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Author (s)	Choon-Piew, POW
Address	Dept of Geography, National University of Singapore
Telephone	65-6516-3854
Fax	65-6777-3091
Mobile	65-91288610
E-mail	geopowcp@nus.edu.sg
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**From Public Housing to Private Neighborhoods: Gated Condominium
Estates in Singapore**

Abstract: *The proliferation of gated communities worldwide has generated great interest and critical attention from urban scholars and planners. The rise of gated communities, however, is by no means a universal urban phenomenon that displays uniform characteristics and genesis. Using Singapore as a case study, this paper examines the development of gated communities (in the form of enclosed condominium estates) within the context of the city-state's housing policies and urban governance. While Singapore is widely known for its successful public housing program, a small but substantial segment of the population (about 15%) lives in private housing estates, many of which are extensively gated condominium estates or 'cluster homes'. The paper will trace how these enclosed private residential estates first emerged in Singapore in the early 1970s and highlight the role of the state in regulating as well promoting (through government land sales) gated private estates for the aspiring new middle-class population.*

As will be pointed out in the paper, gated communities in Singapore may be considered as 'club goods' that exist as part of the state's overall housing plans alongside public housing program and are, arguably, less contentious and socially divisive than those typically depicted elsewhere.

From Public Housing to Private Neighborhoods: Gated Condominium Estates in Singapore

1. Introduction

It has been remarked that no other urban development has captured the attention of urban scholars and planners in recent decades than privately organized and secured housing developments or what are often known as 'gated communities' in the Anglo-American urban literature. In the United State alone, it has been estimated that the number of people living in gated communities has increased from four million in 1995, to eight million in 1997 and to sixteen million in 1998 (Low, 2003: 15). Worldwide, the trend towards the gating up of private residences has intensified with gated communities now being found in virtually every major urban center. Gated communities, however, are not the same everywhere. Drawing a parallel with Jacob's observation that 'a seemingly global thing (such as high-rise buildings or gated housing developments) – is always at the same time situated and specific' (Jacobs, 2005:13), the objective of this paper is to contextualize the 'spread' of gated communities within the specific political, economic and social geographies of Singapore, a city-state that is well known for its successful public housing program with 85% of its population residing in public flats.

This paper heeds the call by several scholars to 'read beyond' the narrow interpretation of the physical form of gated communities to interrogate the underlying social-spatial structure of the city as well as its political and economic context. In particular it will be pointed out that the physical and political-economic situation and circumstances in Singapore help to ameliorate many 'negative' impacts commonly associated with gated communities elsewhere. Gated communities in the form of enclosed condominium estates function as exclusive 'consumption clubs' that exist alongside the public housing program as part of the state's overall housing plans.

To substantiate these arguments, the paper is organized in five main sections. Following the introduction, the second section briefly examines some of the existing literature on gated communities and highlights some of its limitations, in particular, the danger of uncritically

accepting gated community debate without adequately considering the local institutional and social contexts. The third section then turns to examine issues on urban development in Singapore, underscoring some features of the development/entrepreneurial state in regulating and facilitating urban growth including private housing provision. Specifically, it will be argued that rather than the result of freewheeling privatism, gated communities had emerged within the Singapore state's urban developmental framework and political agenda of managing middle-class housing aspirations. Section 4 then provides a detailed analysis of condominium housing in Singapore and how the state attempts to manage the (middle-)class politics of envy through the development of government-sponsored gated condominium estates. The paper will conclude with a brief summary of some of the main points highlighted in this paper and provide some reflections on future research agendas. Before proceeding further, it is necessary at the outset to state categorically that this paper is not an argument on/for the exceptionalism of the Singapore's urban developmental model (see Savage and Pow, 2001). Rather the point here is to demonstrate how gated communities have developed and evolved within the specific context of Singapore and how the state through various mechanisms have shaped and structured the private housing sector in the city-state.

