990's, the concept of 'open house' during festivals has become a part of the Malaysian way of life. When the question of visiting during festivals was posed about 21% of the Malays said that they visited their friends from other ethnic groups every year compared to 18% of the Chinese. This pattern was reflected in the sample. Table 13 provides the details of the visiting pattern.

Visits during festivals took place between friends from different ethnic groups. However, since the number of friends visited was not asked for, it could not be established whether the visits related to many houses during the festival or only specific to a particular house every year. In terms of visiting during festivals, 64% of the Malays in Malay areas claimed that they visited their friends from other ethnic groups during festivals about once in two years.

TABLE 13
Visiting during festivals

Residential Types	Mixed		Malays	Chinese
	Malays(%) n=47	Chinese(%) n=24	(%) n=33	(%) n=15
Every year	20.5	17.6	8.8	9.3
Sometimes	33.3	47.1	64.7	39.5
Rarely	24.4	23.5	14.7	37.2
Never	21.8	11.8	11.8	14
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
chi-square:0.464,p>0.05				

Source: Nobaya Ahmad 1999

CONCLUSION

The study has found that mixed residential policy has an effect on social interaction patterns amongst residents from different ethnic groups. However, in general, there are more non-socialisers than socialisers among both ethnic groups. It was found that there were more socialisers amongst Malays and Chinese residing in mixed areas compared to those in mono-ethnic areas. In confidential and family matters, both the Malays and Chinese tend to confide mostly in their family members. Hence, in both societies, the family still plays an important role in the lives of their members despite living in urban areas. Primary relationship is still maintained despite residing in urban areas. The strong family relationship is a cultural factor of both the Malays and the Chinese, perhaps influenced by religion.

Social interaction at neighbourhood level took place between Malays and Chinese residing in mixed areas although the Chinese tend to make more effort to socialise with neighbours from different ethnic groups compared to their Malay neighbours. Malays tend to visit friends from the same ethnic group but the Chinese visit their friends from the other groups. This was also reflected in the visits during festivals where irrespective of which area they were residing in the Chinese visit their friends during the festivals.

However, there seemed to be a lack of participation amongst the Chinese in neighbourhood activities compared to the Malays. The Malays tend to participate in organisations mostly as part of their obligations to the community, which was required by religion.

However, the findings suggested that Chinese were more involved in organisations at higher level than the Malays. Hence, this is one avenue where social interaction can be encouraged across ethnic groups but because it is voluntary in nature, this can prove to be difficult.

Although Kuala Lumpur is undergoing rapid urbanisation, social interaction at the neighbourhood level is still an important part of the daily lives of the residents especially amongst the socialisers. Whatever avenues there are to foster social contacts between the different ethnic groups, they should be encouraged to reduce social distance between the races.

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