

‘Half-Caste’ and Cast Aside: the Eurasian Experience in Colonial Singapore
from 1919 to 1942

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Abstract

My thesis recovers the Eurasian experience in colonial Singapore as the community contested the pejorative category imposed upon them by the British and as they defined an identity of their own. That identity was largely realised in associational life where Eurasian men and, crucially, women congregated to assert their own sense of 'Eurasian-ness', though it also manifested in demands – partially realised – for inclusion in military and political institutions. Although this thesis offers chapters that survey earlier and later periods, the main focus is on the interwar years. This was the time when Eurasians in Singapore cohered as a community as never before, proliferating organisations serving their community, beginning with the Eurasian Association in 1919. These included other quasi-political groups, such as the Eurasian Women's Association and the Eurasian Youth Movement, and the Eurasian branch of the local militia. Particular focus is given to the role played by sport as an arena for Eurasian women and men to question both the social conservatism of colonial life and the racially discriminatory order of the British Empire in Singapore. Utilising a wide range of sources including oral histories, memoirs, official records, newspapers and magazines, including Eurasian periodicals, of colonial Singapore, the thesis explores the phases of this period of effervescent community life and organisational development and reveals how it was brutally terminated when the Second World War overwhelmed Singapore. The historical path unearthed by this study was, in effect, was closed off, firstly by the Japanese Occupation and then by the rise of nationalism and decolonisation.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Guy de Cruz, veteran of “D” Company and ‘F’ Force, a prisoner of war before his 18th birthday and, always, a proud Eurasian of Singapore.

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Note on Spelling

Names and places have been spelt as they were at the time, in the sources used.

Introduction

The community that is the focus of this doctorate – Singapore’s Eurasians – is largely absent from studies of the territory. For example, there are no references to Eurasians in the text or the index of Nicholas Tarling’s *Colonial Singapore*, and the same applies to Leonore Manderson’s *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870-1940* which includes all the non-white communities in its analysis except for the Eurasians.¹ There is no mention of Eurasians as a community or an ethnicity in Timothy P. Barnard’s *Imperial Creatures: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore, 1819-1942* and, apart from being included in a sentence concerning World War Two, Eurasians are absent from a recent ‘official’ history, *Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore*, which was also the case in an earlier tome, Donald and Joanna Moore’s *The First 150 Years of Singapore*.² These works are emblematic of a tendency to omit Eurasians from how Singapore is conceived, and the list of works that have a cursory reference to Eurasians are legion. There are brief mentions of them in the following works published this century where a lengthier consideration might have been expected: Lynn Hollen Lees’ *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941*, Michael D. Barr’s *Singapore: A Modern History* and Carl A. Trocki’s *Singapore: Wealth, power and the culture of control*.³ Eurasians are also absent as a community in Lee Kuan Yew’s *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* whose account of Singapore’s history in the 20th century has become, in many ways, the official

¹ Tarling, Nicholas, *Colonial Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies (Singapore)/Straits Times Press, 2015); Manderson, Leonore, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² Barnard, Timothy P., *Imperial Creatures: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore, 1819-1942* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019); Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Peter Borschberg, Tan Tai Yong, *Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2019); Moore, Donald & Joanna, *The First 150 Years of Singapore* (Singapore: Donald Moore Press, 1969).

³ Lees, Lynn Hollen, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Barr, Michael D., *Singapore: A Modern History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Trocki, Carl A., *Singapore: Wealth, power and the culture of control* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

version of events that the city state tells itself.⁴ In many broader accounts, such as *An Introduction to Southeast Asian Studies* and *A New History of Southeast Asia*, Eurasians are also not included in their analysis.⁵

Notable exceptions are Mark Ravinder Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow's excellent *Singapore: A Biography*, E. Kay Gillis' *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, and the still essential *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* by John G. Butcher but, of course, given the general scope of such works, the Eurasian experience cannot be a central focus of these sweeping works.⁶ This holds as well for C.M. Turnbull's classic *A History of Modern Singapore*, Edwin Lee's *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, and also Nick Aplin's *Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy*. Disappointingly, Eurasians receive little acknowledgement in Peng Ham Lim's 'The introduction and institutionalisation of Western sport in colonial and postcolonial Malaya, 1786-1965' in *The Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*, despite the fact that sport was an arena in which they made significant contributions, as shall be seen in later chapters of this thesis.⁷ It is also the case that *Voices and Choices: The Women's Movement in Singapore* has little about Eurasian women despite their

⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1999).

⁵ Halib, Mohammed, and Tim Huxley, eds., *An Introduction to Southeast Asian Studies* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996); Ricklefs, M.C. ed., *A New History of Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶ Frost, Mark Ravinder, and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2009); Gillis, Dr E.Kay, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005); Butcher, John G., *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁷ Turnbull, C.M., *A History of Modern Singapore 1819-2005, third edition* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2020); Lee, Edwin, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008); Tarling, Nicholas, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume Two, Part One From c. 1800 to the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Aplin, Nick, *Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2019); Peng Ham Lim, 'The introduction and institutionalisation of Western sport in colonial and postcolonial Malaya, 1786-1965', in Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2021).

pioneering roles in female employment and sport in Singapore, something which the present work establishes.⁸

The paucity of scholarly literature that deals specifically with and is entirely devoted to Singapore's Eurasians under colonial rule is evident – there are notable works on the Eurasian communities of Penang and Malacca⁹ – and often those claiming to consider the Eurasian experience throughout the British Empire in Asia have their focus elsewhere, such as Felicia Yap's two monographs which concentrate on the Eurasians of Hong Kong and the Indian-centred account by Richard Symonds.¹⁰ There are only two published histories of the Eurasian community in Singapore, and they are not works of academic scholarship: the inspirational *Singapore Eurasians* edited by Myrna Braga-Blake and the much-briefer but still helpful work by Alexius A. Pereira.¹¹ Particularly helpful for my research were two unpublished thesis, one written for a B.A. Honours degree and the other for a Masters, by Patrick Khaw and John Conceicao.¹² Also of great value and insight is *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian men who volunteered to defend the Empire, 1862-1957* which manages to be much more than just a history of the Eurasians in the Straits Settlements Volunteer

⁸ Lin, Jenny Lam, ed., *Voices and Choices: The Women's Movement in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Edition, 1993).

⁹ Goh, Beng-Lan, *Modern Dreams: An Inquiry into Power, Cultural Production, and the Cityscape in Contemporary Urban Penang, Malaysia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2002); Walker, Kirsty, 'Intimate Interactions: Eurasian family histories in colonial Penang', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 2(2012), pp. 303-329; Rappa, Antonio L., *Saudade: The Cultural and Security of Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2013); Sarkissian, Margaret, *D'Albuquerque's Children: Performing Tradition in Malaysia's Portuguese Settlement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Yap, Felicia, 'Eurasians in British Asia during the Second World War', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 21, Issue 04, October 2011, 485-505; Yap, Felicia, 'Sex and Stereotypes: Eurasians, Jews and the Politics of Race and Religion in British Asia during the Second World War', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4 (March-April 2010), 74-93, pp. 83-87; Symonds, Richard, 'Eurasians Under British Rule', in Allen, N.J., R.F. Gombrich, T. Raychaudhuri, G. Rizui, eds., *Oxford University Papers On India, Volume I, Part 2* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹¹ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ed., *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992); Pereira, Alexius A., *Singapore Chronicles: Eurasians* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies/Straits Times Press, 2015).

¹² Khaw, Patrick, 'The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963', BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87; Conceicao, John Gregory, 'The Rulers and the Ruled: The Singapore Eurasian Community under the British and the Japanese', MA Thesis, School of Arts, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, 1993.

Force.¹³ However, as these works demonstrate, literature that is primarily focused on the Eurasian experience in Southeast Asia tends not to have been written by professional historians.¹⁴

Although I focus on Singapore, it is important to note that many aspects that emerge in my exploration of the Eurasian experience there were replicated in the experience of similar groupings in the great territorial crescent stretching from India to Singapore and whose inhabitants included Dutch *burghers* and Portuguese *mestizos*, Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmese. Whilst much attention has been paid to the British Empire in Asia and to Asian nationalism, to Pan-Asianism and to anti-colonial struggle, and the influences upon them in this period, new illuminations of these crucial phenomena result from a focus on the Eurasian experience of them. That experience is not commonly considered as it does not fit neatly into dichotomies of imperialism and anti-imperialism but is instead found somewhere in-between: in the case of the Eurasians of Singapore, one is referring to an English-speaking minority in a colonial hierarchy, insecure and seemingly trapped by their subordinate status. The Eurasian place in colonial society was secondary and subservient; they worked in the engine room of the British Empire in key strategic positions, such as telegraph operators and as clerks for the colonial enterprise, and they were sufficiently privileged to follow certain European and British customs and attitudes with the apparent consent of their colonial masters; but in Singapore the Eurasians were generally segregated from their European counterparts, excluded from European clubs and restricted in employment opportunities. Consequently they set up their own social and quasi-political organisations, for Eurasian men, women and children, and it is in these social organisations that the nascent community was socially and culturally located and through which they achieved their coherence and identity.

¹³ Jansen, Mary Anne, John Geno-Oehlers and Ann Ebert Oehlers, *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian men who volunteered to defend the Empire, 1862-1957* (Singapore: Wee Kim Wee Centre, Singapore Management University, 2018).

¹⁴ See, also, Daus, Ronald, *Portuguese Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1989).

This associational effervescence was most strikingly marked in the quarter century after the First World War. Hence the chronology of my study which broadly spans the period from the establishment of the Singapore Eurasian Association in 1919 to Singapore's occupation by victorious troops of the Imperial Japanese Army in 1942.

The 'in-between-ness' of the Eurasian position left them dismissed and misrepresented; their position was too tenuous and too complicated, and what constituted Eurasian identity could be highly ambiguous. This complexity included contested ideas about what made someone a Eurasian, ideas used for contrasting purposes – in attempts at community cohesiveness by Eurasians themselves and for communal control by the British in their use of the category as a way of excluding and segregating 'undesirables'. The colonial state instigated the formation of defined ethnic/caste communities as it sought to 'order' colonised societies – whether through the census or through the award of communal positions on representative bodies. But in a post-colonial world of nation-states with founding narratives of Western oppression and the noble victim-hood of the colonised, the ambiguous position of Eurasians, caught between two sides and seen by nationalists as collaborators of dubious loyalty and origin, disappeared in the new ideological discourse. There was no room for intermediaries: 'The colonial world is a Manichaeian world',¹⁵ and it was more convenient to disregard them altogether. Thus, in Singapore's statistical records, the Eurasian category has been absent since 1957 and Eurasians are hidden, alongside foreigners and transients, as 'Others'.¹⁶

Paradoxically, a notion of diasporic identity has relevance for this study of the Eurasians of Singapore. Engseng Ho has reversed the usual meaning of diaspora when looking at the creation of a British identity in the Empire. As disparate groups migrated to a new place, they coalesced around a new identity. Ho sees the British Empire abroad bringing

¹⁵ Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 31.

¹⁶ Braga-Blake, Myrna, 'Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview', in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 19.

together Scots, Welsh, Irish and Englishmen in a new notion of Britishness 'in terms of belonging to an empire, a British empire.' Movement precedes the formation of a homogenous community: 'they became a *people* as they became *an empire*.' But how can one apply such a theory to the Eurasians of Singapore?

The Eurasian community arrived in Singapore separately as individuals or families of disparate origins while a small minority were the result of unions between white men and non-white women in Singapore. They came from across the region, mainly from nodal points of the British Empire in Asia such as Colombo, Calcutta, Rangoon, and from the earlier mixed-race settlements of Malaya, Penang and Malacca, and were a mixture of European and Asian ethnicities in many different combinations. Living together in close proximity and forced together by the evermore rigorous racial categorisation and segregation of the British, they were identified and, ultimately, self-identified as Eurasians of and in Singapore, with ties extending outwards to similar communities in the British Empire in Asia, joined in networks of familial connection and the shared circumstances of the second class status imposed upon them. They became a *people* because of *empire*. My study of the diverse origins and coming together of Eurasians in Singapore broadens Ho's new model of diaspora and affirms their position at the heart of empire as 'an imperial people'.¹⁷

Indeed, it gives particular force to the discrimination they suffered at the hands of the British, their hopes and struggles to be accepted as British imperial citizens and, ultimately, how they were condemned to be a diaspora without a home. Tim Harper considers that, in comparison to European ones, 'other diasporas tend to appear as somewhat shadowy and amorphous bodies off-stage' and that: 'This is a failing of much recent literature on the

¹⁷ Ho, Engseng, 'Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat', *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 2004, 210-246 (p. 214).

culture of empire.’¹⁸ It is my intention to remedy this lacuna in imperial history, not merely by recovering in detail the experience of Singapore’s Eurasians, but also through a close consideration of the various ways in which the Eurasian community was segregated from Europeans and alienated from other Asians and how this shaped their experience of colonial society and the end of empire.

How a ‘Eurasian’ should be defined has been problematic, not least within the Eurasian community itself.¹⁹ A Eurasian category was absent from the Singapore census until 1849, the terms Native Christian and Indo-Briton being preferred until then.²⁰ Baptismal and marriage records from the mid-19th century show Eurasians listed variously as European, Indo-Briton, Indo-Portuguese, Portuguese Native Christian, Malacca Native Christian and Native Christian.²¹ Internal differentiation and discrimination by Eurasians themselves was also present, as this thesis will show, with those closest to British heritage and a commensurate middle-class lifestyle claiming primacy in the community and calling themselves ‘the Upper Ten’. This is redolent of W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of the ‘talented tenth’ of Black Americans and his positing of them as the necessary leaders of their community.²² Certainly, ‘the Upper Ten’ assumed elite positions as communal representatives and, although no direct link between the two terms has been uncovered, at least some Eurasians became aware of Du Bois during the interwar period and were susceptible to his influence.²³

¹⁸ Harper, T.N., ‘Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore’, *Sojourn*, vol. 12, No. 2 (1997), pp. 261-92, p. 263.

¹⁹ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), pp. 11-23 (p. 11).

²⁰ Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians’, p. 12.

²¹ Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians’, p. 25.

²² Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk: with “The Talented Tenth” and “The Souls of White Folk”*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), first published in 1903.

²³ See, for example, ‘Negro Problem’, *Malaya Tribune*, 17 April 1925, p. 2; Dover, Cedric, *Cimmerii? or Eurasians And Their Future*, (Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1929), p. 19 and 62; Augustin, James, ‘Eurasian Foundations Sound’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p. 12; Dover, Cedric, *Half Caste* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1937), p. 307.

Progeny of European conquest, intimately connected with the imperial project that was Singapore, the Eurasians in colonial society expressed the many contradictions of the colonial experience and the dichotomies of exploitation and emancipation, modernity and imperialism, only to be confined to the margins of scholarship and of modern Southeast Asian society as narrow and racially-defined nationalisms displaced white authority. The Eurasians' "patterns of accommodation and assimilation...as strategies of survival"²⁴ in Singapore were seen by many, and misleadingly, as the eager embrace of the colonial ideal rather than as attempts to find dignity, security and – sometimes – even equality in a world shaped by the hegemony of an imperial power that discriminated against them. In fact, the contradictory nature of Eurasian history and experience exposes the casual prejudices behind colonial and even some post-colonial thinking and the absurdity of assigning dominant traits to entire communities. In some senses, Eurasians were both victims and beneficiaries of colonialism: they were, literally, progeny of European expansion and could be active participants in the imperial project. Yet they were subjected to considerable prejudice, exclusion and discrimination and became increasingly anxious about losing their privileged yet second class status: fears that would become reality in the new post-colonial settlement.

Through reconstructing and examining their unique position in imperial society, I will trace the complex ways in which Eurasians conceived of themselves. The process of becoming Eurasian, as will be shown, was not only an ideological and political one but one that involved social and cultural practice. Indeed, it had to involve such practice since, to begin with, Eurasians were largely absent from and excluded from the political world and much of the civic one as well. Throughout the period surveyed by this thesis, there was a debate about what constituted Eurasian-ness that took place within the community, much as a way to counter the imperial racial notion of the 'half-caste' – some wanted to imbue it with a

²⁴ Braga-Blake, Myrna, 'Preface', in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 9.

positive quality, a vigorous hybridity, and one which accepted the terms of the racial discourse. For some Eurasians, this notion of themselves continued to be held throughout the interwar years, while for others – certainly in the 1930s – the influence of progressive ideas and the rise of nationalism meant Eurasian-ness was no longer merely a response to imperialism. In establishing the extent to which the Eurasians of Singapore were able to agree upon basic notions of a shared social identity and culture, i.e. Eurasian-ness, and to see themselves as part of a common group delineated by an ill-defined and still somewhat imposed racial identity, this thesis will place Eurasian mobilisation and agency in a broader context that includes, for example, the nationalism of the resident Chinese community of Singapore. As we shall see, it is quite impossible to locate the Eurasian discourse about themselves without reference to the wider continental currents assailing a British Empire that was being challenged and that would soon be supplanted by Asian nationalism and Japanese imperialism.

My thesis depends centrally on the contemporary material created by and for the Eurasian community itself. However, much was lost or destroyed during World War Two, including the records held by the Eurasian Association of Singapore for the period before the Japanese Occupation. It has been possible to compensate for this absence through the detailed reports of their meetings and activities as recorded in the local English-language press, something that is also testament to the prominent role assumed by the Eurasian community in the interwar period. Fortuitously, the convention of sending printed matter from the periphery to the imperial centre has meant that the two key Eurasian publications of the time which specifically served the community, *Our Magazine* and *The Eurasian Review*, are held, in almost their complete runs, at the British Library. Although utilised in David M. Pomfret's 2015 monograph on imperial childhood, this is the first time that a full systemic analysis of

Our Magazine has been attempted.²⁵ And in the case of *The Eurasian Review*, more representative and enduring than *Our Magazine*, it has been entirely missed in previous considerations, academic and otherwise, of the Eurasian experience in Asia, let alone Singapore. By using material that, in effect, has not been closely considered before, this thesis is the first comprehensive scholarly survey devoted to the Eurasians of Singapore in the colonial period.

Our Magazine was published in Singapore in 1919 and was aimed primarily at the Eurasian population of Singapore and Malaya. It was edited by a local Eurasian and was mainly written by members of that constituency. Although it purported to be a mouthpiece for the entire community, it was predominantly a voice for the Eurasian ‘establishment’, with contributions from members of the Eurasian Literary Association and the Eurasian Association, both exclusively male and with a leadership cadre taken from the educated elite of Eurasian society. *The Eurasian Review*’s first issue came out in July 1934 and, although the last extant edition is from December 1937, there is evidence that it continued to be published into 1938.²⁶ It was produced in Penang under the imprimatur of the various Eurasian Associations in British Malaya, which included Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Penang, Selangor and Singapore, though it was dominated by contributions from Singapore Eurasians, male and female. It was similar to *Our Magazine* with its mix of articles about Eurasian history and politics, travelogues and reminiscences, Eurasian sports and the local militia, and its link to *Our Magazine* was acknowledged. Where it differed from its predecessor was not only in its longevity, but also by including many articles written by Eurasian women from Singapore.

²⁵ Pomfret, David M., *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), pp. 265-70.

²⁶ *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, 13 March 1939, p. 9.

It has been observed that the 1930s in Singapore was a period that coincided with an upsurge in the publication of newspapers and magazines catering to a local non-European English speaking audience.²⁷ This was testament to the extent of what Ai Lin Chua calls ‘the domestic common framework of English-language education and cultural references’,²⁸ and which Su Lin Lewis, when writing of colonial Penang, terms an emerging ‘indigenous’ English-language local press.²⁹ It was into this milieu, with newspapers, magazines and radio, all public media that ‘formed a sense of communal identity, creating multiple ‘imagined communities’ between speakers of a common language’,³⁰ that *The Eurasian Review* made its appearance. The *Review* can therefore be located as a uniquely Eurasian expression in the growth of an English-language print medium that, as Lewis acknowledges, was ‘a child of empire’ but was also one which enabled ‘non-European societies to articulate their own sense of identity.’³¹ And, for the Eurasian community, it was one that allowed them to assert their own unique place in a modern, cosmopolitan, colonial society.

My understanding of the Eurasian experience, the sense of Eurasian-ness, as outlined in *Our Magazine* and *The Eurasian Review*, has been buttressed by the personal recollections of contemporary Eurasians found in memoirs published in limited numbers by local presses, held in a very few private collections and at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, part of the National Library of Singapore. Additionally, I have been able to utilise the large range of interviews conducted by the Oral History Department of the National Archives of Singapore, including over 30, mainly from the 1980s, where participants reminisced about their early lives as Eurasians in colonial Singapore. My study has been enriched by the variety of voices

²⁷ Van der Putten, Jan, ‘Negotiating the Great Depression: The rise of popular culture and consumerism in early-1930s Malaya’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(1), 2010, pp. 21-45, p. 22.

²⁸ Chua Ai Lin, ‘Singapore’s ‘Cinema-Age’ of the 1930s: Hollywood and the shaping of Singapore modernity’, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 13:4, pp. 592-604, p. 592.

²⁹ Lewis, Su Lin, ‘Echoes of Cosmopolitanism: Colonial Penang’s ‘Indigenous’ English Press’, in C. Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 233.

³⁰ Lewis, Su Lin, ‘Print and Colonial Port Cultures of the Indian Ocean Littoral: Penang and Rangoon’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, December 2009, Vol. 82, No. 2 (297), pp. 9-24, p. 14.

³¹ Lewis, ‘Echoes of Cosmopolitanism’, p. 239, p. 247.

recorded there. English-language newspapers and magazines of the time have augmented this picture and I have used local papers such as the *Malaya Tribune*, *Straits Times* and the *Singapore Free Press*, accessed via the National Archives of Singapore digital newspaper archive, and local magazines such as the *Eastern Illustrated Review*. The “*Sportsman*” from the 1930s, held at the British Library, has enabled me to confirm the importance of sport in Eurasian associational life at the time.

Official colonial documents have been useful in exploring the Eurasian position in colonial society through, for example, census records, government reports on education, employment and the local militia, the proceedings of local government, the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, and in unguarded glimpses of the opinions of senior British officials, most notably concerning ‘the fighting value of the races in Malaya.’ Reports by the Singapore Special Branch have been valuable in tracking Eurasian involvement (or non-involvement) in allegedly subversive activities in Singapore; while the Communist Party of Great Britain’s archive at the People’s History Museum in Manchester, together with personal papers held by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, have allowed me to follow the path taken by those few Eurasians whose political activities warranted the authorities attention. Finally, the information garnered through personal conversations and the perusal of private documents and memorabilia during the course of two research trips to Singapore, one during the pandemic, helped immeasurably to propel my work forward in those difficult times.

A creole language, *Kristang*, commonly used by Malaccan Eurasians, especially those with Portuguese antecedents, has become an area for linguistic research and a focus for a version of Eurasian cultural heritage popular in present-day Malaysia and Singapore. However, the extent of the use of this vernacular by the Eurasians of Singapore is still disputed and, despite Kevin Wong’s recent work on the subject, I found little evidence of its

use by Eurasians in the public sphere during the period under discussion.³² Eurasians' relationship with the Church lies outside the remit of this thesis. There were Eurasian Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists, but the vast majority of Eurasians in Singapore attended a Catholic Church divided in theological jurisdiction between Portuguese and French Missions. Which particular branch someone belonged to had been decided earlier, in the 19th century if not before, and mainly prior to their arrival in Singapore, so outside of the period this thesis covers and any tensions between the two missions were usually confined to their European clergy rather than their Eurasian congregants. Although, inevitably, the church did play a part in the private and public life of the community, it performed this function for all its congregation of many ethnicities and worked towards the sense of a multi-ethnic faith community.³³ English-language schools in colonial Singapore broadly shared a multi-ethnic demographic and although they were essential in instilling their pupils with imperial sentiments and values, and despite the plethora of Eurasian men and women who taught in them, they did not add to any specific sense of Eurasian-ness so much as a pro-British one.³⁴

The thesis is structured as follows. It begins with a survey of Eurasians in Singapore, their origins and place, through the 19th and early 20th centuries – that is until the core period under review in this dissertation, which is the time-span from the end of the First World War to the devastating results of the Second. The analysis of the earlier period shows how, for the most part, 'Eurasian' was initially an identity imposed upon these people and that they were

³² Personal conversation with John Conceicao, Singapore, 24 July 2023, and with Mrs Elisabeth Chan, Singapore, 2 August 2023. See also, for example, Wong, Kevin Martens, 'Na kaza, greza kung stradu: The Kristang language in colonial Singapore, 1875-1926', *Language Ecology* 3:2 (2019), pp. 157-188; Ghim, Phyllis and Lian Chew, *A Sociolinguistic History of Early Identities in Singapore: From Colonialism to Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³³ See, for example, *Malaya Catholic Leader*, 5 January 1935; Boss, James Newton, *Journey of 190 Years: A History of the Eurasian Catholic Community in Singapore 1825-2015* (Singapore: Global Cultural Alliance, 2016); Wijesingha, E., *Going Forth...: The Catholic Church in Singapore 1819-2004* (Singapore: His Most Rev. Nicholas Chia, Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Singapore, 2006).

³⁴ See, for example, Kong, Lily, Low Soon Ai and Jacqueline Yip, *Convent Chronicles: History of a Pioneer Mission School for Girls in Singapore* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 1994); Wijesingha, E., *The Eagle breeds a Gryphon: The story of Raffles Institution 1823-1985* (Singapore: Pioneer Book Centre, 1989).

defined, as it were, by the British in an imperial racial order. From the end of the First World War and notably in the series of events, centred on the year 1919 – the subject of Chapter Two – the Eurasian community dramatically asserted itself, to combine as a community and define a sense of Eurasian-ness of their own. As Chapter Three reveals, when the limits of their influence on the colonial government and on representative bodies became abundantly clear to them, Eurasians turned successfully to other areas of associational life, in sport and the military, in their quest for recognition, fulfilment and ‘fair play’ in 1920s Singapore. Even though they suffered under the impact of the Great Depression – considered in Chapter Four – the Eurasians of Singapore paradoxically enjoyed much individual advancement and a growing female assertiveness in the 1930s. In the face of economic difficulty and the political uncertainty arising from the rise of Asian nationalism and British concessions to it, Eurasians nevertheless were approaching the summit of their social and political achievement in colonial Singapore, achieving a greater degree of unity and assertiveness than ever before. Chapter Five takes the Eurasian experience through the Second World War and its aftermath as the years immediately preceding the Japanese Occupation saw an unprecedented degree of Eurasian associational activity and unity, only for this to be brutally cut short in a devastating fashion.

Chapter One

Eurasians of Singapore as an imperial community: an initial survey

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce my subjects and set them within the context of colonial Singapore, a crucial nodal point in the complex web of continental and maritime connections that made up the British Empire. The chapter, therefore, includes a broad review of the Eurasians of Singapore during the colonial period in order to provide an initial historical framework to support all that follows. It will show when and how the term ‘Eurasian’ entered common parlance and what it meant to the community itself, literally and figuratively. It will also consider the Eurasian ‘type’ as it was conceived in the literature and popular science commonly circulated in the British Empire at the time my enquiry begins.

There is evidence of Eurasians in Singapore within two years of Raffles’ arrival in 1819.¹ Over the next hundred years, Eurasians migrated to Singapore from Malacca and Penang, and from across wider Asia, evidence of earlier European penetrations: Portuguese *mestizos*, principally from Malacca, Macao, Goa and Ceylon; Dutch *burghers* from Malacca and Ceylon; British Eurasians from India, Penang, Malacca, Burma and Siam; French Eurasians from Indo-China and perhaps Pondicherry in India.² These people were the descendants of earlier Asian/European relationships, invariably between a European male and an Asian female, as a procession of European powers attempted to dominate the Indian Ocean and the China trade. Portuguese and Dutch were encouraged to marry native women in the absence of any white alternative. The Dutch married Portuguese *mestizo* women in Malacca and the

¹ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Edition, 1992), p. 13.

² Braga-Blake, Myrna, and Ann Ebert-Oehlers, ‘Where The Twain Met: Origins of Eurasian Families’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), pp. 25-33.

British did the same with Dutch *burghers* in Ceylon.³ Initially, a happy outcome for the colonial authorities was the creation of this subordinate group, viewed by the colonial racial masters as loyal ‘half-breeds’ who filled local positions at reduced cost, although official British attitudes to Asian wives and concubines would harden by the second half of the 19th century.

Already by the 1840s, most Eurasian men in Singapore were working as clerks for commercial houses or the civil service.⁴ By the end of the 19th century, 74% of the clerks in the municipal and civil services were Eurasian.⁵ Throughout the colonial period, Eurasians would be disproportionately represented in these white-collar jobs and at major companies including Dunlop, Shell, Cable and Wireless, and the Hong Kong and Shanghai bank. Employment was often secured through word-of-mouth personal recommendations and family connections, and ‘for generations it was Dad’s or Uncle’s influence that got young Eurasians their first jobs – jobs which generally lasted a lifetime.’⁶ Duties involved significant responsibilities as transient white senior administrators worked short hours leaving their Eurasian juniors in charge. Senior positions were held by covenanted men recruited in England, and while this placed a limit to Eurasian ambition, the penury and drudgery of the ‘coolie’ was a visible reminder of the Eurasians’ relatively exalted status. Some Eurasian encroachment upon European society was achieved through Freemasonry with Eurasian masons found in the Singapore Lodge by the 1850s,⁷ at a time when the Freemasons could still be seen as the progressive Enlightenment movement that had attracted men like Raffles.⁸ Europeans and Eurasians combined in 1854 to form the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps, uniting to protect their communities following what were termed ‘Coolie riots’ earlier that

³ Ibid, p. 28, p. 32.

⁴ Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians in Singapore’, p. 14.

⁵ Gillis, Dr E. Kay, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005), p. 68.

⁶ D’Rose, Pat, ‘Nine To Five: Where Eurasians Worked’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 69.

⁷ Braga-Blake and Oehlers, ‘Where The Twain Met’, p. 32.

⁸ Wurtzburg, C.E., *Raffles of the Eastern Isles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), p. 398.

year.⁹ Membership of the Singapore petit jury was restricted to Europeans and Eurasians.¹⁰ However, the racial bias in the relationship between Europeans and Eurasians was strengthened in the latter part of the 19th century. Increased contact from the imperial centre, together with events like the Indian Rebellion of 1857 hardened racist attitudes.

A pivotal moment for Singapore came with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. For Joseph Conrad, ‘The piercing of the Isthmus of Suez, like the breaking of a dam, let in upon the East a flood of new ships, new men, new methods of trade.’¹¹ Singapore’s strategic position as an imperial port-city was assured. Modern ideas about science and race passed along the new mail, steam, and telegraph routes. The work of Charles Darwin appeared to give credence to the ‘scientific racism’ of Gobineau and other leading intellectuals of the time. Existing prejudice was justified by spurious rationalisations and proofs. The more relaxed Georgian attitude to miscegenation and concubinage was replaced by the puritanical code of the Victorian age. Not only could ideas travel faster but wives previously left behind in Britain could now follow their spouses abroad.

By the 1880s the Eurasian presence in the Singapore Volunteer Corps had come to an end.¹² An effective and implicit colour bar became explicit and administrative racism was institutionalised with a 1904 ruling restricting senior civil service positions to those of ‘pure’ European descent on both sides.¹³ The Governor of the Straits Settlements felt that ‘any European would consider it an indignity to be asked to serve under a Eurasian.’¹⁴ Eurasians were seen as ‘a threat to white prestige, an embodiment of European degeneration and moral

⁹ Turnbull, C.M., *A History of Singapore 1819-2005* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 76.

¹⁰ Turnbull, C.M., *The Straits Settlements 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony* (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), p. 72.

¹¹ Joseph Conrad, quoted in John Darwin, *After Tamurlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 249.

¹² Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians in Singapore’, p. 17.

¹³ Shennan, Margaret, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 70.

¹⁴ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 68.

decay.’¹⁵ And it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that Eurasians first sought to congregate into associations as Eurasians, a response to hardening Victorian racial attitudes and increasing discrimination. The St. George’s Singapore Catholic Young Men’s Society founded in 1866 was predominantly Eurasian. The first Eurasian newspaper, *The Straits Intelligence*, started in the 1870s, was followed by the *Singapore Eurasian Advocate* in 1887 and *The Daily Advertiser* in 1892 though all soon folded. Of lasting significance was the formation by Eurasians of the Singapore Recreation Club on 1 July 1883. It was founded with official encouragement since whites viewed it as a means of promoting ethnic segregation.¹⁶ However, the Club was located on the Padang in the heart of the imperial district.

We should not lose sight of the importance of the Padang at this time and afterwards. It was the symbolic centre of colonial Singapore, the place where Sir Stamford Raffles unfurled the Union Jack to establish a British presence on 6 February 1819. At one end of this imperial playing field was the Singapore Cricket Club with its imposing pavilion, founded in 1852 for the exclusive use of the European elite. At the other end of the Padang, facing the Singapore Cricket Club was the Singapore Recreation Club, built for the cream of Singapore’s Eurasian community. From their respective balconies, the two communities eyed each other, separated by a cricket pitch where annual contests of Europeans against the ‘Rest’ took place, where players and spectators were segregated, a stage for the ‘subtle screen that divided Singapore society’¹⁷ to play itself out. And yet it was some measure of their status in comparison to others that a Eurasian presence was allowed in such a prestigious location. There were no Chinese, Malay or Indian clubs on the site.

¹⁵ Stoler, Ann Laura, ‘Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia’, in Cooper, Frederick, and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 199.

¹⁶ Khaw, Patrick, ‘The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963’, BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87, p. 24.

¹⁷ Bayly, Christopher, and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 62.

European clubs were a focal point for the colonial elite, exclusive and delineated locations for the ruling class to meet, drink and relax, somewhere that the attributes of an English gentleman, of fair play and good sportsmanship, were reinforced and displayed. For a society that believed the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, play was a serious business. By the time the Singapore Recreation Club was founded, whites already had the Tanglin Club, the Yacht Club, and the Billiard Club. The Singapore Cricket Club on the Padang was one of the oldest established, second only to the Singapore Turf Club. Tim Harper calls these institutions ‘bastions of racial prestige ... [whose] social function was to reinforce the mystique of the ruling caste.’¹⁸ Testament to how deeply the Eurasians had drunk from the imperialist well was the way their own club recreated the model of their colonial masters. There they simulated European social mores, and the Singapore Recreation Club ‘was recognised as the premier organisation of the community.’¹⁹ It was racially exclusive and enforced a social divide within its own community with ‘undesirable’ Eurasians denied membership through secret ballots²⁰ and – as we shall see later in the thesis – women were prohibited from entering its sacred environs during the colonial period. However, whatever the divisions amongst Eurasians, and whatever the relative privileges that the ‘master race’ of whites accorded them compared with the places given to the various groups of Asians in Singapore, it is clear that Eurasians had to wrestle with an enormous burden of prejudice and discrimination, not to mention the crushing weight of negative imagery and conceptions imposed upon them.

Writing about the mixed-race peoples of Southeast Asia, Ann Laura Stoler describes ‘a story with multiple versions about people whose cultural sensibilities, physical being, and

¹⁸ Harper, T.N., ‘Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore’, *Sojourn*, vol. 12, No. 2 (1997), 261-92, p. 272.

¹⁹ Barth, Valerie, ‘Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 98.

²⁰ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Please Pass The Salt: Class within the Eurasian Community’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 123.

political sentiments called into question the distinctions of difference that maintained the neat boundaries of colonial rule'.²¹ Accepting both the possibility and practice of agency in a subordinate community like the Eurasians of Singapore, the imposition of empire inevitably produced reactions against the reality of imperial life, including attempts at autonomy and self-determination. Nevertheless, to understand the cultural sensibilities and political sentiments Stoler refers to, it is necessary to take account of the imperial straightjacket, cultural and political, in which Eurasians were bound. This will require a survey of how Eurasians were pictured not only in the fiction and non-fiction of Singapore but also in the broader imperial imaginary of a British Empire stretched across the Indian Ocean, one which encompassed the 'Borderline folk' of Rudyard Kipling's fantasised British Raj. This is pertinent as, for more than the first half of the imperial British presence in Asia, Singapore came under the same administrative control, political and mercantile, as British India: this was a time when the writ of the East India Company stretched from Bombay to Singapore.

Constructed Eurasian-ness, imagined and real, must be sketched in order to see how Eurasians reacted to it, how they lived with it, contested it and, to some extent, acquiesced in the bind of W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness, 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.'²² In this respect, this study deliberately subverts Benedict Anderson's concept of national identity as something self-made in print and rather sees the Eurasians initially as a community imagined by others, specifically their imperial masters, to better understand Eurasian attempts to forge an identity and escape the image imposed upon them.

²¹ Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers', p. 198.

²² Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 7; first published in 1903.

Conceptions of the Eurasian

Throughout the period under consideration, there was debate within the community about what and who were Eurasian, what was meant by this and, by extension, what constituted Eurasian-ness itself. This was manifested in arguments, often heated, over the naming of the community. By whom their label was chosen, and for what purpose, and the extent it signalled an enduring attachment to the European colonisers or a counter to the racist notion of the half-caste, was contested throughout. Some Eurasians tried to give it a positive quality, a vigorous hybridity that, while accepting the terms of the racial discourse, refused the derogatory connotations of ‘half-caste’. And for some of these thinkers, the meaning of Eurasian and of Eurasian-ness would remain harnessed to notions of a benevolent British Empire while for others, affected both by progressive ideas and the rise of nationalism, especially in the 1930s, no longer did imperialism alone influence notions of Eurasian-ness.

The origin of the term ‘Eurasian’ is the subject of disagreement, with some mixed-race commentators attributing its creation to the Marquess of Hastings, Governor General of the East India Company’s territories from 1813 to 1823,²³ while others claimed he did nothing of the sort.²⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary dates the first recorded use from 1826²⁵ while the dictionary of the British Raj, *Hobson-Jobson*, found its first use in 1844 and it defined Eurasian as: ‘A modern name for persons of mixt European and Indian blood, devised as being more euphemistic than Half-caste and more precise than East-Indian.’²⁶ This

²³ Dover, Cedric, ‘Anglo-Indians or Eurasians’, in Kenneth E. Wallace, *The Eurasian Problem: Constructively Approached* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1930), p. 129.

²⁴ Anthony, Frank, *Britain’s Betrayal in India: The Story of the Anglo-Indian Community* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1969), p. 2.

²⁵ “Eurasian, *N. & Adj.*” *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5871963012>.

²⁶ Yule, Henry, and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Definitive Glossary of British India* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2015), p. 226; first published in 1886.

was the same definition, the mixture of European and Indian, *Hobson-Jobson* used for ‘half-caste’.²⁷

A history of Eurasian nomenclature can be gleaned from the work commissioned to mark the centenary of Raffles’ occupation, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*.²⁸ It noted that some early inhabitants of the colony were known as ‘Native Christians’, ‘Creoles or half-breeds,’ terms for Eurasians commonly used by Europeans in the nineteenth century (the author calls Chinese women ‘small-footed ladies’). In a statistical section detailing local censuses, the confusion surrounding the changing identification of Eurasians is apparent. In the first five censuses from 1821 to 1827, the term, ‘Native Christians’ was used. In the next eight from 1828 to 1840, the designations ‘Indo-Britons’ and ‘Native Christians’ were included. In the 1833 count, for purported Europeans, Native Christians and Indo-Britons, no fixed principle was adopted with some enumerating officers categorising as European all those wearing European clothes. ‘Eurasian’ was first used in the census of 1849, to the exclusion of the earlier epithets, and the seven census returns broadly covering the decades between 1849 to 1911, all used the ‘Eurasian’ denomination.²⁹ This implies that even though it was not yet the name unanimously accepted by the community itself, from the second half of the nineteenth century it was one by which they were classified for the official record.

In *Roget’s Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, the word ‘Eurasian’ is located under the keyword, *hybrid*. It is included among other words giving context and meaning, these being ‘cross, cross-breed, mongrel; mule, hinny, tigon; half-blood, half-breed, half-caste;

²⁷ Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p. 255.

²⁸ Makepeace, Walter, Gilbert Brooke and Roland Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being Some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919* (London: John Murray, 1921).

²⁹ Marriott, Hayes, ‘Inhabitants and Population’, in Makepeace et al (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, p. 348, p. 349, p. 355, p. 356, pp. 357-60.

mestizo, metis; Eurasian, Cape Coloured, Creole, mulatto; quadroon, octaroon.³⁰ The *Collins English Dictionary* offers only one definition for the noun Eurasian: ‘a person of mixed European and Asian descent.’³¹ This is a straightforward classification, wide in its scope and broad in its meaning, but one clearly shaped by how European imperialists conceived of Eurasians. As to that conception, we may be guided by the numerous portrayals of Eurasians made by their colonial masters, portrayals in which one finds them assigned a place in a chain of being described in travelogues and scientific treatises from the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Eurasians were one of the many inhabitants of the British Empire who were categorised, characterised and caricatured by members of the imperial elite in accordance with all the prejudices and assumptions of that particular cohort. It was against this backdrop of an imposed identity justifying an inferior status that the Eurasians of Singapore would try and forge a selfhood of their own, more authentic than the one created for them.

An early significant text illustrating the European encounter with Eurasians as seen through the prism of nineteenth-century British imperialism was *Goa, and the Blue Mountains*, a mid-nineteenth century work by the explorer Sir Richard Burton. Published when he was aged thirty and a lieutenant in the Bombay Army of the East India Company, it described his travels in the Indian subcontinent while he was recovering from a bout of cholera. Burton believed the Eurasian population of Goa, whom he calls ‘black Christians’, to be the personification of the decay of the once paramount Portuguese maritime empire. In his introduction to the 1991 edition, Dane Kennedy found Burton’s appraisal to be consistent with his contemporaries’ views and with government policy of the time.³² His racist descriptions of Eurasian physicality, their mental attributes and inclinations, are marked by

³⁰ Davidson, George, ed., *Roget’s Thesaurus of English words & phrases* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 27; first published in 1852.

³¹ Butterfield, Jeremy, ed., *Collins English Dictionary: Complete & unabridged* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 2004), p. 565; sixth edition.

³² Kennedy, Dane, ‘Introduction’ to Richard F. Burton, *Goa, and the Blue Mountains, or Six Months of Sick Leave* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. xii.

the same disturbing tropes that persist over the time and space of the British Empire in Asia: there is the indolence and (over)indulgence of a ‘degraded’ race whose physical decline is so rapid it precedes maturity, and this race displays a mixture of touchiness, licentiousness, arrogance and inferiority. In all aspects the Eurasian population of Goa were inferior to Europeans, physically they are ‘revolting’ with ‘a remarkable want of muscularity,’ Eurasian women are uneducated, lazy and prematurely aged with a penchant for ‘certain obstinate scandals’ while the ‘mongrel men’ are ‘intolerably dirty and disagreeable’ and overindulge in drink ‘for the purpose of intoxication.’ For Burton, they are the worst of both worlds: ‘the mental and bodily development of this class are remarkable only in being a strange *mélange* of European and Asiatic peculiarities, of antiquated civilisation and modern barbarism.’³³

Burton’s *mélange* of racial stereotypes and demeaning epithets resonates with the imperialist debates about race outlined by Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Burton’s *Goa* was published in 1851 which predates the three events that, in Young’s view, drove racism to its preminent place in imperial ideology: British shock at the Indian ‘Mutiny’ of 1857, the question of slavery and the American Civil War of 1861-5, and the brutal suppression of the Jamaican Insurrection at Morant Bay in 1865. Burton’s vision of Eurasian decrepitude supports Young’s assertion that unions ‘between distant [races]... either are infertile or tend to degeneration [was]... the dominant [imperialist] view from the 1850s to the 1930s.’³⁴ Young cites Thomas Carlyle’s contemporaneous ‘The Nigger Question’ which articulated a fear of ‘hybrid’ children, of creolisation and miscegenation, and employed a Gothic template, conjuring up legions of ‘dark extensive moon-calves, unnameable abortions, wide-coiled monstrosities, such as the

³³ Burton, Richard F., *Goa, and the Blue Mountains, or Six Months of Sick Leave* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), pp. 97-102.

³⁴ Young, Robert J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

world has not seen hitherto!’³⁵ (In a text-book case of Victorian sexual hypocrisy, such fears did not prevent Carlyle from becoming infatuated with Kitty Kirkpatrick, the mixed-race daughter of the East India Company Resident in Hyderabad who had converted to Islam to marry her mother, a noble of Mughal descent.)³⁶ In fact, the place of race in Burton’s *Goa*, including his commentary on Eurasians, can be seen as prefiguring Young’s general thesis that ‘In the imperial phase from the 1880s onwards, the cultural ideology of race became so dominant that racial superiority, and its attendant virtue of civilisation, took over even from economic gain or Christian missionary work as the presiding, justifying idea of empire.’³⁷

Moving from India to the Malayan peninsula, an influential Victorian portrait of the region is Alfred Russel Wallace’s *The Malay Archipelago* published in 1869 and continuously in print ever since. It was Joseph Conrad’s preferred choice of bedside reading and he used it as a reference for the lavish depictions of Malay flora and fauna in his fiction, things which in reality Conrad only experienced at distance from the deck of a ship.³⁸ Wallace was a naturalist and writer who had arrived at a theory of natural selection independently of Charles Darwin and would be given the honorific title of the ‘Grand Old Man of Science.’ He was an early socialist and, if one excepts his attitudes to Eurasians, he generally held positive views of the many peoples he encountered during wide-ranging expeditions to the Amazon and Southeast Asia. Hugely respected, he was awarded medals from the Royal Society, the Société de Géographie, the Linnean Society, and the Order of Merit. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of the Royal Geographical Society, Royal Entomological Society, and Zoological Society, amongst many others.³⁹ Based on a decade’s worth of travelling across the region, his all-encompassing two volume

³⁵ Carlyle, Thomas, ‘The Nigger Question’, quoted by Young, p. 6.

³⁶ Dalrymple, William, *White Mughals* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).

³⁷ Young, *Colonial Desire*, p.92.

³⁸ Sherry, Norman, ‘The Bornean River and Its People’, in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Thomas C. Moser, second edition, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), p. 363.

³⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36700> accessed 12 Nov. 20.

work was dedicated to Darwin, ‘not only as a Token of Personal Esteem and Friendship but also to Express my Deep Admiration for his Genius and his Works.’⁴⁰ Reflecting Young’s positioning of Darwin within the racial theory of the time as holding the then conventional view that miscegenation leads to either infertility and/or degeneration, are Wallace’s depictions of Eurasians in their admittedly limited appearances in his book.

Wallace paints a vivid picture of Singapore, ‘as seen during several visits from 1854 to 1862’, already a bustling and burgeoning entrepôt less than fifty years from the subterfuge of its seizure for the East India Company by Stamford Raffles. For Wallace, ‘Few places are more interesting to a traveller from Europe than the town and island of Singapore, furnishing as it does, examples of a variety of Eastern races, and of many different religions and modes of life.’ He proceeds to list these, English, Chinese, and Malays, the Klings [Tamils] of Western India, Arabs, Bengalis, Parsis, Javanese, and ‘traders from Celebes, Bali, and many other islands of the Archipelago.’ Eurasians, too, are here and are classified under the guise of ‘The Portuguese of Malacca [who] supply a large number of the clerks and smaller merchants.’ When Wallace visits Malacca itself, which he sees as a commercial centre declining as Singapore grows, they merit a greater scrutiny: they are described as ‘the descendants of the Portuguese – a mixed, degraded, and degenerate race’, defective in speech and dress.⁴¹ Eurasians, noted in the first volume by Wallace as one of the various races living in Singapore, are absent when, in his second volume, he spends a chapter discussing ‘The Races of Man’ of the region.⁴² Were they no longer categorised as a race, or did he consider Eurasians not to be sufficiently or properly ‘native’ to the archipelago? Wallace does not provide an answer in this instance of the ambiguity and the liminal space into which Eurasians so often disappeared.

⁴⁰ Wallace, Alfred Russel, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, two volumes (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869).

⁴¹ Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, volume I, p. 31, p. 32, p. 42.

⁴² Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, volume II.

Despite his numerous affiliations with various groups pursuing scientific and social issues, there is no record of Wallace being invited to become a member, not even an honorary one, of the Straits Philosophical Society. Founded in Singapore on March 5th, 1893, as ‘a particular ordering of intellectual space wherein various members of the colonial elite stimulated and reinforced important aspects of their colonial sensibilities,’⁴³ membership was restricted to fifteen at any time, normally resident in Singapore and holding a university degree.⁴⁴ These men were all white with the exception of the Straits Chinese writer Tan Teck Soon and, later in 1895, the physician and social reformer, Dr. Lim Boon Keng.⁴⁵ Each month a speaker introduced a topic for discussion in what their President called ‘a meeting of Western philosophers in an Eastern city.’⁴⁶ A measure of that philosophy, and how it matched the dominant ideology of the time, is found with the presidential address by W. R. Collyer in 1898.⁴⁷ Entitled ‘The Influence of Europeans Abroad upon Native Races’, it spoke of European superiority in multiple aspects, ‘Triumph of science – triumph of education – triumph of energy – triumph of race’, and a world where ‘the Western nations have regarded themselves as the natural leaders and civilisers of mankind’.⁴⁸ Here is the all-embracing racial theory that Young finds in late Victorian colonialism which ‘has always been a cultural, as well as a political, scientific and social construction.’⁴⁹

The Society discussed a broad range of subjects and some of their most notable talks were collected in the anthology *Noctes Orientales*. Diverse topics included ‘The Influence of Religion in China’, ‘The Doctrine of the Survival of the Fittest as Applied to Man’, ‘That the

⁴³ Jose, Jim, ‘Imperial Rule and the Ordering of Intellectual Space: The Formation of the Straits Philosophical Society’, *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1998, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1998), pp. 23-52, p. 49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Collyer, W. R., ‘The Influence of Europeans Abroad upon the Native Races’, in *Noctes Orientales: Being a Selection of Essays read before the Straits Philosophical Society between the years 1893 and 1910*, ed. by H. N. Ridley (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh, 1913), p. 131.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁴⁹ Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 93.