2. Literature Review on Gated Communities Research

The proliferation of what are commonly known as “gated communities”¹ and “fortified enclaves” in cities throughout the world has generated great concern and debates among urban scholars and city planners. Typically, these debates have been polarized between those who view gated communities as symptomatic of the imminent breaking down of society at large, culminating in the “revolt of the elites” (Lash, 1995) - the retreat of upper middle class citizens from meaningful public sphere; and those who consider gated communities as innovative and efficient ways of organizing and (re)distributing public goods. In particular, Blakely and Snyder (1999) consider

¹ Gated communities are often associated a number of terms such as “master-planned communities”, “proprietary developments”, “enclosed guarded condominiums”, “defensive housing complexes”, “residential club communities”, “Community Association Institutes” (CAI), “Common-Interest Housing” (CIH), “neighborhood level private governance,” etc.

gated communities as manifesting a number of social tensions: “between exclusionary aspirations rooted in fear and protection of privilege and the values of civic responsibility; between the trend toward privatization of public services and the ideals of the public good and general welfare; and between the need for personal and community control of the environment and the dangers of making outsiders of fellow citizens” (Blakely and Snyder, 1999: 3, emphasis added). For their harshest critics, gated communities have often been diagnosed as a form of “urban pathology” (Davis, 1990) that is associated with destructive forms of “splintering urbanism” (Graham and Marvin, 2001); and other detrimental social impacts such as the excessive encroachment of private property on public spaces, the undermining of traditional forms of citizenship bonding and civic trust, the exacerbation of social-spatial polarization and urban inequality and, ultimately, the disintegration and eventual destruction of the society at large and a meaningful public life (see Low, 2003; Webster et al., 2002; Caldeira, 2001;1999; Sennett, 1992).

That gated communities have generated such wide spread concern and contention is understandable, especially in view of its rapid diffusion across urban centers throughout the world. In the United State alone, it has been estimated that there are easily in excess of twenty thousand gated communities with more than three million housing units that are bounded by walls and entrance gates (Low, 2003:15; Blakely and Snyder, 1997). Similarly, gated communities can also be found in nearly every major city in Europe, South America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia (see for example Grant, 2005 Wu, 2004; 2005; Miao, 2003; Coy and Pohler, 2002; Graham and Marvin, 2001).

Urban scholars have defined gated communities as simply “residential developments surrounded by walls, fences, or earth banks covered with bushes and shrubs with secured entrances” (Low, 2003:12). Others have emphasized that gated communities are “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are [now] privatized” (Blakely and Snyder, 1999: 2). Specifically, Blakely and Snyder (1999) have identified three main categories of gated communities in the United States: in “lifestyle communities” such as retirement villages, golf/leisure community clubs and suburban “new towns”, shared public spaces and local amenities have become privatized and controlled more as a social statement than as a security

feature. These developments reflect the “notion of shared territory and exclusive rather than inclusive sharing values” (Blakely and Snyder, 1997: 55). By contrast, “prestige communities” may lack the shared recreational facilities in lifestyle communities. The sole purpose of gating here is to symbolize residential distinction as well as to enhance and protect the image and property value in the neighbourhood. In the third category, “security zone community” is created predominantly out of fear for crime and outsiders. In security zones, residents rather than developers are the ones who initiate the erection of gates and barricades in an attempt to defend the neighbourhood from both “real” and/or “perceived” threats. While these three categories of gated communities are essentially ideal types, in reality their distinctions and characteristics often overlap. In a recent conference on gated communities, Atkinson and Blandy (2005) further define gated communities as walled or fenced housing development to which public access is restricted, characterized by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management (2005:178). To be sure, the rise of gated communities is by no means a universal phenomenon that displays uniform characteristics and genesis. As Webster et al. (2002: 316) correctly points out, “[a] development plucked from an international repertoire of concepts and designs may serve subtly different purpose in Beijing than it does in Baltimore.” Researchers thus need to be wary of the danger of accepting gated communities debate without adequately considering the local institutional and social contexts in which such gated housing developments are emerging.

To this extent, the next section will now turn to examine the case of Singapore.

