

BEHIND THE FACADE

by Dr. Kieran James

The women are kept in cages just off Serangoon Road
In four years in Singapore
I have seen a lifetime of glitter and a lifetime of woe

The old man turned and smiled at me
He's voted opposition since day one
The flats are falling down around Potong Pasir
Vote the opposition he tells his son

Cranes dot the skies above the fields in Pasir Ris
The owner works in Raffles Place
The mortgage too it's his

The girls start work in Joo Chiat pubs at just about seven
Servants of the underworld
They will be princesses in heaven

In 91 the opposition invented the by-election strategy
and deprived the poor of Chinatown the chance
to vote out the incumbents in Tanjong Pagar GRC

In modern-day Singapore
 where the leaders says you will never find a beggar
 One evening an old man talked with me in Chinatown
 then asked me for money for his dinner

Ghosts prowl the corridor at nights at N.U.S.
 creativity's not needed here
 you just have to pass the tests

The Indonesian villagers know a kindness
 that your leaders can never know
 Their goal is human engineering
 as they create the perfect society row by row.

The knives are sharpening
 to vote out the incumbents in Tampines GRC
 the old ones still remember
 who diverted the 147 bus from Potong Pasir

When a famous politician grounded his children
 due to shocking misbehaviour
 they escaped through their bedroom windows
 and were spotted by a neighbour

The Chinese clan associations
 Can they ever be revived?
 They could have been trade unions
 fighting for workers' rights
 Now they are just a place to have a social bite to eat
 Behind the scary entrances the ghosts will never sleep

Think of all the foreign workers
 who break their backs to build the nation
 while the children of the rich ones
 ask the maid to change the TV channels

I treat my foreign maid just like an object
 My son studies 16 hours per day for PSLE
 I'm just another typical Singaporean
 why can't they keep my condo swimming pool more
 clean?

The international jet set class voted Changi
 the best airport in South East Asia
 while the tenants of one-room flats in Bukit Merah
 can hear the sex acts of their neighbours

Ed's Note: Dr Kieran James is a Senior Lecturer in Accounting at University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba, Australia). He is an Australian with 17 years of teaching experience in Australia and Singapore. He has published over 25 scholarly articles in leading journals including Critical Perspectives on Accounting, International Journal of Critical Accounting, International Journal of Social Economics, Korean Journal of Industrial Relations, and Musicology Australia. He worked in Singapore for four years, 1993-94 and 2001-02, the last two years for a well known Middle Road business college. He is presently writing books on Singapore opposition politics and the death-metal music scene in Bandung, Indonesia.