Evidence for the Survival of Human Personality after Death is Inconclusive’, ‘Colonies as a Source of Strength or Weakness’, ‘and ‘The Inconsistency of Personal Belief’.⁵⁰ Published in 1913, *Noctes Orientales* was compiled by the man who replaced Collyer as president, the botanist Henry Ridley. “Rubber Ridley” was the Director of the Singapore Botanical Gardens from 1888 to 1911, President of the Straits Philosophical Society from 1906 to 1911, and was considered to be the man most responsible for encouraging the rubber industry in Malaya; he was also a Fellow of the Royal Society, the Linnean Society and the Royal Horticultural Society.⁵¹ Ridley had earlier, in fact, made the Eurasians the focus for a contribution to the Society. Significantly, there were no Eurasians present when Ridley gave his address on ‘The Eurasian Problem’ in August 1895. This was just as well, given his tone was paternalistic and condescending: ‘the half-caste of both hemispheres has disappointed our expectations,’ he said, and was unable to fulfil the role assigned to them as conduits for colonialism: ‘Taking the race as a whole, they are weak in body, short-lived, deficient in energy, and feeble in morals.’⁵² Again, as per earlier accounts, they are the worst rather than the best of both worlds.

These discussions were played out within a wider conceptual *milieu* where race was not seen purely as a biological concept but as part of a culturally-charged anthropology that explained the rise and fall of civilisations as pre-determined by race, with the white race inevitably supreme. Nineteenth-century anthropology offered two competing theories for either a single or plural origin of humankind: monogenesis and polygenesis. The single point of origin claimed by monogenesis meant all races could intermingle which was a negation of some racist characterisations concerning mixture and miscegenation, while polygenesis supported the idea that all men were not created equal and that hybridity inevitably led to

⁵⁰ Ridley, H.N., *Noctes Orientales*, p. v.

⁵¹ Jose, ‘Imperial Rule and the Ordering of Intellectual Space’, p. 32.

⁵² Ridley, H. N., ‘The Eurasian Problem’, in *Noctes Orientales*, p. 54.

degeneration, infertility and civilisational decline. This fear of hybridity, framed in the discourse of polygenesis, persisted into the twentieth-century despite its being at variance with the theory of evolution proposed by Darwin in *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). This was in no small part due to Darwin's failure to spell out in full the consequences of his ideas for fear of an inevitable backlash against the revolutionary implications of his work.⁵³

Contained within this idea of racial difference seemingly established through the 'anthropological objectivity'⁵⁴ of polygenesis, one which allowed and demanded a separation of races, the cultural consequences of miscegenation were seen as apocalyptic. The arrogance of Victorian racial superiority was shot through with anxiety, an anxiety embodied by those of mixed race. Fears of sterility, moral and physical decrepitude were increasingly inhabited in imperial imaginations by Eurasians. As C. J. Hawes succinctly put it, 'both rulers and ruled were typecast in stereotyped roles and attributes.'⁵⁵ To resist the apocalypse, and in opposition to the weak and dissolute Eurasian, the ideal Victorian administrator must exhibit control: control of his desires through sexual restraint and faithfulness to "the girl back home", control of the conquered through the exercise of the type of manly virtues that promote imperial prestige, not forgetting a judicious use of the practical implements of British power.⁵⁶ Achieving this necessitated placing a boundary around the Eurasians, a borderline not to be crossed: there was an urgent task to suppress any 'errant interracial sexual desire [that] might destroy all humankind.'⁵⁷ This boundary required doing away with hints of designating Eurasians as a useful, collaborating class (to use Ronald Hyam's phrase)

⁵³ Bolt, Christine, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ Griffith, John W., *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma: 'Bewildered Traveller'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 144.

⁵⁵ Hawes, C. J., *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773-1833* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. 81.

⁵⁶ Malchow, H. L., *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 202.

⁵⁷ McBratney, John, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space: Rudyard Kipling's Fiction of the Native-Born* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), p. 59.

and inventing a different Eurasian personality, one marked by specific physical and mental attributes, moral and emotional predilections, all degenerate ones, designed to put them in a particular place in imperial society, and to keep them there.⁵⁸

The nature and long persistence of the image of the Eurasian in the European imperial mind is well demonstrated in the lurid fictional representations found in the popular literature of the period. We find an early example in Eugène Sue's *The Wandering Jew* from the mid-1840s – that is, the period of the early decades of British rule over Singapore – a hugely successful serial novel, published in 10 volumes, which has an evil half-caste Thug ‘whose murders suggest a perverted sensuality.’⁵⁹ A later example is provided by the novelist Henry Bruce, who travelled in British India, and published *The Eurasian* in London in 1913. Another sensationalist text, the Eurasian in question is a dope-smoking assassin, who as well as marrying and thereby ruining an innocent English nurse, murders the Governor of a fictional Indian province.⁶⁰ It is a book that will later be cited by the Eurasian polemicist and activist, Cedric Dover, as evidence of the dominant imperial mind-set concerning Eurasians and race.⁶¹ These fictions worked in tandem with the ‘factual’ representations of Eurasians by Burton, Wallace and Ridley to reinforce the specific characteristics imposed upon them, and the better this discriminatory discourse was reproduced, the greater the chance of commercial success. A large domestic audience was a significant marketplace⁶² and Mohamad Rashidi Pakri, in his analysis of *The Fiction of Colonial Malaya*, finds that ‘the more the authors create the myths and stereotyped characters or subjects, and articulate it in accordance with

⁵⁸ Hawes, *Poor Relations*, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 204.

⁶⁰ Bruce, Henry, *The Eurasian* (London: John Long, 1913).

⁶¹ Dover, Cedric, *Cimmerii? Or, Eurasians and Their Future* (Calcutta: Modern Art Press, 1929), p. vii.

⁶² Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma*, p. 26.

the imperial idea, the more appealing the publication, and with it, of course, the imperial idea, becomes to the British public.’⁶³

Maud Diver was a bestselling author of novels set in the Raj; an Anglo-Indian in the nineteenth-century meaning of the term – that is, a child of Britons who was born in India – she was a close friend of Rudyard Kipling’s sister and a ‘passionate defender’ of the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh.⁶⁴ Her novel, *Candles in the Wind*, was first published in 1909 and was reprinted a further eleven times over the next five years, including six ‘shilling editions.’⁶⁵ Its heroine, an ‘English rose’, daughter of a country doctor, is tricked into marriage and moves to India with her Eurasian husband who deceived her into thinking his mother was Spanish rather than Indian. Before the husband conveniently dies, leaving her free to marry a dashing English officer, all the familiar tropes concerning Eurasians are paraded in front of Diver’s readers: ‘the half-caste out here falls between two stools, that’s the truth. He has the misfortune to be neither white nor brown; and he is generally perverse enough to pick the worse qualities of the two races, and mix them into a product peculiarly distasteful to both.’⁶⁶

There are also representations of Eurasians in the work of the more well-known writers, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and W. Somerset Maugham. All three writers are famous for their fictional depictions of the British Empire in Asia and as much as they enjoyed commercial success, especially in the cases of Kipling and Maugham, there is a level of seriousness to their work that has demanded a level of academic engagement and acclaim not afforded to Maud Diver. Although he places their fiction in the genre of adventure-imperialism, Edward Said found Kipling and Conrad ‘nevertheless writers with a claim on

⁶³ Pakri, Mohamad Rashidi, *The Fiction of Colonial Malaya* (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2014), p. 8.

⁶⁴ Woodcock, George, ‘A Distant and A Deadly Shore: Notes on the Literature of the Sahibs’, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring, 1973), pp. 94-110, p. 102.

⁶⁵ Diver, Maud, *Candles in the Wind* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1914).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 45.

serious aesthetic and critical attention'.⁶⁷ And, in their somewhat ambiguous position in relation to the British establishment of the day, there is the possibility of a degree of detachment from imperial norms and an artistic freedom that can sometimes result in a sympathy, if not empathy, for the Eurasian situation not found in writers closer to the imperial elite: Kipling was a middle-class provincial born in Bombay, Conrad an itinerant Pole with English as only his third language, and Maugham a French-born homosexual at a time when homosexuality was considered immoral, dangerous and taboo. Nevertheless, working from 'outside the tent' as it were, they might feel the pull of conformity even more with a desire to repeat conventional wisdoms of the time: three outsiders wanting to be insiders, depicting Eurasians, also outsiders wanting to be insiders.

In looking at characterisations of Eurasians by Kipling, Conrad, and Maugham, I will engage with the literal representations of Eurasians found in their work. There are already many excellent and insightful critical works concerning Kipling, Conrad and Maugham that look below the surface and are archaeological in their attention to detail and the depth of analysis, reading their fictions as hidden testaments to, variously, suppressed sexuality, the trauma of separation, and the subversion of colonial society and race theory.⁶⁸ However, the purpose here is an attempt to outline the impression their depictions of Eurasians would have made on the casual reader, a mass audience looking for entertainment more than enlightenment. It is in this public, seemingly superficial, layer of things where one finds evidence of the everyday prejudice and unconscious bias which maintained imperial

⁶⁷ Said, Edward, 'Kim as Imperialist Novel', in Rudyard Kipling, *Kim: a Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 343.

⁶⁸ Clement, Mark, 'Queer Colonial Journeys: Alfred Russel Wallace and Somerset Maugham in the Malay Archipelago', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 26, No. 2, May 2017, pp. 161-187; Jean Fernandez, 'Hybrid Narratives: The Making of Character and Narrative Authority in Rudyard Kipling's "His Chance in Life"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2008), pp. 343-359; Philip Holden, 'W. Somerset Maugham's Yellow Streak', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 29 (4), Fall 1992, pp. 575-582; Jeremy Krikler, 'The Historical Significance of Autobiographical Elements in *Kim*', *Kipling Journal*, June 2013, pp. 24-44; Agnes Yeow, "'Here comes the Nazarene": Conrad's Treatment of the Serani and the Racial Politics of Empire', *Conradiana*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2007, pp. 273-290.

hierarchy and hegemony. There is the condescending, comic/ironic gaze of Kipling in ‘His Chance in Life’, the Eurasian as a mendacious and malevolent parasite in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, and the cowardly bluster and inferiority complex, hidden in an exaggerated snobbishness, found in Maugham’s ‘The Yellow Streak’. Finding representations of the classic Eurasian caricatures and tropes in these readings of Kipling, Conrad and Maugham demonstrates the depth to which these views were held and held sway in the colonial culture and society of the time.

In the opening paragraph of the short story, ‘His Chance in Life’, which first appeared in the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore in 1883, Rudyard Kipling encapsulated and perpetuated a version of Eurasian-ness which strikingly conveys the stereotype imposed on those of mixed-race, one from which they would struggle to escape in the imperial age. Kipling’s Eurasians have a particular character and consciousness, and they inhabit a world they do not control and in which they exhibit a range of foibles and peculiarities. Of relevance here is Du Bois’ point in *The Souls of Black Folks* that someone subjected to stereotypes is forced into ‘measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.’⁶⁹ Indeed, a mixture of ‘amused contempt and pity’ exactly describes Kipling’s attitude to his imagined Eurasian personalities in ‘His Chance in Life’. In the opening paragraph, Kipling dubbed the Eurasians ‘Borderline folk’ and gave them classic characteristics that comprised some of the racist stereotypes which defined Eurasians again and again in imperial literature – being embarrassingly and inappropriately passionate, being touchy and thin-skinned, and prone to crime. Implicitly embedded in this paragraph is the idea of the Eurasian as an excitable, almost hysterical, antithesis to imperial notions of self-control and the calm, resolute authority of the “stiff upper lip”; there is also the over-compensating affectation and sensitivity born out of an inferiority complex with Kipling’s

⁶⁹ Du Bois, *The Soul of Black Folk*, p. 7.

assertion that, in the Eurasian, ‘the White shows in spurts of fierce, childish pride, a kind of Pride of Race run crooked’; meanwhile, for Kipling, in the Eurasian, ‘the Black [shows] in still fiercer abasement and humility, half-heathenish customs and strange, unaccountable impulses to crime’ – that is, a degenerate propensity for malevolence.⁷⁰ Such a racial conception was the ‘natural’ order of things under Empire and Kipling gives himself free rein in his generalisations and his condescending descriptions of Eurasian life.

As a case-study for established clichés about Eurasians, ‘His Chance in Life’ resonates with earlier and later writings. Harking back to Burton’s description of Eurasians in his *Goa*, it will subsequently find an echo in the deportment and home life of the Eurasian family in Joseph Conrad’s *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). Thus, Kipling gives his reader a view of Eurasian domesticity in the description of the home of Mrs. Vezzis, future mother-in-law of the story’s subject, the lowly telegraph operator, Michele D’Cruze: ‘a house full of Vezzises, Pereiras, Ribieras, Lisboas, and Gonsalveses, and a floating population of loafers; besides fragments of the day’s market, garlic, stale incense, clothes thrown on the floor, petticoats hung on strings for screens, old bottles, pewter crucifixes, dried *immortelles*, pariah puppies, plaster images of the Virgin, and hats without crowns.’⁷¹ The chaos of the domestic arrangements is an implicit contrast to Anglo-Saxon virtues of restraint and order. Utilising the assumed and accepted caricature for comic effect, Kipling deployed the varied repertoire of Anglo-Saxon superiority, utilising stereotypes concerning dubious Eurasian behaviour, ancestries and affectations, primitive Catholicism and prejudice, and mocking these in accordance with imperial norms. The plot itself revolves around an aspect of racial theory, for Kipling refers to the ‘dilution’ of the white blood that runs in the veins of D’Cruze. But, after generations of dilution the one drop of white blood left in D’Cruze is still sufficient for a

⁷⁰ Kipling, Rudyard, ‘His Chance in Life’, in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), p. 63; first published in 1890.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 64.

solitary act of bravery before the white in D’Cruze is overwhelmed by the black, and he reverts to servility and uncontrolled emotions.⁷²

Beneath a canopy of gentle, affectionate mockery, the premise of the story is undeniably racist and confident its stereotypings were shared by its readers. The minimal whiteness left in D’Cruze, diluted over eight generations, is enough to make him a hero and command Indians employed by the British to face down a riotous Indian mob. It is his residual whiteness that allows D’Cruze to step outside himself and, briefly, become a white man. It is at the moment when he is named as a white man, a Sahib, that he is able to adopt the mantle of leadership, decisiveness and courage. Only when he encounters true whiteness in the person of the young District officer, after the rioters have been routed, does this temporary persona dissolve into an emotional, blubbering weakness, never to return.

The Eurasians of ‘His Chance in Life’ are also represented as prejudiced and snobbish. As we shall see, Kipling apprehended here a feature that was present amongst Eurasians in Singapore. This prejudice, Kipling implies, was the consequence of their precarious position in imperial society and the wish to delineate a separation between themselves and the ‘natives’, their own borderline against what he termed ‘the Black’. D’Cruze is depicted as even more prejudiced towards Indians than the British with their paternalistic condescension, his prejudice brought on by an insecure racial status and dubious ancestry: ‘he looked down on natives as only a man with seven-eighths native blood in his veins can.’⁷³ Mrs Vezzis, meanwhile, looks down on D’Cruze due to gossip in the community about a ‘black Jew of Cochin’⁷⁴ in his ancestry and an uncle who does menial work as a cook. She takes pride in her English ancestor, a Yorkshire railwayman, and demands that D’Cruze get a pay rise

⁷² Ibid, pp. 66-67.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

before he can marry her daughter: something that will be motivation and reward for his achievement.

Joseph Conrad's Eastern stories cover the same geographical location as Alfred Russel Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* – Singapore, Malaysia, Borneo and Indonesia. Eurasians appear in the fiction of Conrad, chronicler of continental and maritime Empires, as embodiments of 'the flaws, fallacies and paradoxes of colonial prescriptions and criteria for citizenship.'⁷⁵ Conrad employed current scientific tropes in his representations of first generation mixed-race characters and such characters of succeeding generations. The first generation was moral, strong-willed, tragic and beautiful, but subsequent generations acquire the same peculiarities and vices Kipling gave the borderline folk of 'His Chance in Life'. The Eurasian family in Conrad's second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, was significantly further down the evolutionary and generational scale than the first generation. Their surname, Da Souza, placed them inside the same societal and genealogical orbit of the D'Cruzes and Vezzises of 'His Chance in Life' but, in contrast to Kipling's predominant stance of amused disdain, Conrad's tone was sheer revulsion. What both writers shared was the representation of miscegenation leading to an inevitable degeneration. Conrad made this representation clear when he described the Da Souzas as 'degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors',⁷⁶ drawing on the catechisms of the scientific racism of the Victorian era in an explicit allusion to Wallace and Burton. Here was indolence and squalor brought on inexorably, the certain consequence of lineal decay:

They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were – ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat,

⁷⁵ Yeow, Agnes, 'Here Comes the Nazarene: Conrad's Treatment of Serani and the Racial Politics of Empire', *Conradiana*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2007), 273-90 (p. 285).

⁷⁶ Conrad, Joseph, *An Outcast of the Islands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 4; first published in 1896.

and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their last.⁷⁷

Cornelius, the villain of Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), is the most extreme representation of a Eurasian in all of Conrad's work. As the following montage demonstrates, Cornelius was sub-human, more insect than animal. A 'little wretch', this 'half-caste croaker' had – as did Kipling's D'Cruze – his pride (he was 'bursting with importance') but he was 'vermin-like', an 'unsavoury creature', a 'loathsome insect' whose 'slow laborious walk resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle'. He didn't overtly give much away: he was 'mute as a fish' and 'sinister' and from his 'sour yellow little face' issued 'malevolent, mistrustful, underhand glances'.⁷⁸ Cornelius was placed in opposition, an anti-hero, to Jim, who, in the words of Marlowe, – Conrad's narrator and alter-ego – was 'one of us',⁷⁹ an English gentleman, although it was Jim who had abandoned a ship full of pilgrims to Mecca to an uncertain fate during a tropical storm. And by having Jim's Malay bodyguard, Tamb' Itam, avenge Jim's downfall by killing Cornelius in cold blood, suggests that Conrad believed Europeans and Malays shared a suspicion and hatred of Eurasians. Through Marlowe's gaze, readers were left in no doubt about the repulsiveness of Cornelius and his Eurasian-ness:

He leaned his forehead against the fence, and in that position uttered threats and horrible blasphemies in Portuguese in very weak ejaculations, mingled with miserable plaints and groans, coming out with a heave of the shoulders as though he had been overtaken by a deadly fit of sickness. It was an inexpressibly grotesque and vile performance, and I hastened away.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Conrad, Joseph, *Lord Jim* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), p. 170, 171, 172, 183 and 192; first published in 1900.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 196.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 195.

‘The Yellow Streak’ was a short story by W. Somerset Maugham, first published in 1925 and included in his collection set in Malaya, *The Casuarina Tree*. Two men are travelling in the Malay interior: Izzart is upper-middle class while Campion is lower-middle class. Izzart attended the famous public school Harrow, and is only too happy to remind his companion of his superior social standing. But while Izzart looked down on Campion, he suspects Campion looks down on him too. The source of this unease is Izzart’s fear that his hidden Eurasian background will be discovered and his reputation consequently ruined. This was a twist on Kipling, a curious inversion of the proposition in ‘His Chance in Life’ that, concerning race, the smallest trace can make all the difference. For D’Cruze, the single drop of white blood propels him to heroism and the fulfilment of his dreams. For Izzart, son of an English father and Eurasian mother, his ‘drop of native blood’⁸¹ marks him with a fatal flaw in his character, the yellow streak of the title, and seals his fate: ‘Everyone knew that you couldn’t rely on Eurasians, sooner or later they would let you down; he knew it too, but now he asked himself whether they didn’t fail because failure was expected of them.’⁸²

Things come to a head when Izzart and Campion are thrown into a river after turbulence overturns their raft. Izzart, half drunk and half asleep, abandons Campion to his fate and saves himself. But, just as Jim’s pilgrims survived the storm, Campion is saved and becomes, for Izzart, a living reproach to his own cowardice. When they reach the local town and ‘civilisation’, Izzart attempts to cover up his inaction, just as he covers up his Eurasian origins. The fact that Campion, in his version of events, does not cast doubt on Izzart’s behaviour only adds to Izzart’s paranoia. At the end of the story, all becomes clear. Campion, also the worse for wear, panicked in the river, and is as keen as Izzart for the incident not to be subject to detailed scrutiny. However, Izzart’s discomfort has gifted Campion the chance

⁸¹ Maugham, W. Somerset, ‘The Yellow Streak’, in *More Far Eastern Tales* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 223. First published in 1926.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 223.

to repay Izzart for his snobbery and condescension. Champion taunts Izzart for his 'yellow streak', the mark of a Eurasian. For Izzart, this is confirmation of his worst fears: his mixed background is known, was known, and he has been mocked and despised behind his back. His public school education and social contacts, his handsome demeanour, his sporting trophies at the club, all count for nothing. When it comes to colonial prejudice, race trumps class, and both Champion and Izzart know it: 'What a fool he was ever to think that they believed that story of his, about the Spanish grandmother! They must have laughed at their sleeves when he told it, and behind his back they had called him a damned nigger.'⁸³

Izzart believes what he believes everyone to believe, everyone meaning his white contemporaries, that to be Eurasian means one is not to be trusted; someone who fails at the crucial moment. Someone who, when needed most, cuts and runs. Somebody who is not and can never be 'one of us'. And yet it was not a Eurasian but an Englishman who abandoned the sinking ship in *Lord Jim*, someone who, through the voice of Marlowe, Conrad explicitly named as 'one of us'. But Jim was allowed to redeem himself and reveal his true nature, the masculine ideal of the English gentleman. Izzart understands there will be no second act afforded him, no second chance in life, once his Eurasian-ness is revealed.

In contrast to the conception of their group in colonial science and literature, for the Eurasians of Singapore, their understanding of who was or was not a Eurasian was contested, complex and, for many, confused. Consider this attempt in the 1990s by one pillar of the community, a lecturer and administrator, reflecting at the end of a long life and distinguished career about Eurasian identity in colonial Singapore in the twentieth century: "they were thoroughbred Eurasians. Now, it is difficult to describe a thoroughbred Eurasian because

⁸³ Ibid, p. 240.

that's a contradiction in terms.”⁸⁴ This demonstrates an awareness on the part of the speaker of the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory definition for ‘Eurasian’, not least in respect of reaching agreement over who was a Eurasian and who was not. It was something that exercised other Eurasians when pressed on the matter in interviews for the Oral History Department of the National Archives of Singapore. The following examples are all from Eurasian women and men born and brought up either before or during the interwar period. According to their various accounts, all referenced below, there were Portuguese Eurasians, Dutch Eurasians, British Eurasians, many different categories of Eurasians: Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Burmans, Ceylon *burghers*, even Eurasian Eurasians. In colonial society, who you were, what race you belonged to, was paramount; in many respects, and, for most people, it was the defining fact of life. These spokespersons for the Eurasian community had internalised the pre-eminent importance of upbringing and pedigree for their British masters. For the imperial rulers, this was about hierarchy and exclusion, and keeping non-white people away from the places where power and influence was found: in commerce, the civil service, the army, and in the social spaces where the governing classes relaxed.

The language used in the attempt at classification provided by the interviewee quoted above is pertinent. He used the word ‘thoroughbred’, a term taken from the sport of Kings and Queens, horse racing, an aristocratic sport obsessed with ancestry, tracing bloodlines back to one single point of equine origin, a mythical Arab stallion from the 18th century. The oral history interviews are littered with similar Eurasian attempts to describe and classify that inadvertently expose the internalisation of such an ideology: words such as “pure”, “three-quarter”, “mixture”, “pure-blood”, “upgrading”, “biological improvement”, and “blood”

⁸⁴ Mosbergen, Rudy William, interview, Singapore, 26/04/1994, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

abound.⁸⁵ Authenticity, legitimacy mattered. It was within this context that the interviewees talk of some Eurasian clubs restricting membership to Eurasians only and insisting upon a white patrilineal line of descent. Eurasian-ness was a status seemingly not available to all Eurasians.

Although most interviewees paid lip service to the claim that there was no prejudice or distinctions within the community, they also described complex and multi-faceted delineations based around skin colour, class, income and lineage. One category which illuminates concerns about wealth, language, education and race was one some Eurasians coined for themselves: ‘the Upper Ten’. This term was used by a number of the interviewees and is found in many self-produced Eurasian memoirs and anthologies as well as contemporary Eurasian publications like *Our Magazine* from 1919.⁸⁶ While there is no definitive etymology for this descriptor, its meaning was not contested: it referred to the self-appointed top ten per cent of the community. The Upper Ten distinguished themselves from those they considered beneath them in much the same way as their colonial masters: through segregation and exclusion in the form of a sealed social circle. As one interviewee put it, someone who placed herself in this elite group, “we don’t go too much below.”⁸⁷ It is also striking that Eurasian marriages habitually stayed within the various sub-groups of the

⁸⁵ Barth, Ronald Hubert, interview, Singapore, 23/03/1984; Grace Taylor interview, Singapore, 29/11/1984; Mrs. Charles William Bennett interview, Singapore, 27/11/1984; Leonard Albert Duckworth interview, Singapore, 25/10/1984; all Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁸⁶ For references to the ‘Upper Ten’, see the following interviews: Joseph Henry Chopard interview, Singapore, 27/08/1985; Ronald Benjamin Milne interview, Singapore, 22/08/1984; Ronald Hubert Barth interview, Singapore, 23/03/1984; Mrs Charles William Bennett interview, Singapore, 27/11/1984 and 14/12/1984; all Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore. For publications making reference to it, see – for example – ‘The Submerged Tenth’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 1934, pp. 1-3; Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Please Pass the Salt: Class within the Eurasian Community’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Edition, 1992), pp. 119-125.

⁸⁷ Bennett, Mrs. Charles William, interview, Singapore, 05/11/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

community with some Anglican and Methodist Eurasians looking down on Catholics for being from Portuguese rather than British stock.⁸⁸

This was a characteristic trope, dividing people into different classes and placing them on the rungs of a societal ladder with those on top looking down with disdain upon the unfortunates below. The Upper Ten interviewee cited above claimed she could always tell those who did not share her exalted position by what she called their “shabby behaviour [and] wrong type of talking”. In a significant echo of imperial values she defined “shabby behaviour” as the opposite of the conduct of an “English gentleman”.⁸⁹ Eligibility to this closed-off world had as much to do with these subtle nuances around social mores and performance as to ostentatious displays of wealth, similar to the English nobility’s distinction between ‘old money’ and *nouveau riche arrivistes*. Nonetheless, membership was not free of charge. For example, it was signified by a particular lifestyle, including the (paid) membership of the twin pillars of Eurasian social and communal life: the Singapore Recreation Club and the Eurasian Association.

Another tool for reinforcing inequality was skin tone. Interestingly, interviewees denied skin colour had any prejudicial impact, while elsewhere, and often in the same interview, claimed it did.⁹⁰ For some, skin colour was an indicator of how close generationally a person was to a ‘pure white’, though others, while still acknowledging the determining factor of skin colour, observed a wide and random spectrum of skin tone even amongst siblings.⁹¹ This was described by one interviewee thus: “Eurasians ranged from white, yellow, brown, right down to black and very dark.”⁹² In the Eurasian community, there was not only the colour prejudice

⁸⁸ De Cruz, Gerald, interview, Singapore, 23/08/1981, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, Singapore, 09/01/1985; Charles William Bennett interview, Singapore, 11/07/1984, all Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁹¹ Barth, Ronald Hubert, Singapore, 23/03/1984.

⁹² Ibid.

imposed upon them and affecting them from the outside, but the self-imposed colour prejudice emanating from within the community, with Eurasians from Malacca deemed the darkest group.

In these series of interviews conducted with Eurasians from Singapore, Malaccan Eurasians were repeatedly relegated to the bottom of the pile. The starkest example was when an interviewee described Eurasian schoolboys taunting each other in the playground where Singaporean boys insulted their Malaccan counterparts by calling them “Seranis”.⁹³ Serani was a Malay name for Eurasians and came from the corruption of a word Malays used to identify Eurasians by their Christian religion, Nazarene, and was here employed by Eurasian children against other Eurasian children in a derogatory way. It was a well-worn term of abuse: in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, Jim’s loyal and violent Malay manservant, Tamb’ Itan, refers to the treacherous Eurasian Cornelius as ‘the Nazarene [...] to awaken the indignant attention of the universe.’⁹⁴ ‘Serani’, then, was internalised by these Eurasian children and understood as an extreme verbal insult that could only be met with fists.⁹⁵

Something that worked against a sense of community, and that was acknowledged by some of the interviewees as such, was the practice of some Eurasians with fair skin to try and pass off as white in order to enjoy the advantages of being European.⁹⁶ Some certainly tried to pass themselves off as white and deny their Asian heritage, attempting to join European clubs, use European shops, attend dances and balls at hotels where Asians were not permitted, and use toilets reserved for whites only. Entry into European society was based primarily on skin colour, on how white one looked but also on how one talked. Some ‘white’ Eurasians succeeded in enlisting in the European company of the Singapore Volunteer

⁹³ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, Singapore, 18/07/1984.

⁹⁴ Conrad, Joseph, *Lord Jim*, p. 170.

⁹⁵ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, Singapore, 18/07/1984.

⁹⁶ Bennett, Mrs. Charles William, Singapore, 07/01/1985.

Corps.⁹⁷ However, passing for white undermined communal cohesion as the assumption of a European identity meant the rejection of their background and their fellow Eurasians as will be seen in Chapter Three with the example of the talented Eurasian sportsman, Roy Smith.⁹⁸ This attempt at transformation arose from the ambivalent position of Eurasians, located in an imperial society with its colour bars and barriers. For the fair-skinned, it was an attempt to escape prejudice and discrimination; if successful it was something of an individual liberation, but an apolitical one, leaving the structures of oppression unchallenged at best and reinforced at worst.

Lineage mattered in the Eurasian community and followed the cliché of the British tripartite system of upper, middle and lower classes. This was directed by the Upper Ten, with those of recent or actual European parentage held to be at the top, followed by local Singapore Eurasians, and Malaccan Eurasians at the bottom. In this scenario, all Singapore Eurasians were held to have part-British ancestry while Malaccan Eurasians were looked down on as poor fishermen of Portuguese ancestry.⁹⁹ It was patently untrue and yet was repeated alongside other equally fanciful ‘creation myths’ which contradicted it. In one version, there was no common heritage between Singapore and Malaccan Eurasians – the Eurasians of Singapore were the descendants of Europeans who arrived in Singapore with Stamford Raffles in 1819 and mixed with the locals there. Against them were the dark Eurasians of Malacca who were, according to the same interviewee, “the very poor type that got together with the Malays”.¹⁰⁰ In this account, the Singapore Eurasians did not like “the Malay streak”¹⁰¹ found in Malaccan Eurasians. Singapore Eurasians were more presentable,

⁹⁷ Jansen, Mary Anne, John Geno-Oehlers and Ann Ebert Oehlers, *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian men who volunteered to defend the Empire, 1862-1957* (Singapore: Wee Kim Wee Centre, Singapore Management University, 2018), p. 79.

⁹⁸ Sharp, Ilsa, *The Singapore Cricket Club: Established 1852*, revised 2nd edition (Singapore: Singapore Cricket Club, 1993), p. 73.

⁹⁹ Chopard, Joseph Henry, Singapore, 27/08/1985.

¹⁰⁰ Bennett, Mrs. Charles William, Singapore, 27/11/1984.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 14/05/1984.

more westernised. Yet, in an illustration of Eurasian confusion about their mixed origins, there was a counter narrative in the transcripts, more in keeping with reality, where the Eurasians were established as communities in Penang and Malacca and came from there to Singapore.¹⁰²

Another contributor to the oral histories rejected the term Eurasian altogether. It was a misnomer: “we are Portuguese”,¹⁰³ he said. In this scenario, a Portuguese king assured his troops that when they married local women their children would be considered Portuguese, a practice then adopted by the Dutch when they arrived in the region. This Eurasian story continued with the assertion that the Portuguese in Southeast Asia never married Muslim Malays but only more ‘acceptable’ women from Goa, and the Dutch then married these new ‘Portuguese’, as did the British when they became pre-eminent, from generation unto generation. In this semantic sleight of hand, and against all the available evidence, the Asian in Eurasian almost disappears. It was noted by one interviewee that when there was an influx of Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmans into Singapore after the Great Depression of 1929, they found the ‘Eurasian’ descriptor degrading, something Singapore Eurasians did not. For these new arrivals, ‘Eurasian’ was a slur and inferred that you, or at least one of your parents, was a bastard (which wasn’t true, the interviewee hastened to add). Ironically, the Eurasians of Burma were held in contempt by the local Burmese who called them “bo kyet chee kala”, literally ‘shit-coloured Indians who think they are British’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Schoon, Roland, interview, Singapore, 06/07/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰³ De Souza, Jocelyn Simon, interview, Singapore, 24/07/1985, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰⁴ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, interview, Singapore, 22/08/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

Another significant factor as a marker of discrimination was education, and for some this was more important than skin colour, despite a fair skin enhancing employment prospects.¹⁰⁵ A European surname was seen as a good indicator of ‘superior’ racial origins – Dutch, Portuguese, French, and so on, with an English surname the most prestigious.¹⁰⁶ Housing was another point of difference between those who lived in a house with servants, those living in terraced houses and, lastly, the poor Malaccan Eurasians living in kampongs (Malay fishing villages).¹⁰⁷ Malaccan Eurasians were characterised as dark, different and, according to one of the Upper Ten, had “degenerated very badly”¹⁰⁸, a comment that had an unfortunate correspondence with that racist trope of imperial ideology which saw generational decline as an inevitable consequence of miscegenation.

Racial prejudice was common amongst Eurasians, “Cross-marriage”, marrying outside the community, was problematic with the possibility of social banishment a real prospect, especially for women.¹⁰⁹ A Chinese spouse was deemed more acceptable than an Indian one, and a Malay Muslim husband was beyond the pale. Conversely, having a European son-in-law in the family was considered “a feather in the cap.”¹¹⁰ For Eurasian men, marrying a European woman was equally prestigious, and those marriages usually took place in Britain, where the men had travelled to study to become lawyers or doctors, and where they met and married their brides. For Eurasians, the metropole was a place where the colour bar was more permeable than colonial Singapore. For one interviewee, these marriages, though, were considered doomed once the wives travelled East, the racist reality of colonial societal mores and of segregation too much for such unions to bear, not to

¹⁰⁵ See the following interviews: Ronald Benjamin Milne, Singapore, 05/12/1984; Ronald Hubert Barth, Singapore, 29/03/1984.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, Mrs. Charles William, Singapore, 14/12/1984.

¹⁰⁷ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, Singapore, 22/08/1984.

¹⁰⁸ De Souza, Jocelyn Simon, Singapore, 28/03/1984.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, Ronald Hubert Singapore, 29/03/1984.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

mention the British women's presumed inability to match the culinary know-how of a Eurasian wife.¹¹¹

For Eurasians, racism was a two-way street and they suffered the scorn of the Europeans although, as we have seen, it did not necessarily throw them into the arms of their fellow Asians. The varied impact of white racism was brought out in different interviews: in one opinion, white elitism and racism inhibited any space for a strictly Eurasian culture and instead encouraged a carbon copy of the customs of their rulers.¹¹² In another, Eurasian was a term created by the British to “demarcate” and formally mark out the racial divide that excluded Eurasians: the conundrum over Eurasian identity was solved by locating it in a negative – to be Eurasian was not to be British: “So Eurasian simply means someone who could never attain a British status and enjoy all the benefits, because at that time England was at the height of its glory and there were a lot of benefits especially for citizenship.”¹¹³

The Eurasians of colonial Singapore in the early 20th century: an overview

How did this self-image of Eurasians sit with the facts of Eurasian life in Singapore in the interwar period with which this study is concerned? The government of the Straits Settlements included Singapore, Malacca and Penang, Singapore being the largest and the administrative and commercial centre. It conducted a census in 1911, in line with the rest of the British Empire, and this was repeated a decade later in 1921 and again in 1931. These provide a statistical picture, albeit a top-down one, of colonial Singapore and its Eurasians at these moments in time. The administration also produced annual returns for the colonial

¹¹¹ Bennett, Mrs. Charles William, Singapore, 27/12/1984.

¹¹² Ibid, 18/02/1985.

¹¹³ Gabriel, Vincent, interview, Singapore, 16/02/2005, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

centre concerning matters of interest for planning and political purposes, including details of the population, education and ecclesiastical matters, as well as reports regarding employment and the cost of living. Taken with the more comprehensive census returns, these reports augment one another to form a picture of the Eurasian place in colonial society and of that society as a whole in Singapore during the interwar years, the core period of this study.

According to the 1911 census, the total population of Singapore was 311,985, while its female population was only 91,095, less than a third of the total number.¹¹⁴ This reflected the transient nature of life for many of the population of the port city, for example male Indian and Chinese indentured labourers working in the godowns or as rickshaw pullers. There were also European men, on postings of limited duration, employed by the government or one of the many trading houses, all neither born in Singapore nor with intentions of staying there, living without the family life that an equitable proportion of women would imply. For the Eurasian community of Singapore, things were different, established and enduring: of the total population of Eurasians (4,712) just over half (2,439) were female, reflecting a more settled position.¹¹⁵ Eurasian women formed only 2.68% of the total female population, and less than one per cent of the total population of the territory was Eurasian. The white community, what the census called 'Europeans and allied races,' was similarly less than one per cent of the total but with less than a third of these female.¹¹⁶ Numerically insubstantial, like their white counterparts, the Eurasian population differed from them in the balanced ratio between the sexes which reflected their permanency. They also differed in this way from the bulk of the Asian population as over 98% of those in Singapore, like the Europeans, were predominantly sojourners. In their attachment to the polity of Singapore, Eurasians were the

¹¹⁴ Marriott, H., Superintendent of Census, *Report on the Census of the Colony of the Straits Settlements, taken on the 10th March, 1911* (Singapore: The Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 79.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

most settled population of the imperial port city, the ‘real’ Singaporeans in a sense, which made the Empire’s lack of commitment to them seem particularly harsh.

The census differentiated between urban and rural Singapore and collated separate statistics for Singapore Municipality and Singapore Country. Singapore in general was a mainly urban population, with the proportion of the total population living in Singapore Municipality being 83.7% in 1911 and 82.6% in 1921.¹¹⁷ The vast majority of Eurasians, over 94%, lived in urban Singapore, Singapore Municipality, and this would be the case for the entire interwar period.¹¹⁸ Consequently, the numbers used in the following section refer to Singapore Municipality only. The 1921 census gave the Eurasian female population as 2,810 and the male as 2,641.¹¹⁹

In 1911, sixteen schools were teaching English in Singapore, and enrolment was 5,019 for boys and 1,288 for girls. By 1921, there were 7,505 boys and 2,214 girls at 19 schools teaching English.¹²⁰ Of these, 565 were Eurasian boys and 476 were Eurasian girls, and the number of Eurasian children at these schools was proportionally greater than those of the sojourning communities.¹²¹ The census held that only 4.2% and 0.4% of Malay males and females respectively were able to speak English, while the numbers for the Chinese were 7.4% and 2.2% and for Indians, 9.4% and 5.9% respectively.¹²² The 1921 census recorded that the percentage of the people speaking English in Singapore was only 9.3% of males and 5.3% of females.¹²³ Bearing in mind the relative insignificance, in numerical terms, of the Eurasians of Singapore, and that not all children in Singapore attended an English-speaking

¹¹⁷ Nathan, J.E., *The Census of British Malaya, the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei* (London: Malayan Information Agency, 1922), p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Marriott, *Census 1911*, p. 79.

¹¹⁹ Nathan, *Census 1921*, p. 148.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 112.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 273.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 112.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 111.

school, or one at all, they were a significant part of the English-speaking population of Singapore, with all of the potential advantages that ensued from that. The Eurasians were thus well represented in roles where facility in the English language was an essential condition of employment: they disproportionately performed jobs such as clerks, salesmen and teachers in comparison to the rest of the population.

From the information contained in the 1921 census, it is easy to see how misleading it is to characterise – as did many contemporaries – the Eurasian community as one predominantly of housewives, children and clerks. It is true that approximately half of its adult female population were categorised as occupied with ‘household duties at home’ and a similar proportion of the adult male population were employed in clerical roles. But the proportion of Eurasian women employed in roles requiring a facility with the English language was significantly larger than that of any other community: 10% of Eurasian clerks were female, whereas the proportion of Chinese clerks that were women was less than 1%. The same applied with respect to teachers, the census showing that 98 Eurasian women were working as teachers in Singapore, compared to 90 Chinese women, 68 European women, 14 Indian women and 19 Malay women.¹²⁴ In fact, in comparison to their Asian counterparts, Eurasian women led freer and more autonomous lives, and it has even been argued that Eurasian women had to learn resilience due to the nature of the initial colonial encounter when they were habitually abandoned by their European partners, either through a return home or by succumbing to fatal tropical disease.¹²⁵ At any rate, there is little doubt that many Eurasian women were educated and encouraged to work and, by 1931, half of those were

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 268, p. 273, p. 279, p. 293, p. 304.

¹²⁵ Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians in Singapore’, p. 22.

working in professional occupations, mainly teaching and nursing, in comparison to only 9% of the total female population of Singapore.¹²⁶

One can make a comparison with the other enumerated communities to illuminate the disproportionate Eurasian presence in white collar areas of employment. There were, according to the 1921 census, 747 Eurasians working as clerks (commercial and unspecified), 123 teachers, 98 civil service officials and clerks, 82 municipal officials, 51 salesmen and shop assistants, and 45 telephone operators.¹²⁷ Using the category of civil service officials and clerks as an indicative example, there were the following numbers of other groups employed in these roles: 213 Malays, 173 Indians and 146 Chinese compared to 98 Eurasians.¹²⁸ However, the Eurasian population was only 3% the size of the Chinese, 16% of the Malay and 20% of the Indian population of Singapore.¹²⁹ In 1921, then, the outsize relative weighting of Eurasians in these types of employment is clear.

In the preamble to his report, the Superintendent of the 1931 Census, Charles Vlieland, outlined his thoughts concerning the different characteristics of the inhabitants of British Malaya. The division of people into Chinese, Eurasian, European, Indian, Malays and Others in the 1931 census shared the same classifications used by the 1921 and 1911 censuses. In his view, the majority of Chinese, Indians and Europeans were ‘mere sojourners who come to Malaya to seek their fortunes with no intention of colonisation or permanent settlement’ while Eurasians were part of a self-contained and well established indigenous community with its own culture and traditions, with few ‘new mixtures.’¹³⁰ The growing population of Singapore, increasing by a third from 1911 to 1921 and again from 1921 to 1931, now

¹²⁶ Vlieland, C.A., *British Malaya (The colony of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States under British protection, namely the Federated States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang and the States of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Brunei): A report on the 1931 census and on certain problems of vital statistics* (London: Malayan Information Agency, 1932), p. 248, p. 261.

¹²⁷ Nathan, *Census 1921*, pp. 272-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272, p. 279, p. 292, p. 304.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³⁰ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 9.

exceeded half a million, and this growth was understood as an economic phenomenon, a ‘migrational surplus.’¹³¹ Of a total population of 567,453, the urban population of Singapore, what in this census was called Singapore Town and in the 1911 and 1921 censuses was termed Singapore Municipality, was 447,741.¹³² The proportion of urban to total population had remained constant in the period of the three censuses of 1911, 1921 and 1931, broadly around 80%, as did the rate of increase – 30% over the same period.¹³³ The urban population of Singapore was 76.4% Chinese, 9.8% Malay, 9.3% Indian, while the remaining 4.5%, a mixture of Eurasians, Europeans and Others, was considered ‘a numerically inconsiderable portion.’¹³⁴ Vlieland found Eurasians to be predominantly urban, 85.5% were classified thus, ‘the great majority of whom are engaged in clerical work.’¹³⁵ In this, and finding no significant changes in Eurasian circumstances, he was in complete agreement with the analysis from the census of a decade earlier.¹³⁶

In Vlieland’s view, the two non-sojourning communities of Singapore were the Malays and the Eurasians and this was demonstrated in the ratio of men to women in these groups. Whereas the wider population, with almost three men for every woman,¹³⁷ reflected the commercial priorities and transient nature of a society built on trade and transactions, there was a numerical parity between Malaya men and women, and even more Eurasian women than men, and that had been the case since 1901.¹³⁸ Vlieland saw this as proof that the Eurasian community in Singapore was ‘essentially settled.’¹³⁹ He went even further, differentiating them from the Malay population by categorising some Malays from the Netherlands East Indies, the Indonesian archipelago, as ‘immigrants’, and claimed that ‘the

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 32.

¹³² Ibid, p. 45.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 45, p. 46.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 47.

¹³⁶ Nathan, *Census 1921*, p. 41.

¹³⁷ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 51.

¹³⁸ Marriott, *Census 1911*, p. 2.

¹³⁹ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 51.

case of the Eurasians is of special interest because, more than any other of the six main racial divisions, they form a settled and “isolated” community, relatively unaffected by migration.’¹⁴⁰ This was supported by his predecessor in his report on the 1921 census.¹⁴¹

The censuses showed that Eurasians usually married within their community, which was held to help maintain their own customs and traditions, and the growth of the Eurasian population in Singapore from 5451 people in 1921 to 6937 in 1931 was considered ‘the “natural increase” characteristic of a separate and distinct people.’¹⁴² The colonial authorities explicitly considered the 16.3% increase of the Eurasian population from 1901 to 1921 as ‘not caused by immigration.’¹⁴³ Vlieland found little evidence of intermarriage between any of the communities in the 1931 census, so the Eurasians were seen as a result not of a current mingling of races but of events in unknown times and places in the past. Wherever or whenever it happened, it was not, substantially, a phenomenon of the present or recent past in Singapore.

This portrayal of the Eurasians of interwar Singapore as a coherent community was supported by statistics from the 1931 census, with less than 10% of Singapore Eurasians born outside British Malaya, and less than 25% born outside Singapore.¹⁴⁴ This held true in the figures from the previous census where 4112 out of a total Eurasian population in Singapore of 5451 were born in Singapore and of the remaining 1339 over half were born elsewhere in British Malaya.¹⁴⁵ This indicated a small but settled community established over earlier generations, reaching back into 19th century Singapore. Additionally, over 40% of the Singapore Eurasians lived around Serangoon Road, close to the centre of Singapore Town,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 54.

¹⁴¹ Nathan, *Census 1921*, p. 54.

¹⁴² Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 74.

¹⁴³ Winstedt, R.O., ed., *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States* (London: Constable & Co., 1923), p. 76.

¹⁴⁴ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 216.

¹⁴⁵ Nathan, *Census 1921*, p. 221.

overlapping the area commonly known as Little India. However, as the name Little India suggests, it was never an exclusively Eurasian enclave; in 1931 the Eurasian population there was less than the Indian one and much smaller than the number of Chinese recorded as living in the district.¹⁴⁶

The statistics also indicate a young community; half of all Eurasians in Singapore were under the age of fifteen in 1931. The proportion under fifteen had been 42% and 40% in the 1901 and 1911 censuses.¹⁴⁷ It was also a religious community of a particular kind: the 1911 census recorded 99.7% of Eurasians as Christian.¹⁴⁸ The community also evinced, for the time, a conventional and ‘respectable’ attitude to domestic arrangements in the matrimonial sphere – half of Eurasians aged over fifteen were married while only one person under the age of fifteen was married.¹⁴⁹ Although not definitive evidence of child marriage being an unacceptable practice, it does point to it being extremely uncommon for Eurasians. Indeed, the 1931 census showed that most Eurasian men married after the age of twenty-five and most Eurasian women married after the age of twenty.¹⁵⁰ This also implies a community settled and secure enough in their future prospects to encourage marriage and children.

Although Eurasians never exceeded 2.2% of Singapore’s population, a proportion reached in 1832, 1871 and 1881, they still outnumbered the Europeans who had measured only 0.5% in 1832 and 2% in 1881.¹⁵¹ Eurasians arrived, settled and stayed. The 77% of Singapore Eurasians who in 1931 were born in Singapore, was twice the percentage of the Chinese and five times that of the Indian community born in the territory at the time of the census.¹⁵² Moreover, as noted before, and unlike other migrant groups, Eurasians were not primarily

¹⁴⁶ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁷ Marriott, *Census 1911*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Nathan, *Census 1921*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁹ Vlieland, *Census 1931*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Braga-Blake, ‘Eurasians in Singapore’, p. 13.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 14.

male. Marriages were made within a community which claimed, in the twentieth century, a very small number of Eurasians who were now the progeny of European and Asian parents.¹⁵³ This was the story the community told itself, acting out of a perceived self-interest and self-preservation: it was the kind of story that would be unthreatening to the racial order commanded by the white masters of Singapore.