3. State-Led Urban Development in Singapore

The dominant role of the state in Singapore’s development has been well documented (Rodan, 1989; Chua, 1991;1997; Tremewan, 1994). In particular, it has been established that the ascent of the People’s Action Party (PAP) government and its enduring power in politics have given birth to a ‘developmental state’ that places economic development at the forefront of national planning

for the past 30 years or more (Yeung and Olds, 1998:30). Perry et al.'s (1997) Singapore A Developmental State proclaimed that 'the state gives much greater priority to transforming economic conditions than it does to changing aspects of the social order' (1997:7). Drawing from Johnson's (1982) seminal study on post-war development in Japan, various authors argued that Singapore's governance has displayed attributes of state developmentalism including the prioritisation of economic development in national policy (e.g. the First Development Plan focused on the provision of new jobs and the promotion of economic development), the establishment of an elite economic bureaucracy to 'guide' the market (e.g. the Economic Development Board (EDB), Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), etc.) as well as the close alliance between PAP leaders and the state bureaucracy.

While it is generally accepted that the 'developmental state' has underscored Singapore's development, authors have also pointed out that the state not only 'guides' but also directly participates in business enterprises. To this extent, as Low (1990: 143) noted, 'state entrepreneurship has always been a dominant feature of modern Singapore economy'. Without doubt, the state has long played the dominant role as both 'planner' and 'entrepreneur' in the city-state's urban/economic development (Yoshihara, 1976; Low, 1990; Dale, 1999:71-115). Contrary to the US 'growth-coalition' model which posits a strong private-sector led development, urban entrepreneurialism in Singapore has been underscored by the central role of the state. 'State entrepreneurship', in particular, has proven to be capable of harnessing private capital for national and economic development (see Pow, 2002).

Concomitant with the pro-active promotion of economic growth, state entrepreneurship in Singapore is also underpinned by the 'pro-business' urban planning strategies of the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA), Singapore's main national planning and conservation authority responsible for the overall physical development of the country, Haila (2000) has described Singapore (along with Hong Kong) as entrepreneurial 'property states' where real estate development not only forms a significant portion of the national wealth but has been effectively controlled and harnessed by the state for national development. This can be seen most clearly not only in the provision of public housing policies (see Castells et al., 1990; Chua, 1997) that

houses up to 86% of the population but also in the 'pro-business' planning strategy of the country's planning agencies such as the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA).

Underlying URA's pro-business strategy, the 'Sale of Sites' programmes has played an important role in promoting collaboration between the Government and the private sector in urban development (see URA, 1999:32-33). Under this program implemented since 1967, land parcels were first acquired (at below market rate) by the Government under the Land Acquisition Act (1966) and the loose land parcels were subsequently assembled and sold to the private developers (see Klublall and Yuen, 1991:191-202; Perry et al., 1997:201-04; Dale, 1999:88-91). Through this system, the state was able to own, directly or indirectly through the URA and other government agencies and statutory boards, up to 87 per cent of the land in Singapore (Table 1). Currently, the state owns up to 58 % of the land in Singapore with another 29% held by statutory boards while only 13% is under private ownership.

The significant point to note here is that as the largest landlord in Singapore, state intervention in urban planning and real estate development has been extensive. Specifically, through state-regulated mechanisms such as the Sale of Sites or Government Land Scales (GLS) programme, the government has been able to determine the types of development (commercial, residential, industrial etc.); the location and scale; as well as the timing and pace of development through the periodic release of state land for sale. Under the Government Land Sales (GLS) programme, some 1,360 land parcels totaling 820 hectares had been sold for private sector development. These have provided 1.9 million sq m nett of office space, 1.3 million sq m nett of shop space, 12,000 hotel rooms and 51,700 private housing units, making up 31 percent, 41 percent, 39 percent and 26 percent of the total stock of the respective type of properties in Singapore (Choo, 2002).

It is in this context that we now turn to examine private residential development in Singapore.

Year	State Ownership (%)	Private Ownership(%)
1949	31.0	69.0
1960	44.0	56.0
#1965	39.9	50.8
1970	60.0	40.0
1985	76.2	23.8
1990	80.0	20.0
1999	80.0	20.0
*2007	87.0	13.0

Table 1: Landownership in Singapore (1949-2007).

