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SINGAPOREAN YOUTHS MUST HAVE WINGS AND YET KNOW WHERE THEIR NEST IS

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ABSTRACT

Young people generally form the future of any nation state and Singapore is no exception, it is, however, especially concerned about the future of itself as a nation. For Singapore the theme of youth is doubled, as the newness of the nation is a mirrored reflection of young Singaporeans and for the state. Young people embody the fragility of the nation itself, and government policy towards them has become a site where anxiety about the future of the nation is expressed. "Singaporean youths must have wings and yet know where their nest is" interrogates selected policies directed at young people in the city-state of Singapore against the backdrop of the youth of that nation-state itself. This examination includes: policies towards young offenders (and criminality generally), highlighting the anxiety the state feels about the non-conformity of young law-breakers and about the othering of criminals, about the role of National Service as a mechanism for masculinised nation building, and about the definition and discourse around post-independence generations, including the "brain drain" generation, the "Generation Millennium", and the "quitters and stayers", illustrating Singaporean tension between nationalism and political apathy. The resulting analysis questions the notion of youth as agents of change, troubles ideas of technology as a mechanism for liberalisation in Singapore, and challenges Western assumptions about the liberalising power of affluence and globalisation.

Keywords: Singaporean youths, nation, anxiety, consumption, crime

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INTRODUCTION

Novelty and youth are leitmotivs in the national narrative of Singapore. In particular, the government regularly draws attention to the newness of the nation in order to stress Singapore's fragility as a nation-state and apprehension about the lack of a nationally binding tradition. The nation is perceived as being inherently vulnerable to both internal and external threats, precisely because of its young people. According to official policies, the youth of the nation must, therefore, be disciplined. In this discourse, however, "the youth of the nation" coupled with newness of the nation, come across as a mirrored reflection of young Singaporeans. Young people reflect, in the state's rhetoric, the youth and fragility of the nation itself. This reflection is in constant tension with Singaporean politics. In one sense, young people are imbued with the potential of the nation. They are thus, in the words of Vivienne, "the yeast ensuring Singapore's pre-eminence".[1] Like yeast, however, there is the always the risk that the youth will not rise, and, without yeast, can there be any hope that the nation itself will rise concurrently?

On the other hand, an overly active culture threatens hard-won political stability. Young people are the future of the nation, but only if they comply with the state's expectations will they fulfil this potential. If they fail to live up to the state's expectations, young Singaporeans and, by implication, the nation, are threatened. This calls for an unusually extensive and public policing of youth behaviour as well as the creative negotiation of these threats by building upon two of the great strengths of contemporary capitalism and Singapore — globalisation and consumption. Encouraged and disciplined by the People's Action Party (PAP) to behave, to conform, and to consume, the youth of the nation ultimately confirm the PAP's role in guiding the nation into the future.

NATIONALISM AND SINGAPORE

The emergence of many small nation-states since the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted a re-evaluation of established theories of nationalism. While a unifying theory of nationalism remains elusive, the recent history of nationalism and the many books about it are testimony at least to the variety of national experiences. In some respects, Singapore's nationalism is quite

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[1] Vivienne, W. 1995. Children, population policy and the state in Singapore. In Sharon Stephens (Ed.). *Children and the politics of culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

recognisable in these models. It has a flag, national songs, national days, and at least some forms of an "imagined community".[2] In other respects, it is unusual, even singular, among modern nation-states. The history of its cultural policy in the face of globalisation is one such example.

Ernest Gellner suggested that industrial societies require a common culture in order to function and that nationalism is an attempt to create such a culture.[3] Globalisation, a product of the spread of industrialised societies, is often understood as having the potential to undermine a unifying culture and is therefore seen as a threat to the nation-state.[4] Nationalism and globalism thus tend to be framed as contradictory terms that nonetheless coexist. In fact, the paradox of globalisation is that at the point where the boundaries of the nation-state are dissolving, there has often been a simultaneous rise in nationalist sentiment. Specifically for Singapore, being global has emerged as a characteristic of being Singaporean. In this sense, globalisation can be regarded as a unique nationalist project.

While globalisation may be linked to Singapore's future, like other nations, Singapore has to cope with the question of cultural origins. In multi-ethnic states, national identity can be more complex than in a culturally and racially homogenous society. The tension between ethnic identity and national identity was consciously and carefully navigated in Singapore when nationalist policies were first instigated after the country's independence. Rather than relying on cultural heritage to inform nationalist policy, as many countries do, Singapore began by deliberately avoiding deeper historical narratives.

Instead of emphasising heritage or culture, the PAP began by stressing the shared experience of hardship associated with independence as the basis for national unity. Typically, nations showcase their strength and age more than their weakness and novelty.[5] When a country like the US, for example, emphasises its newness, it does so as a sign of its strength: it is new and vital in comparison to the stale old world of Europe.[6] For the Singaporean government, this inversion was deliberate and successful. The newness of the Singaporean state was, and is, constructed as one of the causes of its fragility. Precisely because the nation is thought of as fragile,

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[2] Benedict, A. 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. New York:Verso

[3] Ernest, G. 1983. *Nations and nationalism.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

[4] Leo, S. 2000. Nation-building and nation-destroying: The challenge of globalisation in Indonesia. In Leo, S. (Ed.). *Nationalism and globalisation: East and West*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

[5] Jean, C. 1978. *Pasts and futures or what is history for?*, Schofield Coryell (Trans.). London: Thames and Hudson.

[6] John, B. 1992. *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration and patriotism in the twentieth century.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

the government must be regarded as strong. The logic of stressing hardship provided the PAP with the legitimisation it needed to rule in the first place, and it has continued to be an important strategy for maintaining hegemony.

Young Singaporeans, raised in more affluent and comfortable times, did not experience the hardships of independence, and the Singaporean government is careful to remind them of the sacrifices made by the generations of their parents and grandparents. In his 2002 National Day Speech, for example, the then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong began by reflecting on the past and describing his personal circumstances before he returned to the present. "Today", he argued, "it is the turn of our young to be tested. This baptism of fire will temper your generation". He believed that Singapore's youth would survive the baptism: "from your performance in National Service and the workplace, and the way you take to sports, I am confident that you have what it takes to secure your place under the sun".[7] What Goh Chok Tong had to say on this occasion seems quite common but, at the same time, it encapsulates the government's position. Singapore relies on youth for the future of the nation and reminds them of past hardships by way of impressing on them their responsibility to their country.