It is clear that Eurasians were given a place in that racial order. This can be seen in the yearly reports published by the colonial secretariat ‘on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Straits Settlements’ together with the annual analyses of ‘Labour Wages and Cost of Living.’¹⁵⁴ For the latter, colonial society was divided into ‘Asiatics, Eurasians and Europeans’. Even changes in the prices of various items that were monitored were pressed into this racial format with the overall assessment of the percentage increase or decrease in the cost of living analysed for each community. Including all the various Asian nationalities under the heading, Asiatic, meant that approximately 98% of the population were included in one group with the remaining 2%, Eurasian and European, given groups of their own – a reflection of the racial hierarchy and prejudice that vitiated the colonial project. Nonetheless, it is significant, and indicative of their relative position to others, that Eurasian was one of the three categories into which colonial society was divided. It demonstrates the order of precedence in the imperial hierarchy, with Eurasians placed in-between Europeans and Asians, and outlines their relative circumstances during this enquiry.

Given the Eurasians incorporation into the second rung of an imperial racial order, the other Asian communities in Singapore tended to view them as people whom the colonialists saw as respected and favoured aides, people “trusted as part Europeans by the ruling

¹⁵³ Braga-Blake and Ebert-Oehlers, ‘Where The Twain Met’, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ CO 277/70-91 Straits Settlements Blue Books of Statistics, 1919-1939.

British.”¹⁵⁵ Certainly, Eurasian children were brought up to believe in the beneficence of the British Empire, and to jealously guard their position within the imperial hierarchy.¹⁵⁶ To a considerable extent, then, Eurasians were estranged from their fellow Asians and there is evidence they viewed them as threatening. As one Eurasian put it, long after the end of Empire: “They were very, very afraid of the Chinese because of their numerical superiority, and the industry and intelligence of the Chinese – very afraid – and they didn’t like the Malays at all. The white man was their ideal and their model.”¹⁵⁷ Yet despite this, the British continued to discriminate against them. In 1911, the winner of the Governor’s Cup for sharpshooting was disqualified by the Singapore Rifle Association because he was Eurasian.¹⁵⁸ Eurasians were barred from the senior ranks of the civil service, there was segregation on the railway, and they were denied entry to the ballroom of the Raffles Hotel.¹⁵⁹ Even by the end of the First World War, Eurasians were still largely excluded from the deliberative bodies and the social world of the colonialists. The whole question of military service and its function as an emblem of belonging to the citizenship of the Empire was of special concern to the Eurasians. After the mutiny of Indian troops stationed in Singapore in February 1915, leading Eurasians petitioned the authorities to form a Eurasian volunteer infantry company. The government instead encouraged Eurasians to support the European militia as ‘clerks, storekeepers, telephonists, signallers and engineers,’¹⁶⁰ the same second rank jobs they performed in civilian life. It was only after three and a half years of pressure that the “D” (Eurasian) Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps was created in 1918. Insofar as they were incorporated into the militia, it was in a segregated way.

¹⁵⁵ Jumabhoy, Rajabali, interview, Singapore, 15/07/1981, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁵⁶ De Cruz, Gerald, *Rojak Rebel: Memoirs of a Singapore Maverick* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1993), p. 12, p. 22.

¹⁵⁷ De Cruz, Gerald, Singapore, 23/08/1981.

¹⁵⁸ Jansen, *On Parade*, p. 77.

¹⁵⁹ Butcher, John G., *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 98.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, Valerie, ‘Belonging’, p. 106.

Eurasians inhabited a world where their identity and position, their in-betweenness, was defined for them. The term itself began as an imposition, an administrative clarification that enabled the colonial authorities to keep them at arm's length and to make them functional to the colonial order. They were allowed to serve as useful, and loyal, functionaries but only in those roles the British deemed appropriate to their status as bag-carriers for colonialism. This was the world in which the fledgling gestures towards a more decisive agency and the articulation of a specific Eurasian voice largely foundered in the 19th century and in the very early 20th century. It was really from the end of the First World War that the Eurasians of Singapore sought to assert their rights and identity. For it was the period between the wars, the focus of this study, which saw the substantial efforts and achievements that led to a Eurasian definition and appropriation of Eurasian-ness and an active participation by Eurasians as Eurasians in the social and political life of Singapore.

Chapter Two

1919 and Singapore's Eurasians

A hundred years ago there was no Eurasian in Singapore, nor until Raffles came any Europeans or Chinese. It was the generous policy of the founder of the settlement to make it free to all races, and from that freedom of residence has sprung the important section of the community sometimes called the Domiciled Community in India, the Burghers in Ceylon, which has this year decided to adopt in Singapore the name Eurasian for the fresh start made in organising and making itself felt.¹

This chapter will focus on a series of events, centred on the year 1919, and how they fed into the emergence of a Eurasian consciousness, a consciousness beginning to be shared within the community and one that separated this group from other groups, as they started to make an impression on the public sphere, not merely as notable individuals but as part of a recognised group. It will consider the entrance of Eurasians as Eurasians into the island's militia, local politics and the press, and the limits to what they achieved, both in terms of understanding themselves communally with an agreed identity, particularly in associational life, and in respect to the civic society of Singapore as a whole. Finally, it will set these within the wider context of world events, tracing their impact on Singapore's Eurasians as they navigated the crosscurrents of history.

The centenary of Sir Stamford Raffles' acquisition of Singapore for the East India Company was a significant moment for the island, and, as it came only a short time after the armistice ended the First World War, was one of extensive celebration and reflection. The seething, bustling port city was now considered worthy of a two-volume tome, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, 'compiling a history of a hundred years of varying civic, public, and

¹ Carlos, A.H., 'The Eurasians of Singapore', in *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being some account of the capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919, Volume 1*, ed. by Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke and Roland St. J. Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), p. 363.

social life of a number of communities such as Singapore contains'.² One of these communities was the apparently newly-named Eurasians, a title chosen by community itself, a symbol of its supposed rebirth.

The appropriation of 'Eurasian' for Eurasians was made by a Eurasian, A.H. Carlos, in his chapter, 'The Eurasians of Singapore', which appeared in the centenary publication. It was a historical account in which the author, Secretary of the Eurasian Literary Association (ELA), which was a forerunner of the Eurasian Association – more on both of these organisations shortly – was mounting a defence, presenting an argument to his imagined audience of mainly European readers, for Eurasians as a positive and respectable part of Singapore society: 'how great has been the influence in the development of the Colony of the Eurasian families.'³ However, even this celebratory chapter contained a hint of the pressures under which the community laboured, registered in a passing comment concerning a change of Eurasian surname from the Portuguese Pinto to the English Painter.⁴ On the wider implications of these – something that bore upon both the prejudices amongst Eurasians as well as the imperial order that shaped those prejudices through its placing of white Britons at a racial apex – Carlos was silent, too polite to challenge any racist assumptions of his audience. Instead, he drew a veil over questions of genealogy – 'The record of the Eurasian community is less easy to follow than that of some other sections...' – in favour of giving Eurasians values of which their imperial masters would approve. An early Eurasian arrival in Singapore was described as 'a man of means' and Eurasians were characterised as 'first-class', 'honest, steady and responsible.' Carlos promoted Eurasians as a loyal cadre: 'they

² Makepeace, Walter, Gilbert E. Brooke and Roland St. J. Braddell, 'Preface', in Makepeace et al (eds.), *One Hundred Years*, p. vii.

³ Carlos, 'The Eurasians of Singapore', in Makepeace et al (eds.), *One Hundred Years*, p. 368.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 365.

have played their part faithfully and well,' worthy of development and of a greater participation in colonial life.⁵

In this context, any reticence in the text can be understood as a quiet strategy designed to improve Eurasian prospects under British rule. Accordingly, Carlos eschewed etymological analysis and a detailed discussion of origins and constructed a vision of Eurasians as a group of model citizens, emphasising their allegiance to the imperial project and its associated values. It was a claim for a genuine attachment, meaningful and beneficent to both parties. This was apparent even when a critical note was introduced, concerning the exclusion of Eurasians from the military, for it was only in the denial of demonstrating loyalty through blood sacrifice that a dissenting Eurasian voice was heard, one more authentic and less concerned with the sensitivities of its audience. Carlos was acting as an advocate, arguing for the twin rewards of further patronage by the British and, as a consequence, greater community cohesion.

1919's significance for the Eurasians of Singapore begins with the publication of the periodical *Our Magazine* in January 1919, the 'Our' signalling something primarily addressed to the local Eurasian community, the first concerted effort of the century to make audible in print a local Eurasian voice. As it happened, *Our Magazine* only lasted for a year, though its content points to the consciousness and ideas of the most influential group within the Eurasian community. The journal was edited by a young Eurasian, Thomas Claude Archer, and appeared a month before the Centenary so its arrival broadly coincided with Carlos' 'fresh start'.⁶ It was the importance of 1919 in the chronology of Singapore, and as a world-historical moment, that fed into the Eurasian sense of it being an auspicious time for understanding their place in the imperial order. In *Our Magazine*'s mission statement, 'Our

⁵ Ibid, p. 363, p. 365, p. 369.

⁶ Ibid, p. 363.

Policy’, were three justifications for its appearance at this particular moment. One was the momentous end of the Great War, a war seen by Eurasians and the victorious Allies as a conflict won by the forces of civilisation and promising a new settlement of racial equality, national self-determination and international unity. This was not a sentiment universally shared across the British Empire in Asia as Indian nationalists found the conflict calling into question the Western notion of civilisation. Moreover, because – certainly in South Asia – it was rapidly followed by a dashing of hopes regarding civil and political rights even in 1919, it gave rise to civil disobedience campaigns. The second significance of 1919 for Eurasians, as announced in *Our Magazine*, was that it heralded the Singapore Centenary, the anniversary of a particular (somewhat fantasy-laden) liberal vision consistent with the new ideals forged by the years of war. Thirdly, Eurasians, the *Magazine* announced, had an urgent need to come together as a united community, looking forward, to best win their fair share of the fruits allegedly on offer. This would only happen through and by their social and political development, the stated aims of the periodical. In this construction, Eurasian identity is located in communal affairs, developed through a full participation in colonial society, and validated by its adherence to the new global outlook. In *Our Magazine*, Eurasians are placed at the centre of their own story, for the first time explicitly announced as agents of history.

The year 1919 has been increasingly identified by historians as a crucial moment in Asian history.⁷ It has been variously described as ‘a hinge in social time’,⁸ a ‘concatenation of political movements [and] radical planetary transformations’,⁹ ‘a centre point or node’,¹⁰ ‘a

⁷ Zachmann, Urs Matthias, ed., *Asia after Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-33* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Tooze, Adam, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2015); ‘Forum - Anti-colonialism in Asia: The Centenary of 1919’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (May) 2019.

⁸ Melzer, Mark, ‘The Correlation of Crises, 1918-20’, in Urs Matthias Zachmann, ed., *Asia after Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-33* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 23.

⁹ Chaturvedi, Vinayak, ‘Editorial Forward,’ *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (May) 2019, p. 255.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 255.

launching pad’,¹¹ ‘a historical inflection point’,¹² and ‘a critical moment in changing the world order’.¹³ For the Eurasians of Singapore, 1919 was an opportunity for a fresh start and for new arrangements, a moment to reset their internal relationships as a minority community and their unique position in the wider colonial society, especially with respect to their white imperial masters. The year would see the establishment of the Eurasian Association and, with the publication of a periodical, *Our Magazine*, primarily written by Eurasians for Eurasians, an authentic Eurasian voice can begin to be heard. The contributors usually hid behind pseudonyms, common practice in English-language magazines of the time, but those who did identify themselves were characteristically ones that had already or would go on to assume leadership roles for the community, the often self-appointed ‘elite’ within the group. Using this entry point, I plan to map the path taken by these Eurasians as they navigated the events and ideas that swirled around them, with the absences as significant as the inspirations and encounters specified.

Mark Melzer has outlined a series of seismic shocks from 1918 to 1920, ‘extraordinarily dense’¹⁴ events which shaped the interwar period. Export booms and busts, trade embargoes and dramatic price fluctuations were legacies of a global supply chain disrupted by the years of war and now, in the shock of peace, deflation followed inflation. In Asia, grain shortages in 1918 began with crops affected by a drought caused by the *El Niño* weather system, leading to rice shortages across the region in 1919. There was the global sweep of influenza as the pandemic crossed continents during 1918/19; India alone had at least six million fatalities, approaching a third of total world influenza deaths.¹⁵ Trade routes, paths of mobilisation and demobilisation, passed between all points of the British Empire in Asia,

¹¹ Manela, Erez, ‘Asia in the Global 1919: Reimagining Territory, Identity, and Solidarity’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (May) 2019, p. 409.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 416.

¹³ Ghosh, Durba, ‘Whither India? 1919 and the Aftermath of the First World War’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (May) 2019, p. 393.

¹⁴ Melzer, ‘The Correlation of Crises, 1918-20’, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

roads the pandemic also followed, from the Middle East to India through Burma to the entrepôt and urban centre of Singapore, and on to the plantations and mines of the mainland interior. The impact of the epidemic was calculated in the 1921 census for the region of which Singapore was part: ‘it is probable that the number of deaths due to influenza was not less than 40,000, or approximately 1 in 80 of the population.’¹⁶ Moreover, at this time, mass movements for political and social change took on a transnational global aspect, feeding off one another, with uprisings in Europe, the Middle East, and convulsing Korea, India and China. The prospect of national self-determination and racial equality first raised and then dashed by the Paris Peace Conference and the Versailles Treaty added to the tumult and demand for new arrangements. Every year, the Governor, or his representative, gave an address to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, outlining the impact of the year’s events, internal and external, upon the colony. The one delivered to the Legislative Council in October 1919 acknowledged the challenges faced over the course of the year, referencing rice shortages and anti-Japanese demonstrations: ‘The life of the Colony since the cessation of hostilities has been somewhat distorted. We have had to face very big problems as regards the question of food supply. We have had industrial trouble and civil disturbances I regret to say have occurred.’¹⁷ For Melzer, these were ‘transformative shocks [but also] ‘alarm’ shocks’¹⁸ as revolutionary actions provoked reactionary responses. Is it appropriate to place a Eurasian awakening as arising from and becoming part of this worldwide effluence or was it a case of temporal coincidence?

In the midst of this growing tumult, the centenary encouraged an examination of Singapore’s place within the imperial firmament, a process that entailed looking backwards

¹⁶ Nathan, J.E., *The Census of the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei* (London: Malayan Information Agency, 1922), p. 20.

¹⁷ ‘Address of His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Frederick Seton James, to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council on 6th October 1919’ in Robert L. Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 7: 1915-1921* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), p. 310.

¹⁸ Melzer, ‘The Correlation of Crises, 1918-20’, p. 25.

and looking forwards, with official celebrations and exhortations for a reinforcement and renewal of what were held to be Rafflesian liberal, enlightenment principles in its governance. The celebration of Raffles' anniversary in February 1919 was a well-planned, lavish affair with parades, speeches and a thanksgiving service at the Anglican Cathedral, St Andrew's, built by Indian convict labour in the previous century. The civic centrepiece was the rededication of the statue of Raffles, one which stills stands prominently in 21st century Singapore. The ceremony, as described in the official souvenir, *Singapore Centenary*, anticipated the remembrance ceremonies for Armistice Day that spread across the British Empire over subsequent years. Wreaths were laid at the base of the statue from organisations including the governing authorities, local schools, mercantile and legal groups, associations representing various Chinese, Malay and Indian interests: 'His Excellency and party then left, but before doing so, Sir Arthur Young turned to the statue and reverently saluted it. The National Anthem was played, the troops marched away and the huge crowd began to disperse, and His Excellency and party left for the thanksgiving service in the Cathedral.'¹⁹ But, although Eurasians were prominent as individuals in the planning and execution of the official remembrance, Eurasians as a community were conspicuous by their absence, especially in comparison to other ethnic groups who had organised parades, sponsored floats and gave speeches of thanks to their port city's founder. Indeed, David Pomfret sees the absence of an official Eurasian presence as a community at the centenary – something that suggested a certain marginality or invisibility of the community to the principal organisers – as a major reason why the Eurasian Association, their own ethnic organisation, was established at this time.²⁰

¹⁹ *Singapore Centenary 1819-1919: A Souvenir Volume* (Singapore: Kelly And Walsh Ltd., 1919), p. 61.

²⁰ Pomfret, David M., *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 266.

Evidence of the impact of the centenary upon the Eurasian elite can be found in the record of the centenary celebration held by the Eurasian Literary Association on the evening of 8 February 1919. Formed in April 1917, the ELA is considered to be a precursor of the Eurasian Association and its formation coincided with the first mootings of *Our Magazine*.²¹ The ELA was in many respects a Eurasian version of the Straits Philosophical Society and, similarly, it sponsored a series of lectures for the elevation of its members. Thus the *Straits Times* reported a discussion on ‘the Advent and Growth of the Eurasian’²² at the ELA in May 1918 where ‘The complex question of unity received attention and encouragement was given to better results in this direction’,²³ while it also noted a lecture by the Rev. Wm. Cross on ‘Ideals in Democracy’ later the same month.²⁴ The Eurasian Literary Association was ‘an association of eminence’²⁵ and its President, Edwin John Tessensohn, Justice of the Peace and Municipal Councillor, was a member of the committee appointed to organise the official centenary activities. (Tessensohn was chosen as the Eurasian for inclusion in a series of books, *Our Amazing Pioneers*, on significant figures of the past written for Singaporean children in 2023.²⁶) The Secretary of the ELA, A.H. Carlos, was an early sponsor and distributor of *Our Magazine*.²⁷

Our Magazine recorded the evening as ‘Footprints on the Sands of Time’, reflecting the emphasis of the ELA event itself. The meeting was attended by members and friends of the association: ‘There were a number of ladies present’ and the evening included musical interludes. Self-improvement was promoted with the Eurasian Literary Association’s evening classes for the practical, economic improvement of Eurasian men and women less fortunate

²¹ Cardoza, Francisca, and Jacinta Cardoza, ‘They Made Their Mark: Prominent Eurasians in Singapore’s History’, in Braga-Blake, Myrna, ed., *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 81.

²² *Straits Times*, 10 May 1918, p. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Straits Times*, 6 May 1918, p. 8.

²⁵ Cardoza, Francisca, and Jacinta Cardoza, ‘They Made Their Mark’, p. 81.

²⁶ Seah, Shawn, *Edwin Tessensohn: Leader of the Eurasian Community* (Singapore: W.S. Education, 2023).

²⁷ Subscriptions slip in *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919.

than the esteemed members of the ELA, with lessons on shorthand, book-keeping and typewriting, now renamed as the 'E.L.A. Raffles Centenary Night-Classes.' But the main event, the main part of the article, was the address by the Hon. Secretary, A.H. Carlos. In his speech, Carlos gave a retrospective account of the Eurasians in Singapore: successful families and individuals were named and achievements were listed, including early, short-lived, attempts at a Eurasian newspaper, and it was largely the same recitation of notable Eurasian achievements and individuals that formed the bulk of his contribution to *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. A significant difference was that Carlos used the occasion to discredit one of the many myths about miscegenation held against Eurasian advancement: the idea that sexual contact between races resulted in genetic decline, mental, physical and spiritual, leading to indolence and infertility. It was Carlos the Eurasian, quiet and composed, no longer addressing a white audience: 'Sometimes it had been said that Eurasian families died out after the third or fourth generation. There were many names in Singapore which proved the contrary.' And, to the cheers of his audience, he praised *Our Magazine* for being a fresh start.²⁸

The appearance of *Our Magazine* predated Raffles' anniversary by one month and the first edition was very conscious of its proximity to the centenary and invoked his spirit, keeping itself, and its purported readership, firmly attached to the imperial bosom. Volume One, Number One of *Our Magazine* was sold in January 1919 at a price of 50 cents. It began with the declaration, 'Our Policy', an unsigned editorial that presumably was the work of its editor, Archer, and was a statement of intent on the magazine's behalf. *Our Magazine* predicted a better future, one which included Eurasians: 'The war, in the main, has swept cant and hypocrisy aside and opened a wider and more democratic door.'²⁹ It shared Carlos'

²⁸ 'Footprints on the Sands of Time', *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1919, p. 37.

²⁹ *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1919, p. 3.

reluctance to define Eurasians in racial terms, ‘whatever the term “Eurasian” may imply’,³⁰ and promoted an idea of Eurasian-ness based on communal activity and behaviour, on compassion, fellow-feeling and unity.

The reference to war was not coincidental. It spoke of the Allies as being ‘on the side of those who denied the existence of supermen and inferiors.’³¹ And in keeping with so many Eurasians’ pro-imperial stance, in *Our Magazine*’s loyal view, Britannia still ruled the waves and if any one thing had won the war, it was not the United States’ entry but the Royal Navy’s blockade of Axis ports: ‘We stood by our ideals at a time America was neutral. And we made sacrifices at a time America was making millions of dollars out of the war.’³² Clearly, the *Magazine* saw the war as an ordeal during which Eurasians stood side by side with the British Empire.

This was emphasised by its response to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, which it celebrated with a dove of peace on its cover and with photographs of Singapore’s official Peace Celebration Night. Nevertheless, its editorial at this time, ‘Peace and the Future’, looked forward with hope and trepidation in much the way that British policy-makers did, complete with the ideology of victory: ‘A new era it assuredly is with its great principles, its mighty experiments, and its tremendous problems.’ But – also – with a keen sense of the challenges to the Empire. Surveying a panorama of events across the globe, *Our Magazine* identified the dangers posed by ‘the social problems’ of the working class, ‘the awful curse of Bolshevism’ and a defeated Germany plotting subversion ‘by revolution, by secret treaties and insidious propaganda.’ Countering these was a renewed British Imperialism: ‘War purified the soul of the Empire’. Fighting alongside one another, men of Great Britain and the Dominions, it held, had discovered a shared sense of duty: ‘New

³⁰ *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1919, p. 135.

³¹ Ouidee, ‘Race Prejudice’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 13.

³² ‘Editorial – President Wilson’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1919, p. 111.

emotions, new ideals, new ambitions have been born and a place has to be found for them in the social, economic and political life of the Empire.’³³ There is a sense, then, in which *Our Magazine* placed Eurasians in an imperial citizenry of the metropole and the Dominions, and these were identified as forming the ‘civilised’ part of the imperial community. India, jewel of the imperial crown, was not included, and there were Africans referred to as ‘naked savages.’³⁴ A limit of inclusiveness had been reached and *Our Magazine* reiterated its belief in the worldwide equality of the ‘civilised.’

The challenge of securing lasting peace and freedom was, it feared, beyond a nascent League of Nations which, though based on ‘the greatest of all ideals which ever inspired mankind’, was far from established and, in reality, ‘this charter of redemption from war remains a glittering ideal.’ The stakes were too great to ‘barter away the peace of the world and the security of the British Empire for sentiment.’ The internal logic of ‘Peace and the Future’, its understanding of the world as it was rather than as it should be, was that for Eurasians their best chance was to keep in with the British, accept their colonial dominion but strive for inclusion in an imperial citizenry. Hence, their blood sacrifice through military participation in the Empire’s war was viewed as an essential demonstration of Eurasian loyalty and value. Only through an embrace of Western and imperial norms, could the Eurasians be assured of their future, a future which lay within the British Empire, and which – it was insisted – they possessed all the attributes for civic, cultural and even racial inclusion: ‘the fact remains that there are the binding ties of a common race, a common faith, a common law, a common ideal of liberty, and last but not least a common language.’³⁵

The magazine was ‘first and foremost’ a magazine for Eurasians and assumed the support of the community. The editorial stated that the local daily newspapers available to Eurasians

³³ ‘Editorial – Peace and the Future’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 6 & 7, June/July 1919, p. 190.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

were not written for them: the *Straits Times* and the *Singapore Free Press* were largely written for Europeans, the *Malaya Tribune* had a mixed ownership and audience; it dubbed these ‘cosmopolitan mediums’ and *Our Magazine* believed Eurasians needed their own journal to discuss their ‘peculiar position... [resulting from] a combination of conditions over which they have had no control.’ It located Eurasians within and yet apart from the wider cosmopolitan community of English-speakers in Singapore, with a special and unique place imposed upon them, and now sought to create a space within that space, *Our Magazine*, where their specific concerns could be addressed, argued over and, hopefully, resolved. It is worth noting the contrast between the idea of Eurasians having no control over their circumstances, which implied they were blameless and had no meaningful agency, with the stated purpose of the magazine to create agency and a forum for debate, to bring to ‘a satisfactory conclusion’ issues which had prevented the community’s advancement over the preceding years. The opening salvo of *Our Magazine*, ‘Our Policy’, acknowledged the importance of uniting a community that was currently divided. There was ‘no more pressing need’ and it was essential for the name ‘Eurasian’ to be respected and not despised. *Our Magazine* exhorted its readers to accept their Eurasian selves and work together: ‘Then there is certain to follow a general uplifting of the race.’³⁶

Repeated calls for unity betrayed fears that disunity would inhibit progress and implied that disunity within the community had been the norm until now. Divisions within, and without the community, were laid out in a series of articles and editorials which admitted to ‘sets and cliques.’ One was entitled ‘The Submerged Tenth’, an inversion of the term, the Upper Ten, used by the Eurasian elite for themselves. The writer, one of the Upper Ten, described a community divided between two constructed types of Eurasians, ‘western’ and ‘no longer western’, where the Upper Ten maintained a show of European superiority and an

³⁶ ‘Our Policy’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 1, p. 2.

air of exclusivity while looking down on the rest. The Submerged Tenth were blamed for their own inferiority and for tainting the entire community: ‘Because of them we were despised. Because of them we loathed the very term “Eurasian.”’ Now, in the new age ushered in by war’s end, it was the responsibility of ‘the better class’ to assist less privileged Eurasians in a spirit of fellowship.³⁷

‘Our Policy’ had asserted that 1919 was an auspicious time for the magazine, with its emphasis upon Eurasian unity, to appear: the end of war ‘has brought together in a common cause men of all races and creeds,’ a new atmosphere – what the writer calls a ‘sentiment’ – formed in the crucible of a war in which ‘Eurasians have played their part in the struggle’ and now the shared sacrifices of recent years would be acknowledged and rewarded.³⁸ This was forward looking, the promise of a colour-blind future and of solidarity between peoples, but *Our Magazine* also located this promise in the imperial past and saw itself as a fitting tribute to Raffles and a continuation of the principles behind the founding of his settlement. It placed Singapore, Raffles and Eurasians within a tradition of ‘civil liberty [...] full rights and privileges’ for all.³⁹ The editorial saw this as what a true Rafflesian vision should represent – a reality yet to be made concrete. Clearly, what it was arguing for was inclusion in an imperial community of equals, a benevolent and paternalistic version of imperialism, a claim it made on behalf of the entire Eurasian community. It is also possible to see this utopian vision of renewal and reward as part of the ‘Wilsonian Moment’ of 1919, a vision of national and personal self-determination far beyond what the US President had intended, but one embraced by Asians living under foreign control, before it came crashing down to earth, undermined by colonial repression and the maintenance of racial supremacy across empires.⁴⁰

³⁷ ‘The Submerged Tenth’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1919, p. 1, p. 2, p. 4.

³⁸ ‘Our Policy’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Manela, Erez, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

It was a partial vision of equality and, unsurprisingly, race would preoccupy other contributors to *Our Magazine*.

The polemic finished with a reiteration of the magazine's primary purpose: 'our main object is, frankly, to support and encourage the social and political development of Eurasians.' In this, it did not want to exclude or alienate those it called Europeans and Asiatics but hoped to enlist their support. Once again this was couched in a universalist, liberal language which harked back to founding principles supposedly espoused by Raffles and looked forward to a new world order of things where all 'will be treated in an impartial and just spirit.' The magazine's central purpose and declared focus was repeated together with its belief, shared by all similarly enlightened members of the community, in 'the uplifting of a people who it is thought have been too prone to look indolently on and grumble at their fate.' As subsequent articles made clear, the Eurasian community was split, 'weakened by sects and divisions.' It urged unity and for 'petty differences' to be overcome for 'a general uplifting of the race.'⁴¹

In the space of two paragraphs, the reader was moved from the betterment of a people to the advancement of a race, and Eurasians are turned, without definition or clarification, from just a community into something more significant and more abstract, a race. Looking at the mixture of Malay, Thai, Burmese, Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, British, Dutch, German, Danish, Irish, the list goes on, all they had in common in their categorisation – one might say their racialisation – by their imperial rulers was a shared mixedness, rather than a shared ethnicity. Yet this, the self-definition of Eurasians as a race in *Our Magazine* was consistent with the powerful influence of race theory across the British Empire at that time, if not the world. Racial classification was used for categorisation and discrimination, and was a widely-accepted mode of thought. Here we see its power and pervasiveness as the language of race

⁴¹ 'Our Policy', *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 2.

was adopted by the spokesmen for a racially-oppressed group. It was as if, while wishing to assert themselves, and improve their position within the racial order of Western imperialism, that racial framework was itself adopted.

If some of what appeared in *Our Magazine* appeared to conform to some degree with the overriding racial emphases of imperial ideology, we should not lose sight of its focus upon issues that bespoke an attempt to remove discrimination against Eurasians. This can be seen in particular in its focus on the issue of military service. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Eurasians were barred from serving for the local defence force on racist grounds and this had continued into the war years despite attempts by various Eurasian luminaries to change the government's mind. Representations were made throughout the war and even the February 1915 mutiny of Indian troops in Singapore, which exposed the unpreparedness of the authorities, did not prompt a change to the government's position. In May 1915, Edwin Tessensohn proposed the formation of a Eurasian company, the local press were supportive, and he was granted a meeting with Lieutenant-Colonel Owen of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps. However, Owen only offered Eurasians auxiliary support roles in the army, such as acting as clerks and telephonists. The outrage that followed this rebuff culminated in a mass meeting of Eurasians at St. Andrew's School Hall in March 1918, and the Governor was petitioned again for a Eurasian volunteer corps. This proved positive and in July 1918 one hundred Eurasian men were sworn in. Eurasians had demonstrated to themselves the potential of a mass organisation and confirmed it with a successful outcome. In the centenary anthology, A.H. Carlos was sure of its importance: 'The meeting marked a day unique in the history of Eurasians in Singapore. Never before had the Community banded itself together for the cause of raising its status.'⁴²

⁴² Carlos, A.H., 'Eurasian Volunteers', in Walter Makepeace et al (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, p. 394.

Carlos chose not to outline the discriminatory reasons behind the earlier disbandment of the Eurasian element in the local militia, the Singapore Volunteer Corps, at the end of the 19th century – ‘Why and how this happened need not be gone into’ – and was no more direct when he addressed recent events. The Government’s initial gesture of offering only administrative and supporting roles to Eurasians was a pointed insult redolent perhaps of racist notions of the supposed effeminacy and weakness of Eurasians but certainly emblematic of the second class imperial citizenship of this Singapore group. He declined to find any racial prejudice in the proposal and focused rather on the fact that Eurasians were unwilling to do in the army the same work they did in their employment: ‘It is hardly surprising to learn that these proposals were rejected.’ This response to military discrimination was conceived by Carlos as something that prompted a new Eurasian unity and activism. At the meeting in March 1918, of over 200 Eurasians, ‘the different classes, which had for nearly half a century kept each other at arm’s length, dropped all the differences which had tended to keep them divided.’⁴³

The importance of military service to Eurasians was suggested by the first issue of *Our Magazine* which reproduced a piece from the *Times of India*, ‘Eurasian Soldiers: Some Famous Adventurers Of Old’. It described the ‘great gallantry’ shown by Anglo-Indian (i.e. Eurasian) soldiers in ‘the turbulent times preceding the establishment of the Pax Britannica throughout India’ and ‘The historical aspect of the fitness for military service of members of the domiciled community.’ To support its view of the suitability of Eurasians for imperial military service, the exploits of their soldiering under the Marathas and the East India Company were listed, including those of the notable commander, James Skinner, Sikander Sahib of Skinner’s Horse fame.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid, p. 392, p. 393, p. 394.

⁴⁴ ‘Eurasian Soldiers: Some Famous Adventurers of Old’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 28.

In fact, Anglo-Indians appeared in *Our Magazine* always in the context of martial heroism. The May 1919 edition reprinted a piece from an Anglo-Indian periodical which celebrated the return of Anglo-Indian troops after fighting in Mesopotamia. It consisted mostly of speeches given in honour of their arrival in Bombay which described the troops' conduct as uniformly heroic and without reproach, in contrast to the historic mistrust and maltreatment shown them by the British. The signature speech was made by Lieut.-Col. H.A.J. Gidney, President of the Bombay Branch of the Anglo-Indian Empire League. He made the case for 'Anglo-Indians as a valuable military asset to the King's Forces in the British Dominions' and how they had been repeatedly spurned despite the 'undying fame of gallant deeds performed [...] when the Anglo-Indian fought shoulder to shoulder with the Britisher.' Prohibition on military service was, according to Gidney, the worst of the 'many vicissitudes and trials' suffered by Anglo-Indians, something that was their birthright: 'are we not sons of Britishers, and, as such, have we not every right to defend our country and serve our King?' He hoped the sacrifices made by the soldiers in Mesopotamia would end any further argument: 'We have proved beyond doubt that we are worthy sons of a great Empire; that in our hands the honour and the glory of the army and country can be safely placed.'⁴⁵ Clearly, *Our Magazine* was linking Eurasians in India and Singapore through their shared experience of the recalcitrance of colonial authorities towards Eurasian participation in military service.

In another issue, the *Magazine* reproduced a further article of Anglo-Indian origin called 'The Eurasian Heritage.' This rehearsed the same arguments as Gidney: 'the cause of England has ever been the cause of her Anglo-Indian sons', with stories of Anglo-Indians fighting alongside Sir Robert Clive, while noting their subsequent exclusion from East India Company armies. Anglo-Indians were located alongside the British in the Black Hole of

⁴⁵ 'Anglo-Indian Battery', *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1919, p. 185.

Calcutta, the massacre at Patna, the Sepoy Mutiny, and the Great War, living and dying for the cause, but met with rejections: “O England! Who are these, if not thy sons?” Here was the desire to have the community incorporated, as it were, into the body of those who enjoyed full rights of imperial citizenship.⁴⁶ In fact, it was specifically the colonial denial of the opportunity to demonstrate martial loyalty and blood sacrifice during war that galvanised the Eurasians of Singapore in 1918 to demand representation in the military. As shown, their successful movement for this was an important precursor to the events of 1919, a lesson that taught them what could be achieved through combining in a single voice. And the most concerted move in that direction occurred in mid-1919 with the formation of the Eurasian Association.

The Eurasian Association was born in June 1919. It was called into being with a notice from Edwin Tessensohn (the most prominent Eurasian of the time in Singapore, patron of the Eurasian Literary Association and president of the Singapore Recreation Club) advertising a meeting at 8.30pm, Thursday June 5th at St Andrew’s School Hall,⁴⁷ the same venue that hosted the one about the volunteers the year before. It was published in the *Straits Times*, the establishment paper, proof that Tessensohn and his colleagues were seeking a respectable place in colonial society for their new organisation. Reports of the event were published immediately: according to the *Tribune* over 120 people were present, an association was established, its objectives agreed and officers duly elected. Thomas Archer, editor of *Our Magazine* and a newly elected committee member, proposed the motion “That the Association be called the Eurasian Association” which was reported as being unanimously carried.⁴⁸ Tessensohn was elected President with the manifesto: “Unity is strength.” Another speaker, committee member C.A. da Silva, outlined the challenges facing Eurasians, “a

⁴⁶ ‘The Eurasian Heritage’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 6 & 7, June/July 1919, p. 227.

⁴⁷ *Straits Times*, 2 June 1919, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Malaya Tribune*, 6 June 1919, p. 5.

community which was ill judged and often slighted,” and reminded his audience that, as well as facing external pressures, prejudice within the community must be addressed.⁴⁹ Committee member, J.C. Pestana, saw the Montagu Chelmsford proposals regarding constitutional change as “great reforms in India [that] are going to take place after the peace” and the new association could facilitate Eurasian views when those reforms reached Singapore. (Interestingly, he had no comment on the fact Indian nationalists found the reforms insufficient.) He blamed the current lack of Eurasian representation in Singapore’s positions of authority and responsibility, even in comparison to that enjoyed by Chinese and Malays, on “ourselves”. Vice-President Dr. Noel Clarke agreed: “There is no doubt that Eurasians have to work out their own salvation.” At present, there was “a gross indifference in our ranks,” which – to his mind – required Eurasians to be “moderate in our demands”: Eurasian representation on the Straits Settlements Legislative Council should be postponed, he argued, until the community was ready.⁵⁰

One report in the *Malaya Tribune*, ‘An Enthusiastic Meeting,’ listed the attendees, all men (there is nothing in any of the press accounts to suggest any women were present), and included more from the speeches by Tessensohn and da Silva. Tessensohn told his audience that “we have at last realised the necessity of being united” and advertised the elite’s leadership credentials: “like me there are several prominent men who have your interests at heart.” Da Silva placed the Eurasian Association within the orbit of the war’s end and the Singapore centenary: “Let this same year be such that future generations will look back with pride and say in that year our fathers saw right to stand by one another for time and

⁴⁹ *Singapore Free Press*, 6 June 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

evermore.” The *Tribune* noted, however, some discussion around the use of the term ‘Eurasian’, something that took on a greater prominence in the press over the coming days.⁵¹

The *Straits Times* welcomed the Eurasian Association as ‘A Sign of Progress’ but, in keeping with its thoroughly colonial ethos, disagreed with da Silva’s depiction of Eurasians as ‘slighted and belittled’, seeing this view as expressing Eurasian paranoia and touchiness. The *Times* also disparaged some Eurasians for their alleged tendency to show off when Europeans were present and ‘loudly talk of swans when geese or even ducks are meant.’ While not quite damning with faint praise, the newspaper noted that the emergence of the Association ‘may yet prove not the least of the events of this centenary year’, and it expressed its support in words which perpetuated a culture of paternalism and prejudice: Eurasians needed to know, and remember, their place in the imperial hierarchy. It praised the community for being ‘patient’, ‘well-behaved’ and ‘industrious’ but warned that it had to improve on its behaviour ‘to effect any useful purpose.’ The *Times* considered unseemly and inappropriate the arguments over the term Eurasian since this was the official descriptor and the correct choice of name.⁵² The *Singapore Free Press*, meanwhile, approved of the new association with its emphasis on unity and believed changes in outlook caused by the war meant such an organisation now had a greater chance of success than at any previous time.⁵³ It condemned prejudice against Eurasians but did not challenge the racist premise or the framework that sustained it – and, similar to the *Times*, blamed Eurasians for their own predicament:

The admixture in time should produce a community of a reliable kind. The evil is not so much in the actual fact of the mixing in the past, as in the tendency, which has been too common, of the

⁵¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 7 June 1919, p. 5.

⁵² *Straits Times*, 9 June 1919, p. 10.

⁵³ *Singapore Free Press*, 9 June 1919, p. 10.

members of the Community to accept without question a position of inferiority.⁵⁴

However, the Asian-owned *Malaya Tribune* in its editorial of June 10th implicitly rejected this blaming of Eurasians for their status and warned against seeing it as due to ‘their own lack of interest in their own welfare, their own jealousies and narrow-mindedness’. Instead, it argued, Eurasians ‘have not been accorded the treatment they should have been given’ and reminded its readers of the time when Eurasians were not allowed to volunteer for military service and how they were insulted with the offer of serving as military clerks:

It is not so much the indifference within the community as the indifference outside it that makes it of importance that there should be an Association to further their interests. The entire community is hampered with a lack of wealth. There is nothing more difficult than to preserve a high moral and social standard when there is poverty.

The article placed the Association within the worldwide demand for freedom and for democracy, a consequence of the war years. Previously, there were ‘hundreds of years of tradition and conservatism...[and a] reluctance to depart from the old established order.’ But the war had had a transformative effect on the people of the world who realised that ‘they were as important in the country as the elect’. The emergence of the EA was ‘a sign of the times.’⁵⁵

The founding of the Eurasian Association has been seen through both ends of a telescope. It has been portrayed as evidence of Eurasians as a participatory presence in an emergent civil society, formed at a time of optimism for the community and designed to strengthen their roots in Singapore and their commitment to the colony.⁵⁶ Alternatively, the creation of the Association has been used as proof of a hardening of racial divisions and ‘a clear indication of its community’s lack of faith in the colonial government to administer to all

⁵⁴ *Singapore Free Press*, 10 June 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 10 June 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Gillis, Dr E. Kay, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005), p. 69.

racial groups fairly and equally.’⁵⁷ Interestingly, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* – a work commissioned by the Eurasian Association in 1992, and updated in 2016, and very close to an ‘official’ history of the community – as well as the website of the Association, record objectives from the original 1919 constitution which appear sufficiently ambiguous to support both views. Those 1919 objectives as they appear on the website and in the official history are stated thus:

- a. To promote the political, economic, social, moral, physical and intellectual advancement of all Eurasian-British subjects.
- b. To promote among its members an active interest in the affairs of Malaya.
- c. Generally to look after the interests of all Eurasian-British subjects.⁵⁸

However, *Singapore Eurasians* acknowledged the lack of original Eurasian Association sources from the time, and it is believed that their records were lost during the Second World War.⁵⁹ In fact, the founding objectives were recorded differently at the time. The contemporary reports from the *Malaya Tribune*, the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Straits Times* list five objectives:-

- a. To promote among the members an active interest in the affairs of the British Empire and to maintain their loyalty as subjects of the King.
- b. To promote the political, social, moral and intellectual advancement of all Eurasian British subjects.
- c. To communicate with the Government of the Straits Settlements on behalf of Eurasian British on all questions affecting the rights, interests, and privileges of Eurasian British subjects.
- d. To encourage higher and technical education in some practical way as well as to provide for the education of the children of Eurasian British subjects.
- e. To afford the Eurasian British subjects, who may require it, the assistance of the Association in any other country.⁶⁰

The objectives point to a community concerned with self-help and self-improvement, one seeking increased opportunities in social and political spheres, in education and employment,

⁵⁷ Barth, Valerie, ‘Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations’, in Braga-Blake, Myrna, ed., *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 100.

⁵⁸ Ibid; <https://www.eurasians.sg/our-history>.

⁵⁹ Personal conversation with Dr. Alexius A. Pereira, President of the Eurasian Association, Singapore, 25 January 2022.

⁶⁰ *Singapore Free Press*, 6 June 1919, p.4; *Malaya Tribune*, 7 June 1919, p. 5; *Straits Times*, 9 June 1919, p. 8.

and one keen to demonstrate their commitment to King and Empire. There is the appearance of loyalty – reassuring to the established power – and, over the course of the interwar period, as will be seen, the Eurasian Association did not routinely express any ‘lack of faith’ in the colonial government. The Association was instituted, then, for the purpose of promoting, maintaining, improving, and securing the interests of the Eurasian population through a unified voice *within* a colonial order. It was concerned with making a contribution to civil society and being allowed to make one, and sought recognition for contributions already made. The use of the term ‘Eurasian British’ denoted a legitimate presence in colonial society while hinting at insecurities over naming and their place in the imperial pecking order.

In short, the Eurasian Association had given itself objectives to produce loyal, useful subjects, educated to participate at all levels of society, to obtain meaningful employment, and gain the opportunity to achieve all this, while also protecting whatever ‘privileges’ the community had already accrued. They identified four areas requiring intervention and improvement – political, social, moral and intellectual – terms generous enough to allow, potentially, intervention in all aspects of communal life, and in keeping with their focus on self-help, unity and personal responsibility. The Association promised a dialogue with government, a conduit through which Eurasians could request the tools and the chance to do things for themselves. The economic realities of Eurasian life, the poverty in the community underlined by the *Malaya Tribune*, was addressed only by implication with a ‘practical’ policy on education, stressing technical as well as higher education, similar to the evening classes hosted by the Eurasian Literary Association.

With regard to the Association’s stance on political rights, it will be recalled that Clarke, then its Vice President, argued against demanding an immediate Eurasian seat on the Legislative Council. In his view the community was too immature and not ready for representation in government. This broadly reflected the imperial perspective of the Anglo-

centric newspapers, the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Straits Times*. Meanwhile, Pestana – a member of the governing committee of the Association – saw Eurasians as future benefactors of the limited reforms towards greater local representation in the governing of India, and seemed to offer his audience this as a path towards political progress, one seemingly closed off by the comments of the Vice-President. But even this fell short of the promise of the Eurasian Association as construed by the Asian-owned *Malaya Tribune* which, as noted, saw the creation of the Association as part of the global push for democracy and emancipation at war's end.

Being Eurasian: Self-Understandings in 1919

In order to gauge what Eurasians thought and how they understood what it meant to be Eurasian at this critical point in their history, I will examine the way they expressed and saw their Eurasian-ness, their place in the world, and their relation to the events of the time. As well as in their own journal, *Our Magazine*, these debates were reported and discussed in the pages of the local English-language press of the time. Undoubtedly, these Eurasian voices come from a newspaper-reading, educated and articulate 'elite' who, in many cases, hid behind pseudonyms. Consequently, it is not possible to identify whether different conceptions of Eurasian-ness were held by any particular class or sub-ethnicity within the group. Singapore had a morning paper, the *Singapore Free Press*, and an afternoon one, the *Straits Times*, both founded in the 19th century and well established by 1919 with a readership extending beyond Singapore and into the Malayan hinterland.⁶¹ In 1914, they were joined by a third newspaper, the *Malaya Tribune*. Unlike the pro-British bias of the *Straits Times* and the *Singapore Free Press*, the *Malaya Tribune* aimed to 'express the views and aspirations of the domiciled communities' and was hailed as 'the people's paper' and the 'voice of the

⁶¹ Turnbull, C.M., *A History of Modern Singapore 1819-2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), p. 59.

Asiatics'.⁶² This notion of 'domiciled communities' implicitly included the Eurasians and the paper was far more sympathetic to them than the newspapers that represented, above all, a colonial viewpoint. Unlike its two rivals, the *Tribune* was mainly staffed by Asians and was founded by the colony's pre-eminent philanthropist, Lim Boon Keng, together with other rich Straits Chinese and Indians, one Jew and one Eurasian.⁶³ Interestingly, Lim Boon Keng also owned a monthly magazine, the *Eastern Illustrated Review*. Aimed at the educated English-speaking Straits Chinese, it appeared at the same time as *Our Magazine*, sharing the same context of a communal mobilisation in print, and it shared many of the same concerns with articles on Raffles and the centenary, reforms in India, war and peace.⁶⁴ However, it diverged from *Our Magazine* in its detailed and thoughtful coverage of the May Fourth movement in China and Singapore.⁶⁵

A crucial source for my purposes is *Our Magazine* which made many contributions to the burgeoning sense of Eurasian-ness expressed by the Eurasian Association's appearance at this time. Questions relating to the Eurasian place in society, on discrimination, communal organisation, and commentaries on the wider world, appeared in a magazine that was a complementary voice alongside those of the Association and the Eurasian Literary Association. Taken together, they form an outline of how high-profile and leading (male) Eurasians understood themselves – as individuals and as a community – and their place in the world. The principle of unity amongst a differentiated community, central to the Association, and the reality of living in a society that was racist and hierarchical, and finding a path between one and the other, were concerns repeatedly addressed in *Our Magazine*. But words

⁶² Quoted in Frost, Mark Ravinder, and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2009), p. 200.

⁶³ Frost, *Singapore*, p. 200.

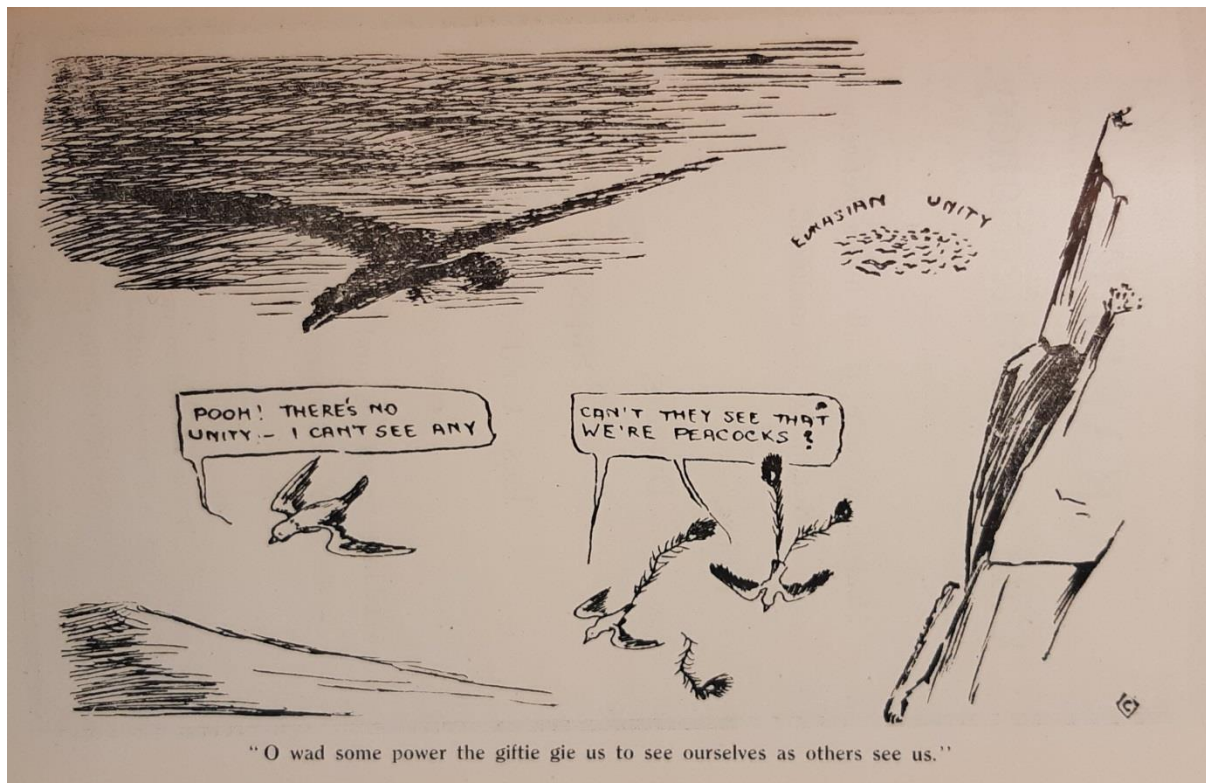
⁶⁴ 'Sir Stamford Raffles: A Centenary Appreciation', *Eastern Illustrated Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1919; 'Victory and Peace', *Eastern Illustrated Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4, July 1919; 'Indian Reforms – Criticisms Criticised', *Eastern Illustrated Review*, Vol. 2, No. 5, August 1919.