#Note that in 1965, the British military still owned 9.9% of state land.

* Personal communication with officials from the Singapore Land Authority (SLA).

Sources: Dale (1999); Motha and Yuen (1999); URA (1999); SLA

3. 1 Private Housing

While government-subsidized public housing in Singapore generally provides an adequate level of comfort and quality of life, in tandem with economic growth, there has been rising middle-class housing aspirations for more exclusive and better design housing that are beyond the purview of state institutions and agencies such as the HDB.²

For the aspiring middle-class, private housing is perceived to be more prestigious and desirable than HDB flats for a number of reasons. Most importantly, private developers are seen as being able to offer an 'ideal lifestyle' with greater level of proprietary control, especially for residents of private condominium estates (more on this later). For the latter, the perceived higher quality of life is also matched by the provision of shared amenities such as swimming pools, landscape gardens, club houses and 24-hour security services, all of which are only accessible to members living within the private estate. According the Department of Statistics General Household Survey 2005, over 90% of residents in condominiums and private flats hold white-collar occupations, with over 70% of them in senior managerial and professional positions. In terms of per capita monthly household income, over half of these residents have per capita income of over \$3000 with 60% holding university degrees or diploma (<http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/annual/ghs/r2/t37-43.pdf>). The following section will further examine in detail the development of condominium estates in Singapore.

4. Private Condominium Estates as Gated Communities in Singapore

The idea of developing condominium housing estate was first mooted in the 1970s as increasing affluence brought about by national economic growth led to the emergence of a group of middle-income population. Condominiums in Singapore are usually strata-titled development with a full-range of facilities within a minimum land area of 0.4 hectares (4000 square meters). According to Choo (2002:5), private residential condominium projects made their debut in 1974 with the sale of

² Under the developmental state, the Singapore society and polity underwent significant changes as more members of the middle-class assert their preference and aspirations. However as Rodan (1996:19) argues, the middle class in Singapore largely seeks autonomy from the PAP state as consumers rather than autonomy to challenge the distribution of social and political power.

Hillcrest Arcadia and Grangeford, as “gracious living” became the aspiration of the young and upwardly mobile nation. In the early phase of condominium development in the 1970s, prime residential districts were chosen as sites for the development of such exclusive housing estates.

Significantly, the development of private condominium estates in Singapore was to encourage the more intensive use of limited space in the land-scarce city-state (see Sing, 2001). According to the official ‘Guidelines for the Planning of Condominiums in Singapore (The Straits Times, May 15 1972), the declared objectives of condominium housing are:

to encourage more intensive use of scarce land

to preserve more greenery and open spaces for communal recreation

to secure the proper maintenance of community amenities and facilities in housing estates and apartment blocks

For example, the first guideline specifies that the overall residential density may be increased to twice the maximum density stipulated in the Master Plan (up to 750 persons per hectare). At the same time, condominium estates should also take the form of flats, apartments and town houses. In addition, the building coverage in condominiums should not exceed 40 per cent of the site area and condominium developers are obliged to provide a minimum of 40 per cent of communal open spaces (COS) and recreation facilities (The COS requirement was lifted in 2000 to allow developers greater flexibility in designing condominium estates). At the same time, developers also have to comply with strict guidelines on plot ratio and height control of buildings under the Development Guide Plans.³ (see Table 2)

³ Technically, the main distinction between condominiums and flats lies in the site area requirements. According to URA guidelines, a public flat development can only span an area of not more than 4000 square meters (sq m) whereas condominiums cover a land area of more than 4000 sq m. However, developers may choose to build flats on more than 4000 sq m but not vice versa (Skyline, March/April 2000: 5).