YOUTH DISCIPLINE AND CRIMINALITY

If youth is the future, then shaping youth is shaping the future of the nation. The legal system in Singapore is based on the British system and relies on English common law, but criminality is rarely understood in Singapore as an issue or problem with social causes. Discussion invariably centres on individuals, their social deviance and their rejection of societal norms. Narrow conceptions of criminality such as these are further restricted by a reluctance to view criminality as a product of poverty or circumstance. Crime is framed as something committed by "outsiders", either literally, in the form of foreign workers, or metaphorically, by those Singaporeans who do not conform.[8]

In punishing the transgressions of non-conformists, the state sends a powerful message about the limits of its tolerance and emphatically demonstrates its preparedness to punish those who do not submit to its vision of the Singapore nation.[9] John Clammer, in particular, has argued that

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[7] Goh, C. T. 2002. National day speech. Singapore Government press release. Hereinafter: Goh, Speech.
[8] Ganapathy, N. and Lian, K. F. 2002. Policing minority street corner gangs in Singapore: A view from the street. *Journal of Policing and Society, 12*(2), 139–152.
[9] Nicole, T. and Alfred, O. 2005. Capital punishment and the culture of developmentalism in Singapore. In Austin, S. and Christian, B. (Eds.). *The cultural lives of capital punishment: Comparative perspectives*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

a discourse of criminality is useful to authority on several levels. It provides a scapegoat as well as displacing or disguising "class, race and gender as the key issues in public discourse" and thereby legitimises piecemeal social policy "solutions" rather than wholesale political reform.[10] As a result, in addition to the usual institutional sites of youth discipline such as family, church, or school, Singapore has placed particular public emphasis on the uncompromising disciplining of youth via crime and punishment

The 1994 caning of Michael P. Fay, an American teenager, provides a pertinent example of crime committed by *others*. Fay was sentenced to caning after he had been found guilty of vandalising cars and stealing road signs. Controversially, the Singaporean government was unflinching in its determination to carry out the sentence despite diplomatic intervention by the United States. In part, this determination arose because the caning of Fay functioned as an object lesson for young Singaporeans. Richard Deck, for example, argued that the caning of Fay was manipulated and staged by the government as a warning to young Singaporeans, especially those who gathered in the downtown area of Orchard Mall. For Deck, the incident was "a form of deterrence, aimed at the enhancement of the nation's Social, Psychological and Economic Defence".[11] The starkly visible punishment of youth crime works to discipline the young, regardless of who was caned.

The combination of the Fay incident, Singapore's abolition of legal appeals to the Privy Council in 1994, and the execution of Flor Contemplacion in 1996 led to increased international interest in the prosecution of crime on the island. Partly because of the unwelcome and hostile nature of this attention, it has become increasingly difficult to research crime in Singapore. Goh Chok Tong, for example, facilitated a tightening of access to information about crime and government secrecy over crime statistics. According to Amnesty International, however, Singapore has one of the highest incidents of capital punishment, with 357 deaths since 1991. It is impossible to confirm these statistics — these data were once available via a government publication, *Statistical Report on Crime in Singapore*, but access to this publication is now restricted. Historically, permission for access has had to be granted by the Criminal Intelligence Unit of the Criminal Investigations Department, and even if permission is given, the publication of the figures is prohibited.[12]

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[10] John, C. 1998. Framing the other: Criminality, social exclusion and social engineering in developing Singapore. In Catherine, J. F. and Mike, N. (Eds.). *Crime and social exclusion*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Hereinafter: John, Framing the other.

[11] Richard, D. 1999. Singapore: Comprehensive security — total defence. In Ken, B. and Russell, T. (Eds.). *Strategic cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region*. London: Macmillan Press.

[12] Laurence, W. L. 1997. Singapore. In Donald, J. W. and Richard, G. (Eds.). *Sociological control of homosexuality: A multi-nation comparison*. New York: Plenum Press.

It is notable that while access to crime information is limited, there is simultaneously an increased focus on crime in Singapore. A visible public discourse of crime, after all, does not necessarily depend on the publication of charts or statistics. Some crime stories are perhaps even easier to tell in the absence of potentially contradictory information. Consider, for example, issues of crime and race. In Singapore, there *is* a racial component within the discourse on crime: domestic criminality is portrayed as a particularly Malay problem.[13] Drug addiction, for instance, is framed as a "Malay problem" and cast as symptomatic of Malay criminality rather than as a manifestation of socio-economic marginality. When crime is symbolically attributed to non-Malay ethnic groups, it is in terms of specific crimes, rather than criminality *per se*. Gambling, for example, is associated with the Chinese community. However, there is no desire or willingness to confirm these symbolic attachments with the published data.

The idea of crime is packed with meaning in Singapore. In Clammer's view, crime is not to be solely understood as offenses against persons or property. Instead, it reflects a deeper meaning — it is a *pollution or cancer* that, if not cured, will then infect the greater society. Crime in Singapore, then, is framed as "the first sign of the unravelling of the carefully constructed and managed social fabric of Singapore". Further, the state ultimately constructs crime as "ingratitude, a perverse unwillingness to co-operate in bringing about the utopia that the government is so painstakingly building".[14] Such noncompliance necessitates state intervention.

Because crime is framed as an individual rejection of Singaporean values, the citizen, not the state, is framed as at fault. Citizens must thus be "monitored for their own good" and crime is understood not as an outcome of social conditions, but as the chaos which could ensue if order is disturbed. Crime becomes a willingness to give up the "Singapore Dream". Citizens are not excluded by the state — rather, "they excluded themselves" by their refusal to participate in the dominant narrative.

Clammer extends this to argue that Singapore is a totalitarian state precisely because it requires total commitment and that noncompliance makes the citizen deviant and subject to the condemnation of the "system".[15] Applying Clammer's analysis specifically to the issue of youth crime, discussions of youth in Singapore are never far from discussions of delinquency, a consequence of people too readily being able to imagine that one bad apple might spoil the whole crop. Young people, in particular, are

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[13]   Lily, R. 1998. *The Singapore dilemma: The political and educational marginality of the Malay community.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14]   John, Framing the other.

[15]   Ibid., 146.

seen as making choices that result in "excluding themselves".[16] These choices have predominantly to do with education — the delinquent child chooses not to succeed academically and chooses crime and socially unacceptable behaviour, such as loitering and smoking. For the doubled *youth of the nation*, even these minor transgressions must be nipped in the bud, lest they grow into poisoned fruit. Environment or circumstances are generally not included as causal factors.

In addition to the Fay incident, 1994 was a pivotal moment in the public articulation of anxiety about youth crime in Singapore, with the PAP commissioning a study on "problem youths in Singapore" and ministers, including the Prime Minister, making a series of speeches about the issue. The formation, in the same year, of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Dysfunctional Families, Juvenile Delinquency and Drug Abuse, as evidenced in its title, made clear that youth problems could be traced back to families and personal responsibility. Youth must be disciplined to take responsibility for their own choices but are also responsible in the behaviour of their peers via mentoring schemes such as the True Hearts Connection Mentoring and Befriender Scheme, in the success of other youth.[17] From the Justice Teen Quest to Streetwise Programs, young people are made responsible for their choices, for their future, for their peer community, and for their relationship with the nation.