⁶⁵ 'The Japanese Boycott', *Eastern Illustrated Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3, June 1919; 'Why The Chinese Delegates Refused To Sign The Peace Treaty', *Eastern Illustrated Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4, July 1919.

alone were not enough, and could be more exhortation than resolution, as will be seen by the controversy in the Association and local press over one word, Eurasian. *Our Magazine* reflected tensions between what was and what should have been, and arguments over fundamental issues concerning why Eurasians were in the position they were in, who was responsible for this, what could change their status, and how this would be achieved. There were too many questions and they precluded a single answer or position that all could unite upon.

The confusion and lack of clarity was illustrated by the cartoon (reproduced here) in *Our Magazine* in 1919. What the cartoon was trying to depict was not obvious nor was its language: “O wad some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us.” This was from a poem by Robert Burns, ‘To A Louse’, and given that an earlier editorial criticised the community for its lack of education, one wonders who would have recognised the quote or understood the dialect, and its use, more likely, was a case of Archer and his cohort talking amongst themselves. The subjects of the cartoon, portrayed as birds, are Eurasians uninterested in unity. Some were pretending to be what they were not, plain birds holding peacock feathers in a vain attempt to pass as peacocks, like Eurasians who try to pass as white. One bird was blind to a distant flock of birds called Eurasian Unity and to a bird of prey waiting to pounce. Who the bird of prey was is not spelled out but was likely a representation of the racial prejudice in colonial life. The cartoon was concerned with how disunity appears from the outside and how ludicrous, isolating and dangerous it was especially when security and unity was there if only they would grasp it.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Cartoon, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 6 & 7, June/July 1919, p. 213.



Archer used editorials to raise what *Our Magazine* considered were other problems in the community – that is, class snobbery and insufficient schooling, problems he held the community as equally or more responsible for than any outside agents, and ones which the community could resolve. These were more critiques rather than the crude stereotypes used by the British that portrayed Eurasians as indolent and divided. The editorial, ‘The Submerged Tenth’, referred to an unsophisticated class of Eurasians ‘whose only tie to-day with anything Western is their name’ and exposed a division imposed on poorer Eurasians by ‘Western Eurasians’, in emulation of upper class whites, and similar to the hierarchies existing in ‘every social community at one stage or another.’ But this divided Eurasians and prevented those less advantaged Eurasians from improving their precarious existence. Such snobbery still existed in England but ‘The war, in the main, has swept cant and hypocrisy aside and opened a wider and more democratic door.’ This was instigated by trade unions and social reformers who understood that there could be no moral or intellectual advancement until people were freed from their hand-to-mouth existence. Although *Our Magazine* argued

against confrontational tactics, it believed Eurasians should learn from what had been achieved and help their own lower classes to rise ‘by extending a friendly hand to this section of the community.’ These Eurasians were deemed part of the deserving poor due to ‘signs of a mental and moral awakening on the part of members of this class.’ The editorial finished on a characteristic note:

We Eurasians have to work together. Ours is a hard, up-hill fight and the issues are grave. But we need never despair of winning in the end, if only we sink our petty feelings and stand together as one man on the question of unity which affects the whole community.⁶⁷

An editorial on ‘Eurasians and Education’ criticised the Eurasian Literary Association for passing the motion ‘Eurasians are making the most of what education is on offer’ when only eight Eurasians had qualified from the Singapore medical school in ten years. The stakes were high: ‘No race or nation has been great that denied itself, or was denied, the benefits of a sound education.’ The editorial bemoaned the lack of facilities in the region, including no University, but felt that Eurasians left school too early, seduced by ‘the flesh pots of Egypt in the form of money, cigarettes and freedom.’ Parents should encourage their sons to remain in education (daughters were not mentioned) as a parental and communal duty: ‘The longer they permit and encourage the boy to remain at school the further do they contribute to his power eventually as an economic force, and in assisting the individual they are serving the race.’⁶⁸

In its opening editorial, *Our Magazine* considered the term ‘Eurasian’ and its author classed himself both idealistic and realistic. Idealistic in the wish for racially-charged epithets like ‘Eurasian’ to become irrelevant; and realistic in accepting the term for what it was: it was within the power of Eurasians to determine whether the term, and those it represented, was viewed positively or negatively: ‘After all, a name is what the people make of it.’ For the writer, there were more important issues to concern Eurasians and more pressing matters to

⁶⁷ ‘The Submerged Tenth’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1919, p. 1, p. 2, p. 3.

⁶⁸ ‘Editorial: Eurasians and Education’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3, March 1919, p. 77.

debate than the name ‘by which we are universally known.’ Here he was answering those members of the community who found the term too ‘Asiatic’ for their taste and indicative of an unwelcome ancestry. The editorial implied that Eurasians had little choice over the descriptor assigned to them but that they did have the ability to determine how the term was viewed outside the community: ‘let our conduct then be such as will win for it the respect that it is denied.’⁶⁹

In fact, and as previously noted, there was some debate at the organisation’s inaugural meeting about choosing the word ‘Eurasian’ for the Association’s title. Some argued against the name, with one of those present reported as saying:

We are Britons heart and soul I am happy to say. I certainly think that the word Eurasian is a misnomer. There is no country by the name of Eurasia. We know only of one King and that is King George and we are therefore Britons over the seas. We shall not be known by any other nor shall we allow ourselves to be called anything else.⁷⁰

However, at the event, Archer defended the choice with a lengthy exposition on ancestry and etymology, and the meeting closed with the issue seemingly resolved in his favour. But arguments over the name continued to exercise Eurasian correspondents in the local press. Some rejected both the term and the mixed ancestry it implied. Using the moniker, Luna, one complained that when proposing the title of the Eurasian Association, Archer had misrepresented the *Burghers* of Ceylon, and their descendants, as Eurasians, as they were of Dutch extraction only and were not mixed-race, and this was the reason given for their refusal to attend the meeting:

The term Eurasian, in Ceylon, is given to the offspring, in nine cases out of ten illegitimate, of Europeans and natives. A Burgher wherever he goes, be it India, Burma, Hong Kong or the Straits is a Burgher and never a Eurasian.⁷¹

⁶⁹ ‘Our Policy’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1919, p. 5.

⁷¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 10 June 1919, p. 5.

The inference of illegitimacy for all ‘Eurasians’ could not be clearer, or more insulting, to a community aspiring to a legitimate respectability. Archer’s reply disputed that *Burghers* were of ‘pure European descent on both sides’⁷² while the *Malaya Tribune* told its readers it had decided not to publish some of the letters received on the subject as ‘Unity among domiciled communities hailing from different countries will never be achieved through personal attacks by one section against another.’⁷³ This had been anticipated by one of the Association’s Executive Committee members, C.A. da Silva who had declared at the inaugural meeting that: ‘a few of our own people [...] felt it a slight to be considered members of their community (cries of shame.) There were members of their community who thought it a disgrace to be associated in the remotest possible manner with any Eurasian interest whatever.’⁷⁴

The spat continued in the *Straits Times* with a letter from Archer regretting ‘this barren and contemptible dispute about nomenclature’⁷⁵ and chastising *Burghers* living in Singapore, who he reiterated were Eurasians so part of the community, and their boycott of the Association ‘comes with an ill-grace from men who claim to be sportsmen.’⁷⁶ This provoked the antagonistic response from someone under the pen-name “Hollandische Burger”, who described Archer ‘as having been born with a grievance’ and who restated the separation of Eurasians and *Burghers*.⁷⁷ It proved too much for a further correspondent called “Sincere Fellowship” who called for just that in a letter to the *Straits Times*.⁷⁸ At this point, the editor of the *Times* felt called to intervene and, in an echo of the exasperation of his counterpart at the *Tribune*, informed readers that ‘All letters from correspondents expressed in terms which

⁷² *Malaya Tribune*, 12 June 1919, p. 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Singapore Free Press*, 6 June 1919, p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Straits Times*, 14 June 1919, p. 11.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Straits Times*, 17 June 1919, p. 8.

⁷⁸ *Straits Times*, 19 June 1919, p. 8.

are likely to further the cause of Eurasian unity are inserted but we have no intention of publishing acrimonious letters and have not printed several such.’⁷⁹ Archer’s fellow committee member, Pestana, entered the debate with an attempt at damage limitation: ‘the ‘Ceylon gentlemen’ can do what they like in Ceylon, [and] it’s a shame some people don’t like the term Eurasian but they are a small part of the community.’⁸⁰ All of these letters were published in the *Times* under the heading ‘Eurasian Unity’, and the final one concerned the public nature of the dispute, which troubled its author, R.V. Chapman, a notable member of the Eurasian community and a famed sportsman: ‘It is of no use airing one’s dirty linen in public.’⁸¹ Although he was not at the inaugural meeting, Chapman’s choice of words were very much in keeping with the tone of that event, and also (given the following metaphor) with the importance of sport in asserting Eurasian pride: ‘It is up to us to play the game, to cast all prejudice aside, and stand shoulder to shoulder for the common cause, namely, to help uplift ourselves and our community at large to a higher standard of plain living and high thinking, instead of throwing stones at one another.’⁸²

Eurasian-ness as an externally defined entity was always seen by *Our Magazine* in European/Eurasian terms and hinged on the idea of race as the determining factor in the Eurasian place in the colonial hierarchy. It published two articles with the same title, ‘Race Prejudice’, one in the first issue and the other immediately before the Eurasian Association’s founding. The second article, by an anonymous Eurasian contributor, Centurion, made a link between European racism as experienced by Eurasians and the nascent concept of a Eurasian community, with unity being the appropriate counter to racial discrimination. In the author’s view there was no point in wanting to be ‘European’ and, instead, the fact of the community’s Eurasian-ness should be embraced:

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Straits Times*, 20 June 1919, p. 10.

⁸¹ *Straits Times*, 28 June 1919, p. 10.

⁸² Ibid.

...in the sense of our existence as a community, distinct and apart from other communities, lies the germ of great possibilities. The mere fact that individuals in a community feel, or believe they feel, certain actions to be directed against the community as a whole, is a sign of the birth of “esprit de corps.” We should encourage that. We should not harp upon insults, real or imagined, but foster the sense of a common interest and responsibility they arouse.

He outlined ‘the generally accepted prejudices that exist between Europeans and Eurasians...[and that] whatever the word “Eurasian” may imply, it does define a section of the community whose existence is established, whose continuance is certain.’ That these matters needed addressing was due to the realisation that ‘the Eurasian community as it exists today is, and will continue to be, a factor in the social economy of the colony.’ Eurasians were here to stay.⁸³

Centurion gave three reasons for European prejudice: firstly, the idea of Eurasians as the ‘living example of the white man’s lack of morality’ through the illegitimacy entailed by the early intimate relations between European men and Asian women. He argued this was no longer an issue and dismissed the notion of the Biblical “sins of the fathers” being visited upon subsequent generations: Eurasians were ‘guiltless dependants’ of older unions which ‘were no more than the normal outcome of abnormal, though often perfectly legalised, conditions.’ The second reason for European prejudice against Eurasians was the belief that ‘the intermixing of European and Asiatic races is not compatible with development of the best qualities of both races’, something Centurion endorsed, claiming ‘experience has not facilitated the intermixing of the best types of either race.’ The third reason for the prejudice was ‘that speaking broadly the “white” race is “top dog,”’ and this was a ‘fact’ that Centurion also accepted. However, Centurion offered his fellow Eurasians a way out through active demonstrations of their worth and utility: in short, a ‘Policy of deeds – not words.’ While Centurion found some Eurasian resentment at the ‘callous indifference’ shown by Europeans

⁸³ Centurion, ‘Race Prejudice’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1919, p. 137.

to Eurasians as a community, a community they had brought into being, the greater resentment was against ‘the attitude of superiority adopted by Europeans.’ Once more, a solution was found in positive actions as these slights were, it was held, ‘largely a creation of the Eurasian imagination and self-consciousness [and will] remain just as long as no general proof is forthcoming from the Eurasian side that it is unjustifiable.’⁸⁴

Under the impenetrable mask of an assumed name, Centurion was deploying the same tropes found in the debates in the local press and in the Eurasian Association meetings concerning the uplift of the community. He was contrasting the weakness of Eurasians in behaving as solitary, atomised individuals with the strength and cohesiveness to be found in a communal acceptance of who they were: ‘let us blazon the name Eurasian, without fear or false shame, on all that we are and all that we do; but above all let that be the very best that it is in us to be and do.’ Progress, for Centurion, would be when Eurasians acknowledged that British racism was indiscriminate and did not only affect them, and when they overcame their oversensitivity and concentrated on ‘the realisation that they are in fact a distinct, self-contained community.’⁸⁵

Despite these calls for a proud assertion of identity, for self-reliance and self-development, the insistence all would earn the respect and admiration of Europeans was an indication that while communal spokesmen were looking to build inside the community, they were still seeking external approval and their prescribed remedies were similar to those recommended for them by their imperial masters. The previous issue of *Our Magazine* included an article by an anonymous European, Amicus, who warned Eurasians not to make a fuss about the Eurasian ‘Problem’ as the solution was to hand: ‘the truth is that all you have to do is to make the most of your opportunities and to make the most of yourselves and leave

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 136, p. 137.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 137, p. 138.

the rest to time.’⁸⁶ Writing as a self-appointed paternalist handing-down his wisdom to those less well versed in the ways of the world, he depicted Eurasians as ‘still a young community [...] and, when it finds its feet, will speedily take its proper place in the body politic.’⁸⁷ Where that place was, he did not specify. This was a distance from the emergent independent voice of ‘Our Policy’ and was a retreat from the modern, democratic worldview expressed in an article from the same issue, ‘Race Prejudice’ which took a less insular and cautious position than Centurion, let alone the paternalistic one of Amicus.

In ‘Race Prejudice’, an anonymous Eurasian, Ouidee, placed racial discrimination at the heart of world events. The war had been fought on both sides by governments who professed to ‘certain fundamental laws of right and wrong’.⁸⁸ The difference between them, according to Ouidee, was the victorious Allies meant what they said, while for the Germans and the powers aligned to them, any adherence was a façade which hid their true aims of aggrandisement and oppression. The strength and ultimate success of the Allies was based on the unity of all partners in the struggle and it was on this principle, the equality of the small (‘plucky Belgium’) and the large, that war had been waged. However, Ouidee offered an important caveat to this general principle of equality: ‘there was an equality of *civilised* races’⁸⁹. The civilised races were not named, but it is safe to assume that Ouidee considered Eurasians part of them. Nevertheless, Ouidee’s differentiation between the ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’, his implication that the Eurasians belonged in the former category, implied support for inserting them into the racial citizenship of the Empire, but excluding from that citizenship the unspecified ‘uncivilised’. This would have been consistent with a ‘liberal’ British Imperialism of the Rafflesian kind.

⁸⁶ Amicus, ‘Sympathy With Youth’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3, March 1919, p. 91.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁸⁸ Ouidee, ‘Race Prejudice’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1919, p.12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12 (italics mine).

It is true that Ouidee's conceptualisation of racial equality placed no permanent barrier preventing the eventual attainment of civilised status by all. However, he spoke of a civilising movement that began with ancient Greeks and Romans pitting themselves against the massed barbarians of the outside world. While he saw racial ideology as nothing more than 'a falsely conceived pseudo-science of races which divided humanity into unequal fractions of superior and inferior races or aristocratic and slavish people,' peddled by the usual (non-British) suspects, Gobineau, Wagner, and Nietzsche, he construed the British as civilisers and saw India before the arrival of the British as degenerate and locked into inevitable decline, with its supposedly fixed hierarchies and inbreeding caused by a rigid caste system. Ouidee was emphatic in looking to a future when the unscientific concept of different human races was discredited once and for all: 'The word "race" should be avoided' he said, 'and "human varieties" substituted in its stead.'⁹⁰ Nevertheless, his notion of civilisational progression was consonant with much of the ideology of a hierarchy of peoples in British imperialism.

The article was an overt expression of the initial assumptions and aspirations of *Our Magazine*. And, in those terms, it was as significant as the editorial declaration of intent ('Our Policy') in the same, first, issue. It placed an emancipatory programme for Eurasians within wider currents of historical change and 'liberal' imperial ideas of civilisation and progress. But – crucially, and in marked difference from the prevailing imperial notions of the day – it concluded with the prophecy of a new world built on the ashes of the old, with the Eurasian as its embodiment: 'Is it not civilisation which dissolved primitive societies founded on unity of blood and which established as a principle the commingling of all with all, the general pan mixture, the universal half breed? The war is over: the era of democracy appears.' In fact, the underlying identification of Eurasians with the League of Nations was difficult for any reader of the *Magazine* to miss, as was the alignment of Eurasians with wider expectations of

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 13.

political and societal transformation. The experience of world war was seen as having accelerated the process of change: ‘prejudices and frontiers have disappeared like the sacrosanct privileges of castes and social classes.’⁹¹

But despite these references to democracy and equality, *Our Magazine* cannot be said to have responded positively to movements from below if these discomfited British imperialism. Thus, reference to nationalist protests in India was oblique and second-hand, and the reprinted article concerning the return of Anglo-Indian troops to Bombay regretted the unfortunate absence of the Governor and senior military from the homecoming celebrations ‘owing to local labour trouble.’⁹² Reforms to the Indian Government were portrayed positively at the inaugural meeting of the Eurasian Association, but the draconian measures of the Rowlatt Acts, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, and the repression of the Indian National Congress and its supporters, all passed without comment. This, and the following, points to these spokesmen for the Eurasian community wishing to distance themselves from any actions or movements from below that challenged the colonial empire.

The impact of the May Fourth Movement and the serious rice shortages across Southeast Asia overlapped in British Malaya. As reports of uprisings in China made their way south to the diaspora in Malaya, they prompted boycotts of Japanese goods and protests that escalated into riots, widespread destruction of property and goods, and the looting of rice stores. The local Chinese community chose not to participate at official peace celebrations in Singapore to protest the signing of the Treaty of Versailles which transferred the German sphere of interest in Shantung province to Japan instead of returning it to Chinese sovereignty, the catalyst for the May Fourth Movement.⁹³ *Our Magazine* actually trivialised these events with

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁹² ‘Anglo-Indian Battery’, *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1919, p. 183.

⁹³ For the impact of the May Fourth movement in Southeast Asia and Singapore in particular, see Yong, C.F., and R.B. McKenna, ‘Sir Arthur Young and Political Control of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, 1911-

a combination of derision and sneering disregard at odds with the universalist principles it espoused elsewhere. Its proposed solution to rice shortages was a ban on rice dishes at Europeans hotels to ensure enough rice for those who ‘simply cannot do without’,⁹⁴ and it later claimed that ‘the so-called rice problem is not really as serious as it seems.’⁹⁵ In a similar vein, the May Fourth Movement was referred to in an affected sardonic aside: ‘Little did Captain Boycott dream that his name and fame would travel as far as China.’⁹⁶ The violent protests and the boycott of the peace celebrations were dismissed in a high-handed manner: ‘are they Chinese first and British subjects after?’⁹⁷ Clearly, the magazine sought the favour of the colonial authorities by implying that the Eurasian community, unlike those protesting, were more loyal, and therefore more deserving of rights.

The imperial authorities took the actions of the Chinese diaspora in support of the May Fourth Movement, the demonstrations, the looting and killing, far more seriously and introduced new legislation to curb any overt activities sympathetic to the Kuomintang. It had already used some of the laws available to them in a more draconian way. An example of this, and one which illustrates the favourable treatment given to the Eurasian Association and Eurasian Literary Association, was the Societies Ordinance of 1889 which required organisations to provide names and addresses of their members. When, in 1914, the colonial government demanded that the local branch of the Kuomintang comply with the Act, the branch chose to dissolve itself and the Kuomintang went underground in Singapore.⁹⁸ In contrast, the EA and the ELA were exempted from registration under the Societies

1919’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1984, Vol. 57, No. 2 (247), pp. 1-30, and Kenley, David L., *New Culture in a New World: the May Fourth Movement and the Chinese diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁹⁴ *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1919, p. 187.

⁹⁵ *Our Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 6 & 7, June/July 1919, p. 242.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 58.

Ordinance,⁹⁹ proof that they were not viewed as a political threat or as a challenge to the imperial authorities.

Eurasians and Political and Union Representation

We should not imagine, however, that Eurasians were exclusively concerned with the question of their identity or place in the Empire in an abstract sense in 1919. They involved themselves in the politics and civil society of the day in Singapore, sometimes in ways that brought out tensions in their ranks. This can be seen in the organisation of clerical workers. In April 1919, the Eurasian Literary Association participated in a joint debate with the Chinese Christian Association on the proposal to establish a union for clerical grades in Singapore, with A.H. Carlos, that leading figure of the ELA, speaking in support.¹⁰⁰ As Eurasians were prominent in clerical roles,¹⁰¹ any such organisation could have a significant impact on the community. The *Straits Times* announced an ‘Inter-Association Debate’, related to the proposed clerical union, to be convened jointly by the Chinese Christian Association, the ELA, the Moslem Institute and the Straits Chinese Literary Association, a coming together of the non-European educated elite of Singapore. Its subject was ‘Are Strikes Justifiable’, a potent tool for any union and one which related to actions taken in Singapore by Chinese rickshaw pullers in support of the May Fourth Movement.¹⁰² But the possibility of a union, open to all races, would fracture the apparent consensus between *Our Magazine* and the communal organisations of the Eurasian intelligentsia as to the distinctiveness of Eurasians in the colonial order of Singapore. The first hint of a fracture had come earlier when the *Singapore Free Press* reported the resignation of Carlos from *Our Magazine*.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Singapore Free Press*, 13 September 1919, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Inter-Association Debate’, *Malaya Tribune*, 1 April 1919, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ CO 277/70 Straits Settlements Blue Book 1919, p. 143, p. 144, p. 151.

¹⁰² ‘Inter-Association Debate’, *Straits Times*, 27 September 1919, p. 8.

¹⁰³ *Singapore Free Press*, 25 July 1919, p. 5.

The *Free Press* noted that 200 people attended the debate and that they voted by a majority of 63 ‘that strikes in certain circumstances were justifiable.’¹⁰⁴ Significantly, one of the speakers against was none other than Thomas Archer, the editor of *Our Magazine*. It was not just the legitimacy of strikes that Archer was opposed to, he objected to the idea of a non-communal clerical union and used an editorial in *Our Magazine* to voice the segregationist opinion that ‘a Union confined to members of one race is far more likely to be successful than one comprising five or more races not in harmony with each other.’¹⁰⁵ This provoked a series of letters to the *Malaya Tribune*. One complained that Archer ‘has taken up an attitude of directly insulting the Indian community’, something that constituted ‘a hurt to all Asiatics and especially the clerks.’¹⁰⁶ Another condemned his editorial as ‘a violent and destructive criticism against a worthy movement, as the Union undoubtedly is’, and pointedly cited the League of Nations: ‘The Union is, likewise, composed of different communities, and there is no reason why such a Union cannot prosper.’¹⁰⁷ But Archer claimed ‘the cause of the Eurasian community was not being bettered by Eurasians joining the Union, as constituted,’¹⁰⁸ a point of view not shared by ‘a certain influential Eurasian [who] expressed the fear that Mr Archer was speaking through his hat.’¹⁰⁹ Nor was it shared by the *Tribune* who accused him of ‘confusing the issues.’¹¹⁰

The Clerical Union was the brainchild of leading Straits Chinese including Song Ong Siang who chaired its founding meeting in October 1919.¹¹¹ It was very much an English-speaking ‘middle class union’ concerned with securing the substantial, and regular, income

¹⁰⁴ ‘Inter-Association Debate’, *Singapore Free Press*, 4 October 1919, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from “A Journalist”, *Malaya Tribune*, 25 November 1919, p. 5. I have been unable to locate a copy of either the August or September editions of *Our Magazine*.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from “Naidni”, *Malaya Tribune*, 15 November 1919, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from “A Journalist”, *Malaya Tribune*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Malaya Tribune*, 25 November 1919, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from “A Journalist”, *Malaya Tribune*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 26 November 1919, p. 4.

¹¹¹ *Singapore Free Press*, 1 November 1919, p. 6.

needed for ‘middle class respectability.’¹¹² The local authorities saw it in an unthreatening light; it would not pursue radical demands, and, like the Eurasian Association, was exempted from registration under the Societies Ordinance,¹¹³ a requirement made of any association believed to harbour subversives. Leading members of the Eurasian Association and the Eurasian Literary Association were involved with the Clerical Union from the outset. As we have seen, Carlos had spoken in favour of a union shortly before his break with *Our Magazine*, and Edwin Tessensohn spoke at the founding ‘meeting of clerks’ in October 1919.¹¹⁴ In fact, Tessensohn, now President of the Eurasian Association, Carlos, N.B. Westerhout, C.A. da Silva, P.A. Beins, all EA committee members, were elected as officials at the first Clerical Union Annual General Meeting in March 1920.¹¹⁵

If 1919 saw a significant Eurasian involvement in a signal moment of labour organisation, it also saw their asserting themselves in political developments in Singapore. Coincidental with, and at least tangentially connected to, the anticipated reforms of the Government of India, the desire for an extension of political representation in Singapore led to calls for changes to the constitution of the local governing authorities there. This threw up opportunities and dangers for minorities like the Eurasian community for whom enfranchisement – depending on its nature and extent – could jeopardise or amplify their collective voice. In May 1919 the Eurasian Literary Association debated the proposition ‘That the Nomination [mode]... (for Legislation and Municipal bodies) is preferable to the Electoral.’¹¹⁶ An ability for the community – or its organised elements – to nominate a Eurasian representative would guarantee a political voice for years to come and guard against

¹¹² *Malaya Tribune*, 13 October 1919, p. 4.

¹¹³ *Malaya Tribune*, 12 June 1920, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ *Singapore Free Press*, 11 October 1919, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 12 March 1920, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 8 May 1919, p. 4.

the fear that, as a minority community, they would lose out in elections based on general suffrage.

In 1920, the mercantile Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association, made up of local businessmen of all races, including Eurasians, though it was habitually headed by an Englishman, conducted a referendum of its members which showed a majority in favour of representation by ethnicity.¹¹⁷ It recommended that the Eurasian community nominate a Municipal Councillor and a member of the Legislative Council: ‘We consider that every encouragement should be given to the Eurasians to take an active interest in their local affairs. This country is their home and they can base their claims to representation on their Western ideals and habits of thought as well as their past record of unswerving loyalty.’¹¹⁸ Archer wrote to the *Tribune*, the *Free Press* and the *Times* on the same topic.¹¹⁹ The Eurasian community, he declared, now had a nominating organisation: ‘The Eurasian Association is the most representative if not the only representative body of Eurasians in this Colony.’ The time was surely right for concessions to the community: ‘The Eurasian has been, for long, a negligible quantity, but there are not wanting signs that he is slowly but surely awakening to a sense of what is due to him, and the sooner his just claims are met the better it will be for all concerned.’¹²⁰ At a public meeting convened by the mercantile association in December 1920 on the question of reform, Archer spoke in favour of communal representation, but – significantly – with voting rights restricted to those suitably educated.¹²¹ In fact, the colonial government agreed with the mercantile association’s proposal for Eurasian representation on both the Municipal and Legislative Councils. In 1921, Dr Noel Clarke was nominated by the

¹¹⁷ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 68.

¹¹⁸ The Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association, *Council Reform: Recommendations and Views*, (Singapore, 1931) Appendix I, quoted by Gillis, p. 69.

¹¹⁹ *Malaya Tribune*, 29 October 1920, p. 4; *Singapore Free Press*, 1 November 1920, p. 7; *Straits Times*, 11 November 1920, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 29 October 1920, p. 4.

¹²¹ *Straits Times*, 22 December 1920, p. 9.

Eurasian Association as their Municipal Councillor¹²² and, in 1923, Edwin Tessensohn took the Eurasian place on the Legislative Council,¹²³ both men were sometime Presidents of the Eurasian Association and a testament to its impact on civic life.

Conclusion

1919, then, was a moment of flux, concern and opportunity, and this chapter has conceived it as a crucible in which the Eurasian intelligentsia anticipated change in both hope and fear. It hoped for greater equality and a greater role, while fearing the loss of their limited advantages in colonial society as it was then constituted. They showed unwavering support for British imperialism in their elite institutions – the Eurasian Literary Association, *Our Magazine* and the Eurasian Association, most of who emerged in 1919. It is significant that these organisations, and the Clerical Union in which they were involved, were exempt from registration under the Societies Ordinance, which illustrates they were not viewed as challenges to the colonial order. (This is not to deny, however, that the Clerical Union’s emphasis on local economic issues, such as fair rents, fair pay and working hours contested a socio-economic power structure.) Discomforted by rising nationalism, *Our Magazine* displayed a condescending attitude to the May Fourth Movement and ignored other nationalist uprisings across the globe, notably in India. Its frivolous solution to rice shortages demonstrated a lack of fellow-feeling that contradicted its avowed humanity.

Nevertheless, the worldwide soul-searching at the end of the war opened a new space for freedom, democracy and the chance for a reordering of affairs, internationally and locally. At the same time, the Singapore centenary encouraged Eurasians to rethink their place in the colonial order. *Our Magazine* and the EA are evidence of a new Eurasian engagement with matters local and global, and an attempt – to some degree – to rewrite the rules of the

¹²² *Malaya Tribune*, 4 March 1921, p. 8.

¹²³ *Straits Times*, 9 January 1923, p. 8.

imperial game. What this meant in practical terms was as loosely defined as the Association's constitution, and the new sense of communal togetherness, first found in the Singapore Volunteer Corps 'moment', was fragile. The row over the term 'Eurasian' and the repeated appeals for unity were too many not to indicate important divisions. Arguably, leading Eurasians found themselves facing in too many directions to fashion a coherent position, one which included 'ordinary' Eurasians less concerned with the political advancement of an educated elite. However, the involvement of representatives of the 'Upper Ten' in the Clerical Union suggests they were aware of the need to address the pressing concerns of those 'below' them in their community. Nevertheless, such was the dominance of a small group over Eurasian institutions ostensibly available to all, that discerning a single authentic Eurasian voice is not possible. We hear, instead, largely the sound of members of an elite speaking to other members of an elite, the intelligentsia speaking to the intelligentsia.

The moment of 1919, however, left its mark on subsequent developments. By January 1921, the Clerical Union had 842 fee-paying members,¹²⁴ while the Eurasian Association – unlike *Our Magazine*, which folded the preceding year – was now a fixture of the Singapore world, even if it then had a membership of only 270 members.¹²⁵ Committee members of the Eurasian Association were members of both that association and the Union. Most likely, ordinary members of the Association – if they were clerks of some kind – joined both as well. In the first years of the 1920s, the Eurasian Association appeared to lack some of the momentum of the Clerical Union with its larger (and non-communal) voice. Interestingly, while the meeting to confirm Clarke's nomination to the Municipal Council was well attended in 1921, previous meetings of the Association had been abandoned as less than the necessary quorum of 30 members were present.¹²⁶ But, in its first 18 months, the Eurasian

¹²⁴ *Straits Times*, 25 January 1921, p. 8.

¹²⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 16 August 1920, p. 5.

¹²⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 13 August 1920, p. 4; *Malaya Tribune*, 16 February 1921, p. 5.

Association had gained a place in local government, and its leaders held significant posts in the new Clerical Union. Both the Association and the Union, however, operated according to the strictures of a colonial order. With such circumscription, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the Eurasians chose to extend their efforts and energies on non-political aspects of associational life.

Chapter Three

The Quest for Fairplay: Singapore Eurasians, 1920 to the Great Slump

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the Eurasian community in the decade or so after the creation of the Eurasian Association (EA) to see whether they built upon that communal achievement as well as that signified by the community's gaining of colonial military status through the formation of that Eurasian unit of the local militia – that is, the Eurasian Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps: in 1922 it would be renamed “D” (Eurasian) Company, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF). The chapter will then turn to seemingly non-political facets of communal life and reveal that it was around these social and sporting activities that Eurasian life revolved, so that these were the locations where a distinctive Eurasian identity was made and enacted. These were the places where most Eurasian effort was directed, where prestige was won and lost, and arguably the Eurasian Association suffered in comparison. As shall be demonstrated, the Eurasian community was determined to prove itself a loyal asset to the colonial regime but the first shoots of later dissatisfaction and disillusionment can begin to be discerned.

Becoming a new type of Eurasian, allowing a broader engagement with the colonial order, took place in a variety of locations. It was found in the sports clubs, formal and informal, patronised by young Eurasians at this time, where men and women were eager to prove they were the equal of their white peers, both in the playing of the games and the manner in which they played them.¹ It was found on parade at the unit's military headquarters, the Drill Hall, which was also a venue for dances where, while wearing European-style attire and dancing to western music, Eurasians could be themselves,

¹ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, interview, Singapore, 22/08/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

Eurasians at play. This was not an aping of something that did not belong to them, nor cultural appropriation or a dressing up in borrowed clothes, for the Eurasians of the 1920s believed their share of the culture of the British Empire was a birth-right. The new Eurasian-ness was also found, in a more conventional way, in the talking shop that was the Straits Settlements Legislative Council (SSLC), where their councillors, if little else, articulated a growing Eurasian assertiveness.

This world can be traced through newspaper reports, club and corps records, and the minutes of the SSLC. In addition to the daily press, the decade in question, and the years immediately after it, saw the publication of magazines devoted to sport. This was due to a wider participation in sports by local communities in the various sports clubs that appeared in Singapore, and as part of their education. Sports publications included the *Malayan Sports Annual* (founded 1928), *The "Sportsman"* (1930), *Malayan Sports Pictorial* (1932), and *Sports and Pastimes* (1934).² *The "Sportsman"* in particular, issued first as a fortnightly and then as a monthly magazine, reported on Eurasian men and women pioneering individual and team sports from boxing to badminton. This was a period where associational life loomed large for Eurasians and where they sought an accommodation with their imperial masters, they sought a pact whereby in return for unswerving loyalty they would be rewarded, above all, through admittance to some meaningful notion of imperial citizenship. It was the associational life of clubs and corps that became the stage on which Eurasians displayed their fitness, in both senses of the word, and where this hoped-for social contract between rulers and ruled was pressed forward. But, first, the chapter will consider the Eurasian Association's history at this time and the more traditional methods of conducting political business.

² Brownfoot, Janice N., '“Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds”: Sport and Society in Colonial Malaya', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19:2-3, 2002, pp.129-156, p. 145.

Eurasian Politics: the 1920s to the Great Slump

The impact of world historical events upon Singapore was acknowledged by its government in February 1921: ‘The shock of the War and the wave of new political ideas and ideals which swept the world has affected this Colony as well as the larger countries of the East.’³ The administration’s response to these changing circumstances included the setting up of a Political Intelligence Bureau, a Malayan Special Branch, to monitor subversive movements as well as other perceived threats in the region, mainly consisting of disparate groups of Chinese and Indian nationalists and communists. For the moment, the authorities believed the motivating impetus for questioning the established order was not home grown but imported. In his survey of its first year of operations, the Director of the Political Intelligence Bureau was clear that ‘The great problems which are stirring the East do not originate in Malaya, in which they are only reflected.’⁴ The extent to which it was feared that these problems were located in the Eurasian community was, in Special Branch’s view, virtually non-existent, and only two references to Eurasians appeared in the monthly *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence* during the 1920s. In both cases, this concerned the Eurasian Association acting in public and in concert with other communal associations – Chinese, Indian, Muslim/Malay – to abolish the colour bar in the local civil service, which prevented non-whites from attaining senior posts.⁵ To what extent did the open and overt political activities of Eurasians and their Association in the 1920s hold true to the aims and aspirations that heralded the creation of the organisation?

³ CO 275/104, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, ‘Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider whether any and what changes are desirable in the constitution of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements’, 21 February 1921, p. C31.

⁴ IOR: L/P&J/12/103, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 7, September 1922.

⁵ IOR: L/P&J/12/104, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 21, June 1924; IOR: L/P&J/12/105, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 28, April 1925.

By 1921, the Eurasian Association could boast a membership that had more than doubled in two years from 187 men in 1919 to 432.⁶ In January 1921, the Governor of the Straits Settlements authorised the appointment of additional mercantile and communal representatives to the Municipal Commission and gifted the nomination of a specifically Eurasian commissioner to the Association⁷ and, in February, the Government-appointed body looking at reforms to the Legislative Council recommended similar representation there – the most senior representative assembly in the Colony – albeit with the caveat of a Governor’s right of veto to any nomination.⁸ A declared purpose to these reforms was to encourage greater Eurasian participation in local affairs. ‘This country is their home’, declared an official body advising on constitutional reform in the Straits Settlements, ‘and they can base their claims to representation on their Western ideals and habits of thought as well as on their past record of unswerving loyalty.’⁹ How far the Eurasian Association was responsible for these changes was not recorded but they were the undoubted beneficiaries. And it is noteworthy that an editorial of the *Malaya Tribune* from March 1921, the principal non-white English language daily newspaper in Singapore, criticised mercantile and communal bodies, including the Eurasian Association and the Straits Chinese British Association for inactivity: ‘is it not time they began to do something useful instead of contenting themselves with preening their feathers and congratulating themselves upon the official recognition that has come their way?’¹⁰

The Eurasian Association’s membership of 432 was less than 20% of the total male Eurasian population of 2632 as recorded by the census of 1921, and the Annual General Meeting in October that year could only attract one over the required quorum of 30

⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 16 August 1920, p. 5; 29 December 1922, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid*, 26 January 1921, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid*, 2 February 1921, p. 4.

⁹ CO 275/104, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, ‘Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider whether any and what changes are desirable in the constitution of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements’, 21 February 1921, p. C33.

¹⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 16 March 1921, p. 4.

members.¹¹ The Association's committee lamented 'the lack of interest amongst members' and repeated the usual exhortations from earlier meetings for unity and against 'personal prejudices [and] little jealousies'.¹² Various problems with the organisation seem to have persisted throughout the decade with which this chapter is concerned. At the 1927 AGM, for example, it was noted that although membership cost only \$1 per year, some members were not prompt in paying up.¹³ And, although a dance held in July 1928 in honour of its president's appointment to the SSLC was 'a great success,'¹⁴ attendance at the AGM the following month was only 'fair'.¹⁵ Collecting subscriptions was an on-going issue: 'there is a lot of grouching ... [with] many members thinking that they were not doing sufficient as an Association.'¹⁶ Only eight new members joined in 1929 giving a total membership of 829,¹⁷ almost double the 1921 number, but by 1931 membership had fallen to 739.¹⁸ The AGM that year was initially postponed when the required quorum of 30 members present was not reached.¹⁹ At the reconvened meeting, with only 20 members in attendance, the rules of the EA were changed to prevent any further embarrassing postponements.²⁰ Still, at its height in 1929, the more than 800 members of the Association comprised a very sizeable percentage – almost half – of the adult Eurasian males of Singapore.

As to the political foci of the Association in the decade or so following the constitutional reforms of 1921, in 1922 a resolution was passed that September, in conjunction with other organisations, in favour of abolishing income tax in Singapore, an attitude consistent with Raffles' original, liberal vision for his settlement. There was also a discussion to decide if the

¹¹ Ibid, 14 October 1921, p. 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 27 August 1927, p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid, 22 August 1928, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid, 30 August 1928, p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 31 August 1929, p. 13.

¹⁸ Ibid, 18 November 1931, p. 14.

¹⁹ Ibid, 25 November 1931, p. 8.

²⁰ Ibid, 18 December 1931, p. 10.

body should affiliate with the Anglo-Indian Association of Madras. The parochial position of many 'loyal' Eurasians was articulated by the lawyer Hugh Ransome Stanley Zehnder, a founding member of the Eurasian Association and the Eurasian Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, who argued against this on the supposed grounds that 'Anglo-Indians were out for home rule' while, in Singapore, Eurasians 'merely desired to be treated as equals', an equality he evidently did not extend to all Asians, for he deplored the fact that Indians were allowed to join the Anglo-Indian Association.²¹ His attitude was not shared unanimously and a letter against Zehnder's position was published in the *Malaya Tribune*.²² The AGM of January 1923 was troubled. The current President of the Eurasian Association, N.B. Westerhout, announced that affiliation would not take place, since their organisation was exclusively Eurasian, whereas the Anglo-Indian Association was 'open to Europeans, Americans and Australians' (significantly, no mention was made of Indians), and he characterised the past year as 'one of misunderstandings and perhaps jealousies.'²³ Westerhout then proceeded to add to these by using his platform to attack Edwin Tessensohn, former President of the Eurasian Association and probably the pre-eminent Eurasian of the time in Singapore.

The row between Westerhout and Tessensohn revolved around the visit to Singapore of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, earlier in 1922. There was an apocryphal story in which the Prince scandalised polite society by dancing with a beautiful young Eurasian woman at a gala ball at Raffles Hotel in preference to any of the white women present. But it was not this that worried the President of the Eurasian Association. A covered stand, for Eurasians only, to view the official ceremony to mark the Prince's visit was erected by the Eurasian Association on the Esplanade, next to the Padang. To defray the cost, the

²¹ Ibid, 14 October 1921, p. 5.

²² Ibid, 19 October 1921, p. 2.

²³ Ibid, 5 January 1923, p. 8.

Association asked for donations from its members and charged \$1 for each of the stand's 250 seats.²⁴ Although the EA had secured this exclusive seating to view the Prince's progress, they were unable to arrange a meeting in person with Prince Edward and this was the bone of contention brought before the AGM. According to Westerhout, Tessensohn had been invited on behalf of the community to meet the Prince, without the Association being consulted, and had kept that invitation secret thereby embarrassing the Association, who felt they should have chosen the Eurasian representative. Tessensohn, who was present at the AGM, denied the allegations and said he had not come to the AGM to be insulted and threatened to walk out. This really seemed to be a case of pique and sour grapes from Westerhout as where the bulk of the membership stood on this argument may be discerned by Tessensohn's re-election as President of the Eurasian Association at the same AGM,²⁵ and his nomination as the first Eurasian representative for the SSLC.²⁶ Seen in the context of legislative reform, the scenes at the meeting were deemed unfortunate and unseemly, and the *Malaya Tribune* warned that constitutional change was dependent on 'the fitness and ripeness of the people' for any such change and that 'petty jealousies and hair-splitting over trivialities' at the EA worked against this.²⁷ The next issue raised by a President of the Association, however, was far more substantive.

In 1923, at a meeting of the Straits Settlement Legislative Council, Edwin Tessensohn raised the exclusion of Asians and Eurasians from senior positions in the Malayan Civil Service, his appeal for fair treatment carefully constructed within the imperial framework:

It is so absurd, so contrary to actual fact and manifest truth, so opposed to the plain dictates of common sense, so preposterous that the most astounding part of the whole affair is that educated and

²⁴ Ibid, 5 January 1923, p. 8.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 21 March 1923, p. 8.

²⁷ Ibid, 8 January 1923, p. 6.

²⁸ CO 275/111, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 14 March 1924; CO 275/111, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 3 November 1924.

intelligent men could have seriously alleged it to justify the passing of a Regulation which adversely affects the interests of thousands of his Majesty's loyal subjects in this part of the British Empire.²⁸

Tessensohn, along with fellow communal representatives at the Legislative Council, including Tan Cheng Lock for the Chinese and P. K. Nambyar for the Indian community, spoke against the colour bar in the civil service at council meetings in June and November 1924.²⁹ Singapore Special Branch monitored public meetings against the colour bar in April and May, organised by the Straits Chinese British Association and attended by a 'very representative assembly including EA committee members, Dr Noel Clarke and Claude da Silva.'³⁰ An Emergency General Meeting (EGM) of the Eurasian Association in June voted in favour of the motion, proposed by Clarke and seconded by da Silva, that the stance of the Colonial Secretary on the civil service 'not being open to Non Europeans is unsatisfactory.'³¹ Earlier in Council, Nambyar had quoted Queen Victoria back at the administration in support of the case for equal treatment and this was repeated by Clarke at the EGM. Their arguments were kept firmly in the context of loyal opposition and might be said to have exploited that political culture to advance their cause: Eurasians were 'pioneers of the British Empire' and da Silva found the discrimination to be 'un-British and was not in the spirit of British tradition and British fair-play.'³² Further cross-communal agitation against the colour bar was reported in the *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence* in 1925. At the SSLC meeting in March 1926, Tessensohn challenged the justifications behind preferential rents and allowances for the (white) 'senior service' compared to those for 'clerical and subordinate' officers: 'Sir, I only wish to say that I do not consider the replies to my questions

²⁸ CO 275/110, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 29 October 1923.

²⁹ CO 275/111, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 14 March 1924; 3 November 1924.

³⁰ IOR: L/P&J/12/104, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 21, June 1924.

³¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 18 June 1924, p. 5.

³² *Ibid*, 25 June 1924, p. 7.

satisfactory.’³³ Tessensohn died on 26 September 1926 and was replaced as Eurasian member of the SSLC by Dr Noel Clarke who continued to press for civil service reform. He had also replaced him as President of the Eurasian Association.

The annual report for the 1926 AGM noted the current concerns of the committee regarding areas of discrimination: the provision of beds at the new General Hospital for Singapore and cases of racial discrimination as ‘Eurasians have been stopped from dancing in the hotels.’³⁴ Credit was given to President Clarke ‘who had a personal interview in each case [he did not say whether this was with the Governor or a more junior member of the administration] so as to have results as satisfactory as possible.’³⁵ A similar achievement was ascribed to Clarke for bringing up the question of discrimination in the civil service at the Legislative Council in August 1927. His appeal, it was claimed, was ‘sympathetically received ... [and] an assurance was given that this matter would receive the personal consideration and study of His Excellency the Governor.’³⁶ But (limited) reforms to the local civil service would only take place in the next decade.

The issue of the provision of hospital beds for Eurasians had first been brought up at the AGM of January 1926.³⁷ It was symbolically important, since it suggests the degree to which the Association was, in fact, following a segregationist agenda since the complaint related to the placing of Eurasians alongside Asians. (There were segregated medical facilities for whites.) At the AGM in August 1927 it was reported that a ward of sixteen beds was available ‘for the sole use of male members of the Eurasian Community.’³⁸ However, a letter to the *Malaya Tribune* in October 1929 complained that this was not the case (‘Asiatics of all

³³ CO 275/116, *Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 29 March 1926.

³⁴ *Malaya Tribune*, 29 July 1926, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1928, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 January 1926, p. 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 August 1927, p. 7.

denominations can be found there.')

and called on the EA to act.³⁹ The limits of the Association and Clarke's interventions were revealed when Vice-President da Silva informed the 1930 AGM that 'the Eurasian Ward was not a ward exclusively for members of the community and that if there was an overflow of [Asian] patients the ward would be used [for them]. If there were any complaint of injustice to a Eurasian patient the Association would readily take up the matter but he did not think they could interfere with the administration of the Hospital.'⁴⁰

There was a public debate as to whether the Eurasian Association was sufficiently proactive or merely rather too reactive, unrepresentative of the community if not misrepresenting it, and this was illustrated by a series of pieces published in the *Malaya Tribune* under the headline 'Eurasians and Their Future'. It began, in August 1929, with an editorial masquerading as a book review.⁴¹ The book in question, published in Calcutta in June 1929, was called *Cimmerii? or Eurasians and Their Future*, its subtitle borrowed by the *Tribune* to head its editorial.⁴² The author of the reviewed work, Cedric Dover, was an Anglo-Indian activist who had worked in Malaya, and was well acquainted with the new ideas and rising nationalism animating India, and who was frustrated with the pace of change and the conservative approach of the leaders of his community. Dover deployed history and science to demolish myths of mixed race inferiority, even stating that with Jesus Christ 'both illegitimacy and mixed blood can be distinctly traced.'⁴³ Despite an Anglo-Indian emphasis to his book, Dover rejected that descriptor in favour of the broader term, Eurasian, in the interests of 'Unity and Harmony. It is futile, wasteful and illogical for Eurasians to divide

³⁹ Ibid, 5 August 1929, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 6 September 1930, p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid, 5 August 1929, p. 8.

⁴² The Cimmerians were an ancient nomadic people of the Eurasian steppe in Central Asia. They appear in Homer's *Odyssey* (11.14ff) as ones who live where the sun never shines, near the land of the dead.