REGISTRATION INSTRUMENT		LAND TITLE AND STRATA TITLE (LANDED)		FORM OF HOUSING	
		Land Title	Strata Title	STRATA TITLE OR STRATA LEASE (NON-LANDED)	
LOW DENSITY		Landed Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bungalows • Semi-detached • Terrace 	Low-rise Strata Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strata detached (bungalow) • Strata semi-detached • Strata terrace • Mixed strata landed housing 	4 storey flats with gross plot ratio up to 1.4	
MEDIUM DENSITY		Not applicable	Not applicable	Condominium Flats	Non-Condominium Flats
HIGH DENSITY		Not applicable	Not applicable	HDB flats & areas designated for HDB type housing	

Table 2: Different forms of housing density in Singapore

(Source: BCA, 2005)

By the 1980s, condominium projects began to appear in outer districts and suburban areas where land prices are lower. The 1990s was also a period of accelerated residential site sales by the URA to meet rising demand for more private housing and greater choices of location and housing type. Through the residential sales of site, private housing developers acquire land (either on freehold or leasehold of 99 years) to develop their condominium projects. Significant government land sales projects include riverside housing at Robertson Quay, waterfront condominiums at Tanjong Rhu, as well as mixed landed and cluster housing at Kew Drive. Currently there are approximately 2300 private condominium estates (housing some 98,178 households) in Singapore compared to only 30 of such projects identified in the early 1980s (see Lai, 1982).

Practically all condominium estates in Singapore are gated, enclosed and secured. Private security guards are employed to provide round the clock surveillance at the gates and within the housing compounds. Entry to condominiums is by strictly invitation and identity verification only. However unlike gated communities detailed elsewhere (e.g. Caldeira, 2001), security concerns are not the prime reasons why people choose to move into gated communities

as crime rates are relatively low in Singapore.⁴ More than ensuring security, gated communities in Singapore ultimately represents the selling of a gracious lifestyle and the good life. The gates and walls signal more a sense of prestige and exclusive membership rather than security. In Blakely and Snyder's typology, condominium estates in Singapore are a combination of 'lifestyle' and 'prestige' communities. Local scholars critical of such enclosed housing developments in the city-state have decried them as the return to a form of 'medieval fortress'. Robert Powell, a notable local architectural critic has this to say:

The changing demographic profile and an increasingly prosperous middle –class has precipitated a desire for greater choice in housing. The most visible response to this is the growth of condominium developments. These enclaves are the contemporary equivalent of the medieval fortress. In Singapore they signify the defensible space of the economically successful. The medieval ramparts reappear in the form of high boundary walls, guard post (gatehouse) and drainage ditch (moat). A glance through the pages of the Singapore street directory indicates the exclusiveness of the private condominiums and reveals names such as 'Bullion Park', Diamond Tower, 'Goldhill Mansion', or more optimistically 'Rainbow Mansion'. They are no-go areas to the economically underprivileged, their exclusivity protected by guards. With rare exceptions external space is entirely privatized; the 'public' are excluded' (Powell, 2002: 97).

Under the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (BMSMC), residents in strata-titled properties such as condominiums are identified as 'subsidiary proprietors' (SP) who collectively own, enjoy and are responsible for the upkeep of common facilities such as lifts, parks, sports and recreational facilities such as swimming pools, gymnasiums, tennis courts, etc, in their estates. All owners of condominium apartment units or SPs are also required to contribute to a management fund that is regulated by a Management Corporation (MC) elected in each

⁴ According to statistics released by the Singapore Police Force, the 2005 crime rate per 100,000 population is relatively low at 843 (despite a slight increase in recent years).

condominium estate. At the same time, each MC is also required to adopt a set of by-laws stipulated by the BMSMC, in addition to additional by-laws that the MCs are free to make. According to the Building and Construction Authority, the BMSMC empowers the MC of each development to control and manage the common property with the spirit that each MC at the local level is able 'to exercise self-governance and manage its own domestic affairs'. (BCA, 2005:11).