In June 2000, Project Bridge, a program specially designed for early school leavers, was launched. Young people between the ages of thirteen and nineteen who were not enrolled in formal education had already been identified as being at higher risk for delinquency. The focus of the program was to help early school leavers or out-of-school youths (OSY) either to return to education, to find work or to *explore other talents*. Early school leavers were constructed as doubly deviant, both in the sense of deviating from the right path and in the sense of moral corruption, a trend that, left unchecked, might spread. At the first anniversary of the project, Ho Peng Kee, then-Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs and Chairman of the Inter-Ministry Committee on youth crime, challenged those who have been *turned around* by Project Bridge to help others who are in trouble, imploring these re-invented citizens to "be a bridge over troubled waters".[18]

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[16]   Ho, P. K. 2001. *The 1st anniversary of project bridge*. Speech by Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs and Chairman of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime. Singapore Government press release. Hereinafter: Ho, The 1st anniversary of project bridge speech.

[17]   Alfred, C. and Wing, L. T. 2004. *Fighting youth crime: A comparative study of two little dragons in Asia*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.

[18]   Ho, The 1st anniversary of project bridge speech, 4.

Just like the recipients of the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA), the no-longer-troubled youth have an obligation to reach their potential and contribute to society. The importance of obligation was clearly spelled out in the NYAA special presentation for youth inmates. In the context of young criminals, these awards are not about "opportunities for development and personal growth",[19] but instead emphasise "a sense of responsibility to themselves, society and their nation".[20] Ho Peng Kee stated that despite an individual's background, the NYAA Scheme adopted by the Prison Department illustrates well the motto "Every Singaporean Matters". Each Singaporean has an allotted role to play, and those who deviate must be brought back into the fold so that they play that part. Those who choose not to run the race or be the best they can be are letting society down.

NATIONAL SERVICE

The PAP tends to equate youth with boys, reflecting their priorities. That is, they care more, though not exclusively, about disciplining male youth. National service provides an additional opportunity to regulate and discipline young men in Singapore. Providing a common experience for male Singaporeans, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is a key tool in nation building. Tai Ming Cheung, writing for the *Far Eastern Economic Review,* suggested that although the primary mission of the SAF was military defence, its efforts to instil patriotism and discipline, racial cohesion and "defence awareness" amongst the population, were equally important. In this sense, the SAF is a key component of a Singaporean identity.[21]

The two-year period of compulsory military service is intense, affording the Singaporean government almost unrestricted access to the minds of young men and being constructed as a male rite of passage to citizenship. According to Alfred Oehlers, these young men "are immersed in a hierarchical and authoritarian culture, where an intense nationalism is cultivated, as well as discipline and an unquestioning obedience to

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[19] John, C. National Youth Achievement Award Presentation Ceremony. Speech by Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology and National Development. Singapore Government press release (17 February 2001). Hereinafter: John, National Youth Achievement Award presentation ceremony speech.

[20] Ho, P. K. 2001. The National Youth Achievement Award, Special Presentation Ceremony. Speech by Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs and Chairman of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime. Singapore Government press release.

[21] Tai, M. C. 1991. Ideological mission. *Far Eastern Economic Review, 154*,16.

authority".[22] Twice yearly, male Singapore citizens are given an opportunity to reinforce national values and obedience by spending a weekend upgrading and maintaining their skill base.

National service operates on a number of levels to reinforce obedience, not least by offering employment opportunities.[23] Certainly, Singapore's security culture emphasises the vulnerability of the nation. The heightened awareness of this vulnerability leads Chin Kin Wah to describe Singapore as suffering from "small-nation syndrome".[24] Derek Da Cunha argued that "one of the pillars underpinning the success of Singapore as a nation-state is its armed forces".[25] It may be more accurate to say that discipline, cohesion, and obedience, maximised by national service, have been the pillars underpinning the youth of the nation of Singapore.

YOUTH AS FUTURE OF THE NATION

In 1996, the post-Independence generation was described by Goh Chok Tong as having come of age.[26] More than half of Singapore's population in 1996 was born after independence. If we consider, as Goh Chok Tong suggested, that only those Singaporeans who were young adults at the time of Independence can know and understand Independence from personal experience, then only one quarter of Singaporeans *know* Independence.[27] Given, however, that the Singaporean government relies heavily on constructions of Independence as a shared hardship that unites Singaporeans, it is essential to pass the discourse, meanings, and symbolism of Independence on to young Singaporeans. At the Teacher's Day Rally in 1996, Goh Chok Tong identified this problem and provided the solution. He argued that because hardships and vulnerabilities are not part of the collective memory of young Singaporeans, they need to "shape their attitudes" to understand "how we got to where we are".[28] Goh Chok Tong in

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[22] Alfred, O. 1998. Youth in Singapore: Agents for social and political change? *Journal of Futures Studies, 3*(1), 8.

[23] Tim, H. 1993. The political role of the Singapore armed forces officer corps: Towards a military-administrative state? Working paper no. 279, Strategic and Defence Studies, Australian National University, Canberra.

[24] Chin, K. W. 2000. Reflections on the shaping of strategic cultures in Southeast Asia. In Derek Da Cunha (Ed.). *Southeast Asian perspectives on security*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

[25] Derek, D. C. 1999. Sociological aspects of the Singapore armed forces. *Armed Forces and Society, 25*(3), 468.

[26] *Straits Times.* 1996. Equipping our young for the future. (9 September 1996).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Goh Chok Tong, quoted in *Straits Times.* 1996. Equipping our young for the future. (9 September 1996).

effect launched a Youth is Future campaign which showed no sign of abating in the new millennium.

At the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) presentation ceremony in 2001, John Chen, then Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology and National Development, articulated the relationship between youth and the future of Singapore. Characterising young people as "our precious assets", Chen stated that providing opportunities for their advancement was "key to our survival". During the ceremony, the success of youth was constructed as the success of the nation, and what was good for youth was deemed to be good for the nation. The NYAA is seen as a program that "engages youth in a systematic and meaningful process to maximise their potential".[29] The development of the nation requires the maximisation of the youth's potential for the "social health" of the citizenry, a point made by several other members of parliament.[30]

At the People's Association Youth Movement 30th Anniversary Dinner in 2001, then-Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong built on the theme developed by John Chen, declaring to his young audience: "youths are the future of Singapore", and "you have to build tomorrow's Singapore on the foundations of what the earlier generation has accomplished". Having established a link with past achievements, Lee Hsien Loong appealed to Singapore's small size and relative vulnerability to justify a future characterised by individual autonomy. Lee Hsien Loong effectively established Singaporean youth as critical to the future yet constrained by that future.