⁴³ Dover, Cedric, *Cimmerii? or Eurasians and Their Future* (Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1929), p. 38.

themselves into Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Burmans, Anglo-Malayans, and the like.’⁴⁴ He called for proud, self-sufficient, self-motivated, educated and modern Eurasian men and women to join a vanguard and lead the rest of the community. A first step would be the creation of a Central Eurasian Association covering India, Burma and Malaya - ‘more powerful, wealthy and efficacious than the present straggling Associations in these countries.’⁴⁵

The *Malaya Tribune* review was generally positive but felt Dover was excessively bitter about white prejudice.⁴⁶ Although the newspaper preferred the more ‘establishment’ Anglo-Indian history, *Hostages to India* by Herbert Stark, the *Tribune* published articles by Dover and his protégé, Kenneth E. Wallace, whose own work, *The Eurasian Problem: Constructively Approached*, appeared in 1930 and in which Wallace repeated Dover’s call for a united, federal Eurasian movement.⁴⁷ Letters to the *Tribune* praised Dover, echoed his calls for unity and a united Eurasian Association, and contained complaints about ‘petty squabbling’ dividing the local community and accusations that the EA was doing ‘nothing to stimulate others to join a bigger effort towards their own salvation.’⁴⁸ The response of the Association to these external stimuli was to be both encouraging and equivocal. At its AGM in September 1929, Dr Clarke said the coverage in the press ‘had done some good’ and greater cooperation between the various associations in Malaya ‘should be encouraged.’⁴⁹ In an editorial the same month, the *Tribune* quoted further correspondence from Eurasians urging unity and a seriousness of purpose in the community ‘instead of wasting their time in cinemas, gambling, etc.’⁵⁰ But, in the space of a few months, the ‘virile spirit’ the *Tribune* found amongst Eurasians had apparently dissipated.⁵¹ In February 1930, as Dr Clarke,

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 5 August 1929, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 12 November 1929, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 12 August 1929, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 7 September 1929, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 9 September 1929, p. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid, 4 February 1930, p. 8.

President of the Eurasian Association, honoured the new Governor with a loyal address presented in an inscribed silver casket,⁵² the *Tribune* repeated the well-worn caricature of Eurasians as ‘lacking in ambition’ and marked by an ‘inability to organise vigorously for the promotion of their interests.’⁵³ This applied to Eurasians across the British Empire in Asia but the *Tribune*’s main focus was more local. Despite, it claimed, the best efforts of Dover and Wallace and the *Tribune*, recent attempts at uplifting Eurasian prospects had been ‘singularly futile. One or two letters in our columns, and then silence!’⁵⁴ The young vanguard had seemingly melted away while agreement between the various associations was elusive. As we shall see in the next chapter, attempts to join up with Eurasians outside of Singapore ran into the ground.

The Eurasian Association in this period was not only marked by the insularity suggested by its negative responses to the possibilities of pan-Eurasianness. It worked with other local communal bodies in Singapore not merely against the colour bar in the civil service, and passed joint resolutions to abolish income tax in Singapore and for free education in the English language,⁵⁵ something – it should be noted - that would benefit the English-speaking Eurasians but exclude many Asian children, especially those from poor families who were not at English-language schools. It also participated in the campaign for the restitution of the Queen’s Scholarship. This was a scheme where, through annual examinations, outstanding local students were selected and sponsored for places at British universities (Lim Boon Keng was the recipient in 1887, Noel Clarke in 1904). First introduced in 1885, the decision in 1910 to end the scheme was a considerable sore point for local, non-white elites. Its

⁵² Ibid, 4 September 1930, p. 13.

⁵³ Ibid, 4 February 1930, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 3 July 1923, p. 6.

restitution in 1924 can be seen as a victory for these local elites and their strategy of working collectively, through the Legislative Council and through their various associations.⁵⁶

There are other examples of the Eurasian Association combining with a number of Singaporean associations over a series of issues. In June 1924, it jointly sponsored a public meeting, in conjunction with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Straits Chinese British Association, the Clerical Union, the Indian Association, the Moslem Association and the Chinese Association, with the aim of ensuring the availability of cheap food from 'Food Hawkers and Food Stalls.'⁵⁷ In December 1926, the Association supported the mercantile, and white-dominated, Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association against the allocation of 10% of the colony's annual income to an Opium Reserve Fund designed to militate against future losses of revenue following the prohibition of opium use.⁵⁸ President Clarke also spoke at this Association in October 1928 in line with their objections to a local tax to pay for the construction of the Singapore Naval Base, a military installation intended to secure the Empire in the East rather than merely defend the island of Singapore.⁵⁹

However, we should not take these Eurasian objections as emblematic of criticism of the Empire. Loyalty to the British, to Western values and the imperial way of life, was repeatedly emphasised and publicly demonstrated: loyal addresses to each new Governor, wreaths from the Eurasian Association laid at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day, a demarcated and prominent Eurasian presence at official visits by the Prince of Wales and by the battle cruisers *HMS Hood* and *HMS Repulse* (the *Repulse* would be sunk by Japanese planes off the coast of Malaya in December 1941).⁶⁰ Eurasian leaders were at pains to display their adherence, to the notion of an imperial community of all races, and to their colonial masters,

⁵⁶ Gillis, Dr E.Kay, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005), p. 73.

⁵⁷ *Malaya Tribune*, 17 June 1924, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 18 December 1926, p. 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 27 October 1928, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 7 February 1924, p. 8; 12 November 1927, p. 9.

even when speaking against imperial actions, for example the withdrawal of the Queen's Scholarship: at a dinner given by the Association in March 1923 to honour Edwin Tessensohn on his nomination to the Legislative Council, Claude da Silva stressed the importance of reinstating the Queen's Scholarship as 'nothing in education could equal in privilege and prestige a first hand acquaintance of England.'⁶¹

Unemployment and economic depression loomed large at both the beginning and end of the period under review in this chapter. The Governor informed the Legislative Council in October 1921 that 'the general high cost of living everywhere pressed hard on all classes of the population.'⁶² And things had not markedly changed twelve months later: 'We have been and still are in the trough of the wave.'⁶³ For the Governor, the principal cause was clear: 'The two mainstays of British Malaya, the tin and rubber industries, are both suffering severely from the world-wide dislocation and constriction of trade,'⁶⁴ factors to which the port-city of Singapore was not immune. The colonial government declared 1921 as 'the worst, from a financial point of view, which the plantation rubber industry has ever suffered [...] The bad state of trade throughout the year resulted in a considerable amount of unemployment, both European and Asiatic.'⁶⁵

'Slump' was the epithet commonly used in Singapore to describe the post-war depression of the early 1920s and for the Great Depression which began later that decade. A Non-European Unemployment Relief Fund (NEURF) was set up by the Clerical Union, the Eurasian Association was on its committee, and August 1921 saw a charity boxing contest for

⁶¹ Ibid, 21 March 1923, p. 8.

⁶² 'Address of His Excellency the Governor to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council on 25th October 1920' in Robert L. Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 7: 1915-1921* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), p. 464.

⁶³ 'Address of His Excellency the Governor to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council on 31st October 1921' in Robert L. Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 7: 1915-1921* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), p. 508.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 515.

⁶⁵ CO 276/93 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1922 Volume II Jul-Dec 'Supplement No. 67 Report on the Straits Settlements for the year 1921', p. 26; p. 50.

the NEURF promoted by the Clerical Union, the Singapore Recreation Club, the Eurasian Literary Association and the EA.⁶⁶ The EA made regular contributions to the Fund although during the Great Depression, as we shall see, it was criticised for holding on to its own money rather than using it to alleviate the hardship of its members. The NEURF remained in existence throughout the 1920s and was active during both Slumps. As shown in the next chapter, the Eurasian Association's donations to the Fund, though consistent, were not generous.

The Eurasian contribution to the welfare of the unemployed may – as suggested – have been limited, but their role in trade union developments in the 1920s – above all, in the Clerical Union – were not negligible. Eurasian achievements in the political arena, meanwhile, despite the efforts of Tessensohn and Clarke, were somewhat limited, but politics was not the only field available for Eurasians to act and become Eurasian, individually and collectively, and to assert themselves in colonial life. They did this through various associations and institutions including – crucially – the Volunteers.

The Eurasian Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps in the 1920s

Although the Eurasian Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps was only raised in July 1918, within two years the colonial administration was proposing changes to local militias and the Singapore Volunteer Corps, including the Eurasian Company, such that they were all to be subsumed within a larger Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. Consequently, all the local defence forces were first disbanded and then reconstituted. In January 1922, a meeting was held at the Singapore Recreation Club to discuss the new Straits Settlements Volunteer Force and the place of the Eurasian Company within it. The new “D” (Eurasian) Company was to be expanded from the current 89 to 158 soldiers. Those present at the

⁶⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 25 August 1921, p. 10.

meeting included Edwin Tessensohn, Dr. Clarke and H.R.S. Zehnder. Tessensohn congratulated all for their continuing loyalty to the British Empire and Clarke observed ‘that during the anti-Japanese riot [in 1919], the S.V.C. was called together, and the Eurasians had the largest number present.’⁶⁷

The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force was formally established in 1922 and included the “D” (Eurasian) Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps which at full strength would be made up of five officers, 158 ordinary ranks and a military band.⁶⁸ According to Captain Winsley in his 1937 history of volunteering in the Straits Settlements, ‘the role of the Volunteer Corps was definitely laid down to be primarily internal security [which suggests a role in maintaining colonial order] and secondly assistance to or relief of the Regular Garrison in case of external aggression.’⁶⁹ The Volunteer Ordinance of 1923 which established the reorganisation in law also entrenched customary racial discriminations: non-European officers needed at least eight years’ service before promotion to Captain and would always lack seniority compared to any newly promoted and fast-tracked Europeans.⁷⁰ In allowances, Europeans fared better than Eurasians who fared better than Asians. The rate for overnight duty was \$5 for European troops, \$3 for Eurasians and \$2 for ‘Asiatics.’⁷¹ Similar discrepancies applied to overnight expenses although exceptions were made for those deemed to be well off or respectable enough for some kind of symbolic racial exemption to be made: ‘In the case of Eurasian or Asiatic volunteers when the Commandant or Commanding Officer is satisfied that the claimant is in the habit of living in the style normal for Europeans the rate applicable to Europeans may be granted provided a certificate to that effect is furnished.’⁷²

⁶⁷ ‘The Volunteers’, *Malaya Tribune*, 7 January 1922, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Winsley, Captain T.M., *S.V.C. A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854-1937 being also An Historical Outline of Volunteering in Malaya* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1938), p. 86.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷⁰ CO 276/95 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1923, Vol. II, July-Dec., p. 2143.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2144.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 2144. How and by whom said certificate had to be endorsed is not indicated.

The head of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force was required to provide an annual progress report on the performance of the troops under his command. The one for 1923 showed that British men in Singapore were far more reluctant to volunteer than their Chinese, Eurasian and Malay counterparts. (At this time the British were the only Europeans allowed in the SSVF, as were only those Chinese who were Straits-born out of the Chinese population, while all Indians were prohibited from serving in the SSVF.) While the European Corps had a shortage of 188 men; ‘the Eurasian Company in Singapore maintains its strength well which is very satisfactory.’⁷³ Compliments such as these should be seen within a context in which joining the Volunteers was a way for Eurasians to assert their imperial citizenship. After all, serving was a symbol of belonging and was in stark contrast, as we shall see, to the colonial military leadership’s attitude towards the local Indian population who were viewed as unreliable at best and disloyal at worst.

The Eurasian volunteers soon enough had an architectural symbol of their place within the colonial forces in Singapore. The General Officer Commanding troops in Malaya (G.O.C.), in commenting on the authorities’ military building programme, declared: ‘There is no doubt in my mind that buildings which can be used as drill halls and as meeting places for the members of the different communities have a very direct effect not only upon recruiting but upon the spirit of the non-European population.’⁷⁴ He went on to state the Chinese and Malays already had suitable accommodation and he strongly recommended the construction of a Drill Hall and Club for the Eurasian Company whose ‘community has undertaken to meet the cost of interior equipment’ to help defray the estimated cost of \$34,000.⁷⁵ Drill Hall, the Eurasian Volunteer Headquarters and Club on Beach Road, Singapore, was opened on 2 February 1927 by the then G.O.C., Major General Sir Theodore Fraser. It was built on two

⁷³ CO 1073/67 Straits Settlements Volunteer Force: Progress report for August 1922 to April 1923. Report by N. Malcolm, Major-General, Commanding the Troops, Malaya dated 2nd May 1923, p. 6.

⁷⁴ CO 1073/67, p. 9.

⁷⁵ CO 1073/67, p. 15.

floors with the club above and the HQ below: ‘The Club part of it was held to be a recognition by the Government of the excellent work of the Eurasian Company during recent years. This work was in a large measure due to Lieutenant H.R.S. Zehnder, and his services in this respect were recognised in 1928 when he had conferred on him the O.B.E. (Military Division) after promotion to Captain.’⁷⁶

Interestingly, enrolment by Eurasians in the Volunteers depended very much on the health of the economy, with an economic revival creating shortfalls. The annual progress report for 1925 indicated that the number of volunteers was down due to tin and rubber booms in Malaya and the resulting difficulty in employees obtaining time off work to volunteer.⁷⁷ However, and this suggests the enthusiasm of its members for the culture of the Volunteers, the Eurasian Company won the following cups for shooting that year: the Buffs, the St. Andrew’s, the Oriental Telephone Co., the Manchester Cup, the Australian Stores Shield, and the Murray Cup while taking second place in the competition for the Bromhead-Matthew’s Shield.⁷⁸

Still, the years of relative prosperity continued to have a bearing on recruitment. The year after these trophies were won, it was reported that due to ‘prosperous conditions in the Colony and business activity,’⁷⁹ the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force was 30% below its full complement of Eurasian volunteers. For the European contingent the shortfall was even greater at 41% while the Chinese were down by 30% and the Malays 17%. For “D” Company, numbers were down to 139 in 1927 despite the opening of the Drill Hall that

⁷⁶ Winsley, *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ CO 276/100 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1926, Vol. III, April-Sept.; Supplement No. 94, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force Annual Progress Report 1925, p. 3.

⁷⁸ CO 276/100, p. 10.

⁷⁹ CO 276/105 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1927, Vol. III, July-Sept.; Supplement No. 80, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force Annual Progress Report 1926, p. 2.

year.⁸⁰ This shortfall of volunteers was to concern the Overseas Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence in London.⁸¹ It clearly concerned at least one Eurasian volunteer as well who earlier wrote to the local press, canvassing for new recruits: ‘Why not make a Christmas present of your services by joining up? – and at the end of 1927 you will have a feeling that you have done your part and “played the game” by the Eurasian Company and Community at large.’⁸² Perhaps it was a desire to retain or boost members that led to the bureaucratic sleight of hand, well received by the Eurasian community, by which the colonial government authorised a new Machine Gun (Eurasian) Platoon that allowed older men a more sedentary role and to remain as volunteers.⁸³

In the annual progress report for 1929, openly published in the Government Gazette, the new G.O.C., Major-General H.L. Pritchard, declared that ‘The Eurasian and Chinese Company, are efficient units and reflect great credit on their Commanders.’⁸⁴ In the Eurasian case, this included Captain Zehnder. In a top secret report for the War Office, ‘The Fighting Value of the Races in Malaya’, Pritchard was more candid with his views. In many respects, he adhered to the racist model adopted by the white men occupying the most senior ranks in armies of the British Empire who were animated by the idea that different races had inherent martial qualities. The Malays, though ‘thoroughly loyal,’ would always require a British officer to lead them if they were to form an effective fighting unit. Indians were dismissed as either being potentially disloyal, in the case of Sikhs, or ineffective: ‘one cannot make Soldiers out of Tamils.’⁸⁵ The motives and loyalty of the Chinese in British Malaya were also open to question. Pritchard believed most individual Chinese to be guided by personal

⁸⁰ CO 276/108 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1928, Vol. II, April-June; Supplement No. 46, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force Annual Progress Report 1927, p. 1.

⁸¹ CO 273/551/7 Straits Settlements Volunteer Force: annual progress report 1927, p. 1.

⁸² *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 18 December 1926, p. 20.

⁸³ Winsley, *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps*, p. 103.

⁸⁴ CO 276/116 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1930, Vol. II, April-June; Supplement No. 41, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force Annual Progress Report 1929, p. 3.

⁸⁵ WO 32/3637 Fighting Value of the Races in Malaya, 1930/31, p. 3, p. 9.

interest alone, and he was also convinced that most were fervent nationalists with only a superficial attachment to the British Empire. Although he acknowledged that Chinese volunteers would support the British against Japanese aggression, a far greater threat than Imperial Japan, and, in Pritchard's view, far more likely, was the encroachment into British domains, territorially and ideologically, of Chinese nationalists. In his conclusion, Pritchard anticipated a conflict that anticipated something of a racial war: 'the issue may some day be Europeans against Asiatics,' which he thought would most probably be the result of a dispute with China.⁸⁶ As such, he considered it in the greater interest to limit Chinese volunteering instead of encouraging it.

Pritchard's views on Eurasians are worth considering at length as they give a detailed insight into senior imperial attitudes regarding them and were articulated in this instance in private intra-state correspondence, they were unashamedly genuine and widely shared by colonialists in Singapore. Indeed, Pritchard prefaces his memorandum by stating that in addition to it being the product of personal observations while General Officer in Command, it was also the result of his 'picking the brains of a large number of men in the Country who know the characteristics of the Races in Malaya.'⁸⁷ For Pritchard:

The Eurasians of Malaya are distinctly superior to the Eurasians of India [...] The best Eurasians are very good, almost equal to the best British. The worst Eurasians are quite useless for any purpose. The average is not high but has its uses. The great point about the Eurasians is that their loyalty is beyond question. Their interests are entirely wrapped up in British Interests, and they undoubtedly make a great effort to volunteer.⁸⁸

He singled out Captain Zehnder for special praise, noting a marked downturn in the Eurasian Company's performance whenever Zehnder was absent. He ends his analysis by stating that

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 7, p. 11 (quotation).

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

‘As with Chinese and Malays, Companies and Platoons of Eurasians must be commanded in War by British, except for the Commander of the Singapore Company referred to above.’⁸⁹

Pritchard’s assessment of the Eurasian volunteers was consistent with the imperial attitude towards the Eurasian population at this time, one which accepted and utilised outstanding individuals, like Tessensohn and Zehnder, but nonetheless disparaged the community as generally inferior and necessarily subservient to whites, one that took it for granted as loyal and always aligned to the imperial interest – suitable, therefore, as a supporting class of minor officials and of clerks, eager to serve their colonial masters. As for the British, Pritchard considered his fellow countrymen’s fighting qualities to be self-evident and he was more concerned about the quantity than the quality of British volunteers in Singapore.⁹⁰

In February 1932, Zehnder was promoted to Major, the first Eurasian Volunteer to reach this rank, and he assumed command of the Company which had previously been commanded by British officers.⁹¹ And, in April of the same year, and *contra* Pritchard, William Athelstan Aeria – another Eurasian – was promoted to Captain.⁹² Aeria was one of the original volunteers from 1918, he had also been the first non-European captain of Singapore’s football team which won the Malaya Cup in 1924,⁹³ and he would eventually attain the rank of Major and follow Zehnder as Commander of the Eurasian Company. Although the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force was segregated, the officer structure allowed a few Eurasians to achieve higher ranks than many white volunteers – it being one of the only collective (if

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 2.

⁹¹ CO 276/123 Straits Settlements: Government Gazettes 1932, Vol. I, Jan-Mar, p. 304.

⁹² CO 276/124 Straits Settlements: Government Gazettes 1932, Vol. II, Apr-June, p. 790.

⁹³ Jansen, Mary Anne, John Geno-Oehlers, Ann Ebert Oehlers, *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian Men Who Volunteered To Defend The Empire, 1862-1957* (Singapore: Wee Kim Centre, Singapore Management University, 2015), pp. 14-16.

segregated) colonial institutions that allowed a measure of status that was not merely racially defined.

Whatever the slights and prejudice suffered, Eurasian volunteers took their service and obligations seriously, perhaps because this was a way of inserting themselves into a place where some notion of imperial citizenry operated and a reason why they set such store by the Volunteers. Cleaver Eber, born in 1911, volunteered in 1930, after being in the cadet corps of St. Joseph's Institution as a schoolboy. He told his oral history interviewer in 1984 about his feelings on signing up: "It was indeed an honour really, because we signed and we had to swear that we had to serve our country, especially in time of trouble."⁹⁴ Eber continued by emphasising the camaraderie and social dimension to life as a Volunteer: "Yes, volunteering was indeed at that time, great fun. We had our usual training, we had our weekly parades. And after weekly parade, we go up to the clubhouse, and there we meet our friends and have a drink, play billiards and all that."⁹⁵ These were men who had gone to the same schools, who lived close to one another in the same parts of town, who were already friends, relatives and neighbours. For the rest of their families, Volunteer affairs included participation through church parades, with the congregation lining the route as the men marched, accompanied by a military band, making their way to the churches and cathedrals of the various Christian denominations: the Presbyterian Church, St. Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, the Catholic Cathedral of the Good Shepherd and St. Joseph's Church.

There were special parades for Armistice Day, for the King's Birthday, when the Governor might compliment the Company for 'the smartness of their appearance,'⁹⁶ and for the King's Jubilee and for the death of the King. In 1930, "D" (Eurasian) Company formed

⁹⁴ Eber, Cleaver Rowell, interview, Singapore, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore, 24 July 1984.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ 'King's Birthday Parade', *Straits Times*, 19 June 1920, p. 8.

the guard of honour for the arrival of the new Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi, in Singapore.⁹⁷

A report by the *Straits Times* in 1923, about an ‘Enjoyable Route March’ gives a flavour of the time:

On Saturday night, the Eurasian Co. of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, led by the Adjutant of the Corps, went out for a route march from the Union Jack Club on Anson Road to the residence of Lieutenant Zehnder and Captain N.L. Clarke [they were brothers-in-law] at Pasir Panjang where the soldiers were entertained. A concert was given with the help of a party of ladies who were present, including the genial hostess Mrs Zehnder. The men enjoyed themselves thoroughly and many of them did not get home until the small hours of the morning.⁹⁸

The Eurasian Volunteers took part in the inter-company football competition for the Donaldson and Burkinshaw cup.⁹⁹ The Eurasian Company also played cricket against the Singapore Recreation Club, with many divided loyalties for the players.¹⁰⁰ Rifle shoots were social events, with spectators of both sexes and all ages enjoying tea, cake and sandwiches as well as the competition.¹⁰¹ However, and despite a surface veneer of frivolity, the depth and seriousness of the Eurasian commitment should not be minimised. The men who volunteered would serve well into middle age and were willing to sacrifice their lives, as many would, to protect their families and their communities and for the British Empire as they conceived it.

The social bodies of the Volunteers, the Eurasian Association and the Recreation Club, and the myriad informal gatherings – whether sporting, military or political – overlapped through the many men who participated in at least some, if not all, these aspects of Eurasian public life. Noel Clarke and Hugh Zehnder were founding members of both the Volunteers and the EA, William Aeria was Captain of “D” Company and the Singapore football team.

⁹⁷ Winsley, *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps*, p. 106.

⁹⁸ ‘Enjoyable Route March’, *Straits Times*, 31 July 1923, p. 10.

⁹⁹ ‘Football’, *Straits Times*, 7 November 1923, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Cricket’, *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1921, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Jansen, *On Parade*, p. 117.

And in Singapore, for Eurasians of the interwar period, sport would increasingly become the proving ground for their hopes and ambitions.

An Associational and Recreational Road to Equality? Eurasian Sports and Entertainment

Sport was seen as an essential part of imperial society. For whites, taking part in sport was considered a necessary antidote to the temptations and boredom of life in the tropics, and the Club, sporting and social, was the location where many of the unofficial, though no less significant, rituals of colonial life were performed. It was where the attributes of a muscular Christianity favoured by the Victorians could be displayed, a playground on which, as well as any battlefield, the superiority of the white race could be demonstrated. Its importance to colonial life in Singapore is shown in the location of the imperial playing field, the Padang, at the heart of the imperial district, alongside administrative and judicial buildings and the Anglican Cathedral. But as well as inculcating myths of racial superiority and dynamism, the virtues of Sport, and especially team sport, also spoke of fair play and equality, values that could undermine the same hierarchies it served to protect.

The Singapore Recreation Club (SRC) was officially opened on 23 June 1883 in order for young Eurasians to play cricket. The Singapore Cricket Club had been around since 1852 but was for whites only and the creation of the Singapore Recreation Club with the approval of the colonial authorities ensured that the segregation between races remained in place. In July 1883, permission was granted to the Recreation Club to use the lower end of the Padang for cricket matches and, later, for lawn tennis. Significantly, this meant the pavilions of the two clubs, the Eurasians' Singapore Recreation Club and the whites' Singapore Cricket Club, would face each other across the Padang, separated by playing fields, a separation that emphasised the racial divide between them but also showed a shared enthusiasm for Sport and the cultural and social values that came with it. And this continued with the same off-the-

field activities of drinks and card games¹⁰² in the same exclusively all-male environment: ‘Club life simulated colonial practice.’¹⁰³ In *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, looking at the Recreation Club, Walter Makepeace gave it a membership of 121 Eurasian men in 1919 and called it ‘the premier Eurasian club in Singapore.’¹⁰⁴

The exact membership numbers for the period before World War II are unclear as records were lost during the Japanese Occupation. In their own anniversary publications, the Club states that membership was over 200 by 1921¹⁰⁵ whereas in Patrick Khaw’s history of it, he finds them only reaching this number by the early 1930s.¹⁰⁶ Nick Aplin’s general account of sport in Singapore during the period of British rule, has the membership of the Club rising and falling in the 1920s, with the highest number in any one year being 265 in 1921, and the lowest 178 in 1925 and 1926. In most years, however, there were over 200 members, and several of those years recorded over 250 members.¹⁰⁷ These numbers were less than those of the Eurasian Association and also, for example, of another association active in individual and team sports, the YMCA, which had 902 members in 1926.¹⁰⁸ This points towards an exclusivity practised by Eurasians’ ‘premier’ club and this is borne out by its fees: in 1919, entrance to the club cost \$5 with a monthly subscription of \$2¹⁰⁹ which, by the 1930s, had increased to \$2.50 for ordinary members.¹¹⁰ Additionally, Myrna Braga-Blake claims the SRC, and the EA, tried to police their elite status in the community by keeping out

¹⁰² Milne, Ronald Benjamin, interview, Singapore, 22/08/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰³ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Please Pass The Salt: Class Within The Eurasian Community’, in Myrna Braga-Blake (ed.), *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ Makepeace, Walter, Gilbert Brooke and Roland Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being Some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919* (London: John Murray, 1921), p. 367.

¹⁰⁵ *Singapore Recreation Club 1957* (Singapore: Singapore Tiger Standard Press, 1957), no page numbers.

¹⁰⁶ Khaw, Patrick, ‘The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963’, BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87, p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Aplin, Nick, *Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2019), p. 129.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 126.

¹⁰⁹ Makepeace, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, p. 367.

¹¹⁰ Khaw, ‘The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963’, p. 32.

“undesirables” with secret ballots vetoing prospective members.¹¹¹ Certainly, there was a notable overlap between the two organisations with the presidency of the Singapore Recreation Club in the 1920s taken, successively, by Edwin Tessensohn, Claude da Silva and Dr Noel Clarke, all leading members of the Eurasian Association.¹¹²

A hugely influential figure of the Singapore Recreation Club, and for sport in Singapore, was Dr Clarke’s brother, Conrad Hercules Clarke. In the interwar period, he was the pre-eminent sponsor of sporting competitions, not restricting himself to Eurasians: *The “Sportsman”* magazine in February 1933 counted fifty-three trophies gifted by Conrad Clarke to sporting associations and schools, including trophies to the Singapore Recreation Club, the Girls’ Sports Club, the Raffles Institution, the Chinese Swimming Club, and the Amateur Athletic Association of British Malaya; and for a broad variety of sports which indicates the range of sporting activities taking place at the time – cricket, tennis, billiards, athletics, football, hockey, netball and badminton.¹¹³ Conrad Clarke was not wealthy, unlike his brother who had sufficient means through ‘wise investments’ to educate his son at Eton,¹¹⁴ and worked as a municipal bailiff whose possession warrants were a likely source for many of his donated trophies.¹¹⁵

In 1924 with the Challenge Cup for cricket, Conrad Clarke inaugurated annual matches of Europeans vs. The Rest, the first match ending in a draw. These matches mainly drew players from the Singapore Cricket Club for the Europeans and from the Singapore Recreation Club for The Rest though the first ‘Rest’ XI included a member of the YMCA and the Ceylon Club, and later players from the Indian Association and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club

¹¹¹ Braga-Blake, ‘Please Pass The Salt: Class Within The Eurasian Community’, p.123.

¹¹² *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine: 100th Anniversary Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983* (Singapore: Singapore Recreation Club, 1983), no page numbers.

¹¹³ *The “Sportsman”*, Volume 6, No. 2, February 1933, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁴ Oehlers, F.A.C. “Jock”, *That’s How It Goes: The Way of the 90-Year Life Journey of a Singapore Eurasian* (Singapore: Select Books, 2011), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Personal conversation with Louise Clarke, grand-daughter of Conrad Clarke, Singapore, 31 July 2023.

were included in the team.¹¹⁶ These contests played out the ‘keen rivalry ... [and] very keen competition’ between the two Padang clubs.¹¹⁷ They received detailed coverage in the local press and, in 1933, *The “Sportsman”* as part of its match report for that year’s encounter which had ended in a narrow win for the Europeans listed all the results to date, a total of two wins for the Europeans, one abandoned match, six draws and a win for The Rest in 1930.¹¹⁸ The importance of the 1930 victory at that most English of sports, cricket, a vehicle for transmitting the values of the imperial ruling class across the empire, and its impact on Eurasian, and Asian, self-esteem should not be underestimated. It reinforced the belief articulated by the Eurasian Association that, in the current system, given a fair and free chance, Eurasians could flourish. And it was also a means by which those affecting racial superiority could be humbled. The reminiscences of one Eurasian sportsman of the interwar period describes competitions against whites in blunt terms: ‘With the colonial snobbery and prejudice in force, it was little wonder than when it came to inter-club games, the non-whites were all intent on giving the European teams a thrashing.’¹¹⁹

There were notable changes that took place in association football in the 1920s. Founded in 1892, the Singapore Football Association restricted entry to their league and it was only in the 1920s that local Chinese, Malay and Indian teams were allowed to participate alongside European and Eurasian clubs, the military, and teams from English-speaking schools.¹²⁰ In 1921, a Singapore Cricket Club football team that toured Java included a Eurasian, Lancelot M. Pennefather, and, in 1922, when the Prince of Wales ‘kicked off the Malay interstate

¹¹⁶ Tessensohn, Denyse, *Singapore Recreation Club Celebrates 1883-2007* (Singapore: People Developer, 2007), p. 43.

¹¹⁷ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, interview, Singapore, 21/11/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore, (quotation); Jocelyn Simon De Souza interview, 24/01/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹¹⁸ *The “Sportsman”*, Volume 6, No. 8, August 1933, p. 40.

¹¹⁹ Oehlers, *That’s How It Goes*, p. 32.

¹²⁰ Lim Peng Han, ‘The Singapore Football League, 1904-1941: Towards the Institutionalization of Football in the Colonial Port City of Singapore’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 2018, Vol. 35, No.s 12-13, 1217-1237, p. 1218.

Football Tournament on the Padang,'¹²¹ Eurasians represented Singapore alongside whites. This competition was more generally known after the trophy the teams competed for, the *HMS Malaya Cup*. The Singapore team contained Eurasians from the outset, including Pennefather and a teenager, Roy F. Smith. The blurring of racial categories in pursuit of sporting success is illustrated not only by Pennefather playing for the Singapore Cricket Club on tour but also by the poaching of the multi-talented Smith, 'Champion Athlete of the Year', from the Singapore Recreation Club by the ostensibly whites-only Singapore Cricket Club with the inducement of a promised post of 'assistant' at the major trading company, McAlister's, a position usually reserved for Europeans.¹²²

However, poaching a gifted athlete did not lead to desegregation elsewhere: at this time, the Singapore Cricket Club's colour bar meant that a Eurasian journalist from the *Straits Times* was not welcome on their premises to report on their matches.¹²³ And, according to one Eurasian memoirist, Roy Smith was married to Doreen Oehlers, founding President of the Eurasian Girls' Sports Club (to be discussed in the next chapter), and when he joined the Singapore Cricket Club and passed off as white, so did she, 'thereby forsaking their Asian heritage; and, for Doreen, the Girls' Sports Club as well.'¹²⁴ Even so, by the mid-1920s, the Singapore football team, consisting of Chinese, Eurasian and European players, had its first non-European captain, W.A. Aeria of the Singapore Recreation Club (and the Volunteers).¹²⁵ The importance of these sporting spectacles cannot be overestimated: a mixed team with a non-white captain would have been playing in front of multiracial crowds on the Padang

¹²¹ Sharp, Ilsa, *The Singapore Cricket Club: Established 1852*, revised 2nd edition (Singapore: Singapore Cricket Club, 1993), p. 71.

¹²² Sharp, *The Singapore Cricket Club*, p. 73.

¹²³ Peet, George Lamb, interview, Singapore, 02/04/1985, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹²⁴ Oehlers, *That's How It Goes*, p. 34.

¹²⁵ *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine: 100th Anniversary Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983* (Singapore: Singapore Recreation Club, 1983), no page numbers.

while representing “The Colony”.¹²⁶ ‘What was new about the late 1920s and ‘30s’, notes the official history of the Singapore Cricket Club, ‘was the acceleration of Asian sports prowess and a completely new demand for social mixing of the races in clubs too.’¹²⁷

By 1927, the range and demand for sport was such that the Recreation Club decided to enlarge its facilities on the Padang. The Recreation Club extension was paid for by the Eurasian community unlike the Singapore Cricket Club which received a \$50,000 loan from the colonial government to pay for new wings added to their pavilion in 1922.¹²⁸ The list of donors to the Singapore Recreation Club Building Fund in June 1927 included Conrad Clarke (\$100), Claude da Silva (\$110) and H.R.S. Zehnder (\$250).¹²⁹ Two new wings were formally opened by the Club’s President, Dr Noel Clarke, on 1 March 1931 and these provided extra rooms for billiards, reading, card games and a grill, as well as a ladies room and toilet.¹³⁰ This was the first time women were allowed inside the Recreation Club; the wives and daughters of members previously had to wait outside for their fathers and husbands.¹³¹ A resolution, moved by Claude da Silva at the Club’s AGM in August 1927, ‘that members be at liberty to invite lady friends to lawn tennis on Wednesday’ had been passed,¹³² but other attempts to allow women greater access to the sporting facilities of the club were ‘firmly rejected.’¹³³

Notwithstanding these gender limitations in the 1920s, sport clearly provided an avenue for Eurasians to assert themselves as part of an imperial community. Interestingly, so did the formal dances they organised, which usually took place at the Drill Hall and at the Singapore

¹²⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 11 August 1924, p. 11.

¹²⁷ Sharp, *The Singapore Cricket Club*, p. 84.

¹²⁸ Tessensohn, *Singapore Recreation Club*, p. 41.

¹²⁹ *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine: 100th Anniversary Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983* (Singapore: Singapore Recreation Club, 1983), no page numbers.

¹³⁰ *The Straits Times*, 11 June 1933, p. 13.

¹³¹ Barth, Valerie, ‘Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations’, in Myrna Braga-Blake (ed.), *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 98.

¹³² *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine: 100th Anniversary Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983*, no page numbers.

¹³³ Tessensohn, *Singapore Recreation Club*, p. 39.

Recreation Club. These dances included some given by the Eurasian Literary Association, Eurasian Medical Students, the Eurasian Association and the Singapore Recreation Club itself, as well as those organised by “D” Company.¹³⁴ The dances were held for a variety of reasons, some of which demonstrated imperial loyalty. There were dances as part of ‘a special recruitment day’, to celebrate the New Year and a Leap Year, to honour Zehnder’s promotion to Captain, and to welcome Zehnder and his wife on their return from ‘a round the world holiday.’¹³⁵ Larger dances were held at the Victoria Memorial Hall, in the heart of imperial Singapore, including one to celebrate Noel Clarke’s elevation to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council.¹³⁶

This political dimension extended to other events as well. The Eurasian community held fundraising dances at the Victoria Memorial Hall in aid of the Poppy Fund, a choice that helped demonstrate Eurasian loyalty and attachment to Empire and this, in turn, was endorsed by the presence of the Governor and his wife, Sir Hugh and Lady Clifford, on one such occasion.¹³⁷ The community was recognised locally for their generosity following a Fancy Dress Ball where the ‘Eurasian Community’s Splendid Effort’ raised \$2725 for the Poppy Fund.¹³⁸ It appeared an overtly altruistic endeavour as all funds raised were destined for distribution to veterans and their families in the UK rather than being used for a similar purpose in Singapore. However, in his insightful article concerning overseas aid in the Straits Settlements during the colonial period, Mark Frost reveals that underlying these charitable events was the desire for full imperial citizenship, for which they can be seen as something of

¹³⁴ *Malaya Tribune*, 4 August 1920, p. 4; 23 December 1925, p. 7; 5 September 1928, p. 8; 5 April 1929, p. 8; 7 January 1930, p. 8.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 9 December 1927, p. 11; 24 February 1928, p. 8; 27 July 1928, p. 7; 9 March 1931, p. 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 22 August 1928, p. 5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 12 November 1927, p. 9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 15 November 1929, p. 8.

a dress rehearsal: ‘Overseas aid efforts allowed many of those subjugated to display their loyalty to the British as an aspiring colonial bourgeoisie.’¹³⁹

Dancing, however, was to prove the catalyst for many unhappy incidents that reminded Eurasians of their place within a racial order. There were many public, cosmopolitan spaces, such as the New World Amusement Park, where it was possible for people to mix and for people of different races to dance in close proximity to, and sometimes with, each other. Things were not so straightforward when it came to socialising and dancing at the prestigious, white, hotels of Singapore, like Raffles’ Hotel and the Hotel de l’Europe, where some racial protocols were unwritten but nonetheless enforced. At one of these, it was reported, the hotel manager had taken to identifying women as Eurasian while they were on the dance floor and unceremoniously ejecting them in acts of public humiliation. This caused a flurry of letters to the press, and Dr Clarke to object, with a “British Eurasian” deploring the treatment of ‘respectable Eurasian ladies’¹⁴⁰ and a white “Britisher” comparing the events in ‘one of our hotels’ to the racism of the southern states of the US.¹⁴¹ Both agreed it was very un-British conduct. The *Straits Times* published four letters on the subject in the space of a week, all against the hotel’s actions and all under a byword for British sporting behaviour, ‘Fairplay.’¹⁴²

Conclusion

E. Kay Gillis correctly sees the period covered by this chapter as one where, in Singapore, the key elements of a civil society were put in place, civil society being defined as a space where autonomous and voluntary groups can affect public policy. Encouraged by their entry

¹³⁹ Frost, Mark R., ‘Humanitarianism and the overseas aid craze in Britain’s colonial Straits Settlements, 1870-1920’, *Past & Present*, No. 236 (August 2017), pp. 169-205, p. 173.

¹⁴⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 26 April 1926, p. 8.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 30 April 1926, p. 5.

¹⁴² *Straits Times*, 22 April 1926, p. 10; 24 April 1926, p. 10; 26 April 1926, p. 10; 27 April 1926, p. 10.

to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, these associations, including the Eurasian Association, 'were well organised and effective'¹⁴³ though their influence was diluted by the sheer number and range of these groups. Perhaps the divisions amongst Eurasians – something for which they were repeatedly criticised - merely mirrored a fragmented local Singaporean society as a whole, something which served the interests of their British rulers through a situation of unplanned divide and rule that impeded the formation of broader, non-communal organisations in this period, the Clerical Union being one exception. However, Gillis argues that the failure of the coalition of the various elite local ethnic associations to make a significant impact, as shown by their failure to achieve much after the 'radical constitutional reforms in 1922',¹⁴⁴ was due to political and strategic factors beyond their control. Gillis accepts the argument made by the British at the time, that extending entry of various ethnic groups into the higher ranks of the Malayan civil service would have offended the Malay Rulers as they would then have had to consort with non-white, non-Malay, officials on equal terms; this, it was held, would jeopardise the wider aim of successive Governors to unite the various administrative entities of British Malaya – the Federated Malay States, the Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements.¹⁴⁵ This reasoning conveniently absolves colonial officials of any institutional racism behind this decision and rather blames the prejudices of the Malay royal courts, a view rejected by many commentators, notably the sociologist Charles Hirschman who cites the imperial administrator Sir George Maxwell in support of his argument that the policy 'owes its inception to British officials and not to the Rulers.'¹⁴⁶ A further barrier to reform was the Colonial Office in London: it vetoed one Governor's plan to remove his built-in majority on

¹⁴³ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁶ Hirschman, Charles, 'The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology', *Sociological Forum*, Spring, 1986, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1986), pp. 330-361, p. 353.

the SSLC in order to ensure there could be no obstruction to the plans for their strategic imperative, the Singapore Naval Base.

John Gregory Conceicao argues that the Eurasian Association at this time was ‘not a formidable or effective organisation that could be representative of the aspirations of the community.’¹⁴⁷ He portrays Eurasians as divided and going through a crisis in their sense of self. For Conceicao, they were absurdly loyal to the British, despite the prejudice and the Colour Bar they suffered, and they only reluctantly began to associate with other Asian groups at this time, such as ‘the more organised and influential Straits Chinese community.’¹⁴⁸ He perceptively sees Eurasians driven to this position against their will. In effect, they were forced to admit their common ground with other non-white groups and acknowledge their Asian-ness, by the failure of the British to keep their side of an imperial bargain which, through Eurasian loyalty and European ancestry, would grant Eurasians a rightful seat at Empire’s top table. Instead, the British imposed a non-European identity upon them, eroded their status, and restricted Eurasians to, at best, a secondary position in colonial society. According to Conceicao, this would ultimately force this ‘disparate group [of Eurasians] to forge a new and collective identity ... [and] identify with Asians.’¹⁴⁹ But first, they would have to go through the process of coming to terms with the true, unequal nature of their relationship with the British.

However, it would be fair to label the period under review in this chapter as one more of accommodation and association. The Eurasian community did not appear to be unduly concerned with either the limited objectives of the Eurasian Association or the limited achievements of their representatives on the SSLC. There was murmuring, and criticism aired

¹⁴⁷ Conceicao, John Gregory, ‘The Rulers and the Ruled: The Singapore Eurasian Community under the British and the Japanese’, MA Thesis, School of Arts, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, 1993, p. 95.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 98.

in the press, but this did not amount to consistent pressure on their political leaders and there were no concerted attempts to replace them, and nor was there any semblance of a coherent internal opposition within the community. There was much acquiescence in the status quo and the slow incremental pace of political reform, and although there was certainly opposition to discrimination against the community it cannot be said to have been mobilised en masse by this. Clearly, for many Eurasians in Singapore the imperial concord still held. The Eurasian Association had gained representation for Eurasians as Eurasians on the Legislative Council and as Municipal Commissioners, albeit at the Governor's discretion. They publicly argued against the colour bar in the civil service, albeit with little success, and discrimination against Eurasians in hospitals and hotels. The Eurasian Volunteers were now part of the colony's defence force and earned the outward praise of senior commanders, in spite of what they may have thought in private, and their dedication and loyalty was taken for granted. In the reminiscences of those who were very young at the time, and some who were not yet born, repeating the memories of their parents, this time was a 'Golden Age' for Eurasians in Singapore, not to be repeated.¹⁵⁰ A moment of innocent enjoyment and laughter, an endless round of dances and parties and sporting events when the figure of Conrad Clarke loomed larger in the lives of Eurasians than the overt political activities of his brother, Noel Clarke.

As Clarke and Tessensohn and the Eurasian Association accepted the rules of the political game in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, and the Eurasian community largely adhered to the code implicit in colonial life and to their place in colonial society, there was an intense engagement on the part of many, not only in the military world but in the associational world of sport. Readers of the English-language press were able to follow the progress of local Eurasian sporting heroes as they competed in increasingly multi-ethnic

¹⁵⁰ Pereira, Alexius A., *Singapore Chronicles: Eurasians* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies/Straits Times Press, 2015), p. 9.

competitions. They were treated to the spectacle of teams of Chinese, Europeans, Eurasians, Indians and Malays playing against each other in a combined football league, the most popular sport in Singapore. The symbolism of non-white men in action against their white counterparts, sometimes against teams drawn from colonial regiments, cannot be underestimated, not least the contests of Europeans vs. The Rest in that most imperial of sports, cricket, annual events inaugurated by a Eurasian. Singapore was represented by a mixed team in the regional football championship and its first non-white captain was Eurasian, leading a team that included Europeans. Clearly, sport was a vehicle that enabled, to some extent, the breaking down of racial barriers and gave Eurasians the opportunity to display sporting prowess at least the equal of their imperial masters. However, the limitations in the 1920s of sport as a location for integration are found in the casual co-opting by the segregated Singapore Cricket Club of a gifted Eurasian athlete as 'white' and, on the opposite end of the Padang, by the ongoing exclusion of Eurasian women from membership of the Singapore Recreation Club. Politics take place in different ways and in different arenas.

The Eurasians' loyalty to King and Country was genuine, and so was their desire to be acknowledged as authentic members of an imperial community – they already believed it was their well-earned birthright, notwithstanding the whites' reluctance to admit them on equal terms. It was found in their faith in certain concepts, the allegedly eternal values of a benevolent British Empire and an imperialism guided by principles of Fairplay that, ideally, would render it colour blind. And, in reality, we find the Eurasians of Singapore in the interwar period trying to utilise notions of Fairplay, consciously and unconsciously, for their own benefit and using the sports field – not least in the matches between Europeans and The Rest on the Padang, and in teams in which they took their place alongside Europeans – to proclaim their equality with colonial whites. That they achieved more, and arguably made greater communal effort, outside of the political sphere, in sports and the local militia, was

hardly surprising, given that the colonial order could accommodate their assertions there more easily than elsewhere. Moreover, while the Eurasian Association could barely muster a quorum of 30 for its AGMs, its dances, often held at the Drill Hall of the Volunteers, were always well attended; and many more young Eurasians joined the number of informal and formal sports clubs like the Recreation Club than applied for membership of the EA. It was as if Eurasians instinctively understood that a far greater symbolic impact could be made outside of council chambers and stuffy meeting rooms.

With all the clubs, the sports, the dances, Eurasians were telling themselves who they thought they were and who they wanted to be. And it was through these demonstrations of loyalty and respectability and prowess, that – they hoped – their desire for full citizenship of the British Empire would be recognised and realised. Although, in the attempt to move forward politically, their leaders had begun to ally with other, mainly Asian, associations and to work with them in the Legislative Council and the Clerical Union, the Eurasian community largely defined itself as a single, separate entity, one that was neither European nor Asian, but one which hoped to be accepted by the Europeans. It was an identity defined by a consensual relationship between Eurasians and Empire, one which Eurasians sometimes chafed at but, despite the protestations of Cedric Dover and others, one which they accepted for the time being.

Chapter Four

The Paradox of the Slump Years: Eurasian Advancement and Vulnerability

In accounts concerning the interwar period, Eurasians from Singapore have characterised the time as a golden age for the Eurasians of Singapore. These include recollections of ‘those happy times’ by one memoirist and the report of “marvellous times” by an oral history contributor.¹ There are many Eurasian oral history records that speak fondly of these years, of private parties, Christmas celebrations, dances at the Singapore Recreation Club and the Drill Hall, events organised by the Girls’ Sports Club and New Year’s Balls at the Victoria Memorial Hall.² It has been described as a golden age for Eurasian sport and the ‘official’ version of Eurasian history, *Singapore Eurasians*, amongst other references to a gilded time, talks of ‘gaiety, games, concerts, house parties, musical evenings and other social activities’.³ In his contribution to the series *Singapore Chronicles*, one of fifty books commissioned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Singapore’s independence, Alexius A. Pereira, later President of the Eurasian Association, refers to a pre-war Golden Age when the ‘community was so close and tight knit.’⁴

In this so-called ‘Golden Age’, it was certainly the 1930s that can be seen as the high water mark for Eurasians. Significantly, it was in this period that they revived a journal for their community. This was *The Eurasian Review*. Intended to be a quarterly magazine, its run

¹ La Brooy, Muriel, *Where Is Thy Victory?* (Privately published in Singapore, 1988), p. 1; Jocelyn Simon De Souza interview, Singapore, 24/03/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

² See, for example, the following: Roland Schoon interview, 25/04/1984; Ronald Benjamin Milne interviews, 22/08/1984 and 21/11/1984; Marie Ethel Bong interview, 08/12/1984; Mabel Martens interview, 17/01/1984; Grace Taylor interview, 29/11/1984; Annie Wilson Kirkwood Oehlers, 15/08/1983; all Singapore, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

³ Braga-Blake, Myrna, ‘Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Edition, 1992), p. 1. See also, Clarke, Louise, ‘Within A Stone’s Throw: Eurasian Enclaves’, in *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, ed. by Myrna Braga-Blake (Singapore: Times Edition, 1992), p. 54, p. 59.