In this sense, condominium estates in Singapore may be considered as collective consumption clubs (see Webster, 2002). They are in the words of Buchanan (1965) "consumption-ownership-membership arrangements" where the owners or subsidiary proprietors of the condominium estates are all able to partake in the enjoyment of the facilities and amenities in the estate on an equal basis. To this extent, condominiums can be considered as 'non-rivalrous' club goods (i.e. all members of the condominium estates in good standing are allowed to share in the consumption of services and amenities within the estate without excluding one another). However, collectively owned condominium estates in Singapore are also distinct from pure private goods, such as a private mansion owned and occupied by a single person or household. Yet they are also not pure public goods (such as the public parks) as condominium estates are excludable goods (only residents who are able to buy into these gated enclaves are eligible to enjoy the use of the facilities and amenities and not others).

What is further interesting about Singapore's case is that far from being the product of a 'sprawling capitalism' and its run-away privatization campaign aimed at seceding private residential communities from public control and state management, gated condominium estates are very much an integral part of the Singapore state's overall housing plans. As noted earlier, from the state's perspective, condominium estates are seen as a way of meeting the rising aspiration of middle-class home buyers in Singapore without running into the problem of wasteful land usages and urban sprawl commonly associated with landed properties in the land-scarce city-state. More importantly, the state being the de facto land owner is able to control and regulate the pace of condominium development through its land sales program. In fact, the term 'condominium' did not even come into use in the housing scene until after official encouragement

was given to private developers to develop condominium type housing in the early 1970s (Lai, 1983: 23).

Arguably, gated communities in the form of enclosed condominium estates also appear to be less contentious and socially divisive than those depicted elsewhere. To understand why this is so, we need to look beyond the gates to examine the convergence of several local factors. First, due to land scarcity, most gated housing estates in Singapore are relatively small in scale and hence do pose huge spatial and structural conflicts. Condominium estates in Singapore constrained by small physical size of the country are unable to enclose huge tracts of land hence alienating large sections of the local population. For example, one of the earliest and largest gated residential estates in Singapore, Pandan Valley (with 623 units) occupies a total land area of only 8 hectares.

More critically, the universal provision of good-quality public housing in the city-state also reduces the social disparity between well-heeled residents of gated communities and 'heartlanders' in public housing estates. In fact, it is not uncommon to find private condominium estates existing alongside public housing flats in the same neighborhood in Singapore. A third factor is that private housing prices including condominium estates have not escalated beyond reach for many middle and even lower-middle income households despite recent hike in real estate prices (The Straits Times, March 6 2007). Despite the relatively affordable prices of private real estate prices, condominium estates are still very much 'objects of envy', especially for the 'sandwich' middle-class (identified as young university graduates and professionals who can afford more than public housing but find private property out of their reach). To manage this rising tide of envy among the young and upwardly mobile electorates, the Singapore state has responded by promoting the development of subsidized gated estates as will be detailed in the next section.

4.1 “Condo-mania” - Managing Politics of Envy

Without doubt, the increase in conspicuous consumption amongst the middle-class in Singapore over the past few decades has heightened awareness of the differentials in material living

standards and generates a politics of envy. In recent years, the insatiable consuming desires of the new middle-class and young professionals for the '5 Cs' (condominium, car, cash, credit card, club memberships) - ideologically thematized as achieving the 'Singapore Dream' – have been rendered elusive as the result of escalating cost of living in the city-state. To prevent the alienation of this substantial group of aspiring new middle-class, the government introduced the 'Executive Condominiums' (EC) in 1995. Comparable in design and facilities to private condominiums, ECs are developed and sold by private developers but at a lower price (about 30% below market rate) and comes with a generous government housing grant (of up to \$S30,000). However the purchase of an EC is based on various eligibility criteria. EC buyers must be a Singapore Citizen with a family nucleus comprising at least another Singapore Permanent Resident or Singapore Citizen. The combined income level per month should also be no more than S\$10,000. Through the building of the EC, the state not only attempts to institutionalize middle-class privileges by helping them achieve their private housing aspirations but also in the process maintaining state legitimacy and rule (Chua and Tan, 1999). To date 21 EC projects have been launched (see Table 3).