POST-INDEPENDENCE GENERATIONS

Historically, different generational waves of young Singaporeans have been positioned quite differently with regard to discourses of politics and the nation, leading to continual evolutions of policy and ideology. In contrast to the youth of the 1950s and 1960s, who were active in bringing about Singapore's decolonisation, and perhaps in response to the powerful disciplining functions of state institutions, the youth of the 1990s and 2000s are relatively apolitical. As Huang Jianli pointed out, this came about in part from a conscious positioning of student activism of that period as binary and

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[29] John, National Youth Achievement Award presentation ceremony speech.
[30] David, T. E. L 2001. Making youth development our growing business. Speech by Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts. Singapore Government press release.

problematic.[31] This changed situation calls for a different approach — apolitical young people fracture the discursive doubling of the "youth of the nation" by their lack of interest in connecting nation to identity, thus threatening the dominant narrative of Singaporean nationalism.

From the 1990s, a slow and bounded re-evaluation of youth political apathy has taken place. Under Goh Chock Tong, three distinct post-independence youth generations were identified. In the 1990s, the term "brain-drain generation" pointed to a cohort of educated young Singaporeans who were not returning home after overseas study. In 2001, "Generation Millennium (M)" was named in the media — a younger and more affluent generation than the brain-drain group.[32] Then in 2002, Goh Chok Tong drew attention to an in-between group, young people in their twenties whom he dichotomised as *quitters and stayers*, in the process defining another post-independence generation.

From an examination of the discourse developed around these three generations, it becomes clear that the Singaporean government is preoccupied with a desire to minimise the migration of young Singaporeans or, more accurately, to minimise the effects of migration by keeping young Singaporeans ideologically connected to the nation state, whatever their spatial location. It sought to do so by inculcating youth with a national identity capable of being expressed through consumption.

BRAIN DRAIN 1990s

In the 1990s, the best and brightest of Singapore's young people appeared unconvinced by the bargain their parents had struck with the PAP, sacrificing liberty for wealth.[33] The new generation apparently found the freedoms of Canada, Australia and New Zealand more enticing. Echoing the emphasis on individual responsibility in discourses of criminality, the Singaporean media tended to discuss this phenomenon in terms of ingratitude, an inattention to duty, and a lack of responsibility towards the nation that provided formative education and resources. According to David Birch, the act of leaving was presented as a "mistake or an irrational act" by the errant child-citizens who had not paid their debt to Singapore

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[31] Huang, J. 2006. Positioning the student political activism of Singapore: Articulation, contestation and omission. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 7*(3), 406.
[32] Leslie, K. and Stephanie, Y. 2001. Goodbye- Gen-X, Hello Gen-M. *Straits Times*, (3 May 2001). Hereinafter: Leslie and Stephanie, *Straits Times*.
[33] Russell, H. 1995. Give me liberty or give me wealth. In Derek Da Chunha (Ed.). *Debating Singapore: Reflective essays*. Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies.

and who therefore represented a bad risk. In this connection, the state was constructed as a "benign and concerned parent" that knows what is best for the child-citizen.[34]

Goh Chok Tong personified the "benign parent" figure described by Birch and tried to find ways to keep the child-citizens from leaving. In the programmatic policy document *Singapore: The Next Lap*, for example, he focused on *minimising the outflow* and outlined ways to encourage Singaporeans to stay at home and to develop a sense of loyalty to Singapore and a sense of Singaporean identity and national consciousness. He especially emphasised the responsibilities of overseas Singaporeans to be loyal to the nation — Singaporeans who live and work overseas do not just export their services, he pointed out; they must act as ambassadors of Singapore, promoting goodwill and building a positive image of Singapore internationally.[35]

The issue was considered in detail in the Singaporean media during the 1990s in articles, editorials and letters to the editor. Advertisements under the rubric of "Singapore My Home" and later, "Singapore My Best Home", alerted the public to the "homeliness" of Singapore.[36] Networks for Singaporeans living or studying overseas were established that relied on the now-defunct Radio Singapore International (RSI) and evolved to include Internet broadcasting and web-based discussion groups. RSI's mandate was to help overseas Singaporeans "share in Singapore's development experience" by keeping them in touch with the news from home.[37] New technologies serve to minimise distance and have been employed by the government to help Singaporeans, especially the young, remain connected to their country.

Associated with discussions of migration were debates about the avoidance of military service. Some citizens firmly believed that others were leaving Singapore to avoid military service, either for themselves or for their children, and said as much in letters to the papers.[38] Part of this discussion focused on what should happen when Singaporeans who have lived overseas come back to Singapore yet have not completed their military service. As one article in the *Straits Times* suggested — they should be allowed back but

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[34]   David, B. 1993. Staging crises: Media and citizenship. In Garry, R. (Ed.). *Singapore changes guard: Social, political and economic directions in the 1990's*. New York: Routledge.
[35]   *Singapore: The Next Lap*. 1990. Singapore: Times Editions.
[36]   *Singapore 21: Make it Our Best Home*. 1997. Singapore: Singapore Government.
[37]   George, Y. 2000. Worldwide web: Strengthening the Singapore network. In *state-society relations in Singapore*. Gillian, K. and Ooi, G. L. (Eds.). Singapore: Oxford University Press.
[38]   *Straits Times*. 1991. George Lee: I'm finished with Singapore, I only miss the seafood. (30 March 1991).

not welcomed with the red carpet. After all, by leaving, "they have betrayed their country, and are ungrateful".[39]

News reports and editorials reinforced the message carried in advertisements and communications from the government and concerned public. "Home is where the heart is", proclaimed an article published in the *Straits Times*. The article purported to be an entertaining lifestyle piece about lawyer-playwright Eleanor Wong, but a close reading shows reveals a modern parable about people returning to Singapore. Wong was successful, had a high-flying legal career, was well-published, and had returned to Singapore. According to Wong, this was because in New York she felt no responsibility. She noted that, "New York may be a beautiful home, but Singapore is mine and I have a responsibility towards it".[40]

GENERATION MILLENNIUM 2001

Much of the Generation M commentary is negative, from Goh Chok Tong's description of them "as a generation born with a silver spoon in its mouth",[41] to newspaper columnist Warren Fernandez's anxieties over their lack of knowledge about the past.[42] However, this is an over-simplification. As with many political constructions in Singapore, Generation M exists on a number of levels and can thus be exploited in different ways.