⁴ Pereira, Alexius A., *Eurasians: Singapore Chronicles* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies/Straits Times Press, 2015), p. 9

from July 1934 to sometime in 1938, the last extant edition is from December 1937, meant it was in circulation for much longer than the year *Our Magazine* lasted and suggests this Eurasian mobilisation in print was matched to a larger extent, compared to its predecessor, with the sentiments of the community it primarily addressed, and who provided the consistent readership that sustained it for a number of years. Eurasians served on committees of philanthropic organisations and the boards of such prestigious Singaporean establishments as the Raffles Institute and the King Edward VII Medical School. Whilst the pressure brought to bear upon the colonial government had not opened up senior ranks of the Malayan Civil Service to Eurasians, it had led to the creation of the smaller Straits Settlements Civil Service which promised greater chances of advancement and the prospect of a partial end to the Colour Bar. Eurasians at this time also served as Justices of the Peace and in local government as members of Singapore's Municipal Council. Prompted by the Straits Settlements (Singapore) Association, the committee of the Eurasian Association supported further reform of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, as well as protecting their own interests, coming out in September 1930 in favour of more councillors if '[t]he right of nomination might be given to responsible representative associations.'⁵

Dr. Noel Clarke was the highly respected Eurasian member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, well regarded to the extent he was co-opted onto the senior executive arm of government when he was appointed a member of the colonial administration's Executive Council, albeit in a temporary capacity. Clarke also served on the committees of numerous bodies including the B.M.A. (Malayan Branch), the King Edward VII College of Medicine Council, Raffles College Council and the Straits Settlements Association (Singapore).⁶ Hugh Zehnder, as well as having a successful career as a lawyer, followed Clarke as the Eurasian representative on the Legislative Council, and in 1932 became the first

⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 6 September 1930, p. 7.

⁶ 'Malayan Personalities – 13', *Malaya Tribune*, 7 August 1928, p. 7.

Eurasian in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force to be promoted to Major, was awarded an O.B.E. and given command of the Eurasian Volunteers in “D” Company.⁷

Membership numbers for the Eurasian Association and the Singapore Recreation Club held steady despite the Slump of the 1930s, and, as we shall see in this chapter, the Girls’ Sports Club founded by Eurasian women made inroads into a male-dominated world. Eurasian sporting success against white opponents, moreover, had added to the pressure for a wider and mixed representation in colonial cricket and beyond and, in 1937, when a representative Australian XI toured the Malayan peninsula, three Eurasians were picked to play for Singapore.⁸ Eurasians were significant players in combined sporting teams, playing against Europeans for The Rest, and representing Singapore in competitions against other states and clubs of British Malaya, as individuals and as team members.

In memoirs written after the war and after independence, in oral history accounts recorded from the 1980s onwards, Eurasians looked back on this period as a golden age for Eurasians in Singapore, punctuated by family parties and other social gatherings, with young Eurasian women increasingly joining their male counterparts in paid employment.⁹ In one respect these memories lead us to a substantial Eurasian achievement as, in the 1930s – as shown above – the Eurasians reached a high point in colonial society and imperial influence in official positions. Notwithstanding this, there is something unreal as the period also coincided with the Slump, and Eurasians were not immune to its consequences as the worldwide Great Depression reached Singapore. It may be that looking back with nostalgia on a Golden Age of past times was somewhat indicative of dissatisfaction with a present where, in the Eurasian case, their relative place in post-colonial Singapore compared unfavourably to the

⁷ CO 276/123 Government Gazettes 1932, Vol. I Jan-Mar, p. 304.

⁸ *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine: 100th Anniversary Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983* (Singapore: Singapore Recreation Club, 1983), no page numbers.

⁹ See, for example, the following: La Brooy, Muriel, *Where Is Thy Victory?* (Privately published in Singapore, 1988), p. 12; de Cruz, Gerald, *Rojak Rebel: Memoirs of a Singapore Maverick* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1993), p. 13.

remembered one in colonial society. In fact, the Slump was a paradox for Eurasians, a time of individual advancement and, yet, communal vulnerability.

What was the occupational structure of the Eurasian community at this time? The 1931 census returns regarding the employment status of Eurasian men in Singapore Town indicated the predominantly subordinate ancillary role for the community already found in 1921. There were only six recorded Eurasian barristers or solicitors, twenty business owners or managers, whereas 697 Eurasian men were classified as working as clerks, office assistants, typists and draughtsmen. The census did not differentiate between government and commercial roles in this group but, in more senior government roles, it recorded 12 Eurasian central government officials and 28 municipal officials, and none of these were Eurasian women. No other category of employment included as many Eurasian men as the clerical one, though there were 32 Eurasian motor mechanics, 95 other mechanics and fitters, 51 foremen and warehousemen and 55 civil engineers, architects and surveyors.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the census did not record the seniority or levels of responsibility of these positions, which could vary widely.

Out of the 84 Eurasian salesmen, shop assistants, mercantile accountants and travellers, 39 were women; 93 Eurasian women were working as clerks, office assistants, typists and draughtsmen, and 70 were employed as midwives or nurses. 181 Eurasians were working as teachers and almost three-quarters of these, 135, were women. 38 of the 46 Eurasian telephone operators were women and the nineteen tailors, dressmakers and seamstresses were all women.¹¹ A cross check of the various categories used in the census – agriculture and fishing, mining and quarrying, electrical and metal, transport and communications, commerce

¹⁰ Vlieland, C.A., *British Malaya (The colony of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States under British protection, namely the Federated States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang and the States of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Brunei): A report on the 1931 census and on certain problems of vital statistics* (London: Malayan Information Agency, 1932), p. 259, p. 261.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 259.

and finance, public administration, professional occupations, personal service, other and indeterminate occupations – shows the proportion of Eurasian women at work as close to 25% of the total adult female Eurasian population of Singapore when the 275 Eurasian women aged 55 or over are discounted.¹² Taking into account an undetermined number of women who were responsible for the care of children and elderly relatives, and that Eurasian women were living under societal norms which until very recently discouraged the idea of women at work, this degree of female employment is substantial and evidence of the possibility of a life of urban modernity for Eurasian women in Singapore, one resembling that of some of their interwar western counterparts, as reflected in the newspapers, glossy magazines and even some of the Hollywood movies they consumed. This is confirmed in some oral history accounts which talk of the greater freedoms afforded to Eurasian women and girls in comparison to the Asian female population of Singapore.¹³

This vision of an urban Eurasian modernity is enhanced by the figures concerning Eurasian literacy in Singapore, the censuses defining literacy in any language as being able to read and write a letter in it.¹⁴ In 1931, the percentage for Eurasian literacy in English was 94.1% for males over 15 years old and 85.8% for females over 15 years old.¹⁵ This was also the case ten years earlier when the 1921 census found that ‘nearly all Eurasian women read and write English.’¹⁶ The equivalent statistics for the Malay, Indian and Chinese communities are striking – only 9.7% of Malay men and 0.6% of Malay women aged over 15 were literate in English, for Indians it was 11.9% and 9.2% respectively, and for the Chinese in Singapore

¹² Ibid, p.p. 236-7, pp. 259-261.

¹³ Martens, Mabel, interview, Singapore, 17/01/1984 and Noel Arthur Pereira interview, Singapore, 24/05/1984; both Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore. See also Lewis, Su Lin, ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Modern Girl: A Cross-Cultural Discourse in 1930s Penang’, *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 6 (2009), pp. 1385-1419, p. 1403; and Lin, Jenny Lam, *Voices and Choices: The Women’s Movement in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Edition, 1993), p. 103.

¹⁴ Nathan, J.E., *The Census of British Malaya, the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei* (London: Malayan Information Agency, 1922), p. 107.

¹⁵ Vlieland, *1931 Census*, p. 330.

¹⁶ Nathan, *1921 Census*, p. 111.

it was 11.4% and 6.7%.¹⁷ The apparent superiority of the Eurasians in the language of their rulers in comparison to the other non-white communities of Singapore has been habitually used, along with a shared culture, to explain the preferential treatment accorded them by the British compared to that meted out to others. This could have been the case at the time of the 1911 census when only 1.7% of the population of the Straits Settlements spoke English and the proportion of Eurasians in the overall population was 1.11% (including the Kristang-speaking Eurasians of Malacca) and the proportion for what the census termed ‘Europeans and Kindred Races’ was at 1%.¹⁸ However, by 1931 Eurasians in absolute numbers were a small minority of all the non-whites in the territory who were literate in English. The census that year recorded 3,466 Malays, 6,170 Indians and 39,307 Chinese as literate in English in Singapore, as against 5,425 literate Eurasians in the port city.¹⁹

This was reflected in the distribution of certain local and central government jobs where Eurasians had nothing resembling a monopoly in these positions. (In arguing this, however, it must always be remembered that – given the miniscule proportion of the total population of Singapore constituted by their community – Eurasians held a disproportionate number of these jobs.) Unlike the 1921 census, the 1931 model did not differentiate between clerical posts in the public and private sector but it did record the numbers employed as Central Government Officials and as Municipal Officials. As noted earlier, only twelve Eurasians were recorded as Central Government Officials and 28 as Municipal Officials and they were all men. For the Chinese, 105 men and three women were employed as Central Government Officials with thirteen male Municipal Officials. 160 Europeans were working as Central Government Officials including four women, and 47 men and one woman worked as Municipal Officials. The figures for the Indian community were 88 and 21 respectively, all

¹⁷ Vlieland, *1931 Census*, pp. 353-5.

¹⁸ Marriott, H., Superintendent of Census, *Report on the Census of the Colony of the Straits Settlements, taken on the 10th March, 1911* (Singapore: The Government Printing Office, 1911), pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Vlieland, *1931 Census*, p. 330, pp. 353-5.

men, and for the Malays it was 104 and six, again all men.²⁰ Contrasted with the other communities, this demonstrates the opposite of a closed shop favouring the Eurasians of Singapore. Indeed, in these positions in toto they were outnumbered by the various other groups of the Singapore population.

The same pattern of Eurasians not securing a monopoly in areas of employment is found in the numbers concerning the five job categories employing the largest numbers of Singapore Eurasians in the 1931 census. These were, firstly, the 790 Eurasians, including 93 women, working as Clerks, Office Assistants, Typists and Draughtsmen; secondly, the 181 teachers, including 135 women; thirdly, the 95 'Metal Workers: Other Mechanics and Fitters', all men; fourthly, the 84 Salesmen, Shop Assistants, Mercantile Accountants, Travellers, a grouping which included 39 women; and, lastly, the 70 Eurasian Midwives and Sick Nurses: these were all women.²¹ A comparison with the other communities repeats the outcome from the 1921 census, there was no Eurasian monopoly. In 1931, many more Chinese and Indians than Eurasians were employed as salesman, clerks and so on, with similar Eurasian numbers compared to Europeans and Malays. Thus, 29,793 Chinese are recorded as working as clerks and salesmen, compared to 3,396 Indians, 1,104 Malays and 980 Eurasians. However, it is certainly true that in occupations where women were prevalent, i.e. as teachers and nurses, Eurasian women were employed in significant numbers compared to other women.²² Proportionally the notable female Eurasian presence in teaching is reinforced by figures recorded by the colonial authorities in 1932 which show that out of 232 women employed as teachers in Singapore that year, over half, 117, were Eurasian.²³

²⁰ Ibid, p. 257, p. 260, p. 264, p. 268, p. 271, p. 275.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 259-61.

²² Ibid, pp. 260-278.

²³ CO 276/130 Government Gazettes 1933, Vol. IV Oct-Dec, Supplement No. 106 Annual Report on Education in the Straits Settlements for the year 1932, p. 57.

Impact of the Slump

It is the case that Eurasian reminiscences of the years of the Depression depict a period of ample opportunities (“there were many Eurasians who had good positions”)²⁴ although this can be partly explained by the highlighting of instances of individual achievement that somewhat obscure the slow pace of communal advancement. One purpose of this chapter is to bring some nuance to this picture, coloured as it is by a rose-tinted nostalgia. By 1930, the Legislative Council were considering the consequences of ‘the present time world-wide trade depression and the sharp fall in the prices of tin and rubber ... [resulting in] very marked signs, in June last, that the labour position throughout the country was becoming serious.’²⁵ This situation, known in the region as ‘The Slump’, extended into the following years with an annual report from 1933 still referring to a ‘financial depression which overshadowed the whole country’²⁶ and recording that: ‘The effects of the world trade depression continued to be severely felt in the Colony.’²⁷ The New Year 1933 edition of a recently-established Singapore sports magazine admitted that the prospects for the coming year were not good: ‘it is expected to outrival its worst predecessors, and create a new record for universal depression.’²⁸ The recovery in Singapore from the world-wide depression brought on by the Great Crash of 1929 was not uniform, and for many the Slump endured, since the rise in commodity prices for the tin and rubber upon which the economy of British Malaya was built

²⁴ D’Cotta, Christopher, interview, Singapore, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore, 26/03/1985.

²⁵ ‘Review of the Affairs of the Colony of the Straits Settlements prepared in the Colonial Secretary’s Office for the information of the members of the Legislative Council at a meeting held on the 29th day of September, 1930’ in Robert L. Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 9: 1927-1931* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), p. 449.

²⁶ ‘Review of the Affairs of the Colony of the Straits Settlements prepared in the Colonial Secretary’s Office for the information of the members of the Legislative Council at a meeting held on the 2nd day of October, 1933’ in Robert L. Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 10: 1932-1935* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), p. 152.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 167.

²⁸ *The “Sportsman”*, Volume VI, Number 1, January 1933, p. 1.

was insufficient to return all of its inhabitants to their status during the boom days of the local economy.

Continuing and substantial unemployment persisted in a Eurasian community dependent upon the types of white collar, clerical roles whose numbers were decimated and who faced a rapidly changing and insecure employment environment. This prompted a considerable amount of soul-searching and led some to question the quality and direction, even the apparent lack of direction, of the local Eurasian leadership.²⁹ And, in a community which prided itself on its loyalty to Crown and Empire, the developments caused a few to question the entire nature of the colonial exchange.³⁰ After all, even that Eurasian badge of imperial loyalty, the Volunteers, did not escape the Slump unscathed. An official history of the Singapore Volunteer Corps noted that ‘Owing to the “slump” a large cut in the expenditure estimates for 1931 and 1932 had to be made’ and the cuts continued into 1933 and 1934.³¹ For *The Eurasian Review*, the question of military service was inextricably linked to demonstrating imperial loyalty *and* solving the problems of unemployment, a point it made explicit in a leader in September 1936. Martial prowess and vigilance, it considered, was necessary for maintaining imperial hegemony, the continuation of which, it believed, was in the best interests of the Eurasian community. But this could be linked to solving the joblessness ‘rife among our people’ through the establishment of a regular, paid and permanent, Eurasian battalion as part of the imperial army in Asia. This would provide Eurasian youths with the discipline that came with having useful work to do, and it would

²⁹ Schoon, Roland, interview, Singapore, 06/07/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

³⁰ Van der Putten, Jan, ‘Negotiating the Great Depression: The rise of popular culture and consumerism in early-1930s Malaya’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(1), 2010, pp. 21-45, p. 44.

³¹ Winsley, T.M., *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854-1937 being also An Historical Outline of Volunteering in Malaya* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1938), p. 109, p. 115, p. 119.

give them a focus for ambitions which were becoming increasingly dissipated due to their current lack of prospects.³²

The impact of the Slump upon the Eurasian community was reported in the local English-language press. There was already an oversupply of clerks in Singapore by the 1920s,³³ and speeches and exhortations made at AGMs of the Eurasian Association (as seen in chapter three) warned the community to adapt to changing circumstances or face uncertain consequences. The assumed Eurasian advantage in securing employment due to their superior English language and literacy skills had been eroded as members of other local communities were educated to the same standards and in the same schools.³⁴ For Dr. Clarke and his fellow leaders of the EA, education was still the key, and in 1931 parents were urged to keep their children in school as long as possible since Eurasians could no longer expect their children to leave school at the earliest opportunity and still walk into secure white-collar employment.³⁵ The point was underlined by the high colonial official, Sir George Maxwell, who gave a speech that year on ‘Education in Malaya’ and declared that the standard English education that had previously led to employment as a clerk, with competency in English being “a commercial asset, ensuring competency in adult life”, no longer held true – demand for such skills no longer exceeded supply and parents and children would have to adapt.³⁶

Clarke as President of the Eurasian Association urged Eurasians at their 1932 AGM to act in what he considered was their self-interest, with education seen as the key to negotiating a future he saw as one of the unremitting struggle of the survival of the fittest.³⁷ The issue was later taken up by the *Eurasian Review*. Just as it believed Eurasians had been usurped in

³² ‘The Profession of Arms’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 2-3, September 1936, p. 1.

³³ Huff, W.G., ‘Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (May, 2001), pp. 290-323, p. 300.

³⁴ Mosbergen, Rudy William, interview, Singapore, 21/06/1994, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

³⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 18 December 1931, p. 10.

³⁶ CO 273/574/8 Education in Malaya 1931, p. 14.

³⁷ *Malaya Tribune*, 10 October 1932, p. 10.

commercial activities by local Chinese and Indian businessmen in the last century, which it claimed pushed them into clerical work, it believed they were now threatened in these jobs due to the competition of ‘more progressive races.’ It called on successful Eurasians to find ways to solve the problem of Eurasian unemployment; it was their duty to do so and the *Review* promised to promote their views accordingly.³⁸ Probably the most radical solution to the problems of unemployment offered by the *Review* came in a set of articles by “Tukang” (Malay for ‘worker’) published from late 1935 to mid-1937. These argued against education as a panacea for Eurasian woes – as long as the Colour Bar was in place, nothing would change and the local schools merely taught Eurasian children to be loyal to their colonial oppressors, he argued. The concept of a Eurasian battalion did not fit into his anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist agenda and instead Tukang urged his fellow Eurasians to embrace a co-operative approach with an emphasis on Eurasian-funded agricultural collectives.³⁹

The *Straits Times* introduced a special feature, ‘Victims of the Slump,’ where unemployed Chinese, Eurasians, Europeans, Indians and Malays could advertise their qualities, qualifications and experience and appeal for work.⁴⁰ The series ran from July 1930 to May 1931 and letters to the local press from unemployed Eurasians continued beyond then. Their complaints were many and included the lack of help from within the community, the lack of assistance to Eurasians from the imperial administration in contrast to others, and the perennial complaint of a lack of unity within the community hindering the work of the Eurasian Association.⁴¹ At the 1930 AGM of the Association, unemployed Eurasians were reassured that they could contact it and the Clerical Union for help though the type of

³⁸ ‘Our Motives’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p. 1, p. 2.

³⁹ ‘An Agriculture Scheme by “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 6, December 1935, p. 11; ‘Malaya’s Eurasians: A Plea for Co-operative Effort by “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, March 1936, p. 4, p. 5; ‘And So The Game Goes On by “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 2-3, September 1936, pp. 5-7; ‘Eurasians, What of the Future? By “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, September 1937, pp. 5-7.

⁴⁰ *Straits Times*, 10 July 1930, p. 12.

⁴¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 16 December 1930, p. 5; 10 April 1931, p. 2; 21 May 1931, p. 11.

assistance the Eurasian Association provided was not outlined and, in May 1931, the *Malaya Tribune* published a letter from an unemployed Eurasian, writing under the pseudonym “Distressed”, who thought the Association’s leadership were ‘proud and selfish [...] I have lost all hopes of ever getting any help from any of them.’⁴² By then the Clerical Union’s Non-European Unemployment Relief Fund had helped a number of Eurasians in ‘great distress’, with over \$300 recently given.⁴³

Eurasians organised dances at the Victoria Memorial Hall in aid of unemployed Europeans and Eurasians.⁴⁴ These charitable events can be seen as an attempt to link Eurasians to the European experience of the Slump, to create equivalence between the two, and, by excluding Asians, it seemed to work against the on-going relationship between the Eurasian Association and the Clerical Union and its charity, the Non-European Unemployment Relief Fund. At a committee meeting of the Fund, the Eurasian Association – clearly discomfited by criticism – attempted to distance itself from the Victoria Hall dances by claiming they had no involvement in them which, they stated, had been organised without their consent.⁴⁵ This position was undermined, however, by the presence of Claude da Silva as a judge for the Fancy Dress competition at the Memorial Hall,⁴⁶ and by the fact that the organisers of these dances included N.B. Westerhout, ex-President of the EA, and Conrad Clarke, brother of the Association’s nominee on the Legislative Council.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that, while the Eurasian Association was increasingly acting in tandem with other, Asian, communal groups, there was still a strong desire, within and without the Association, for Eurasians to associate with their white counterparts.

⁴² Ibid, 21 May 1931, p. 11.

⁴³ Ibid, 5 May 1931, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 31 December 1930, p. 7; 14 February 1931, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 5 September 1931, p. 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 31 December 1930, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 14 February 1931, p. 7.

In November 1931, the *Times* reported that the Fund, created to help unemployed clerks – that is, the Non-European Unemployment Relief Fund – was running out of money and ‘Although Chinese cases are the most numerous, it is the Eurasians who are in the worst plight.’⁴⁸ In response, the Eurasian Association turned to one of their tried and tested practices and organised with the Singapore Recreation Club a fund-raising event for the Non-European Unemployment Relief Fund in October 1932 for members and ‘their lady friends’ with tea on the lawn, billiards and dancing, and encouraged those who could afford it to donate \$1 a month to the Fund.⁴⁹ However, the Association’s donations to the Fund though consistent were not generous: for example, \$40 in July 1932, \$23 in August 1932, \$17 in February 1933, \$31.50 in May 1933 and \$21 in August 1933.⁵⁰ And, at their AGM of November 1934, Dr. Clarke reminded members that although the Association had been collecting subscriptions on a voluntary basis only to help those in financial difficulties but this was now coming to an end.⁵¹ It is ironic and symbolically significant, that, just before the limited sums detailed above were provided, the Association could afford the silver casket presented at the new Governor’s reception in 1929, and a silver cup for the Eurasian unit of the Volunteer Force in August 1928 for its annual shooting competition.⁵² In fact, the Association did not sympathetically approach the economic, political and social disorder of the Slump years – for example the strikes by rickshaw pullers in Singapore and plantation workers in Malaya – so there was no possibility that it would mount any challenge to the ideological framework behind the administrative failure to ameliorate local distress. Instead,

⁴⁸ *Straits Times*, 20 November 1931, p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Malaya Tribune*, 5 October 1932, p. 5; 10 October 1932, p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 July 1932, p. 2; 23 August 1932, p. 7; 17 February 1933, p. 14; 15 May 1933, p. 12; 17 August 1933, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1934, p. 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22 August 1928, p. 5.

Clarke sought to reassure his members that although ‘unable to say what the Government was going to do [...] he knew that Government had been written to.’⁵³

Nevertheless, Clarke, as Eurasian Unofficial Member for Singapore, raised the on-going economic pressures in a speech to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council in 1934. He called for the establishment of a ‘Home for destitutes and decrepits,’ victims of the Slump, and noted the failure of the Hoops Scheme (inaugurated in 1931 and named after the Principal Civil Medical Officer of the Straits Settlements) to increase the number of local men promoted to Medical Officers in the Malayan Medical Service: there were only two successful candidates thus far. He also raised the case of non-white teachers, British subjects all, having their contracts terminated at government-aided schools and being replaced by ‘foreigners’, i.e. white teachers from the UK. He urged the Governor not to abandon the poor, needy and loyal British subjects under his jurisdiction: ‘it is incumbent on Government to look after them in their distress as they have given their best to the country. Immediate action is necessary.’⁵⁴ The next year, a headline in the *Straits Times*, commenting on the 1935 festivities in Singapore to celebrate the silver jubilee of the King-Emperor, George V, stated that ‘Malaya’s Renewed Prosperity Mocks The Unemployed.’⁵⁵ A Silver Jubilee Fund had been set up to help the vulnerable but had not raised a significant amount. In response to the failure of that Fund to raise notable amounts of voluntary contributions from the local populace, the Straits Settlements administration declared its intention to make a contribution of \$750,000. In the Legislative Council at the end of 1935, Dr. Clarke thanked the government for the proposed donation and hoped it would make be distributed urgently for ‘the immediate relief of distress and suffering of the poor and of the unfortunate ones.’⁵⁶

⁵³ *Malaya Tribune*, 18 December 1931, p. 10.

⁵⁴ CO 275/135 Proceedings of the Legislative Council for the Straits Settlements 1934, p. B111.

⁵⁵ *Straits Times*, 25 August 1935, p. 17.

⁵⁶ CO 275/138 Proceedings of the Legislative Council for the Straits Settlements 1935, p. B118.

The colonial administration regularly published recorded bankruptcies and, as an indicative example of the Slump's impact, from January to March 1934, there were sixty-four individuals made bankrupt. Of these, twenty-four had typical Eurasian surnames so one can assume a third of those recorded bankrupts were Eurasian, a proportion far greater than their part of the population, which was approximately 1%.⁵⁷ Significant members of Eurasian society in Singapore were not spared: in 1935 bankruptcy was recorded for A. H. Carlos, Queen's Scholar, member of the Eurasian Literary Association, founding member and Honorary Secretary of the Eurasian Association and the author of the Eurasian contribution to the historical account, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*.⁵⁸ But, of course, the misery was found in abundance amongst the less well-known Eurasians. In the same year as Carlos' bankruptcy was recorded, a columnist for the *Malaya Tribune* reported the plight of a destitute Eurasian widow with four daughters and 'their struggle to keep respectable,'⁵⁹ the inference being that without support the women would be compelled into disreputable behaviour to obtain money. The Singapore Rotary Club's fund 'for the alleviation of the unemployed clerical classes' had seen applications from Eurasians almost match those from unemployed Chinese and, as the English speaking Chinese population of urban Singapore was nearly eight times that of the Eurasian, let alone a total Chinese population which was seventy times greater, the scale of Eurasian suffering becomes clear.⁶⁰

In 1936, the *Malaya Tribune* called the Eurasians the most 'unfortunate race among the millions who go to make up the British Empire,' and stated that 3,000 out of 8,000 adult Eurasian men in British Malaya were currently unemployed. It observed that the rise of nationalist movements in Asia was making the Eurasian position 'more and more precarious,'

⁵⁷ CO 276/131 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1934, Vol. I Jan-Mar, pp. iv-v.

⁵⁸ CO 276/136 Straits Settlements Government Gazette 1935, Vol. II Apr-June, p. 1679.

⁵⁹ *Sunday Tribune (Singapore)*, 17 February 1935, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Straits Times*, 31 October 1935, p. 17 and – for the population statistics - Vlieland, *The 1931 Census*, pp. 120-1.

and with the lack of jobs available for them in British Malaya and a colonial administration unwilling to provide specific assistance, Eurasians were ‘in danger of sinking into despair.’⁶¹ The sparsity of contemporary statistical evidence prevents the confirmation of these numbers and it is possible that the number was exaggerated. Not least, it is inconsistent with a remembered golden age. However, wages and cost of living indices do show a decline for all in Singapore with Asians the worse affected, followed by Eurasians and with Europeans the least impacted.⁶² W.G. Huff’s analysis of the Slump in 1930s Singapore confines itself to what he calls ‘the four main races’ of Malays, Indians, Chinese and Europeans but his findings of ‘cut wages and dismissed staff’ and that ‘Asian unemployment reached very large figures’ points to a situation in which Eurasians were not immune, and this is supported by the evidence here and found in oral histories and personal memoirs.⁶³

Eurasian Politics and Identity in the 1930s

Whatever the insecurities generated by the Slump, the 1930s were unquestionably a time of significant political and social developments amongst Eurasians. For one thing, they saw a striking female assertiveness. One index of the growing assertiveness of Eurasian women is their increasing appearance in *The Eurasian Review* whether on matters relating to identity or in coverage of female activities, as – for example – an update on the Girls’ Sports Club by founding member and Secretary, Zena Clarke.⁶⁴ In their pieces with political implications, Eurasian women could be hard-hitting. ‘Be A Credit! by Poco’, a Eurasian woman from Singapore, rebuked Eurasian men for their lack of ambition, inferiority complex and being

⁶¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 25 September 1936, p. 12.

⁶² CO 277/90 Straits Settlements Blue Book 1938, Section 23 Labour Wages and Cost of Living, Singapore: Annual Index Numbers, 1914-1938, p. 819, p. 821, p. 823.

⁶³ Huff, ‘Entitlement, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression’, p. 290, p. 300, p. 301. See also Joseph Henry Chopard interview, Singapore, 19/08/1985, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore; de Cruz, Gerald, *Colliding Worlds: Memoirs of a Singapore Maverick* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2009), p. 15.

⁶⁴ Clarke, Z.D.M., ‘Girls’ Sports Club: Record of Progress’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, May 1935, pp. 8-9.

‘placid and quite content to be trodden upon’ by their imperial masters; Poco also stressed the need for more education, and an end to the condescending attitudes of community leaders towards the less well-schooled.⁶⁵ In ‘Advice Facetious And Serious by a Woman’, the Eurasian ‘inferiority complex’ was described as ‘our Public Enemy No. 1.’⁶⁶ In the piece, ‘A Schoolgirl’s Reflections’, Marjorie Ford declared her intention – somewhat conventionally – to be a credit to her family, to the British Empire and the Eurasian community but felt her people often suffered from an inferiority complex, while successful members of the community had something of a superiority complex that prevented them from encouraging and engaging positively with the rest. No real action was being taken to address these problems and instead ‘Eurasians today are moving in a circle.’⁶⁷

In March 1936, Jill, another Eurasian woman from Singapore, considered ‘The Colour Question’ and the tendency of some Eurasians, while victims of the colour bar and discrimination, to be prejudiced as well. She berated these Eurasians for prizing fair-skin over darker tones, and condemned light-skinned Eurasians who passed as white with the ultimate goal of marrying a European, despite this meaning a voluntary self-estrangement from family and community. For Jill, responsibility for this denial of one’s origins lay with each individual although she did stray somewhat into ‘blaming the victim’ with her claim that the community had somehow brought the colour bar upon itself, through its own deficiencies. Eurasians, she held, had ‘abused the golden opportunities offered them by either losing their heads or getting too big for their boots.’⁶⁸

Practical advice on how to raise their men from their lethargy was offered in ‘Duty Of The Womenfolk by a Woman’, and the solution offered – significantly – was to allow women

⁶⁵ ‘Be A Credit! By Poco’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, May 1935, p. 9.

⁶⁶ ‘Advice Facetious And Serious by a Woman’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 6, December 1935, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ford, Marjorie, ‘A Schoolgirl’s Reflections’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 5, September 1935, p. 6.

⁶⁸ ‘The Colour Question by Jill’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, March 1936, p. 2.

to join the male-only Eurasian Association since the injection of a female perspective would, it was said, lead to a revival of the organisation. It was, for Eurasian women, a question of being given, and taking, the opportunity to lead by example: ‘Let us each in our sphere of life give the best in us to make our men realise the seriousness of the situation.’⁶⁹ In fact, the Eurasian Association was criticised in the article ‘What Our Women Want’ from September 1935. The anonymous authors, all women from Singapore, argued that it had done ‘very little for our community’ and instead they called for an All-Malaya Eurasian Association that included women: ‘Never again shall we put our faith in those who talk but do nothing.’⁷⁰

One area where women refused to ‘do nothing’ was sport. As shown in the last chapter, the use of sport by Eurasians as a form of social and indeed political (or quasi-political) assertiveness was significant. The breakthrough for Eurasian male athletes in the 1920s was consolidated in the 1930s with the already established annual contests between Europeans and The Rest and the various competitions inaugurated by Conrad Clarke, while inter-school and inter-state leagues initiated historic rivalries in football and hockey, all becoming fixtures of Singapore’s sporting and social calendar. However, a much more significant development in the 1930s was the arrival of women in sport – in fact, Eurasian women were the trailblazers for females in this regard and women from other communities in Singapore followed in their wake. If, in the previous decade, men were to the fore in the sporting arena, it is striking how during the Slump period, Eurasian women created a space of their own. This female assertiveness in a hitherto masculine sphere in a period of economic uncertainty, when the standing of the male breadwinner was under threat, may suggest a complex connection with the Slump. But there was more to it than that. At least part of the basis for a new female assertiveness was their growing role in the labour market even in the Slump. The 1931 census confirmed that Eurasian women had made significant inroads in many areas of

⁶⁹ ‘Duty Of The Womenfolk by a Woman’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 4, December 1936, p. 5.

⁷⁰ ‘What Our Women Want by Madres’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 5, September 1935, p. 4.

employment by the early 1930s. They worked in shops, offices, hospitals and schools, and outnumbered male Eurasian teachers by almost three to one.⁷¹ And clearly, this was related to the earlier findings from the 1921 census which recorded that almost all Eurasian women in Singapore were literate in English.⁷² Individual academic achievement by one female Eurasian reflected a wider propensity to encourage the education of Eurasian girls in Singapore. This was Thora Oehlers, who became the first Eurasian woman to win a Queen's Scholarship to study abroad since its reintroduction, and before she left Singapore in 1933 for medical school in London she was guest of honour at a farewell lunch given by the Girls' Sports Club.⁷³

As seen in the preceding chapter, the men of the Singapore Recreation Club largely kept women out of their sporting facilities. For a group of modern Eurasian women this was not a status quo that could be tolerated any longer. Sport as an emancipatory practice for women, beginning with Western women, has been seen as a consequence of the burgeoning women's movement. Women's rights and dress reform, the end of a corseted and restrictive style of clothing, meant sport was considered a worthwhile pursuit and was physically possible for this new generation in contrast to previous ones. These new ideas and new ways of being crossed continents with the female teachers who travelled from the UK to work in Singapore's girls schools. They introduced new team sports, and acted as role models for their pupils and indeed for their fellow Eurasian teachers, and sport became compulsory for girls in 1931.⁷⁴ Earlier, in July 1929, twelve young Eurasian women decided to take matters into their own hands and form their own sports club in order to play physically demanding

⁷¹ Vlieland, *1931 Census*, p. 261.

⁷² Nathan, *1921 Census*, p. 111.

⁷³ 'Miss T. Oehlers', *Straits Times*, 25 July 1933, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Brownfoot, Janice N., '“Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds”: Sport and Society in Colonial Malaya', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19:2-3, 2002, pp.129-156, p. 134.

sports ‘rather than be confined to “feminine” games like “catching” and “Balloon”.’⁷⁵ While one must give full credit to the agency of Eurasian women as pioneers of female sport in Singapore, it is important to note that both Eurasian students in girls’ schools and the large numbers of female Eurasian teachers in Singapore in the interwar period would have been affected by the ideas, and female assertiveness, brought by British schoolteachers and this goes some way to explain why this was transmitted so swiftly into Eurasian society. The term, “sports girl”, had already appeared occasionally in the local press from the mid-1920s, sometimes disparagingly, but was first seen as very much a Western phenomenon.⁷⁶ It was only after Eurasian women imposed themselves upon Singapore’s sporting scene that this manifestation of female assertiveness became an accepted part of life in the city.⁷⁷ The first sign of this outside of the educational sphere was these Eurasian women’s formation of their own sports club.

First called the Goldburn Sports Club after the name of the house whose grounds they initially used, it became the Girls’ Sports Club (GSC) in September 1930 when it moved to premises loaned by Claude da Silva.⁷⁸ The *Malaya Tribune* characterised this Club’s existence as due to ‘the enthusiasm shown among the Eurasian girls of Singapore in recreation and physical development by participating in hockey, lawn tennis, and netball.’⁷⁹ Netball was introduced to Raffles Girls School in 1929 by its sports mistress, Mrs K.A. Waddle, and the Raffles Girls students who were members of the Girls’ Sports Club taught the other members how to play.⁸⁰ To help promote the new sport, Conrad Clarke, whose daughter Zena Clarke was the Girls’ Sports Club’s first Secretary and later married the club’s

⁷⁵ *Girls Sports Club: 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club* (Singapore: Navjiwan Press, 1980), p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Malaya Tribune*, 27 April 1923, p. 9; *Singapore Free Press*, 9 October 1925, p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Straits Times*, 20 June 1935, p. 19.

⁷⁸ *Girls Sports Club: 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *Malaya Tribune*, 29 July 1930, p. 10.

⁸⁰ *Girls Sports Club: 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club*, p. 9.

netball coach, Geoffrey Tessensohn, donated the Clarke Netball Challenge Shield in 1930.⁸¹ This prompted the club to set up a netball league which initially consisted of seven teams: the Girls' Sports Club, Raffles Girl School, Combined Colleges, "Z" team (pupils at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus), Girls' Life Brigade, Convent Old Pupils Association and Raffles Old Girls Association.⁸² The Girls' Sports Club had been the catalyst for the creation of these and other teams and Aplin credits them as an inspiration which crossed racial boundaries 'to the Chinese community in particular.'⁸³

The equality the Girls' Sports Club sought for women on the playing field was found, to some extent, in its membership criteria. Although membership was open only to Eurasian females, unlike the Eurasian Association it did not focus on the male lineage in defining who a Eurasian was. While the EA insisted on a European or Eurasian father for its members, the Girls' Sports Club put either parent on an equal footing and defined a Eurasian for its purposes as anyone 'born of a European on one side and an Asian on the other; born of Eurasian parents; born of parents one of whom is Eurasian.'⁸⁴ Membership increased rapidly from only twelve in 1929 to 93 in 1932, and the club was considered important enough to have its annual report published in *The "Sportsman"*.⁸⁵ That monthly, published throughout the 1930s and catering to non-white English-speaking sports fans, reported that the club had raised \$1536 for their Building Fund after Zena Clarke's uncle, Dr Noel Clarke, had persuaded the Straits government to loan the club a plot of land on Serangoon Road, and the Club set out on a series of fundraising activities to prepare the grounds and build a pavilion.⁸⁶ GSC members were mainly school students or working as typists, sales assistants, teachers and telephone operators - Zena Clarke was a stenographer - and were not in a position

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, p. 11.

⁸³ Aplin, Nick, *Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2019), p. 173.

⁸⁴ Braga-Blake, Myrna, 'Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview', in Myrna Braga-Blake (ed.), *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 11.

⁸⁵ *The "Sportsman"*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 1932, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 13.

financially to pay for the work themselves so they canvassed for contributions, raising over \$1000 through dances held at the Drill Hall and the Victoria Memorial Hall, and, on 9 March 1932, Dr Clarke cut the ribbon and officially opened the Girls' Sports Club's new home, a year after performing a similar duty for the Singapore Recreation Club.⁸⁷

The "Sportsman" had championed the Girls' Sports Club from the outset, publishing match reports and team photographs, including some of the first annual hockey match in November 1930 between the GCS and a team of 'young English girls.'⁸⁸ These matches, played on the Padang, were the idea of a school teacher, Miss Griffiths-Jones, in support of the Remembrance Day charity, the Poppy Fund. It was the first competitive match between white women and a non-white team in Singapore. Before this, these Eurasian and British women would have met in unequal relationships, such as teacher and pupil or customer and sales assistant, but they were now competing on the basis of strength, speed and ability, equal sides with equal numbers, to an agreed set of rules designed to ensure a fair contest and that the best team won. Here was the level playing field denied to Eurasian women in other aspects of their lives – as women, as Eurasians, as Eurasian women. The match ended in a draw, *The "Sportsman"* commenting on 'a very great display as the Singapore Girls' Sports Club players were admirably militant'.⁸⁹ In fact, the GSC would win the match at the fourth attempt in 1933.⁹⁰ Their team captain, Alice Pennefather, was the Singapore Badminton Champion and Malayan Badminton Champion and the wife of Lancelot Pennefather.⁹¹ In the space of four years, these enterprising Eurasian women had matched the feats of their male counterparts and had bested the sporting cream of white society.

⁸⁷ *Girls Sports Club: 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ *The "Sportsman"*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 14 November 1930, p. 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁹⁰ Aplin, *Sport in Singapore*, p. 174.

⁹¹ *Girls Sports Club: 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club*, p. 35.

They had also paved the way for other women in Singapore. The very issue of *The Sportsman* that covered in image and text the Girls' Sports Club's Poppy Fund match in 1930 gave pride of place to an article on 'The Modern Girl – A Typical Sportswoman.' This praised the new generation of sportswomen: 'It is a happy sign indeed to see that whereas local girls formerly abhorred and eschewed at the mere idea of appearing in public, they are now tramping down this barrier of false modesty and are very much to the fore where games are concerned.'⁹² In a later article, 'Hats Off To The Sports Girl', the cosmopolitan young women of Singapore are seen as liberating themselves from the strictures of old attitudes: 'For a long time girls have been restrained by convention, and by calculated opposition, principally from older women who were jealous ... [and from] disgruntled men.'⁹³ It is well to remember that it was Eurasian women who were, in many ways, the ones who opened up Singaporean space to female athletes from many communities beyond their own.

It is true, of course, that the British schoolteachers who were important in introducing sport to Eurasian and other non-white females in Singapore could purvey aims that were somewhat conventional: one such teacher, Miss D. Mullins, publicly opined in 'Sport in Schools' that the sporting arena provided a portfolio of certain moral virtues deemed essential for an appropriate way of living: 'Here the child is taught to play the game well and fairly; to accept defeat in a sporting way; to co-operate with others; to be un-selfish; to cultivate self-control and self-restraint, confidence and alertness.'⁹⁴ This was an idea of sport as a preparation for life, where the rules of the game must be understood and absorbed, rules not made by the players but followed by them, rules with a promise of fair play, of a sporting chance to succeed. This would come up against the harsh reality and built-in discriminations of colonial society. After all, this was a society in which leagues and the tournaments were

⁹² *The "Sportsman"*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 14 November 1930, p. 1.

⁹³ *The "Sportsman"*, Vol. 2, No. 12, 19 June 1931, p. 17.

⁹⁴ *The "Sportsman"*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 1932, p. 27; p. 28.

segregated: Chinese played against whites, Indians against Eurasians, Eurasians against whites and so on, while there were annual contests in cricket and hockey of the Europeans versus The Rest. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the women of the Girls' Sports Club used the rules and played the sporting game to transcend the place allotted to them by others. The political environments of the Eurasian Association and the Straits Settlements Legislative Council remained closed to them but through sport they could make their mark and, with the formation of their Club and their participation in tournaments, Eurasian women entered one area of the public sphere that hitherto had been closed to all females in Singapore. The Girls' Sports Club may have reflected and reinforced the dominant ideology of the school system that had nurtured its members. However, what happened on the playing field could not just maintain but subvert these imperial norms. Sport could be a challenge to a racist, patriarchal hegemony: it provided one of the few arenas where Eurasians – men and women – could feel, however fleetingly, as if they were part of an imperial community to whom the same rules applied.

With regard to that imperial community, Eurasians – whether women or men – found it difficult at this time to articulate their identity apart from it, even when the Empire relegated them to second class status. We can see this if we turn from sport to the more conventionally political. Speaking at the Straits Settlements Legislative Council in 1933, Clarke chose to place criticisms of the colour bar within what had become a customary framework of loyalty:

The Committee of the Eurasian Association [...] have asked me as their representative on this Council to explain the positions of Eurasians in the Colony. They are not of dual nationality. They are British subjects. At no time in their history has their loyalty to the King ever been questioned. They are born and brought up in this Colony and are not birds of passage; they have their all in this country and naturally look upon this country as their one and only home [...] Therefore it is their natural aspiration and just claim to ask for the privilege of serving in the highest administrative service of

this Colony and they look upon their request as a hereditary right as many of them are the descendants of the pioneers of this outpost of the British Empire.⁹⁵

The Eurasian Review likewise echoed this loyalty and confidence in Empire despite the discrimination suffered by its readers. In ‘Cry Loyalty!’, it acknowledged the unfairness of colonial society as it was then constituted, with discrimination in favour of Europeans in employment and justice since they had the best jobs and received more lenient sentences. Within this unequal society, Eurasians suffered under a ‘subordinate status’ but the article nevertheless declared that ‘our political backwardness’ was not down to any malign intent on the part of their rulers and ‘only a warped mind’ could believe that the unfairness and discrimination inherent in colonial society resulted from ‘acts of oppression deliberately practised by the governing caste to hold down our compatriots.’ Rather it was due to a combination of factors for which locals were responsible, Asian and Eurasian alike. Their ‘want of initiative’ perpetuated ‘political backwardness’ and ‘supine’ leaders left all in the current unsatisfactory state of affairs. What was required were representatives who would not limit themselves to occasional statements in the Legislative Council but would take their complaints to the imperial centre, the Houses of Parliament, where they were bound to receive a sympathetic hearing. Supporting this conviction was the *Review*’s faith in a benevolent imperialism allegedly practised across the empire: ‘we are grateful the British have not misused their strength to bleed us white [...] for the material advantage of Britain. We cry Loyalty!’⁹⁶

This unwillingness to blame British imperialism for the iniquities of colonial society continued in another leader, ‘Eurasian Economic Status’, in the *Review*. It accused Eurasians of acting against their own interests since Eurasians were not employing other Eurasians and this meant that any money they generated went out of the community. The *Review* rejected

⁹⁵ *Malaya Tribune*, 1 August 1933, p. 3.

⁹⁶ ‘Cry Loyalty!’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 2, October 1934, pp.1-2.

the idea that colonial society was exploitative and that the Eurasian community had, therefore, to liberate itself through a fundamental realignment of colonial affairs. Eurasian ambitions, the *Review* held, had to move away from governmental and mercantile clerkships, and there had to be an end to the snobbery that looked down upon other types of work: ‘the artisan or the petty-trader is the equal of the professional.’ Eurasians should set up their own businesses, funded by the spare capital held by those on government pensions, and this would keep Eurasian money within the community, especially if those businesses employed other Eurasians.⁹⁷

The notion that Eurasians should employ Eurasians points to the quest for a defined communal identity and, indeed, the 1930s were a period in which the debate over Eurasian identity became even more intense, as shown – for example – by the redefinition of Eurasian-ness by lineage seen in the Girls’ Sports Club. It is significant, for example, that the very first issue of *The Eurasian Review* contained the article ‘What’s in a Name?’ by R.V. Chapman about ‘controversies raised within our community from time to time over the name “Eurasian”.’ Its arguments in favour of the term were redolent of previous contributions to the debate, one in which he had already participated during the spate of letters on the topic in the English-language press in 1919. Chapman considered the use of ‘Eurasian’ as an established fact even though ‘it is synonymous with “half-caste.”’ Consequently some clung onto their European antecedents alone but ‘are only humiliating ourselves by strutting about under false designations.’ He believed younger Eurasians with ‘virile spirit’ were shaking off these misconceptions, something community leaders should encourage, to usher in a ‘United Eurasian People [who can] face our critics with dignity.’ Nevertheless, the article revealed

⁹⁷ ‘Eurasian Economic Status’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, May 1935, p. 2.

Eurasians still struggling over names and identity while still having ‘to refute the old fallacy – the cruellest of all lies – that everything Eurasian is evil.’⁹⁸

Chapman was not untypical of the Eurasian participants in the on-going debate over identity and unity within the community. Educated at Raffles Institute in Singapore, he had a long history of working in government service, first in British North Borneo (present-day Sabah),⁹⁹ then in Malacca, where he became acting Superintendent of Posts and Telegraphs, until – in 1913 – the permanent appointment of a ‘recently arrived’ British man saw him demoted to the less prestigious post of Inspector of Telephones for a town on the trunk road between Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh.¹⁰⁰ He thus had personal experience of the denigrating impact of the Colour Bar in the colonial civil service. Chapman had clearly followed Eurasian organisations and debates in Singapore for many years and supported greater unity and cohesion amongst the community, deploring the public spat over the use of the term, Eurasian, and over who was or wasn’t Eurasian, and calling on all ‘to play the game [...] and stand shoulder to shoulder for the common cause’.¹⁰¹ A regular correspondent to the local press on Eurasian matters, he rehearsed the familiar themes of Eurasian unity, loyalty, greater education and their history of military prowess,¹⁰² and reflected the outlook over the years of most other Eurasians, as found in the local press, in *Our Magazine*, at the Eurasian Association, and in *The Eurasian Review*. However, he was not averse to attacks on the Eurasian leadership. In a letter to the *Malaya Tribune* in April 1934, he painted a somewhat hyperbolically-dismal picture in an attempt to prompt urgent action: ‘our leaders have been moribund [...] Our Associations are dead’.¹⁰³ Chapman wrote to the *Straits Times* later that year on the subject of Eurasian unity. Familiar arguments were repeated: unity was within

⁹⁸ Chapman, R.V., ‘What’s in a Name?’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Straits Echo*, 10 March 1904, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Straits Budget*, 25 December 1913, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ *Straits Budget*, 13 June 1919, p. 14 and *Straits Times*, 28 June 1919, p. 10. Quotation from the latter.

¹⁰² *Straits Budget*, 11 July 1929, p. 11; *Straits Times*, 17 July 1929, p. 17; *Straits Budget*, 25 July 1929, p. 6.

¹⁰³ *Malaya Tribune*, 9 April 1934, p. 2.

their power despite the discriminations Eurasians endured, and the challenges ahead demanded unity but it was questionable if ‘our leader or leaders ... [recognise] our present deplorable position’. Although some educated members of the community understood the urgency and were beginning to act, they needed the whole community behind them. As shall be seen, Chapman would continue with these themes in *The Eurasian Review* a year later.¹⁰⁴

Some contributors to the *Review* were more optimistic, however: James Augustin, who like Chapman was a regular correspondent to the local press, used his piece, ‘Eurasian Foundations Sound’, to prove the case on scientific grounds – mixed races, such as his fellow Eurasians, were like hybrids in nature, in many ways superior to the non-hybrid and he refused to accept the derogatory connotation of the notion of ‘half-caste’ – ‘it is evident that the contemptuous term half-caste is really a compliment,’ he declared. To support, demonstrate and reassure his readers that any Eurasian inferiority complex was misguided and fundamentally wrong, he cited the works of Cedric Dover and Kenneth Wallace, Eurasian intellectuals who had penned important works about the meaning and significance of the Eurasian experience.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps conscious of the fact that it had announced itself as a magazine for Eurasians in British Malaya, *The Eurasian Review* rarely included pieces written by anyone from outside the community or the region. When it did, the magazine usually looked towards its fellow mixed race communities from the British Empire in Asia, and especially those from British India. Thus, *The Eurasian Review* published a short piece, ‘Message from Calcutta’, by Herbert Stark, the writer of Anglo-Indian histories including *Hostages to India, or The Life-Story of the Anglo-Indian Race* published in 1926. He was loyal though critical of Empire, and exhorted readers to join the Eurasian Association, warning that ‘UNITED WE STAND,

¹⁰⁴ *Straits Times*, 1 November 1934, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Augustin, James, ‘Eurasian Foundations Sound’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p. 12.