Executive Condominiums	Temporary Occupation Period (TOP) Date
Eastvale	27 Jan 1999
Westmere	27 Feb 1999
Simei Green	28 Apr 1999
Windermere	16 Sep 1999
Chestervale	20 Mar 1999

Pinevale	28 Jul 1999
Yew Mei Green	1 Sep 2000
Summerdale	8 Sep 2000
The Rivervale	28 Jun 2000
The Florida	*18 Feb 2000 30 May 2000
Northoaks	3 Oct 2000
Woodsvale	5 Aug 2000
The Floravale	13 Oct 2000
The Eden	16 Apr 2003
The Dew	19 Jul 2003
Bishan Loft	26 Sep 2003
Lilydale	29 Mar 2003
Nuovo	#31 Aug 2004
Park Green	30 Sep 2004
Whitewater	*31 Jan 2005 1 Mar 2005
The Esparis	#22 Jun 2005

Table 3: List of Executive Condominiums

* Project that received phased TOP

Certificate of Statutory Completion (CSC)

(Source: www.hdb.gov.sg)

Even though there is a general absence of glaring social strife and spatial conflicts resulting from the development of gated communities in Singapore, territorial disputes do occur from time to time. For example, in a dispute between two gated private housing estates, residents of Lagoon View and Laguna Park were reportedly at loggerheads over the control of a common gate connecting the two estates (The Straits Times, January 12 2005). Due to the rise in petty crimes like bicycle thefts and vandalism, the homeowners' association and management committees in both Lagoon View and Laguna Park had decided to erect their own gates and further secured them to prevent neighboring residents from accessing their residential compounds. Prior to the incident, residents from both private estates were able to pass freely through the common gates to patronize the grocery shops, dry cleaners, hair salons and a physician's clinic. Interestingly, the dispute was resolved through the intervention of the local Member of Parliament who helped broker an agreement through a series of dinner and karaoke sessions. When the gates were finally reopened, the chair person of Laguna Park Management Corporation commented that: '[Now] we got to know people from the other side' (Lagoon View). We had never mixed with them before.' (quoted in The Straits Times, August 29 2005). Evidently, this incident demonstrates that while condominium estates are certainly not without problems, on the whole, they are hardly as contentious and politically charged as gated communities documented elsewhere in the world. Instead of being perceived as spaces of exclusion and segregation, condominiums existing alongside the extensive public housing estates are considered as 'objects of envy' and models for material envy and emulation for many aspiring middle-class (and arguably even the lower income groups). The state, on its part, is careful to manage the rising tide of 'envy politics' by first ensuring that basic good-quality public housing is still made affordable to the majority of the population; and that the aspirations of middle-class polity for private housing/condominiums are at the same time, not neglected.

5. Conclusion

Using Singapore as a case study, this paper sets out to examine the emergence of gated communities within the city-state's political and social context. It needs to be reiterated that the paper is not an argument for the exceptionalism of Singapore's urban experience. Rather the point here is to demonstrate how gated communities in the form of private condominium estates have developed and evolved within the specific context of Singapore and how the state through various mechanisms (e.g. land scales) has shaped and structured the private housing sector in the city-state.

Where gated communities in Singapore differ quite remarkably from its counterparts elsewhere is the relative absence of urban strife and social polarization often associated with such forms of housing. As this paper has argued in the preceding sections, gated condominium estates in Singapore exist as part of the state's housing plans alongside the extensive public housing development. At a more fundamental level, this paper hopes to underscore the need to 'look beyond the gates' in order to examine underlying political, economic and social geographies of urban places. Extending beyond the case study of Singapore, what needs to be further theorized in gated communities research is the role of the state (be it at the municipal /local /national level) in shaping and structuring gated communities. More specifically, how have state policies enabled and/or constrained the development of gated communities and; in turn how are these gated enclaves transforming the social-spatial fabric of cities and in the process reconfiguring state-society relations? Too often, research on gated communities tends to over-privilege 'neo-liberal' market discourses and gives short shrift to the role of the state as well as place-specific relations between state and society. The latter, as this paper contends, may prove to be critical in advancing our understanding of gated communities.

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