A comparison can be made between Generation M and the *shinjinrui*, Japan's "new breed" of youth. Fumie Kumagai described the characteristics of this generation as "raised in an affluent society, they have no experience of poverty or starvation; they are whimsical, emotional and playful; they display a cold reserve towards things that do not interest them; and they have extremely strong ties with peers".[43] Kamagai also pointed to other qualities of the *shinjinrui*, such as a reluctance to grow up and a lack of social commitment. While not all these attributes could be applied to Generation M, affluence, strong peer relationships, and apathy are commonalities. Parallels can also be drawn with emerging elite youth in Malaysia, where Western-style modernity has been perceived as a threat to

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[39] Warren, F. and Chua, M. H. 1991. Give them a second chance, but not special treatment. *Straits Times*, (7 March 1991).

[40] Hannah, P. 1993. Home is where the heart is. *Straits Times*, (4 August 1993).

[41] Goh Chock Tong, quoted in Leslie and Stephanie, *Straits Times.*

[42] Warren, F. 2001. Gen M, Are You World-Ready. *Straits Times*, (5 May 2001).

[43] Fumie, K. 1996. *Unmasking Japan today: The impact of traditional values in modern Japanese society.* Westport: Praeger.

the social fabric of the nation.[44] Their Generation Y contemporaries in the United are viewed more benevolently, but the associations with affluence are just as marked.

For Singapore, the discourse of Generation M works to legitimate government discussions of responsibility and belonging and simultaneously provides an explanation for the political non-involvement of young people that can avoid discussions of discipline. In its defining article on Generation M, the *Straits Times* provided a guide to identifying Generation Mers, complete with descriptions of their clothes and hangouts and accompanied by photographic evidence.[45] If a physical description and a location guide were not enough, readers were advised that members of Generation M could be detected by their attitudes and accessories. The typical Generation M was an affluent, IT-savvy, mobile-phone-toting, self-centred, high achiever who globe-trotted but cared little for politics. Such an approach was summed up by fourteen-year-old Jean Pek:

> My main concerns are my studies, shopping, track and field, and friends. I have no interest in current affairs or local events, although my teachers mention them occasionally… It is too troublesome to find out about them, and they don′t affect me personally.[46]

Jean Pek's comment and others like it provoked some anxiety. In responding to a *New Paper* poll that indicated that young Singaporeans knew little about their history or current events, Goh Chok Tong said he was "frightened" by this information.[47] Some Singaporeans are concerned that the future of the nation lies in the hands of those who do not care.[48] If Generation M feels no link to Singapore, then they might leave, taking their expensive education and talent elsewhere. As then-Deputy Prime Minister (and later Prime Minister) Lee Hsien Loong noted, "Singaporean youths must have wings and yet know where their nest is".[49]

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[44] Maila, S. 2002. The hope of the nation: State, religion and modernity in the construction of teenagerhood in contemporary Malaysia. In Lenore, M. and Pranee, L. (Eds.). *Coming of age in south Southeast Asia: Youth, courtship and sexuality*. London: Curzon.

[45] Leslie, and Stephanie, *Straits Times*.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Goh, C. T. quoted in Pang, G. C. PM: History syllabus to be reviewed. *Straits Times*, (22 July 1996).

[48] Ho, P. K. 2003. Official launch of 'Stop Shop Theft' programme. Speech by Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs. Singapore Government press release, (16 July 2003).

[49] Lee, H. L. 2001. Opening ceremony of the building community and world-ready youth conference. Speech by Deputy Prime Minister. Singapore Government press release.

However, Generation M is not uniformly viewed negatively, which distinguishes it from the brain-drain cohort. *Straits Times* columnist Monica Gwee in "The great Singapore hope", described the greatest luxury of Generation M as the ability "to dream beyond boundaries".[50] For the "brain-drainers," departure could worryingly be read as an expression of political dissent. For Generation M, however, the lack of political engagement has begun to depoliticise the meanings attributed to leaving Singapore.

QUITTERS VERSUS STAYERS 2002

Brain-drainers are ungrateful and political. Generation M apolitically dreams. With the 2002 political slogan of "Quitters and Stayers", the resultant tensions were negotiated via emotional connections and the nationalism of consumption. In his National Day speech in 2002, Goh Chok Tong spoke about two kinds of Singaporeans: those "quitters" or fair-weather citizens who migrate, and the "stayers" who are "committed to Singapore. Rain or shine, they will be with Singapore". Being a "stayer" does not necessarily mean actually staying in Singapore. In Goh Chok Tong's formulation, it included Singaporeans who live overseas but "who will come back when needed because their hearts are here. The Singapore nation is not just those of us living here but also the thousands of loyal Singaporeans who live around the world".[51] In this sense, being Singaporean was constructed as a state of mind.

In keeping with the established pattern of endorsing the future with reference to the past, Goh Chok Tong reminded Singaporeans of the harshness of the past and the "never-say-die, can-do spirit" that "gave us the peace and prosperity we enjoy today".[52] Goh Chok Tong then expressed his belief in young Singaporeans, saying, "I believe the large majority of our youths are 'stayers' and have not gone soft. The men do National Service. The women support them".[53]

Stayers are the present as well as the future. Their specific responsibilities are already quite heavy. Not only must they "feel deeply for Singapore", stayers must also translate these feelings into economic actions. Goh Chok Tong singled out those Singaporeans who purchased *cheaper* real estate in Australia, rather than investing in Singapore, as undermining the future of Singapore. Such actions have the potential to turn Singapore from

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[50]   Monica, G. 2001. The great Singapore hope. *Straits Times*. (5 May 2001).
[51]   Goh, Speech.
[52]   Ibid.
[53]   Ibid.

a *home* to a *hotel*. Stayers may make money overseas but they are expected not only to be loyal to Singapore but also to feel they belong there. To explain this position, Goh Chok Tong quoted Singaporean director Jack Neo, who claimed that in Singapore "I'm the No. 1 wife. Elsewhere, I′m the concubine".[54]

YOUTH ON THE SCREEN OF A MOBILE PHONE

Having an apolitical youth, while appealing in some ways to the PAP, has an inherent limitation. The PAP *enjoys* being popular. In practical terms, then, when young people become voters, they must be political *enough* to cast a vote for the PAP. From as early as 1987, the PAP had a youth wing called the Young PAP (YP). Its explicit function is to help the PAP maintain its position as the "mainstream political party" via the recruitment of younger members and leaders and by providing a site for the expression of the "aspirations of young Singaporeans".[55] The YP Blog provides space for members to talk about political and social concerns with the intention of building a better Singapore in the process.[56] There is also *life after YP*, where members of the YP who reach 40 and are therefore no longer *young* are graduated from the organisation and encouraged to take up positions in the original PAP.[57] While the YP have been highly successful in helping the PAP maintain its position, like most political parties, it remains dominated by older members.