UNUNITED WE FALL!’¹⁰⁶ However, the key figure amongst Anglo-Indians for Eurasians in Singapore was Cedric Dover who was repeatedly published by *The Eurasian Review*.

Dover was of paramount importance to the debates in Singapore about Eurasian identity and, indeed, about pan-Eurasian-ness. Dover, it will be remembered from the previous chapter, was an Anglo-Indian botanist working in Malaya in the 1920s who had published the influential *Cimmerii: Eurasians and Their Future* (1929). Although based in London in the 1930s, his interventions in, and importance to, Singapore debates amongst Eurasians should not be underestimated. Indeed Chapman in the 1934 article referred to earlier (‘What’s In A Name?’) – published in the very first issue of the *Eurasian Review* – referenced *Cimmerii*. The letters pages of the *Malaya Tribune* reveal that Dover and his vision of a postcolonial, continental Eurasian unity had found some local adherents who were frustrated with the Eurasian Association’s more conservative, insular and gradualist approach.¹⁰⁷ However, Dover’s radical ideas did not find favour in all quarters. In December 1932, an unnamed Eurasian, someone the *Tribune* claimed was a prominent community leader, used the newspaper as a vehicle to revive the debate over the best name to describe the community.¹⁰⁸ Although this anonymous individual acknowledged that the Eurasian Association had previously rejected the term ‘Anglo-Malayan’, he considered Eurasian to be a meaningless and ‘derogatory term ... [of] contempt’ signifying illegitimacy, whereas Anglo-Malayan had ‘a good flavour ... [and] would bring in those Europeans who have been out here for very many years.’¹⁰⁹ But Dover believed these attempts to use the appendage ‘Anglo’ in order to graft a permanent link to the British ‘brought ridicule on the community.’¹¹⁰ The issue was returned to at the Association’s AGM of February 1933, where members of the Penang

¹⁰⁶ Stark, Herbert A., ‘Message from Calcutta’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 3, January-February 1935, p. 2

¹⁰⁷ *Malaya Tribune*, 12 August 1929, p. 5; 13 August 1929, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 23 December 1932, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁰ Dover, Cedric, *Cimmerii? or Eurasians and Their Future* (Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1929), p. 51.

Eurasian Association were in favour of a change of name, but the committee of the Singapore EA, all prominent leaders of the community, preferred the existing designation and this was supported by the AGM so Eurasians remained 'Eurasian'.¹¹¹

It would appear that the Eurasian Association at this time was somewhere between Dover with his radical vision of a new, modern sense of Eurasian-ness, his emphasis on a broad solidarity between mixed races that crossed borders, and the narrower, conservative view of certain 'prominent' people who instead were keen to emphasise any connection to the ruling caste, biological or otherwise, real or imagined, and to downplay and hide any differences within the community. There is no evidence to show that the Association felt trapped in this position, or that it was departing from the general view of its constituency. There is also little evidence, beyond the exhortations of Dover and some dissatisfied correspondents to the press, that the Eurasian Association was under sustained pressure at the beginning of the decade to pursue a faster pace of political change or to amend their strategy of combining with other 'elite' representatives of local groups as a reasonable and loyal opposition working within the constraints of the imperial system. The first edition of *The Eurasian Review* did have a piece by "Quick March" seeking greater Eurasian representation in local government, on municipal councils and the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, but argued that Eurasians needed to be better organised to justify it. It proposed that the various associations in Malaya constitute a parent body, a "Grand Council" which could petition the colonial government for representation 'necessary to the interest of the Eurasian Community'.¹¹² This call was repeated in many of the later editions of the *Review*. Interestingly, this was similar to and, in all likelihood, took some inspiration from Cedric Dover's proposals for a formal body representing all Eurasians living in continental Asia. However, this is not to say that in the

¹¹¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 22 December 1933, p. 12.

¹¹² 'Representation on the Federal Council by "Quick March"', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p.3.

early 1930s the prevailing tendency amongst Singapore's Eurasians was to meld themselves into what might be termed Pan-Eurasianism.

There were, however, some attempts, if not to unite, at least to link up with Eurasians outside of Singapore, though they ended in failure. The Singapore EA had written to the Negri Sembilan Eurasian Association – one of the associations set up post-1919 in mainland Malaya – others were in Selangor, Perak and the island of Penang – asking it to open its membership to Eurasians born outside Malaya but, at their AGM in February 1930, the members from Negri Sembilan turned down the request.¹¹³ That September, the committee of the Singapore EA reported that the Selangor and Negri Sembilan Eurasian Associations had asked for its views on the creation of an All-Malayan Eurasian Association. The committee in Singapore, however, was not in favour, arguing that 'it were better for the Eurasian Associations in [Malaya] to work separately.'¹¹⁴ Singapore also rebuffed two proposals by the Penang EA – firstly, in 1931, for a conference of all Malayan Associations and then, in 1932, for a unified Malayan Association.¹¹⁵ Somewhat sarcastically, Clarke informed the AGM of December 1931 that a conference of associations might be appropriate in ten years' time, 'with a dinner and dance thrown in.'¹¹⁶ However, it is evident that from the mid-1930s, there was a concerted movement towards the idea proposed most strenuously by Cedric Dover – that is, a Pan-Eurasian identity across Asia.

In December 1936, the *Review* published Dover's 'Letter from England' – it appears that he had come across a copy of the *Review* while working in the Reading Room of the British Museum. He admired 'its virile Eurasian spirit' and submitted the article 'Half-Castes and

¹¹³ *Malaya Tribune*, 19 February 1930, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 September 1930, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1931, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Peace' which was reproduced in the same edition.¹¹⁷ Dover considered Eurasians and other mixed races to be 'marginal men' in the colonial realms in which they lived, but also to be natural opponents of nationalism and racism once they fully understood their position in the society which oppressed them. What was required was 'the liberation of half-castes from the complex conditioning of imperialism and assumptions of white superiority.'¹¹⁸ He advanced a programme 'Towards Coloured Unity' in the *Eurasian Review* in March 1937. Influenced by the Popular Front socialism of the time, and the Left Book Club circles he now moved in in London, Dover called on his Eurasian readers to unite against racism and demand rights to organise in trade unions, co-operatives and political parties. Dover also included demands for equal access to education for all regardless of sex or race, for female equality and emancipation, and for an end to racism and racial inequality.¹¹⁹

Six months later, Dover considered the seeds he had sown were beginning to bear fruit: 'Race consciousness is stirring in the hearts of our visionaries. And, anxious to consolidate,' he declared in the *Review*, 'they are now crying for Unity – an united Eurasian community throughout the East.'¹²⁰ There seems little doubt that his arguments were having a tangible effect upon some influential parts of the Eurasian community in Singapore. Although the success of political and social (including sporting) endeavours had helped Singapore's Eurasians to sustain their own sense of Eurasian-ness, and facilitated the Eurasian presence in many aspects of colonial life, in schools, in the military, in the clubs and social calendar to some extent, the mass unemployment caused by the Slump persisted well into the middle of the decade, and exposed the limits of the existing approach to community cohesion and well-being. This was clearly unable to fully meet the challenges of an uncertain time of crisis. And

¹¹⁷ Dover, Cedric, 'Letter from England', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 4, December 1936, p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Dover, Cedric, 'Half-Castes and Peace', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 4, December 1936, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Dover, Cedric, 'Towards Coloured Unity', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. III, No. 1, March 1937, pp. 4-5.

¹²⁰ Dover, Cedric, 'What's In A Name? Anglo-Indians or Eurasians?', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, September 1937, p. 15.

Dover's call for a Eurasian federation that crossed borders came at the same time that contributors to *The Eurasian Review* and the local press began to call for Eurasian unity in British Malaya through the creation of an All-Malaya Eurasian Association.

In fact, the *Review* had already published a call for an All-Malaya Eurasian Association in the piece, 'A Round Table Conference', in May 1935, the conference being seen as the precursor to the establishment of the new Association. The article dismissed the objections against the proposal raised by Clarke at the Association's AGM and the argument that an All-Malaya Association was premature since different associations across different parts of British Malaya were at different stages of development. Such arguments were rejected as 'parochial excuses'. Clarke's remark that any future discussions about an All-Malaya Eurasian Association should form part of an evening featuring a dinner and dance was deemed inappropriate and betraying a lack of seriousness. Instead, the author recommended 'a two-day meeting' and, to ensure that this was not mistaken for a convivial as opposed to a political gathering, he made clear that 'the only social amenity would be an informal dinner.' The creation of one Eurasian Association for all of British Malaya was seen as the key to overcoming 'our lack of cohesion.' This All-Malaya Eurasian Association was part of a proposed four point programme for renewal which included raising Eurasian capital to invest in the creation of new businesses, a Eurasian college of further education, and Eurasian organisations for women and youth.¹²¹

What was the context of this impatient demand for a much wider coming together of Singapore Eurasians with those across Malaya? Central to it was the advance of Asian nationalism within Singapore and British Malaya, the British response to this, and how both generated insecurity amongst Eurasians. They saw the prospect – however distant it might have appeared to them then – of a British withdrawal and the replacement of imperial rule by

¹²¹ 'A Round Table Conference by Kenelm', *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, May 1935, p.7.

a nationalist system with apprehension and were concerned that a minority community like theirs might be overwhelmed by the majority. Indian nationalist-orientated groups in Singapore during the 1930s were characterised by a ‘vigorous organisational activity’ which was, at the very least, an ideological challenge to British hegemony in the region.¹²² And both the British and the Malays feared the local growth of Chinese political activity –the Kuomintang and the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party were suppressed – and there were fears that China would usurp Britain in the region.¹²³ The Chinese community, in turn, had their own fears concerning the British ‘pro-Malay’ policy and the exclusion of local non-Malays from certain government posts in the peninsula.¹²⁴

The apprehensiveness of Eurasians resulting from this changing political context was one compounded by the Slump. They worried, too, about the concessions being made by the Governor, which the *Review* construed as ‘the Pro-Malay Policy of the Clementi regime’ which, it said, had so alarmed a minority of the Eurasian community that some advocated a future for Eurasians elsewhere in specially mandated territories in the British Empire. Certainly, *The Eurasian Review* considered the Governor’s balancing act between what he saw as the competing needs of local communities as invariably resulting in Eurasians losing out to others. In March 1936, its leading article argued against the promotion of only ‘natives’, native meaning Malay, to senior roles in the civil service for the Federated Malay States, all other ethnicities branded by the Governor as ‘foreign’ and excluded as a result (apart from the British, of course). To add insult to injury from the Eurasian point of view, ‘native’ included Malays from the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia), outside of the British Empire, and also any converts to Islam. This, for the *Review*, was poor reward for the

¹²² Rai, Rajesh, *Indians in Singapore 1819-1945: Diaspora in the Colonial Port City* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), p. 194

¹²³ Soenarno, Radin, ‘Malay Nationalism, 1896-1941’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Nationalism in Malaya (Mar., 1960), pp. 1-28, p. 12.

¹²⁴ Roff, William, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, second edition (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 208.

Eurasian commitment to the British Empire, to Singapore and to peninsula Malaya, going back generations: ‘the Eurasian regards himself as a native – an inhabitant of the soil.’¹²⁵ The last phrase was loaded with meaning, one understood by all concerned, since the Malay word for a native of Malaya was *bumiputera* whose literal translation in English was ‘son of the soil’, the term used by Malays to assert their special rights and privileges. There was a sense of anger and even hurt in what was perceived to be the Governor’s demotion of Eurasian claims and rights. Eurasian allegiances were, after all, to Malaya and to the British, and the *Review* believed such patriotic assertions were made concrete through Eurasian participation in the defence of the country, as seen during the world war when ‘Eurasians demonstrated the genuineness of Eurasian protestations of loyalty.’¹²⁶

The demand for ‘closer union’,¹²⁷ then, repeated by many contributors across issues of *The Eurasian Review* from the mid-1930s, and also the articulation of the pressing need for an All-Malaya Eurasian Association, has to be understood within the context of a rising nationalism which seemed to threaten to exclude Eurasians across Asia and by the recent political changes in British Malaya which many Eurasians felt reduced their prospects and demonstrated a lack of concern for them on the part of the colonial administration. In the September 1935 issue, ‘Progressive’ felt an All-Malaya Eurasian Association would have the necessary constituency and strength in numbers for any appeals made to the imperial centre in Westminster ‘if the local government fails to grant us our rights.’¹²⁸ The inveterate correspondent, the redoubtable R.V. Chapman, had pieces in favour of an All-Malaya Eurasian Association published by the *Review* in December 1935, March 1936 and September 1936.

¹²⁵ ‘“Foreigners” and the Administrative Service’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, March 1936, p. 1.

¹²⁶ ‘Our Motives’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1934, p. 1.

¹²⁷ ‘Eurasian Action by Looker-On’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, May 1935, p.12.

¹²⁸ ‘All-Malaya Eurasian Association by Progressive’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 5, September 1935, p. 3.

There was a single dissenting voice found in the *Review*, one which claimed the time was not ripe for union as most Eurasians were held to be ‘not yet socially and politically conscious and capable of sacrifices for common ends.’¹²⁹ But this was a lone voice and, in December 1936, ‘Facefax’ articulated a frustration that no action on any of the proposals put forward – for the new Association, the Fund, the College or the organisations for women and youth – had taken place despite, in the writer’s view, a clear case for all of these having been made. Earlier, in March 1936, *The Eurasian Review* had also noted that no discussions about an All-Malaya Eurasian Association had taken place at any of the AGMs of the various Eurasian Associations across the region. And Chapman was in no doubt as to who was responsible for this dereliction of duty: ‘Our so-called leaders have been afraid to speak out, probably through fear of embarrassing or offending the authorities.’¹³⁰

There was clearly something of a disillusionment with the existing leaders and their mode of appointment. Clarke retired from the Legislative Council in 1936 to praise from his fellow Council Members, having completed the maximum permitted three terms of three years each. He was replaced as the Eurasian Unofficial Member for Singapore by Hugh Zehnder, Major of “D” Company of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps, but there were no recorded contributions from Zehnder in the Legislative Council in that year.¹³¹ Both nominees had been chosen by the Eurasian Association and in the leader, ‘Representation By Election’, the *Review* argued for the Eurasian Member for Singapore to be democratically elected by the whole community.¹³² In a succession of articles for the *Review* in 1936, ‘Tukang’ (‘worker’) – the pseudonymous radical – expressed his belief that the leaders of the Eurasian Association were acting purely in their own interests and those of the ‘upper classes’ and that the Legislative Council was dominated by mercantile interests seeking to exploit the

¹²⁹ ‘Factors Against Federation by Koh Dehulu’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 6, December 1935, p. 10.

¹³⁰ Chapman, R.V., ‘Our Obligations’, *The Eurasian Review*, March 1936, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 6.

¹³¹ CO 275/141 Proceedings of the Legislative Council for the Straits Settlements 1936.

¹³² ‘Representation By Election’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 4, December 1936, p. 1.

masses.¹³³ There was clearly a growing feeling that representation could not be left in the hands of the elite. Hence, in March 1937, a leader, ‘Payment For Councillors’, argued in the *Review* that compensating Legislative Councillors for their attendance at meetings would greatly widen the pool of prospective members and thus enhance the quality and credibility of the Council and make it more representative of those in whose interests it purported to legislate.¹³⁴

Eurasians in general, however, never abandoned their loyal stance. Right until the end of its existence, leading articles in *The Eurasian Review* included respectful and genuine notes of support for the King-Emperor’s Jubilee, and after his death, the new King and then, following the abdication crisis, loyal pledges to George VI, including accounts of Eurasian celebrations to mark his coronation.¹³⁵ We should also not forget that *The Eurasian Review*’s call for a Eurasian battalion in 1936 was couched in strongly imperial terms. It observed that while rivals to the British Empire talked of peace, they ‘feverishly arm for war.’ The dream, then, that the Empire would somehow be able to stand aloof and alone and keep out of an inevitable conflict was a delusion and an abdication of imperial responsibility – if the British Empire did not join the arms race, it would forfeit ‘her paramountcy over a quarter of the globe.’¹³⁶ A regular battalion of Eurasian troops could play its role in a situation in which the future of the Empire was held to be at stake: ‘the cold-blooded training of all her men’s men for the looming “totalitarian” conflict is expedient.’¹³⁷ In the worldview of the *Review*, and in such times of international and imperial jeopardy, the needs of the Eurasian community and those of the British Empire, of their rulers and the institutions that governed them, were aligned.

¹³³ ‘Malaya’s Eurasians: A Plea for Co-operative Effort by “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, March 1936, p. 5; ‘And So The Game Goes On by “Tukang”’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 2-3, September 1936, pp. 5-7.

¹³⁴ ‘Payment For Councillors’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. III, No. 1, March 1937, p. 1.

¹³⁵ ‘Eurasian Coronation Celebrations’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, September 1937, pp. 2-3.

¹³⁶ ‘The Profession Of Arms’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. II, No. 2-3, September 1936, p. 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Even so, such expressions of imperial loyalty sat with a sense of grievance at discrimination. In September 1935, the leader, ‘Senior Jobs for Local People’, damned the colour bar for prohibiting meaningful advancement in government service as well as the failure of the Hoops Scheme to make provision for local medical officers in the Malayan Medical Service. A few months later, the *Review* underlined the results of the colour bar in the civil service: ‘Today’s people are compelled to be limpets to posts of mediocrity.’¹³⁸ In December 1937, the *Review* attacked the government-sponsored review of allowances for the local civil service, the MacGregor Report, which was sympathetic to European officials to the exclusion of others.¹³⁹ That report dismissed the claims submitted by the Asian and Eurasian communities, questioned their veracity and credibility, and sneered at the apparent ‘remarkable unanimity’ of their evidence which it held worked against their interests.¹⁴⁰ The Governor then arrogantly informed the Legislative Council in November 1937 that he would not revisit the report,¹⁴¹ and this, and the report itself, led the *Review* to ‘set on record our general protest against the recommendations ... as being *ultra vires*, discriminating and partial.’¹⁴²

Conclusion

As we have seen, the decade of the 1930s was one of paradox for the Eurasian community – that is, a period of vulnerability and yet one of a growing presence and achievement on their part. On the one hand, there was the insecurity caused by the Slump; on the other hand, there was an increasing penetration of colonial institutions – for example, the military, the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, and through representation on the boards of prestigious bodies such as the Raffles Institute and the King Edward VII

¹³⁸ ‘Awake Malaya!’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. I, No. 6, December 1935, p. 2.

¹³⁹ ‘United We Stand’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3, December 1937, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Case of Asiatic Officers’, *Malaya Tribune*, 8 November 1937, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ *Malaya Tribune*, 18 November 1937, p. 7.

¹⁴² ‘The MacGregor Report’, *The Eurasian Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3, December 1937, p. 3.

Medical School. Eurasians had gained a profile in the media – in newspapers, magazines and on the radio – where their Eurasian identity was explicitly celebrated. Consequently, this was a period of considerable social and political effervescence and consolidation – evidenced by the creation of *The Eurasian Review* and the arrival of Eurasian women as a significant factor in the labour market and as sporting pioneers – expanding the possibilities of what it meant to be Eurasian.

The continuing debates around Eurasian-ness became more intense and ideological with a minority of Eurasian commentators calling into question the community's emotional attachment to Empire and challenging the established leadership's customary loyal and, in their view, quiescent stance. However, the predominant tendency amongst Eurasians, if it shifted towards a version of Pan-Eurasianism, nevertheless remained tied to Empire and, in the main, rejected Asian nationalism. Previously, vocal disappointment with the leadership and the customary calls for Eurasian unity had not resulted in the community coming together in the political sphere to attempt a transformation of Eurasian circumstances. Instead, the gradualist approach adopted by the Eurasian Association and their appointees to the Legislative Council meant pursuing a policy of incremental change and holding on to the hope that a greater emphasis on educational accomplishment would, in the long run, encourage Eurasians to help themselves and equip the next generation with the tools needed for a more competitive world.

However, the particular context of the time led to a new mobilisation. The straightened circumstances caused by the Slump, the distress and destitution that followed in its wake, compounded the continuing racial discrimination Eurasians suffered. There was uncertainty over a future that held the unwelcome prospect of a possible imperial retreat concomitant with the rise of Asian nationalisms that had little room for Eurasians in their movements and intended orders. In this context, the failure of the colonial authorities to embrace Eurasians

despite all their loyal professions was particularly hurtful. All combined to push Eurasians onto a more activist path, and a continuation of the quiet quest for equality and freedom, the strategy adopted by Clarke and his cohort, promised little in the new world order of the 1930s.

The Eurasian Association of Singapore, the largest and most influential of the region, and the leading association whose stance on matters would usually be followed by the other Eurasian organisations of British Malaya had, until now, rejected the idea of an All-Malaya Eurasian Association. But the changed political context, the ferment of dissent (represented, for example, by voices such as Chapman, Dover and 'Tukang') pressed it towards accepting the notion. The clamour for change, personified in the demand for an All-Malaya Eurasian Association, together with attendant organisations and actions, which had been resisted until now, could no longer be ignored or dismissed. The question was whether Eurasians could come together, in enough numbers, to make a stronger, All-Malaya Eurasian Association a reality, and if they could make an even more decisive break with the past by making common cause with other groups subject to discrimination by the Empire.

Chapter Five

Apotheosis and Nemesis: War and its Aftermath

On 29 August 1941, the Registrar-General of Statistics for the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States published what would become the last population figures for British Malaya before the region was overwhelmed by war. The estimated total population for Singapore in June 1941 of 769,216 was subdivided into six categories – Malays, Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Indians and Others (there were no divisions for age or sex). Eurasians numbered 8,321 which was approximately 1% of the inhabitants, the Chinese made up 78%, Malays 10%, Indians 8%, Europeans 2% and Others 1%. (In the wider region, Eurasians were only 0.3% of the total population of British Malaya.) The Eurasian population of Singapore was greater than the next three largest communities of Eurasians in British Malaya put together – Selangor (2654), Malacca (2481) and Penang (2374).¹ Numerically then, Singapore easily had the largest concentration of Eurasians in British Malaya, with a similar measure in terms of their civic and cultural significance for Eurasians of the region. Proportionately too, the Eurasians of Singapore, in comparison to the population as a whole, had, on the eve of the Japanese invasion, attained an importance and prominence in social and public life that far outweighed their numbers.

The history of Eurasians in the years immediately preceding the Japanese attack on British Malaya in December 1941 and the fall of Singapore in February 1942 was confirmation of this high water mark of Eurasian influence and their participation in the civic and social life of colonial Singapore. In some sense, the promises of the previous periods had been followed through in the form of concerted and organised action by the community, and a sense of pan-Eurasianness had emerged, although the advances were to be brutally reversed

¹ CO 276/160 Straits Settlements Government Gazettes July-Dec 1941, p. 1656.

by the years of war and occupation. Nevertheless, it is well to remember what was achieved throughout the 1930s. Aside from the Eurasian representation in the legislative and municipal bodies sketched in the last chapter, there were other advances. The Straits Settlements Medical Service was opened to Asians, including Eurasians, in 1932; the Straits Settlements Civil Service was created in 1934 which promised promotion into senior positions, although this was something of a sop to Asian and Eurasian sentiments as the colour bar was still in place in the Malayan Civil Service. Eurasian boys and girls had benefited from the reintroduction of the Queen's Scholarship scheme for the most talented pupils of the local English-speaking schools. All those born in Singapore automatically became British subjects and, therefore, eligible for appointment onto Executive, Legislative and Municipal Councils and for employment, if suitably qualified, in the Straits Settlements Medical, Legal and Civil Services. Eurasians served on the Education Board, the Singapore Harbour Board, on the Licensing Board and on hospital management committees, on religious advisory boards and in chambers of commerce. There were Eurasian Justices of the Peace; Eurasians were appointed Councillors for Raffles College and the King Edward VII Medical School. In 1938, a Eurasian, Henry Woodford, was appointed the Registrar of Births and Deaths for Singapore.² The Singapore Recreation Club and the Girls' Sports Club, together with the evangelical sporting promotions of Conrad Clarke, meant that Eurasians played leading roles in the sporting life of the city, as faithfully reported in the English-language daily press and in specialist periodicals such as *The Sportsman* magazine.

At the same time, with the fluctuating price of rubber and tin, the effects of the Slump lingered even in the later 1930s. An upturn had followed the wars and rearmament of the late 1930s, and the cost of living in the Straits Settlements was found to have decreased from 1937 to 1938 for all communities, but the colonial authorities, in their review for 1938,

² CO 276/150 Straits Settlements Government Gazettes 1938, Vol. IV Oct- Dec, Supplement No. 98, Singapore Jury List, p. 66.

acknowledged that unemployment was still a problem due to a decrease in the price of rubber and tin over the same period.³ The Eurasian community, with its preponderance of clerks and similar white-collar workers, was particularly vulnerable to ‘the uncertainties of the thirties,’ as noted by M.R. Stenson in his study of industrial relations in the region.⁴ As seen in the previous chapter, one remedy consistently advocated by the leaders of the community in letters to the local press, speeches at the Eurasian Association and articles for *The Eurasian Review*, was for Eurasians to come together in active ways to alleviate individual and communal needs affected by the vicissitudes of economic life: the vice of communal apathy, and the fatalism engendered by it, could be overcome by a unity of purpose and direction, something that was more and more in evidence at the decade’s end. The repeated calls, over previous months and years, for concerted action, were finally being heeded. Rising nationalism and an economic depression that appeared to penalise Eurasians disproportionately exposed a precariousness in their situation, that was made only worse by the growing fear, and realisation, that they could not rely on the British to play fair with them, as loyal subordinates, and in their dealings with the other inhabitants of British Malaya. Three new endeavours stand out in this period that bespeak a more urgent activism and attempt at unity on the part of Eurasians: the Eurasian Women’s Association and the Eurasian Youth Movement, both confined to Singapore, and the Council of All-Malayan Eurasian Associations.

The Eurasian Women’s Association was formed on 12 April 1939 by 17 women meeting at the Singapore Recreation Club.⁵ Whereas the time taken between the forming of the male Recreation Club and the male Eurasian Association was almost 40 years, only a decade

³ Jarman, Robert L., (ed.), *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941, Volume 11, 1936-1941* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1988), p. 371.

⁴ Stenson, M.R., *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 33.

⁵ ‘Two Years Old’, *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 20 August 1941, p. 5.

separated the creation of the Girls' Sports Club and the Eurasian Women's Association. Ineligible for membership of the Eurasian Association because of their sex, the new association's motto was 'Loyalty, Unity, Charity, Kinship'⁶ which can be understood as a statement of intent as well. By the time it was granted exemption from registration under the Societies Ordinance in July 1939,⁷ proof that the authorities viewed it positively, the Eurasian Women's Association could already boast 200 members.⁸ It aimed to alleviate the unemployment that had blighted the community by helping those who would help themselves, and its first President, Miss A.V. de Souza, pointedly instructed Eurasians to rid themselves of the 'false pride' which had led individuals and families into debt through an insistence on keeping up appearances and standards of living they could not afford and by refusing employment in jobs they considered beneath the status they felt obliged to maintain.⁹ They held monthly meetings at the Girls' Sports Club, arranged cooking and sewing classes, and appointed officers responsible for various districts in Singapore and representatives for the main occupations of Eurasian women at the time – teachers, stenographers, nurses and shop assistants. They were immediately supported in their aims and activities by the Eurasian Association and the Singapore Recreation Club, and were given the responsibility for coordinating and collecting funds from local Eurasians for the Malaya Patriotic Fund, created when war was declared in Europe, a significant and notable role given the community's professed loyalty and its many demonstrations of patriotism.¹⁰ However, it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that the support from these men-only organisations was an unequivocal gesture in favour of women's equal rights – in 1938, the year before the Eurasian Women's Association was founded, members of the Singapore Recreation Club rejected a

⁶ 'Eurasian Women Form Association', *Straits Times*, 23 July 1939, p. 17.

⁷ CO 276/153 Straits Settlements Government Gazettes 1939 Vol. III July-Sept, p. 2741.

⁸ *Straits Times*, 23 July 1939, p. 17.

⁹ *Straits Times*, 23 July 1939, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 3 October 1939, p. 4.

proposal to grant associate membership to females which meant, in order to enter club premises, a woman would still have to be signed in by a male member.¹¹

The first annual general meeting of the Eurasian Women's Association took place in October 1940. By this time, the Eurasian Women's Association had 264 members though the President reminded her audience that there was still work to be done as the number of Eurasian women in Singapore was around the 2000 mark. The ambition for the next 12 months would be to increase the membership in Singapore and to expand into and include the rest of British Malaya.¹² The Eurasian Women's Association followed the example of its Eurasian predecessors when it came to modes of fundraising: hence it organised a children's concert in aid of the Girl Guides and promoted popular dances for the adult population of Singapore. One such event took place at the Victoria School Hall on a Saturday night in April 1940 from 9pm to 2am with tickets priced at \$1 each. Dance hostesses were advertised and the music was provided by 'Singapore's popular swing band, The Sambodians.'¹³ The event was a great success with the *Straits Times* reporting that the dance drew 'a large and cosmopolitan crowd,'¹⁴ using the word cosmopolitan to indicate the attendance of all races and colours, mixing together that night.

The Eurasian Youth Movement was formed in March 1939, a month before the Eurasian Women's Movement, with the aim to "uphold and improve the social, moral, physical and intellectual welfare"¹⁵ of the Eurasian youth of Singapore. It was run as an autonomous body of the Eurasian Association with an oversight committee formed of three representatives from the Eurasian Association, one from the Singapore Recreation Club, one from the Girls' Sports Club and a woman and a man from those districts of Singapore with a meaningful

¹¹ Khaw, Patrick, *The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963*, BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore 1986/87, p. 33.

¹² 'Appeal To Singapore's Eurasian Mothers', *Straits Times*, 20 October 1940, p. 9.

¹³ 'Eurasian Women's Association', *Malaya Tribune*, 5 April 1940, p. 2.

¹⁴ 'Dance Draws Crowd', *Straits Times*, 7 April 1940, p. 3.

¹⁵ 'Eurasian Youth', *Straits Times*, 21 May 1939, p. 16.

Eurasian presence: Singapore Town, Tanglin and Bukit Timah, Balestier and St. Michaels, Upper Serangoon, Katong and Geylang. As with the women's association, the intention was for the Eurasian Youth Movement to eventually expand into and encompass the rest of British Malaya.¹⁶ In June 1939, as the Eurasian Association of Singapore celebrated its 20th anniversary with a dinner and dance, the new President and Legislative Councillor, Claude H. da Silva,¹⁷ spoke of their plans for the newly formed Eurasian Youth Movement: "We must develop in them the sense of citizenship and communal responsibility."¹⁸ The intention was to enrol 90% of Eurasian youths into an organisation which would provide, for no fee or subscription, 'music, literature, debates, physical culture, dramatics, needlework and games.'¹⁹ To avoid the possibility of any controversies or arguments, and divisive and unwelcome publicity, any political or religious discussions were prohibited.

By October 1939, it was reported that 40 boys and 57 girls had joined. At the Singapore Recreation Club in November that year, 300 children attended a rally for the Eurasian Youth Movement: the event included a speech by da Silva and the singing of 'patriotic and other songs.'²⁰ The following year, the Eurasian Youth Movement claimed a membership of 148 boys and 122 girls. Libraries for members were started in two districts of Singapore, and the Eurasian Youth Movement held a variety concert at Victoria School Hall in September 1940 with a range of performers aged from five to seventeen years old. Distinguished guests at the concert included Major Zehnder of "D" Company and Harold Cheeseman, Director of Education for the Straits Settlements. Further rallies and concerts took place, there were 'lantern lectures and outings,'²¹ and the first company of Eurasian Girl Guides and Brownies was formed, the 10th Singapore. By September 1941, the Eurasian Youth Movement could

¹⁶ 'Eurasian Youth Movement Launched', *Straits Times*, 21 May 1939, p. 17.

¹⁷ CO 276/152 Straits Settlements Government Gazettes 1939, Vol. II Apr-June, p. 2088.

¹⁸ 'Eurasians Celebrate 20th Anniversary', *Malaya Tribune*, 6 June 1939, p. 9.

¹⁹ 'Eurasian Youth Movement', *Straits Times*, 27 August 1939, p. 9.

²⁰ '300 Eurasian Children Rally', *Straits Times*, 5 November 1939, p. 3.

²¹ 'Eurasian Youth Movement to aid Air Raid Victims', *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 November 1940, p. 5.

boast of a membership of 160 girls and 190 boys, who were empowered to elect their own district leaders every six months.²²

The idea of forming an All-Malaya Eurasian Association had previously been brought before the Eurasian Association of Singapore in 1931 and 1933 but had been rejected each time on the grounds it was premature as not all of the various associations already present in British Malaya were sufficiently organised and ready to join a larger body.²³ However, as the last chapter revealed, there was in the latter half of the Slump period a growing mood in favour of wider unity. Even the *Straits Times* argued in favour of such an organisation and, while it praised the *Eurasian Review* as ‘an excellent magazine,’ it felt that disparate associations could achieve little and only ‘really valuable work could be accomplished by a Malayan Eurasian Association.’ Wearing its establishment hat, and speaking as the mouthpiece of government and mercantile interests, it reassured its readers that such a new and large communal body would pose no threat to the status quo: ‘Eurasians in this country will never be misled into political agitation of the less desirable sort.’²⁴ Letters were published in the local press, not only in the *Straits Times*, supporting the idea and in March 1938 the *Malaya Tribune* reported that all the Eurasian Associations in Malaya bar Singapore were in favour of a united body, and that several prominent Singapore Eurasians were ‘strongly supporting the move.’²⁵ Momentum was building and became irresistible in 1939 with the endorsement of the new President of the Singapore Association, Claude da Silva, and a conference to discuss the initiative was scheduled for the beginning of 1940.

It was held over two days that February, and was hosted by the Singapore Association at the Recreation Club. There were official delegates from the associations of Singapore,

²² *Morning Tribune*, 12 September 1941, p. 6.

²³ See ‘Eurasian Association Meeting’, *Malaya Tribune*, 18 December 1931, p. 10; ‘Question Of All-Malaya Association’, *Malaya Tribune*, 14 February 1933, p. 7.

²⁴ ‘Eurasian Unity’, *Straits Times*, 8 May 1935, p. 10.

²⁵ ‘Malayan Eurasian Association To Be Formed?’, *Morning Tribune*, 16 March 1938, p. 2.

Penang, Selangor, Perak, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Kedah. The conference was chaired by Claude da Silva and R.V. Chapman read a self-penned paper, 'Action Wanted.'²⁶ The conference emphasised the importance of Eurasians becoming representatives on the various public and official bodies now open to them and of the centrality of education as a route to achieving Eurasian ambitions. There were calls for the colonial government to create a Eurasian school similar to the one it had provided for Malays. Military service in the regular armed forces was another objective, currently denied, with Chapman challenging the authorities to "Give Eurasians a chance and see what he is made of."²⁷ In his address as conference chair, Claude da Silva outlined a strategy and a sense of purpose to "develop high and noble minds and plot steadily, unit by unit, not worrying about what has passed, but with fortitude about the future." This can be seen as an attempt to draw a line under the disagreements which had hampered earlier attempts to hold such an event and the accusation of disunity which plagued Eurasians and which had stymied previous moves to reach some sort of consensual agreement and understanding. It can also be read as an acknowledgement of the injustices of colonial society and, rather than dwell upon the daily discriminations, he called upon Eurasians to work towards their elimination. This would happen under the umbrella of the British, who were still seen as essentially benevolent, and the conference was eager in time of war to show its commitment and sent a message to the Governor reassuring him 'of the community's abiding loyalty to His Majesty the King, and co-operation as brothers and citizens of the Colony and Malaya.'²⁸

The running order of the conference was in keeping with other community events with its mixture of the official, the social and the practical. One important aspect, and in contrast to earlier practice, was the innovation that Eurasian women were invited to attend and to

²⁶ 'Eurasians Hold First Conference', *Malaya Tribune*, 9 February 1940, p. 3.

²⁷ 'Eurasians Want To Join Fighting Services', *Straits Times*, 9 February 1940, p. 11.

²⁸ 'Eurasian Conference's Interest In Education', *Straits Times*, 9 February 1940, p. 11; 'Eurasians To Send Message Of Loyalty', *Straits Times*, 10 February 1940, p. 10.

participate, though note how the programme effectively gave the male delegates priority in the proceedings:

Thursday, 10am - Opening of the Conference, Chairman's address.
Views of delegates and preliminary discussions.

11.30am – Conference open to all members of the Community including ladies. Discussion of subjects.

1pm – Adjournment. Delegates will be guests of the Singapore Committee to tiffin.

2.30pm – Conference resumes.

Friday, 10.30am – Paper to be read by Mr. R.V. Chapman, "Action wanted," to be followed by general discussion.

8pm – the Hon. Mr. Claude da Silva and Mrs. Da Silva at home to delegates and their wives.²⁹

After years of correspondence, R.V. Chapman – the man who in the 1930s had been so prominent in the debates about Eurasian-ness and the need for a wider unity – had come to be seen as perhaps the key spokesman for Eurasian sentiments and aspirations, the voice of the Eurasian conscience. The *Straits Times* published a letter from "Shoulder Arms" thanking Chapman for his efforts on behalf of Eurasians and stating it was now the responsibility of Eurasians 'not to let R.V.C. down....He is known throughout the Peninsula for his honesty, sincerity and integrity – a great sportsman in his day, no bluff in his make-up. When questions arise affecting the community, we invariably ask: "What has R.V.C. to say?"'³⁰ His views were emblematic then, and he articulated widely-held views of Eurasians at the point their world was about to change irrevocably with the Japanese invasion. Chapman had consistently argued, in *The Eurasian Review* and in local newspapers, in favour of a central Eurasian Association to rectify the current ineffective arrangements for Eurasians in British Malaya. In December 1936, in one letter published to that effect, he stated: 'It must be the

²⁹ 'Full Programme For Conference', *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, 6 February 1940, p. 12.

³⁰ 'The Role Played by Mr. R.V. Chapman', *Straits Times*, 17 July 1940, p. 8.

Association, the whole Association, and nothing but the Association.’³¹ He returned to the subject again the next year, when he called for an urgent conference of the various associations to form a central body and to revive *The Eurasian Review* which had ceased publication. These were necessary measures to provide the ‘mass propaganda, mass enthusiasm and mass suggestion’ essential to bring the community together and bridge the gap that had grown between ‘ordinary Eurasians’ and their leaders. Currently there was little connection between the two, a lack of personal contact, ‘hence the great cleavage.’³² Notably, it was Chapman who was chosen to give the signature speech at the conference of February 1940.

Entitled, ‘Action Wanted,’ Chapman’s address was characterised by the local press as a ‘Message to Youth’ in which he called upon the coming generation not to repeat the mistakes made by previous ones and to unite: “Mistrust, distrust and defeatism are the curses of Eurasian life.” Instead, a new central organisation and a revived *Eurasian Review* would “sink petty squabbles....[and] build up a strong fortress of Eurasian solidarity.” Chapman believed the way to bridge the gap between the community and its leaders was to have places where the leadership could meet with ‘ordinary’ men, meeting halls “to preach your propaganda and educate the masses.” He told his audience, whom he called the “communal intelligentsia,” to reach out to the rest of the community: “You have energetic men amongst the masses ready to come forward to assist in the work.” He reminded them that “English liberty was founded by vigilant men who could not even write their names but who made history.” This was in stark contrast to the current crop of Eurasian leaders: “Lack of vigilance

³¹ *Straits Times*, 7 December 1936, p. 18.

³² *Straits Times*, 15 November 1937, p. 17.

on your part is shown by your thoughtlessness, irresponsibility and in the general 'looseness' in every grade of Eurasian society."³³

These were serious criticisms, especially as they were made in front of the Eurasian elite. As it was, there were no objections to Chapman's rhetoric which was critical and challenging, far removed from the more careful and conciliatory language usually employed by Eurasian leaders, instructing his audience to "revolutionise your minds...in the real spirit of comradeship." Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to portray the speech as a radical call to arms and an ideological challenge to the status quo. Rather, it was an attempt to rouse his listeners from their alleged inertia. Chapman believed there was no reason why, what he was calling for, would not gain the imperial government's approval and assistance: "but not until you place your communal house in order and with one voice demand your rights." And these Eurasian rights were legitimate rights, as real as their grievances, and could be acknowledged as such and secured within the current, colonial framework.³⁴

The conference closed with the delegates in unanimous agreement over the desirability of forming an All-Malaya Eurasian Association. The advantages were clear: it would be a body large enough not to be ignored and with enough heft to make significant representations to the imperial authorities in Singapore and, when necessary, to the imperial Parliament in London, where it could expect a sympathetic hearing from the British Labour Party, especially on the vexed question of unemployment. However, the various delegations were unable to reach unanimity on the next steps needed to reach their objective. Some wanted to merge immediately, while others, including Chapman, felt it was necessary for the associations to eliminate any discrepancies in their various constitutions first. Bureaucracy won the day and it was agreed that discussions within each association on these issues would

³³ 'Eurasian Leader's Message To Youth', *Morning Tribune*, 10 February 1940, p. 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

occur before any further general action took place.³⁵ Nevertheless, the principle of a pan-Eurasianness spanning the region had been established.

The result of discussions at local level following the conference in Singapore was a new proposal, reported in March 1941 by the *Malaya Tribune*.³⁶ There would be an overarching All-Malaya Central Council of the Eurasian Associations with its headquarters based in Singapore: “The Council shall act as an advisory body to serve as a channel of opinion and co-ordinate the activities of member Associations.” Delegates would come from each association and include representatives from the Eurasian Women’s Association. The Council would meet once a year, matters would be decided by vote, and the Council was given the competence to guide all aspects of community life: “The Council shall have power to formulate and develop schemes for educational, industrial and social advancement of Eurasians.” The plan for the new Council, sitting on top of the current associations, was approved by the Singapore Eurasian Association at its AGM on 17 September 1941. The same meeting appointed its members for the new council: A.J. Braga, R.V. Chapman and G.E.N. Oehlers.³⁷ At last, in fact and not just in principle, a pan-Malaya Eurasian identity and organisation had emerged, centred on Singapore, though it was doomed to be upended by war before it could take root.

It is appropriate at this point to focus on one of the Singapore members of the All Malaya Central Council of the Eurasian Associations – the lawyer, G.E.N. Oehlers – since as the youngest of the Singapore members of the Council, he gives us a flavour of the values of the emerging Eurasian leaders. George Oehlers began a distinguished career as a pupil at the Raffles Institute, founded by Stamford Raffles in 1823 ‘to educate the sons of the higher

³⁵ ‘Eurasians To Form Malayan Association’, *Malaya Tribune*, 10 February 1940, p. 2.

³⁶ ‘Scheme Afoot To Form Central Council For Malaysians Eurasians?’, *Malaya Tribune*, 19 March 1941, p. 3.

³⁷ ‘Eurasian Associations’ Council To Be Formed’, *Straits Times*, 18 September 1941, p. 10.

order of natives and others'³⁸, where he was captain of the hockey and cricket teams, Head Prefect and Head Boy in 1927 and, according to the school magazine, *The Rafflesian*, 'there was no finer example of the type of boy we are trying to turn out.'³⁹ This was no mean achievement in a school that, at the time, practiced informal segregation with separate staff common rooms for European 'masters' and the others, who were known only as 'teachers'.⁴⁰ Appointed a Municipal Commissioner in 1939,⁴¹ Oehlers was already an elected committee member of the Singapore Recreation Club and the Eurasian Association. He was one of the coming generation of Eurasians, younger than the brothers Clarke, and would go on to play a prominent part in both the Eurasian community and the broader Singaporean society of the postwar period, as President of the Eurasian Association and the Singapore Recreation Club, and as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Singapore from 1955 to 1963. Oehlers received a knighthood in 1958, the only Eurasian from Singapore to be given that honour. We have an excellent sense of his beliefs and values because in December 1940, Radio Malaya broadcast a talk by him, one in a series entitled 'Presenting Singapore.'⁴² Its subject was the past, present and future history of the Eurasians of Singapore and it is not surprising that he had the responsibility of presenting the Eurasian outlook in the radio series, given his already many different roles representing his community.

In his broadcast, Oehlers spoke of a domiciled community of Eurasians, established almost immediately after Raffles' appropriation of the island, and, despite their varied heritage, of which Oehlers only chose to refer to the Dutch and Portuguese elements, bound together by a shared language, English, and by a shared Christian faith: "British by birth and British by outlook." He mentioned *Our Magazine*, *The Eurasian Review* and the *Malaya*

³⁸ Cheeseman, H.R., 'A Century of Education in Singapore', *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 8 October 1935, p. 16.

³⁹ Quoted in Wijesingha, E., *The Eagle Breeds a Gryphon: The Story of the Raffles Institution 1823-1985* (Singapore: Pioneer Book Centre, 1989), p. 159.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴¹ CO 276/152 Straits Settlements Government Gazettes 1939, Vol. II Apr-June, p. 2007.

⁴² 'Development Of Singapore', *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, 5 December 1940, p. 4.

Tribune's "Eurasian foundation", and the progression of Eurasians into positions of professional responsibility as doctors, lawyers, solicitors, civil engineers, architects and teachers. He spoke of Eurasians in sport, the Singapore Recreation Club, the Girls' Sports Club, the Eurasian Youth Movement, the Eurasian Women's Association and the Singapore Volunteer Corps. He reminded his listeners that the Malayan Civil Service was still closed to Eurasians at senior levels, though he did not feel it necessary to discuss the reasons why, but assured them that things were looking up:

Today the Eurasians are given opportunities which were denied their forefathers. Today the Eurasian is represented on the Legislative Council, on the Municipal Commission, on the Rural Board and on other public bodies and he takes his share in the civic life of the city.

For Oehlers, the proposals for some form of an All-Malaya Eurasian Association also promised a better future. He was convinced that: "more than at any period in their history, Eurasians are realising the necessity for concerted action." It was unquestionable "that they desire to take a much more active part in local administration and public life."⁴³ In effect, he was tying the past history of Eurasians in Singapore to recent events, links in a causal chain of individual achievement and communal growth that culminated in the current high point of Eurasian development, something he expected only to continue and increase over time.