Ever adaptive, the PAP has sought to make the party more appealing to young people. Younger parliamentarians attempted hip-hop dance routines, for example, while maintaining their *wholesome image*. Or given their engagement with popular technology, Singaporean youth were asked to text message their suggestions about political images to the state. However, as Kenneth Tan noted, in the eyes of some, given this trivialised youth participation, the vision of a monumental nation was to be contained within the tiny screen of a mobile phone.[58] To an extent, this is a metaphor for the PAP's view of youth: participation that is contained, guided, and

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[54]   Ibid.

[55]   The vision statement of the Young PAP organization. http://www.youngpap.org.sg/abtus_vision.shtml (accessed September 2009).

[56]   The mission statement of the Young PAP organization. http://youngpapblog.blogspot.com/ (accessed September 2009).

[57]   Edwin, P. 2007. Refreshing the young PAP: *Renaissance Singapore? economy, culture and politics*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

[58]   Kenneth, P. T. 2007. Youth: Every generation's moral panic. In Kenneth, P. T. (Ed.). *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, culture and politics*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

necessarily limited. Within the vision of limited participation, youth are expected to be shoppers. Singapore is a society that is pre-occupied with consumption, and youth consumption is an area that has received particular attention in terms of its role in nation building.

CONSUMPTION

Youth spending in Singapore is high in part because of living arrangements, which tend to keep young Singaporeans at home until marriage. Living at home shields young people from expenditures on major items and leads to "a window for unlimited consumption" for consumer goods.[59] It also leads to criticisms that young Singaporeans are excessive and that they are too Western. The consumption of Western fashions provides an example of how tensions over excess and Westernisation are raised by specific consumption practices. Hilary Rader asked: "does consumption always work in the service of a hegemonic structure or are there ways in which consumption offers a space for resistance against the very structures that it would appear to represent?"[60] Rader answered her question by suggesting that it is possible to subvert consumption in a variety of ways. But for young Singaporeans, consumption is about conformity and compliance. While objects or artefacts *can* be consumed in such a way as to give "meaning through their active incorporation in people's lives",[61] in Singapore, the act of consumption works as a nationalist activity.

Chua Beng-Huat suggests that the Singaporean government simultaneously advocates a consumption culture and a culture of restraint and that authoritarian states require high economic growth in order to rationalise authoritarianism.[62] For Singapore, this has been coupled with a high-savings policy designed to reduce dependency on international borrowing and increase capital. The economic crises of 1997 and 2008 heightened the emphasis on restraint. However, young Singaporeans who have grown up in a context of comparative affluence have been more inclined to spend than save.

Although consumption can pose dangers to the society in terms of its capacities to undermine cultural identity, Singaporeans are undoubtedly

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[59] Chua, B. H. 2000. Consuming Asians: Ideas and issues. In Chua, B (Ed.). *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and identities*. London: Routledge. Hereinafter: Chua, Consuming Asians.

[60] Hilary, R. 1999. Roaming the city: Proper women in improper places. In Mike, F. and Scott, L. (Eds.). *Spaces of culture: City, Nation, World*. London: Sage Publications.

[61] Peter, J. 1993. Towards a cultural politics of consumption. In Jon Bird (Ed.). *Mapping the future: Local cultures, global change*. London: Routledge.

[62] Chua, Consuming Asians, 9.

encouraged to consume. Consumption cohabits with cosmopolitanism. Wing Meng Ho has gone as far as to characterise Singaporean affluence as "an obsessive preoccupation with the pursuit and acquisition of pecuniary and material gains and the honorific display of wealth", while Lee Weng Choy has argued that one of the underlying ideological agendas of the nation-building project is "to serve multinational capital accumulation".[63] From this perspective, the future of the nation can be seen to rely on the consumption practices, present and future, of young Singaporeans.

Connections between youth and consumption are exemplified by government-supported websites aimed at youth. One part of a Singapore Education website, for example, advertises that "Singaporeans live to shop" and "live, eat, and shop in the heartlands".[64] Similarly, the Government-sponsored site (www.youth.sg), self-described as "unprecedented virtual space for Singaporean youth to get thinking and exchange views on issues that affect them", includes links to dozens of shopping sites in various articles.[65]

A particularly telling connection between youth, consumption, and nationalism was exemplified by the National Heritage Board in July 2005.[66] As part of the celebration of Singapore's 40th birthday, the self-described "tongue-in-cheek" look at "Icons and Identities of Singapore" was exhibited at the Singapore History Museum, Riverside Point. The exhibit was conceptualised around five themes: "Love Me, Love My Stuff!" (collectables), "Love Me, Build Me!" (architecture), "Love Me, Obey Me" (government campaigns), "Love Me, Make Me Rich" (prosperity icons), and "Love Me, Visit Me" (tourism images). The easy slippages across these various meanings of "me" — referring in turn to the built environment, the State, and the citizen — parallel the discursive doubling of the youth of the nation.

Unpacked, the message of the exhibit is simple and essentially Singaporean: Love Singapore (in all its guises), Obey the PAP, get rich, and love your stuff. In this case, the *stuff* was an exhibit of Hello Kitty collectibles, reiterating and reflecting both the importance of youth and the connections of youth to global consumption. That is, in consuming global culture, young Singaporeans are participating in nationalism: as Lee Weng

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[63] Wing, M. H. 1989. Values premises underlying the transformation of Singapore. In Sandu, K. S. and Wheatley, P. (Eds.). *Managing of success: The moulding of modern Singapore*. Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies.

[64] *Shopping*. 2006. Singapore education: Living in Singapore. http.www.singaporeedu.gov.sg /htm/liv/liv01004.htm (September 2009)

[65] "About Us" Youth.SG. http://www.youth.sg/content/view/46/83/ (accessed September 2009).

[66] NHB website. www.nhb.gov.sg/WWW/pr/pra/05/250705.pdf. (accessed September 2009).

Choy noted, "nationalism and globalisation achieve a symbiosis in Singapore".[67] In this sense, to consume is to conform, not subvert.

YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

While young people may transmogrify into the future nation, they can also pose a threat to the social and political order of the nation. As brain-drainers, as over-discerning consumers, as uninformed Generation Mers, or as quitters, these compliant conservative youths retain the capacity to inspire anxieties about the security of the future. A regime of social discipline is thus required to regulate the young. Education systems provide the most obvious example of such a regime. National service and social regulation also reinforce political and social discipline. In Singapore, Chua observed, "every aspect of life is rationalised to increase orderliness; orderliness is a 'totalising' strategy of the government".[68] Themes such as these are explored in popular culture — film and television — and also in the creative arts.

Young people have historically facilitated social change, and many international observers of Southeast Asia see youth as a potential force for democratic change.[69] In both Malaysia and Indonesia, pressure for change has been associated with the young.[70] In Singapore, however, little evidence exists to suggest that there is a growth of such democratic movements. Despite the presence of social satire in forums such as TalkingCock.com[71] and the podcasts of the infamous Mr. Brown,[72] these forums are not democratic movements *per se*. Indeed, they are too sophisticated in both content and form to be led by the young. As Oehlers argued, "youth in Singapore appear to be content to conform to visions of the future elaborated by the PAP". Their contentment is a direct consequence of policies that concomitantly "cultivate and perpetuate traditional conservative values" and work in unison with "punitive measures to ensure compliance".[73] The appearance of Singapore and Singaporean youth as

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[67] Lee, W. C. 2001. McNationalism in Singapore. In Yao, S. (Ed.). *House of glass: Culture, modernity and the state in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute Southeast Asian Studies.

[68] Chua, B. H. 2000. Singaporeans ingesting McDonald's. In Chua, B. H (Ed.). *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and identities*. London: Routledge,

[69] Jon, G. 2001. Singapore's would been democrat. *Eureka Street, 11*(7), 29.

[70] Greg, S. 1999. *Asian values, Western dreams: Understanding the new Asia.* St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

[71] http://www.talkingcock.com/ (accessed September 2009)

[72] http://www.mrbrown.com/ (accessed September 2009)

[73] Alfred, O. 1999. *Imagining the future: Youth in Singapore.* Paper presented at the 13th Biennial International Conference of the New Zealand Asian Studies Society, University of Otago, Dunedin, November 24–27.

Westernised is often misread as a move towards liberalism.[74] That is, factors such as information technology, globalisation, and youth popular culture do not lead Singaporean youth towards political liberty.

YOUTH AND THE INTERNET

The Internet is often presented as a political tool that can be used against authoritarian states, such as Singapore or China. Saskia Sassen, for example, proposed that the Internet would, if not remove, at least limit authoritarian control.[75] In 1998, D. Perrit maintained that "totalitarian regimes" can no longer "ensure themselves a safe environment by controlling the newspapers, radio and television stations because the World Wide Web remains beyond their control and manipulation".[76] The potential for the transformation of Singaporean society has often been attributed to technological advancement, inextricably intertwined with an image of the young Singaporean computer whiz and policy initiatives such as IT 2000 Vision, which sought to make Singapore the "Intelligent Island". A number of scholars have challenged this assumption in the Singaporean context.

Rather than seeking the prohibition of the Internet, the Singaporean state seeks regulation.[77] *IT 2000 – A Vision of an Intelligent Island* envisioned Singapore's future as that of an IT Hub that relied on significant technical skills, particularly among the young.[78] Internet access links domestic, public and private spaces to facilitate commercial transactions and communication with the state. In this sense, the government simultaneously sought to encourage and regulate the Internet.

Regulation comes primarily from the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), although as Peng Hwa Ang and Berlinda Nadarajan noted, it is unusual to classify the Internet as a broadcast service.[79] The SBA is empowered through legislation and industry guidelines to censor Internet sites as it would other media. The Computer Crime Branch acts in tandem with the SBA, patrolling websites and chatrooms in order to keep them

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[74] Erik, P. 1993. Prospects for liberalisation in Singapore. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 23*(3), 291–305. Hereinafter: Erik, Prospects for liberation in Singapore.

[75] Saskia, S. 1999. Digital networks and power. In Mike, F. and Scott, L. (Eds.). *Spaces of culture: City, nation, world*. London: Sage Publication.

[76] Perrit, D. The Internet as a threat to sovereignty? Thoughts on the Internet's role in national and global governance. *Indian Journal of Global Legal Studies, 5*(2), 431.

[77] Erik, Prospects for liberation in Singapore.

[78] Singapore, Ministry of Information Technology and the Arts, *IT 2000 – A Vision of an Intelligent Island*, 1999.

[79] Peng, H. A. and Berlinda, N. 1996. Censorship and the Internet: A Singapore perspective. *Communications of the ACM, 39*(6), 75.

"safe".[80] Extensive self-censorship, particularly with regard to political material, also creates an informal regulation of the Internet in Singapore.[81] With all Internet Service Providers being owned by the Singaporean government or its subsidiaries, it is not surprising that some citizens have come to the conclusion that the Internet is more closely monitored in Singapore than elsewhere.

For Singapore, tension exists between the desire to be at the technological forefront and the need to contain technology.[82] In conjunction with extensive regulation, this attitude serves to reduce the potential of technology to bring about social or political change. To expect youth, in this context, to facilitate change via technology, is unrealistic. Oehlers argued that in Singapore, the Internet "does not occupy a space independent or beyond the nation state".[83] Until it does, the Internet will act as a tool for the maintenance of the authoritarian status quo.

YOUTH AND GLOBALISATION

Representing a major focus of political activity for youth internationally over the past decade have been globalisation and associated concerns. A lateral connection can be identified between this phenomenon and the aspirations concerning Singaporean youth as "future makers", as the globalisation of a discourse on human rights has been viewed in some quarters as an inevitable agent of political and social change. Anthony Woodiwiss has argued that only slight legislative change is needed to turn Singapore into a human rights-friendly nation. "Enforceable benevolence" is, in his opinion, not far away. It will, according to Woodiwiss, be created by "a hybrid paradigm that combines elements of the socialist, patriarchalist and liberal traditions together in a way that is appropriate to the global economic conditions faced by, as well as to the aspirations of, its population". In an over simplification of the Singaporean rights culture, he outlined five minor legislative changes that he believes would facilitate fundamental social change. These are:

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[80] Terence, L. and David, B. Internet regulation in Singapore: A Policy/ing discourse. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy,* 95, 159.

[81] Alfred, O. 2001. The Internet and political change: Some thoughts on Singapore. Paper presented at the Internet political economy forum. Internet and development in Asia. National University of Singapore, Singapore, September 14–15. Hereinafter: Alfred, the Internet and political change.

[82] Ian, S. 1995. Chorus of contempt. *Weekend Australian*, January 21–22,

[83] Alfred, The Internet and political change. 14.

the strengthening of the independence of the lower judiciary; the abolition of the judicial commissioners; the conformation of the currently unused precedent… which allows appeals to the Supreme Court from the Arbitration Court and, finally, the clarification of the status of the constitution.[84]

By focusing on legislative change, Woodiwiss ignored the political reality of Singapore. It is not legislation that curbs human rights in Singapore, but the Singaporean government. Oehlers has suggested that Singapore has a peculiar form of political corruption, the chief objective of which is "the maintenance of the political pre-eminence of the ruling PAP" through securing popular acquiescence.[85] Minor legislative changes would not alter this situation any more than they could compensate for the absence of youth activism in the public domain. The two factors are undoubtedly closely connected.