If Oehlers was the coming voice of his people, it was Chapman who was their principal champion on the eve of the Japanese invasion. He continued with his regular missives to the local English-language press on matters of Eurasian concern: on the topic of the colour bar in the Malayan Civil Service, the desirability for a university in Singapore (like Hong Kong's), and many letters urging the authorities to allow Eurasians to join the regular armed forces, a concession granted not long after the conference of February 1940, no doubt influenced by the pressures of war, when Eurasians were given the right to enlist in the British Army. In Chapman's view, enlistment was as an emblem of imperial citizenship and

⁴³ 'Development Of Singapore', *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, 5 December 1940, p. 4.

giving Eurasians this right brought to an end some of the suspicion and racist stigma attached to Eurasians due to their mixed origins: ‘the bar sinister has at long last been removed.’⁴⁴ He sought the eradication of the myth of racial superiority, which he believed was ‘an artificial growth of the last century,’ the end to white ‘prestige’ and the opening up of the civil service and armed forces to Eurasians. Military service in the regular army would enable Eurasians to prove their worth: ‘We as a class are not wealthy, but we can give our manhood.’ When the senior military officer responsible for British Malaya praised the Eurasian artillery company in the Volunteers, Chapman felt vindicated: ‘My faith in the youth of my community has been justified.’⁴⁵

Further proof that he saw the future for Eurasians as both British and imperial was in his newly-found attachment to the term, Anglo-Malayan, which he wanted to be adopted by the Eurasians of Singapore, something he had argued against in 1919 during the protracted debates over naming conducted in the local press. He claimed that by choosing this title, the community would broaden to include any domiciled Europeans alongside their Eurasian neighbours and could somehow, in the mere act of naming, successfully bring these two disparate groups together and act as ‘a safeguard for an important minority community’, although he failed to explain how it would surmount the entrenched racism and suspicion of whites regarding those they deemed racial others.⁴⁶

Clearly, Chapman did not believe that the time had come for Eurasians to throw in their lot with the local Asian population of Singapore alone. Instead, in answer to the question posed to him by uncomprehending outsiders (‘Why do you people cling so tenaciously to your British loyalty?’), Chapman believed that the declaration made by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941 in the Atlantic Charter, their vision of a new world at war’s end,

⁴⁴ ‘Eurasians’ Chance’, *Straits Times*, 17 July 1940, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Straits Times*, 25 January 1940, p. 8; *Straits Times*, 17 July 1940, p. 8; *Straits Times*, 8 November 1940, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *Straits Times*, 28 February 1941, p. 8.

was, in his interpretation, everything he had argued for. Still situated firmly in the context and history of English liberty, and seemingly unaware that Churchill had fought unsuccessfully to keep the Charter as something that excluded non-white colonial peoples, Chapman called the pronouncement ‘a new Magna Carta for all the peoples of the world.’ Liberty in this postwar world promised to be one which was colour blind: ‘Absolute freedom is the birthright of every people.’ Chapman described the declaration as an opportunity to end racial prejudice and for people to stop living isolated lives in separate communities, and one that spoke to all the communities of Singapore:

Free speech, freedom from self-centredness and inhibitions which prevent men and women from talking sanely and stating openly their deepest convictions, freedom from racial and colour prejudices, freedom from apprehension for our own security – that is what we want. And why? That we may live and prosper, live and work.⁴⁷

Sadly, the fate of R.V. Chapman during the Japanese occupation is unclear: there is nothing of him on record, no evidence to show he survived. And no further articles or letters were published under his name in the postwar period; there is no trace of him in public life. Perhaps, his strong support for British imperialism ensured that he ‘disappeared’ under the new Japanese masters of Singapore, as did so many others who were viewed as politically suspect. His final public appearance came in a letter to the editor of the *Straits Times* published in September 1941, just before the Japanese conquest. Inevitably, he was telling his fellow Eurasians to work together to shape their own destiny and his words articulated the hopes for a better future on the basis of the wider unity for which he had campaigned for so long:

Unite and work for our own salvation, with a bracing trust in ourselves and our leaders, who are doing their utmost for our uplift We who have the West and East blended in our veins must be in the van of all those minority races in the East who are demanding a better

⁴⁷ *Straits Times*, 6 April 1939, p. 15; *Straits Times*, 21 August 1941, p. 10; *Straits Times*, 21 August 1941, p. 10; *Straits Times*, 21 August 1941, p. 10.

system of life. Through our Eurasian National Council and with a national paper we must command the respect and support of the best minds among Europeans and Asiatics. Let us “go to it.”⁴⁸

With that final phrase, Chapman was surely echoing the title of an official booklet, *Eurasia Goes to it*, which had just been published locally as a tribute to the war efforts of the Eurasian community. It contained a foreword by the President of the Singapore Eurasian Association, Claude da Silva, which emphasised their loyalty and service: ‘Eurasian sentiment demands the preservation of the Empire, of Freedom, of free speech and of a free press, and the protection of the best interests of all races and creeds.’ Strikingly, the foreword affirmed Eurasians’ ‘genuine devotion to the British nationality.’⁴⁹

Meanwhile, in the months and weeks before the Japanese invasion of mainland Malaya, life for the Eurasians of Singapore continued in most respects as it had before. In the annual contest for the Conrad Clarke Cup at cricket, The Rest triumphed against the Europeans,⁵⁰ and when rudimentary air-raid shelters started being built in mid-1941 a young Eurasian resident of the time remembers being reassured it was ‘purely precautionary.’⁵¹ Less than a week before the Imperial Japanese Army launched their attack on 2 December 1941, the committee of the Singapore Recreation Club met as usual, approving the purchase of sports equipment including cricket bats, gloves and balls, and repairs to the club’s tennis courts; attendees included A.J. Braga (chairman), G.E.N. Oehlers and Henry Woodford (Hon. Sec.).⁵² And in early December, a day or so before the Japanese invasion, members of the

⁴⁸ *Straits Times*, 23 September 1941, p. 8.

⁴⁹ ‘Eurasia Goes To It’, *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, 24 September 1941, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Tessensohn, Denyse, *Singapore Recreation Club Celebrates 1883-2007* (Singapore: People Developer, 2007), p. 44.

⁵¹ Mosbergen, Rudy, *In the grip of a crisis: The Experience of a Teenager during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, 1942-45* (Singapore: Seng City Trading, 2007), p. 45.

⁵² ‘Minutes of a Committee Meeting on 2.12.41’, *Singapore Recreation Club Souvenir Magazine 1983: 100 Anniversary, Centenary Celebrations 1883-1983* (Singapore: no publisher noted, 1983), no page number recorded.

Singapore Recreation Club played hockey on the Padang against a scratch team from the Indian army.⁵³

Hindsight has exposed as a fantasy the alleged superiority of the British military and the impregnability of Singapore, but it was a fantasy nurtured over many years and one in which the local population of Singapore, removed from the levers of power, had no reason to question. The sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* on 10 December 1941 off the east coast of Malaya was the event that in Eurasian memoirs revealed the myth of British naval and imperial invincibility and shocked an unsuspecting community. ‘We were stunned,’ wrote one memoirist, while another recalled: ‘Some cried, many trembled at the news. We were all struck dumb.’⁵⁴ The hollowness of the Empire’s promise to protect all its subjects was driven home by the clandestine evacuation of Penang when in the face of defeat, on the night of December 16th, British troops and the remaining white civilian residents fled, abandoning the majority of the population, unarmed and undefended, to its fate. It was, as Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper put it in their definitive history, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the war with Japan*, the moment of ‘the moral collapse of British rule in Southeast Asia.’⁵⁵ The American war correspondent Cedric Brown, who had survived the sinking of the *Repulse*, reported an event organised in Singapore on December 22nd when the Commander-in-Chief of the British Far East Command, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, attempted to reassure local community leaders, including some unnamed Eurasians, following the debacle on Penang Island: ‘It was a pitiful meeting and several other Asiatics got up to pledge fidelity to the British cause. But underlying everything they said was the fear

⁵³ Mosbergen, *In the grip of a crisis*, p. 51.

⁵⁴ La Brooy, Muriel, *Where Is Thy Victory?* (Singapore: self-published, 1988), p. 32; van Cuylenburg, John Bertram, *Singapore: through sunshine and shadow* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1982), p. 87.

⁵⁵ Bayly, Christopher, and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the war with Japan* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 119.

that Britain would abandon them.⁵⁶ For some of the local population, Eurasians and others, that fear was now mixed with contempt for British troops and for an imperial administration that had failed to protect their non-white citizens.⁵⁷

The eminent British lawyer, Sir Roland Braddell, scion of the family firm, Braddell Bros., which had practised in Singapore for generations, wrote to his wife in England, Lady Braddell, from the comparative safety of India in May 1942. He was a pillar of colonial Singapore, a Municipal Commissioner, who had contributed to Makepeace's *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, written the brochure for the Singapore Centenary celebrations, lectured at the Eurasian Literary Association, and his book, *The Lights of Singapore*, published in London by Methuen & Co. in 1934, had gone through three editions in one year. Reflecting on the terrible events that had culminated in Singapore's surrender, Braddell felt responsible, 'I feel I couldn't face the people whom we have let down,'⁵⁸ yet helpless: 'Like everybody else, I was completely fooled by the criminal assurances of impregnability we received.'⁵⁹ The implicit paternal promise within Britain's imperial project, of fair play and protection, was broken: 'The undignified scuttle of every Government servant from his post, the appalling lies, the total breakdown of British morale will never be forgotten....It wasn't English and it wasn't decent.'⁶⁰ This was reflected in the testimony of one Eurasian, Gerald de Cruz, a young journalist for the *Straits Times* at the outset of the conflict: he was sure that his disillusionment with the British for the debacle that followed the Japanese invasion was crucial in deciding a post-war career as an anti-imperialist.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Brown, Cedric, *Suez to Singapore* (New York: Halcyon House, 1943), p. 360.

⁵⁷ Conceicao, Joseph Francis, interview, Singapore, 04/04/2006, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁵⁸ ADM 199/622B The Fall and Evacuation of Singapore 1941-2, Extract from Indian Censorship: Letter from Roland Braddell to Lady Braddell in England, p. 71.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 71.

⁶¹ De Cruz, Gerald, interview, Singapore, 04/06/1982, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

The Deluge

It has been stated that, proportionally, Eurasians suffered more than any other community in terms of people murdered and tortured under Japanese rule.⁶² It was not a claim made by Eurasians at the time, or afterwards, and it is impossible to verify due to the intentional failure of the occupying authorities to keep such records, and to postwar disagreements over estimates and numbers, especially those concerning the many thousands of Chinese killed in the Sook Ching massacres during the first weeks of Japanese rule. There is no dispute however, and no lack of testimony, to their maltreatment as prisoners of war and as civilians, with Eurasians being singled out due to a perceived untrustworthiness considered intrinsic to their mixed origins and historic loyalty to their European masters, the British. And, despite the misgivings of some, the prevailing ideology of Eurasians, with their emotional attachment to the British Empire, simply did not allow for a significant faction of them to be drawn voluntarily into the Japanese project in Singapore, unlike some Indian and Malay nationalists. Significantly, none of the Eurasian institutions that were part of the daily routine of communal life, the Association, the Recreation and Girls' Sports Clubs and, more recently, the Eurasian Women's Association and the Eurasian Youth Movement, continued to operate during the occupation. Such was the fear, rooted in the reality of everyday life under the Japanese, that customary social (let alone political) activities in effect came to an end: there would be no more parties.⁶³

The community was fearful and dispersed. Writing immediately after the war's end, one Chinese Singaporean described their predicament as follows: 'The Eurasians were a suspected community...Those who were allowed to be at large lived by their wits, humouring

⁶² Blake, Christopher, *A View From Within: The last years of British Rule in South-East Asia* (Castle Cary, Somerset: Mendip Publishing, 1990), p. 61.

⁶³ Balhetchet, Sheila Marguerite, interview, Singapore, 26/02/2013; Oehlers, Farleigh Arthur Charles, interview, Singapore, 13/04/1984; Shelley, Rex Anthony, interview, Singapore, 31/01/2002; all Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

the Japanese.’⁶⁴ Their communal organisations were inactive, self-suspended and untenable and their leading lights, who had played such prominent roles in Singapore society, faced the unwelcome suspicion of the Japanese due to their contacts with the previous imperial administration. The Girls’ Sports Club’s playing fields were bombed during the Malayan campaign: after Singapore’s capitulation the Japanese tore down their pavilion and, on the ‘carefully laid and well-kept hockey field, netball, badminton and tennis courts,’⁶⁵ they dug slit trenches and drains. The club would only be in a position to resume its activities well after the war’s end. The Recreation Club on the Padang, meanwhile, was ransacked, requisitioned and turned into a medical outpatients centre for the Japanese.

The British imperial surrender in Singapore took place on 15 February 1942 and, on the 19th; G.E.N. Oehlers was ordered by the Japanese military authorities to form a committee to act as a conduit between them and the Eurasian community and, it was feared, to identify appropriate individuals for interrogation and worse. The committee was made up of Oehlers, A.J. Braga, Henry Woodford, W.H. Mosbergen and G. Shelley, all senior members of the Singapore Eurasian Association.⁶⁶ (The President, Claude da Silva, was not in Singapore at the fall and so was not involved.)⁶⁷ Scared and unwilling, this group dissolved itself as soon as it could.⁶⁸ To the victorious Japanese, Eurasians were considered as natural collaborators with the British and ripe for re-education. Two weeks after the fall, on March 3rd, all Eurasians were ordered to assemble for ‘Examination and Registration’ on the Padang. They were required to provide proof of their names, nationalities, age, occupations and ‘parentage.’ At these mass screenings, the Chief of the Syonese Defence Headquarters (Singapore had

⁶⁴ Chin Kee Onn, *Malaya Upside Down* (Singapore: Jits & Co., 1946), p. 196.

⁶⁵ *Girls Sports Club – 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club* (Singapore: Navjiwan, 1980), p. 15.

⁶⁶ Rodrigues, Keith, ‘Trial and Tribulation: The War Years’, in Myrna Braga-Blake, Ann Ebert-Oehlers and Alexius A. Pereira, eds., *Singapore Eurasians: Memories, Hopes and Dreams, revised edition* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2007), p. 173.

⁶⁷ Shelley, Rex, with Chen Fen, *Dr Paglar: Everyman’s Hero* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2010), p. 42.

⁶⁸ Mosbergen, Rudy William, interview, Singapore, 31/05/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

been renamed Syonan, the Light of the South) told the Eurasians assembled there that while they had been ‘spoiled in circumstances of individualism and liberalism...The New Dawn has come over a new Great Asia.’ Furthermore, they were told that ‘Most of you belong to the educated class and you still continue your thoughts and actions as before, disobeying our orders. We must think of a heavy punishment for you.’ While he promised ‘protection in return for faithful co-operation,’ any failure to fully comply with examination and registration would be ‘severely punished.’⁶⁹

Those Eurasians who had been employed in government service and members of the Volunteers not currently incarcerated in Changi Jail as prisoners of war, both categories that were immediately suspect in Japanese eyes, were told to identify themselves as such for processing – some would be led off for further questioning, never to return.⁷⁰ Eurasians married to Europeans and first-generation Eurasians were identified at the mass screenings and were imprisoned in the Changi Jail and Sime Road prison camps in Singapore. They shared their incarceration with white civilians, mainly drawn from the British expatriate communities of Singapore and Malaya. Despite the close proximity of internment and the trauma of defeat, racial prejudice persisted behind the closed walls of prison, the characterisation of Eurasians as unclean and promiscuous persisted and many of the British maintained a distance, emotionally and socially, if not physically, from their fellow non-white internees.⁷¹

⁶⁹ ‘Nipponese Injunction to Local Eurasians’, *Syonan Times*, 6 March 1942, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Daniels, Anthony, interview, Singapore, 01/06/1983; Fernandez, Edna May, interview, Singapore, 20/04/2003; both Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁷¹ Clarke, Gerald Raleigh Eustacius, interview, Singapore, 10/02/2010; Mosbergen, Rudy William, interview, Singapore, 19/04/2006; both Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore. See also Yap, Felicia, ‘Sex and Stereotypes: Eurasians, Jews and the Politics of Race and Religion in British Asia during the Second World War’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4 (March-April 2010), 74-93, pp. 83-87; Yap, Felicia, ‘Eurasians in British Asia during the Second World War’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 21, Issue 04, October 2011, 485-505, pp. 497-504.

Japanese atrocities against civilians continued after their military victory and Eurasians were not spared. Eurasian homes were looted, the occupants beaten; there were many random acts of violence, rape and murder. Those caught listening clandestinely to the BBC on hidden radios were subject to imprisonment and torture, and many were not seen again after being hauled off by the military police, the dreaded *Kempetai*. Food shortages and a lack of basic essentials became part of daily life, and barter and the black market boomed. Sport, of a sort, did take place during the Japanese interregnum, however. The newly-titled *Syonan Times* reported football matches in April 1942, Chinese vs. Malays and Eurasians vs. Indians.⁷² And variously named and constituted hockey teams, including the Eurasian teams, the Hornets and the Harlequins, competed for the Paglar Cup on the Padang and, on another occasion, for two bags of rice.⁷³ This was the generality of life in occupied Singapore, where for the vast majority of Eurasians accommodation to the new power became the order of the day, although gestures of support for the Japanese hid truer feelings and cooperation was merely an attempt to keep out of trouble.⁷⁴

Singapore's English-language press was shut down and all permitted media came under the strict control and censorship of the new authorities, with any illegal journalistic activity punishable by death. The only daily newspaper in the language of the defeated and departed British was *The Syonan Times*, published under the auspices of the Japanese administration. Eurasian voices were silenced except for the odd one prepared to speak in favour of the new regime. One such Eurasian was Charles Nell. In one of the very few instances of a Eurasian seemingly voluntarily working for the Japanese, he wrote for the newspaper under his own name from the outset. Charles Nell Leembruggen was of a Ceylon Dutch Burgher

⁷² *The Syonan Times*, 29 April 1942, p. 3.

⁷³ Tessensohn, *Singapore Recreation Club Celebrates 1883-2007*, p. 60.

⁷⁴ Bogaars, George Edwin, interview, Singapore, 08/12/1983; Clarke, Gerard Farleigh Eustachius, interview, Singapore, 02/02/2010; Conceicao, Joseph Francis, interview, Singapore, 04/04/2006; Paglar, Eric Charles Pemberton, interview, Singapore, 25/08/1983; Pereira, Noel Arthur, interview, Singapore, 24/05/1984; Woodford, Esme, interview, Singapore, 21/12/2007; Wyatt, Donald Peter, interview, Singapore, 11/11/2017; all Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

background but had lived in Singapore/Malaya since at least 1918. There is no record of any journalistic activities on his part until he began writing for *The Syonan Times* and he does not appear to have played any particular role in public life until then. He wrote a variety of articles, not just on Eurasian affairs, until his death in 1943, dismissing the United States' victory at the Battle of Midway as Allied propaganda, praising the Japanese and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and favourably quoting W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey on racial matters.⁷⁵

Reporting on the screening on the Padang, where he observed that many of the fairer-skinned Eurasians who had previously passed as European were now returning to the fold, he told his fellow Eurasians that the British were never coming back and as a community they should therefore act accordingly: 'Today we are Asians.'⁷⁶ Nell informed his fellow Eurasians that as long as they clung 'to their old ideas of "European respectability" and "superiority"...these false traditions of the fallen regime, they will starve.' His remarks had some resonance with criticisms that had been aired in the past. The British, he said, had fostered a proliferation of white-collar workers who would rather be unemployed than work in shops and restaurants, or as farmers and mechanics. Nell advised Eurasians to abandon their pre-war system of 'seeking favours and preferential treatment as a buffer community between the white and coloured races.' Instead, the community had no choice but to accept that 'we are all Asians now' and, in doing so, Eurasians would 'prove themselves men and not spineless gutter-rats' and they could redeem themselves by becoming 'labourers and tillers of the soil.'⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Nell, Charles, 'Nippon Has Shown East Way Of Liberation. Shameless Deceit Of Britain & U.S. Exposed', *The Syonan Times*, 9 March 1942, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Nell, Charles, 'Eurasians On The Padang. Community Must Face Realities', *The Syonan Times*, No. 12, 4 March 1942, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Nell, Charles, 'Malayan Eurasians. A Problem That Requires Serious Thought And Immediate Action', *The Syonan Times*, 29 March 1942, p. 3.

This injunction became reality for many Eurasians as they were forced to exchange their Western dress for the blue serge tunics of Chinese peasants at a resettlement colony on mainland Malaya at Bahau. This internal forced migration was claimed by the Japanese to be an experiment designed to return Eurasians to the soil, spurning their urban sedentary past for an agrarian present. The problem was “Eurasians mostly consisted of clerks so they had little idea of agriculture.”⁷⁸ Settlers suffered with malnutrition, malaria and beriberi and it has been estimated that a quarter of this colony’s population of 2,000 died.⁷⁹

For Charles Nell, the leading members of the defunct Eurasian Association should have set an example to the rest of the community by publicly coming to terms with the new reality. Instead, responsibility for representing the community was given to Dr. Charles Paglar who was persuaded to lead the Japanese-created Syonan Eurasian Welfare Association for the remainder of the war. Compromised by his responsibilities, and kept under close watch by Japanese counter intelligence,⁸⁰ Paglar was imprisoned and tried by the British as a collaborator after the war. Others worked for the Japanese as agent provocateurs⁸¹ – the only woman to receive one of the awards given in honour of the Japanese Emperor’s birthday in April 1942 was a Eurasian woman, Dorothy Siddons⁸² – and other Eurasians would later face trial as collaborators alongside Paglar. It must be emphasised, however, that any siding with the Japanese was by an extremely small minority of individuals which can be inferred by the negligible number of Eurasians charged with collaboration on the British return.

⁷⁸ Marcus, Philip Carlyle, interview, Singapore, 11/08/1982, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

⁷⁹ Bayly, Christopher, and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the war with Japan* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 413.

⁸⁰ WO 203/6312 South-East Asia Translation and Interrogation Centre. Intelligence Bulletin No. 232, 17.5.46, p. 32.

⁸¹ He Wen-Lit, *Syonan Interlude* (Singapore: Mandarin, 1991), p. 121.

⁸² *The Syonan Times*, 30 April 1942, p. 5.

At the end of the war, Paglar was arrested by the British as a traitor. He was imprisoned for two months before being released on bail and was charged with treason in January 1946.⁸³ The trial was a farce: the main evidence presented by the prosecution was the text of a speech Paglar gave praising Emperor Hirohito on his birthday, written for him by his Japanese superior who informed the court that Paglar had no choice in reciting it.⁸⁴ The trial ended in March 1946 with his release. However, Paglar was found neither guilty nor innocent but with the charges held in abeyance until his death. Many of the British community regarded collaboration by Eurasians as ‘a special treachery’⁸⁵ which may explain the authorities’ treatment of the nominal leader of Singapore’s Eurasians under the Japanese.

Also tried for treason was a Eurasian couple in their early twenties, Manuel de Silva and Doreen Wales de Silva. They worked during the Japanese occupation, respectively, as a band leader and a dance hostess in a nightclub for German servicemen based in Singapore and, at the same time, were alleged informers for the *Kempeitai*. An Allied military newspaper stated that: ‘As a result of their reports – for which they were paid and given extra food rations – the club manager and two dance hostesses were subjected to torture and forced to confess that they were anti-Japanese spies.’⁸⁶ After a summary deliberation lasting 20 minutes, the de Silvas were sentenced to death but ‘both prisoners were recommended to mercy’ and, two weeks later, their death sentences were commuted to three years’ ‘rigorous imprisonment.’⁸⁷ Another case involved Eric Woodford, charged with the ‘betrayal of Eurasian volunteers’ at the screening on the Padang and, as a consequence, knowingly resulting in, at best, their torture and, at worst, their death. Woodford pleaded ignorance of the *Kempeitai*’s intentions

⁸³ Shinozaki, Mamoru, *My Wartime Experiences in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Oral History Programme Series No. 3, August 1973), p. 114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁸⁵ Turnbull, C.M., *A History of Modern Singapore 1819-2005, third edition* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2020), p. 363.

⁸⁶ *SEAC – The All-Services Newspaper of South East Asia Command*, published for the Supreme Allied Commander at the Straits Times, Cecil Street, Singapore, 8 February 1946.

⁸⁷ *SEAC*, 8 February 1946; *SEAC*, 22 February 1946.

and was successfully defended by a Eurasian lawyer and was acquitted in February 1946.⁸⁸ As it was, the numbers of Eurasians suspected of collaboration was minimal: by February 1946, only 18 Eurasians had been tried or were awaiting trial and, of these, only two, the de Silvas, were found guilty and sentenced.⁸⁹ Many more, the vast majority of Eurasians in Singapore under Japanese rule, had had no choice but to suffer in silence, and wait anxiously for an Allied victory.⁹⁰

In secret intelligence reports written a few months before the end of the Pacific War, in anticipation of the Japanese defeat, British military planners took the Eurasian community for granted once more declaring that: ‘With very few exceptions, the Eurasian community will welcome the Allied reoccupation of Malaya.’⁹¹ This was borne out by the reaction of those Singaporean Eurasians who had been living in desperate conditions in the resettlement village, Bahau, moved there in a Japanese attempt to alleviate the food shortages in Singapore and as a Japanese gesture to return Eurasians to their supposedly rural roots. On hearing of the Japanese surrender, there was much rejoicing and a Union Jack, previously hidden, was raised and ‘God Save the King’ and ‘There’ll Always Be an England’ were sung.⁹² This was not the case back in Singapore, however: a young Eurasian remembered that, when imperial troops finally returned on 5 September 1945, there was a complete absence of any British flag flying from windows to greet them.⁹³ Too much had changed, too many deaths, too many betrayals:

We had lost faith in the power and prestige of the Union Jack. Even the pre-war practice of standing to attention when ‘God Save the

⁸⁸ CO 537/1581, p. 195.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁹⁰ WO 220/561 Singapore: Report by Security Intelligence for Planning section, general information from 1940 and during Japanese occupation. April 1945, p. 13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² La Brooy, *Where Is Thy Victory?*, p. 174a.

⁹³ Mosbergen, *In the grip of a crisis*, p. 260.

King' was played before a cinema show was discontinued. When the British returned in 1945, they no longer practiced this.⁹⁴

And the survivors from Bahau would soon be disillusioned on their return to Singapore. They were housed temporarily in appalling conditions in Sime Road camp which had previously been used by the Japanese as an internment camp for civilians. Even in the twilight of empire, Eurasians were still deemed second class and their treatment by the British military authorities left them in no doubt that they were now considered part of the Asian population, which drew them closer to local people, and, consequently – as one witness recalled – 'Eurasians figured in the early days of the anti-colonial movement, immediately after the war.'⁹⁵

Some evidence of this is found with the inauguration of a new group, the Eurasian Progressive Movement, in Singapore on 25 October 1945, less than two months after the territory's reoccupation by the British. In all probability the Eurasian Progressive Movement was created as a communist entryist organisation designed to infiltrate the Eurasian Association and then shape the policies of its larger host. The fact that a copy of the minutes for its first meeting was sent to the Communist Party of Great Britain and is held in its archive is an indication of the tendencies of at least some of those present. According to the minutes, in addition to a few local Eurasians, in attendance were five British soldiers, 'closely associated with youth, working-class and trade union movements in Britain and in Europe.'⁹⁶

Certainly, the Eurasian Progressive Movement was of sufficient concern to the military authorities that a weekly intelligence summary in February 1946 claimed that its leader, Gerald de Cruz, 'is at least very friendly with the Communist party, and it is considered likely

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 261.

⁹⁵ Conceicao, J.F., *Flavours of Change: Destiny & Diplomacy, Recollections of a Singapore Ambassador* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2004), p. 159.

⁹⁶ CP/CENT/INT/36/09 'Eurasian Progressive Movement'. This document is part of the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain held by the People's History Museum, Manchester.

that the MCP [Malayan Communist Party] will endeavour to use the Eurasian Progressive Movement to gain a hold over the Eurasian Community.’⁹⁷ Military intelligence correctly analysed the Eurasian Progressive Movement as ‘the first Eurasian party to make an appearance’ but it nevertheless noted that it had ‘not been active in the political field yet.’⁹⁸ The avowed aim of the new organisation was to work inside the Singapore Eurasian Association to ensure that it concentrated on improving the welfare of the Eurasian community and join with other communities for the general advancement of all. It, like the prevailing tendency of the Eurasian Association on the eve of the war, called for ‘Unity Among Eurasians,’ and all members of the new group were required to join the Eurasian Association as it would be through the older organisation that the newer one would realise its goals: ‘Every use is to be made of the Eurasian Association constitution to further and achieve our purpose.’⁹⁹

De Cruz was indeed a secret communist and, in his memoirs, he recounts that at the first postwar meeting of the Eurasian Association, in December 1945, he spoke as Chairman of the Eurasian Progressive Movement and denounced the British and called on the Eurasian Association to campaign for independence. However, the only backing he received came from John Eber, a fellow secret communist and Secretary of the new Movement.¹⁰⁰ The lack of support from the people it was ostensibly aimed at doomed the Eurasian Progressive Movement and, instead, lawyer Eber and journalist de Cruz became prominent in the Malayan Democratic Union, a multi-ethnic political party containing communists and non-communists initially united by ‘a common program of democracy, self-government and anti-colonialism,’ designed to attract the English-speaking local intelligentsia with its avowed

⁹⁷ CO 537/1581 HQ Malayan Command. Weekly Intelligence Summaries Part I 1946. ‘Intelligence Summary No. 15. Based on Information Received up to 9 February 1946’, p. 195.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ CP/CENT/INT/36/09 ‘Eurasian Progressive Movement’.

¹⁰⁰ De Cruz, Gerald, *Rojak Rebel: Memoirs of a Singapore Maverick* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1993), p. 71.

Fabian-style democratic socialism, and concerns about the British proposals for gradual and limited self-rule in Malaya, a Malaya separate from Singapore.¹⁰¹ It published its manifesto in December 1945, in the same month as the debacle for de Cruz and Eber at the Eurasian Association. It called for the end of the colour bar, education reforms, social security modelled on the British welfare state, the end of child labour, Singapore to be included in the Malayan Union, votes for all Malayan citizens aged 21 or over, and for an independent, democratic Malaya in the British Commonwealth.¹⁰² As de Cruz's memoir makes clear, the Malayan Democratic Union also served as a front organisation for the Malayan Communist Party.¹⁰³

This participation of Eurasians in the postwar political ferment that came to be known as the Malayan Spring was limited to individuals like de Cruz, and – in truth – the Eurasian paradox, stemming from the tie to and the hopes in the British, remained in place. Eurasians were present at the birth of the Malayan Democratic Union, Singapore's first political party, but these were only a few, unrepresentative, individuals and, for most, loyalty to Empire was enduring. This was acknowledged by the parliamentary under-secretary for the colonies who commented after a visit to Malaya in 1947 that 'Eurasians would like to align themselves politically with the Europeans, and it would be good tactics to encourage them to regard themselves as Europeans; the only noteworthy exception is Mr. John Eber...but his political views are disowned by the other members of the community.'¹⁰⁴ Ingrained attitudes meant

¹⁰¹ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 123

¹⁰² CP/CENT/INT/36/09 'MDU Manifesto – The Preparatory Committee, Malayan Democratic Union, Singapore 8 December 1945'.

¹⁰³ De Cruz, *Rojak Rebel*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁴ 'Report by Mr. Thomas on his visit to Malaya, 22 February 1947, Colonial Office 537/2141', in *British Documents on the End of Empire (Malaya, Part One: The Malayan Union Experiment 1942-1948)*, ed. by A.J. Stockwell (London: HMSO, 1995), p. 295.

that political activity, even opinion, was frowned upon by many, “among the older people, it was the word [that is, politics] to be feared...It smacked of being anti-British.”¹⁰⁵

It would be through more conservative, though multi-ethnic, organisations that most politically-minded Eurasians would, in future, direct their hopes and efforts. Meanwhile, attempts were being made to create an umbrella organisation to unite some of the various political groupings that had sprung up in response to the colonial government’s proposals for Malaya. The Singapore Eurasian Association was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the multi-ethnic Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action on 22 December 1946 at the headquarters of the Malay National Party in Kuala Lumpur. Also invited was the Malayan Democratic Union, trade unions, communal bodies, chambers of commerce, the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army ex-Service Association (representing the communist guerrillas who had fought against the Japanese in the Malayan jungles), and the Eurasian Union, an amalgam of mainland Malaya Eurasian Associations. Significantly, and a testament to how the cause of Eurasian unity had stalled since the days of the aborted Council for All-Malaya Eurasian Associations which had not survived the war, this Union did not include the Eurasians of Singapore.¹⁰⁶ The Singapore Eurasian Association itself was in a reduced state and absented itself from the political questions of the day.¹⁰⁷ There is no record of the Association, or the Eurasian Union for that matter, taking up the invitation or attending the subsequent conferences, in 1947 and 1948, of what became the All-Malaya Council for Joint Action.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ De Cruz, Gerald, interview, Singapore, 23/08/1981, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹⁰⁶ TCL/22/2, All-Malaya Council for Joint Action documents held in the private papers of Tan Cheng Lock at the Yusof Ishak-Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore.

¹⁰⁷ Zaccheus, Melody, and Janice Tai, *Standing the Test of Time: Celebrating 100 Years of the Eurasian Association, Singapore* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2022), p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ TCL/22/6/1-11; TCL/22/7/1-2.

Like the Malayan Democratic Union, the polyglot All-Malaya Council for Joint Action was largely a front organisation for the Malayan Communist Party. While it organised a successful general strike and economic boycott, a *hartal*, in October 1947, the broad coalition it brought together began to fracture as the communists and their sympathisers tried to manoeuvre more moderate members into taking more radical positions. Even the first *hartal* lacked support from Eurasians and other English speaking locals, as Gerald de Cruz, de facto spokesman for the All-Malaya Council for Joint Action, admitted: ‘they are politically still far behind, as a whole, compared to the non-English speaking sections of the community.’¹⁰⁹ The second *hartal* in January 1948 was not as successful as the earlier one and, when the Malayan Communist Party chose armed struggle and a return to the jungle, the All-Malaya Council for Joint Action fell apart and the Malayan Democratic Union disbanded by the end of that year.

In Singapore, officially sanctioned politics followed an updated model of the pre-war Legislative Council. A limited franchise was introduced which meant that six of the 22 places on the council were decided by popular vote though only British subjects, literate in English, could cast a ballot. The position for a nominated Eurasian member was abolished and, despite a poor turnout which might have favoured a minority community candidate, no Eurasian was elected in Singapore’s first general election of March 1948. There was one Eurasian candidate standing in the election, Charles Paglar, who stood as an independent but not only was he unsuccessful, he polled so few votes that he lost his deposit.¹¹⁰ This meant that for the first time since Edwin Tessensohn became the first nominee for the community in January 1923, there was no Eurasian representative on the Legislative Council.

¹⁰⁹ TCL/22/6/1-11.

¹¹⁰ Shelley, Rex, *Dr Paglar: Everyman’s Hero*, p. 105.

As power inexorably began to pass to the Asian majority, Eurasians felt threatened as their perceived advantages of language and education would soon end. Eurasians were attacked, along with Europeans, by local Malays during riots in Singapore in 1951 and “the Eurasian Association went through a very bad patch...simply because it had no voice in the affairs that mattered.”¹¹¹ There is little doubt that Eurasians were marginalized by the nationalist movements that dominated the new reality. In India, Gandhi had claimed that Anglo-Indians could not participate in the nationalist movement due to their ‘false mode of European existence’ Echoing long-standing imperial stereotypes, he gave as justification for their exclusion ‘their moral and physical tastes [that] showed signs of degeneracy.’¹¹² In Singapore, meanwhile, Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party felt no special obligation to Eurasians. Having based ‘their very collective identity on the imperial structures that had been created in Southeast Asia’,¹¹³ they were now viewed with a mixture of suspicion and contempt. Dismissed as colonial lackeys, Eurasians had to relinquish imperial ties and their British passports to become citizens of independent Singapore. Soon there would appear to be no place for Eurasians as Eurasians in Singapore: they literally disappeared into the category ‘Other’ (an official statistical designation), alongside foreigners and transients, while the dominant ethnic communities (Chinese, Malays and Indians) were congregated into the ‘imagined’ nation of a new city state that recognised each of them.

Eurasian society in Singapore did not come to the same final end that Jean Gelman Taylor ascribes to the mixed race society of the Indonesian archipelago in 1942, an abrupt transition following the end of Dutch rule from a living, separate entity to an anachronism.¹¹⁴ However,

¹¹¹ Mosbergen, Rudy William, interview, Singapore, 26/04/1994, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

¹¹² Bear, Laura, *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy, and the Intimate Historical Self* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 152.

¹¹³ Christie, Clive J., *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 19.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, Jean Gelman, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 174.

it would take decades for the community to regain a semblance of the cohesion it had on the eve of war, with Eurasians acting together in significant numbers to the benefit of the whole. In terms of agency and impact, and not merely as individuals who happened to be Eurasian, it is doubtful if they ever returned to the level of importance, social or political, they once had.¹¹⁵ The history of post-colonial Singapore was punctuated by waves of Eurasian emigration as a response to the growing sense of dislocation and alienation from the new regime. The community created new diasporas in the old imperial dominions of New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Migration was a common response as the ‘creole Eurasian populations...could not brush off the taint of foreignness...despite centuries of local residence.’¹¹⁶ A smaller number even went ‘home’ to the UK.

And what of the institutions and organisations that Singapore’s Eurasians had created in their heyday? There was no appetite to reconstitute the Council for All-Malaya Eurasian Associations after the war, the *Eurasian Review* was never revived, and though in due course the Eurasian Association was, it took some years before it functioned with effectiveness. A much diminished Eurasian Women’s Association dissolved itself in 1947 with pledges, however, to support the Girls’ Sports Club and revive the Eurasian Youth Movement, which subsequently became quite active in athletics in the 1950s.¹¹⁷ Conrad Hercules Clarke, loyal advocate for the sporting life and fair play, had not survived the war, dying in Singapore in August 1945. The first post-war AGM of the Singapore Recreation Club took place on 9 August 1946, after the authorities’ return of their premises earlier that year. At that meeting, the club’s chairman, A.J. Braga, spoke of what had been lost due to the ravages of war: “The Club is going through the worst crisis in its history and every one will have to do his bit.”

¹¹⁵ Barr, Michael D., and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity & the Nation-Building Project* (Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2008), p. 48.

¹¹⁶ Ho, Engseeng, ‘Empire Through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat’, *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 2004, 210-246, p. 211 n. 5.

¹¹⁷ ‘Eurasian Women’s Association Closes Down’, *Morning Tribune*, 16 September 1947, p. 3.

Perhaps to help alleviate the Club's parlous financial position, Club Secretary, Henry Woodford, brought up the question of 'lady members...He said that times had changed and he therefore advocated that membership should be open to ladies with certain restriction.' Women were to be charged \$1 a month for associate membership but they were to have no rights in deciding Club matters. However, members merely agreed to refer the matter to the incoming club committee to deliberate and bring forward any recommendations to a future meeting. In fact, it was only in 1956 that women were finally allowed to join as 'subscribing members', although still without voting rights.¹¹⁸

It took until 1948 before the authorities returned to the Girls' Sports Club the now barren land which it had occupied pre-war and, once more, the members embarked upon a lengthy programme of fundraising in order to raise the \$50,000 needed for rebuilding and restoration.¹¹⁹ Finally, on 5 June 1954, the new club pavilion was officially opened by Dr Paglar, now President of the Singapore Recreation Club and Vice-President of the Eurasian Association.¹²⁰ Paglar's position at the pinnacle of postwar Eurasian associational life is evidence that, though an ambiguous figure to some due to his wartime activities, he was well regarded by many of the community despite the allegations of treachery never being fully resolved one way or the other.¹²¹ Perhaps Paglar's elevation, despite his work with the Japanese under duress, had something to do with Singapore's Eurasians postwar disillusionment with the British Empire.

The Singapore Volunteer Corps was reconstituted in 1949 but without any communal component – the days of a Eurasian company, of "D" Company, were no more. As it was, the post-war treatment of those Eurasians volunteers who served and survived the war was a

¹¹⁸ Khaw, Patrick, *The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963*, p. 42.

¹¹⁹ *Girls Sports Club – 50th Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Club*, p. 15.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²¹ Milne, Ronald Benjamin, interview, Singapore, 28/11/1984, Oral History Department, National Archives of Singapore.

source of enduring bitterness. Eurasian Volunteers participated in the disastrous defence of Singapore in World War II and, as prisoners of war, many were sent north to help lay the notorious Burma-Siam railway. The sufferings of these men were rewarded by discrimination as British soldiers received full back-pay for their time in captivity while the Eurasians received a paltry 50 cents a day.¹²² The scandal has been covered in forensic detail elsewhere,¹²³ but it is appropriate to note both the behaviour of Eurasians prisoners-of-war in captivity and their response to the patently discriminatory policies they faced from the imperial government on their release. Writing to the Colonial Office in support of Eurasian volunteer claims to equal pay, Lt. Col. H.H. Lilley of the Sherwood Foresters expressed his dismay at what the Volunteers were being subjected to:

I feel it my duty to place on record that their conduct, at all times, was exemplary, and they did very much to help keep up the moral in the camps. I cannot speak too highly of them and I know this opinion is held by all who came in contact with them. They were, indeed, a fine example to all.¹²⁴

Most striking of all – given the ideology of imperialism and its supposed fair play that Eurasian society had so long been wedded to – was the correspondence that came from Singapore to the authorities in London on behalf of all the Eurasian POWs, from Eurasian officers of “D” Company. Lt. G.H. Kraal, called into question: ‘The standard set by Britain in the cause of Justice and the British sense of fair play.’¹²⁵ Another, from Captain C.B. Webb, went even further:

These lads were good enough to fight for the EMPIRE, good enough to die for the EMPIRE, BUT – NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO

¹²² Barth, Valerie, ‘Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations’, in Myrna Braga-Blake (ed.), *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1992), p. 107.

¹²³ Jansen, Mary Anne, John Geno-Oehlers and Ann Ebert Oehlers, *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian men who volunteered to defend the Empire, 1862-1957* (Singapore: Wim Kee Centre, Singapore Management University, 2018), Chapter 8: Aftermath: The Back-Pay Dispute.

¹²⁴ CO 968/142/3 Demobilisation in Malaya: Eurasian Volunteers 1946, letter dated 12.1.46.

¹²⁵ CO 968/142/3 Demobilisation in Malaya: Eurasian Volunteers 1946, letter dated 2.5.46.

DESERVE WELL OF THE EMPIRE AND BE TREATED AS
BRITISHERS [...] WHAT DID WE FIGHT FOR?¹²⁶

This painful question conveys powerfully the Eurasian sense of their being a diaspora without a home.

¹²⁶ CO 968/142/3 Demobilisation in Malaya: Eurasian Volunteers 1946, letter dated 23.5.46 (capitals by the author).

Conclusion

This doctorate has offered a periodisation of the social and political development of the Eurasians of Singapore in the interwar period, the arc of an illusory covenant. As shown in Chapter One, the history of the Eurasians in Singapore before their post-World War One mobilisation was marked by the weight of the stereotypes imposed upon them. Eurasians were infantilised and sexualised in a derogatory manner and attributed particular qualities, due to the alleged imperfections and laxity of mixed races. This had a profound effect on the way Eurasians saw themselves and dealt with their Asian ancestry, often by rejecting or downplaying it. Definitions of ‘Eurasian’ which were more fluid and confused in the 19th century became fixed in the 20th as can be seen with the tightening categorisation in the census. This was buttressed by theories of race propagated as Victorian science and by the similar racist assumptions underpinning popular culture as found in the literature of Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and many others. Shaped as they were by the subordinate positions that the British placed them in, Eurasians nevertheless complained about their lack of access, on spurious race grounds, to imperial institutions, notably the Singapore Volunteer Corps and from the upper echelons of the Malayan Civil Service.

The chapter established the intimate etymological connection between ‘Eurasian’ and ‘half-caste’ with all the derogatory connotations that term implied. It illustrated the contested classifications and categorisations of the Eurasian community itself and its internal divisions based on class, background and skin colour in an approximation of the British imperial model, and of the practice of some Eurasians to ‘pass’ as white. Nevertheless, as shown, the Eurasians – who derived from complex streams of people linked to the various Empires (British, Dutch, Portuguese) – rapidly became an established and settled community of men, women and children in colonial Singapore and they used their facility in the English language

and the cultural traits they shared with the British to achieve a disproportionate presence in white collar areas of employment in comparison to their Asian counterparts. This all took place under the racist carapace of the British Empire where Eurasians were subject to a colour bar and racial discriminations that impinged upon their daily lives and forced them inwards, and to combine, as Eurasians, to assert their dignity, rights and identity.

The period from Raffles taking possession of Singapore to World War One was a time when no agreed category of 'Eurasian' existed, as the confusion in the early Singapore censuses show. This fluidity enabled imperial science and literature to provide their own definitions in line with the racial prejudices and fears of their authors. In this pre-history of Eurasian-ness, the definition of what it meant to be Eurasian tended to be the results of a prejudiced imposition rather than being an identity associated with the agency of the people themselves. The first glimmerings that presage the birth of Eurasian agency are found in the mid-19th century when Eurasians combined in associational life at the Singapore Recreation Club. Here the Eurasian elite amended the imposed identity by introducing content that represented their own interests and desires rather than the top down representations forced upon them. However, one cannot really speak of an assertive Eurasian community until World War One and its aftermath – the claiming of 'Eurasian' and Eurasian-ness by Eurasians of Singapore was fundamentally a 20th century phenomenon, with the emergence of Eurasian agency made certain by the formation of the Eurasian Association in 1919.

As Chapter Two revealed, a context of global disruption, refracted through a Singapore locus, combined with the centenary of the founding of the settlement, was key to this burst of 'identity work' amongst Eurasians. The events of 1919 were the culmination of a process begun during the First World War when the community asserted its place in the British imperial community by campaigning to support the war effort through joining the Singapore Volunteer Corps. The War and its aftermath raised hopes of inclusion in an imperial

citizenry, and the Singapore Centenary (from which Eurasians were, in effect, excluded), combined with the challenge and example of Asian nationalisms mobilising in 1919, spurred Eurasians to assert themselves. No longer merely Eurasians in Singapore, in 1919 they became Eurasians of Singapore. Thus 1919 saw the appearance of *Our Magazine*, the self-reflection and self-improvement initiatives of the Eurasian Literary Association, all prefacing the establishment of the Eurasian Association. Despite internal divisions and disputes, notably over the name 'Eurasian', there now was a concerted attempt to come together as a group, as a Eurasian community, self-titled and suitably motivated to ensure that the war-time promise of self-determination and political representation could be realised, albeit within a colonial framework: a reformed British Empire, one purged of discrimination against Eurasians, would guarantee the rights and freedoms of an imperial citizenry which included Eurasians, who had earned the right to join this citizenry after their blood sacrifice and loyalty during the War. Eurasians, they held, were one of the 'civilised races' of the postwar world and had the right to be treated the same as their white counterparts.

There were clear limitations to the mobilisation of 1919 and the institutions to which it gave rise. The Eurasian Association was, like its predecessor the Eurasian Literary Association, male only and dominated by the same educated elite who were responsible for *Our Magazine*. Nevertheless, there was sufficient self-awareness and a sense of communal responsibility within this leadership group for it to promote the interests of all Eurasians in Singapore, including those whom they dubbed the 'submerged tenth'. The Eurasian leaders were also willing, and far-sighted enough, to combine with other non-white organisations as exemplified by their role in the Clerical Union, formed to safeguard the economic rights and well-being of white-collar clerks generally.

In the 1920s the Eurasian Association gained a seat on the Legislative Council, the senior representative body of the time, and it combined with other communal groups to pressure the

imperial authorities over diverse matters such as taxation, education and racial discrimination. But the limit of Eurasian influence in the political arena was soon reached and the British were unwilling to concede more. Eurasian efforts were now largely directed elsewhere, areas where they found greater opportunities to demonstrate to the British and to themselves a range of abilities that gave the lie to myths of Eurasian inferiority and white superiority – in the local militia and, with great success, in sport.

Annual contests, beginning with cricket, between teams of Europeans versus ‘The Rest’ were a Eurasian innovation and became fixtures of Singapore’s sporting calendar. Eurasians competed against their white and non-white peers, for example, in football leagues, tennis tournaments and athletics meetings, which were all eagerly reported in local newspapers and specialist sporting magazines. They were chosen to represent their city in regional competitions, often with a Eurasian captaining a team made up of Chinese, Indian, Malay and, significantly, British players. Playing against one’s peers, within the rules of the game, in fair and open competition, was used by the British as evidence of the superiority of an imperial value system which, at its best, was colour blind. Eurasians shared their love of sport: they accepted its rule-based nature, understood it as meaning the best man could win, and if the best man happened to be Eurasian, this was all to the good. And in embracing British sporting values – something which Chapter Three reveals Eurasians did strongly – they nevertheless used them to subvert those discriminatory and prejudiced aspects of British rule which they continued to suffer. Despite what they continued to suffer, however, the imperial compact held.

The Eurasian experience during the Slump years that followed the 1920s was a paradox. On the one hand, they remained committed to the imperial framework and the 1930s found them better represented than they had ever been in aspects of Singaporean colonial society. Eurasians were as well represented as any other non-white community on the Legislative

Council, the Municipal Board, in government service and the many medical and educational establishments relating to the English-speaking population of the city, while Eurasian troops were led by Eurasian officers, with some rising to the rank of Major. Men like R.V. Chapman and G.E.N. Oehlers parlayed sporting achievements into significant political influence within the community and into positions of importance without. Access to academic honours was available, albeit to a select few under the Queen's Scholarship awards. Considering their small numbers in relation to the Chinese, Indian and Malay residents, the Eurasians had a disproportionate profile in colonial society, sometimes innovating – as in their pioneering role in sport – as Singapore grew into a modern, cosmopolitan city. Eurasians were also amongst the first non-white lawyers, doctors and engineers in the peninsular.¹ In some ways, it was Eurasian women – the very people who had been excluded from the Eurasian Association and the Recreation Club – who led the way in the 1930s, encouraging others through their energetic movement into public and social spheres – notably sport – from which they had been hitherto absent. In this, they set precedents for other women. In colonial Singapore, part of an empire where women were still habitually kept in seclusion, uneducated and exploited, these pioneering Eurasian females embodied a cosmopolitan modernity and a growing sense of female empowerment, and were a promise of a better and possible future for women of all races. It is striking, as well, that their voices were heard as never before – in political tones – in print in this period.

However, if in all these ways, the 1930s represented Eurasian advance, the impact of the Slump upon Eurasian prospects was significant, endangering Eurasian livelihoods, and contributing to an air of uncertainty over the future of the community. This uncertainty only increased with the challenge of the growing English-educated local (Asian) population who were seen as rivals to Eurasians in the market for the white collar and clerical jobs which the

¹ Gillis, Dr E.Kay, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005), p. 98.

community had largely depended upon for employment and status. Salaries remained low for Eurasians in general and the colour bar remained effectively in place when war reached Singapore. Moreover, the 1930s were also marked by the growing challenge of Asian nationalisms that excluded Eurasians, and an imperial policy that was perceived to favour the Malays and pointed, in Eurasian eyes, towards a future that excluded them. It was in this context that there arose a frustration with the conciliatory approach adopted by the established Eurasian leadership, especially at the Legislative Council. There was a growing conviction, one which went against the earlier policy of the Singapore Eurasian Association, that an overarching body to unite and oversee all Eurasians in British Malaya was required. Only this would provide a louder Eurasian voice against the clamour of other demands.

The period just before the Japanese invasion saw the Eurasians of Singapore enlarging significantly their political constituency. There was, for example, the arrival of women as a political grouping in the Eurasian Women's Association. This striking breakthrough came into being hand-in-hand with the emergence of the Eurasian Youth Movement and the long-awaited Council of All-Malayan Eurasian Associations. It was an irony of tragic proportions that, during the gathering clouds of war, the Eurasians of Singapore embraced a degree of unity and sense of purpose previously unattainable, only for the devastating consequences of war to shatter the institutions in which that newly won unity resided. The summit that had been reached was a short lived one, fatally undermined by the catastrophe of war, and doomed by the rise of Asian nationalism and the final imperial retreat.

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