At the heart of Woodiwiss' analysis is the assumption that the state and citizenry are out of step in Singapore. That is, that the state is more repressive and conservative than the populace. Statistics showing high levels of migration and desires to migrate provide some support for this analysis, but public discussions about values and censorship suggest the opposite.[86] The deep conservatism of Singaporeans shows much of the population to be in fundamental sympathy with the state.[87] In a survey prepared by the Censorship Review Committee, an emphatic *no* was given to "liberal values and permissiveness", with 67% disapproving of such Western liberal touchstones as pre-marital sex and cohabitation and 86% disapproving of homosexuality and lesbianism.[88]

Those Singaporeans who *do* feel comfortable with social liberalisation have been granted a special place in the margins of Singaporean society by virtue of the paradigm of "cosmopolitans" and "heartlanders", which allows pride of place to the moral majority. In his 1999 National Day Rally speech, Goh Chok Tong proposed that "Heartlanders play a major role in maintaining our core values and our

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[84] Anthony, W. 1999. *Globalisation, human rights and labour law in Pacific Asia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[85] Alfred, O. 2005. Corruption: The peculiarities of Singapore. In Nicholas, T. (Ed.). *Corruption in good governments in Asia*. New York: RoutlegeCurzon.

[86] Vivien, K. G. L. 2002. Gender differences and attitudes towards homosexuality. *Journal of Homosexuality, 43*(1), 89

[87] Chew, S. B., Kike, L. G. and Tan, K. H. 1998. *Values and lifestyles of young Singaporeans.* Singapore: Prentice Hall.

[88] Felix, S. 1992. S'poreans voice firm 'no' to liberal values. *Straits Times*. (4 August 1992).

social stability. They are the core of our society. Without them, there will be no safe and stable Singapore, in Singapore system, no Singapore brand name".[89] Social liberalisation, personified by young, moneyed, internationally educated globetrotters, is thus a threat to the core as well as its antithesis.

YOUTH POPULAR CULTURE

Music and theatre are among the few domains in which youth have shown some potential to voice dissent or give expression to modestly different values. Accordingly, the government has been strongly interventionist in these domains. In 1994, for example, the PAP passed an act that prohibited script-less performances.[90] The PAP felt that improvisational performances, such as PlayBack Theatre, posed too great a threat to social stability. Alfran Sa'at, a young Singaporean poet, wrote sardonically about the prohibition of script-less performances. He said, "even the zoo will not be spared. Enclosures will be dismantled, a lion will leap from its cage, utter a roar, and will be immediately shot down by the police for an unscripted performance without a license".[91]

Hostility towards youth culture is especially evident in the Singapore music scene, where local music with a Western influence was briefly banned in the 1970s because of its links to drug use.[92] Within the now emerging alternative music scene in Singapore, as with other societies, non-conformist appearances are signals and symbols of involvement or association with that set. In Singapore, however, non-conformity to norms of appearance amount to making a very significant statement. For a period in the 1970s and 1980s it was illegal for men in Singapore to have long hair, defined as hair that at least reaches the collar of a buttoned shirt. Articulated in terms of a rejection of Western morals, visitors to Singapore were subject to this regulation, and customs officials cut hair to the appropriate length. Within the alternative music scene male, long hair was a symbol of belonging to this alternative set.

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[89] Goh, C. T. 1999. National day rally speech. First-world economy, first-class home. Singapore Government press release.

[90] Government Act 1994, quoted in Laurence Wai-Teng Leong, Singapore. In Donald, J. W. and Richard, G. (Eds.). *Sociolegal control of homosexuality: A multi-nation comparison*. New York: Plenum Press, 1997.

[91] Alfran, S. 2001. *Felix the cat: A history of amnesia*. Singapore: Ethos Books.

[92] Phua, S. C. and Lily, K. 1996. Ideology, social commentary and resistance in popular music. *Journal of Popular Culture, 30*(1), 218.

In a song, produced by the local band Raw Fish, the restrictive atmosphere and state intervention was questioned:

> I don't know if you are a god, or a king
> Or if you are government
> Show me a sign that says if I chew bubble gum
> I will fall straight into fire, fire in hell.
>
> Yes, you have god-like powers
> Show me a sign that you are a god and not government
> Show me a sign that I must be your slave and you my master
> And I will be your NS [National Service] man.[93]

The power of this song was tempered, however, by the fact that the state mediates the dissemination of popular music through actions such as sponsoring cheaper editions of songs without swear words.[94] The Singaporean government also sponsors the "Singapore Songs", an annual competition for songs about life in Singapore, which receive extensive publicity, with the top ten songs for each year released on both CD and video.[95] Popular music performers are used by the state for the performance of National Day songs, and songs are sent out to community centres and schools so that everyone can learn them. Wee discussed a related phenomenon in an article about the co-option of popular musician Dick Lee to create music for the nation.[96] In 1986 Dick Lee was speaking out against the Singapore government "trying to force culture upon the people",[97] but by 1994, he was performing in National Day celebrations.

Oehlers also pointed to the export of music as a form of de-politicisation. Using the example of gangsta-rap, he explained that when it is exported, it is "stripped of all its social and political content". As a result, when young Singaporeans mimic the music and appearance of the performers, "they remain totally oblivious to the origins of gangsta-rap, its message and values". He concluded that "far from acting as agents for social

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[93] Show me a Sign, quoted in Phua, S. C. and Lily, K. 1996. Ideology, social commentary and resistance in popular music: A case study of Singapore. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *30*(1), 227.

[94] Alan, W. and Lee, C. W. 1995. Music Culture in Singapore: Record companies, retailers, and performers. In John, A. L. (Ed.). *Asian Popular Culture*. Boulder: Westview Press.

[95] Francis, T. S. 1998. *The media enthralled: Singapore revisited.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher.

[96] Wee, C. J. W. L. 2001. Representing the Singapore modern: Dick Lee, Pop Music and the 'New' Asia. In Yao, S. (Ed.). *House of glass, culture, modernity and the state in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: ISEAS.

[97] *Asia Magazine*. 1986. A day in the life of Dick Lee (29 June 1986).

and political change", it would seem that Singaporean youth are more likely to "be a force for the retention of the authoritarian status quo".[98]

CONCLUSION

From as early as 1972, the government of Singapore framed itself as a global city. In 1977, it articulated its global vision as public policy. Singapore's smallness propelled it, in Thomas Bellow's view, to engage globally from the 1960s.[99] It did so with a rhetoric that emphasised youth, youngness and newness. Despite Singapore's colonial heritage as a trading port and its history of international trading, globalisation has been constructed as synonymous with the new, young nation of Independent Singapore. That is, themes of newness and youth are linked to Singapore's globalised economy. Both have become key components of Singapore's nationalist rhetoric.

In a typically adaptive style, the PAP turned the potential threat of globalisation to the nation-state into a source of nationalism. However, it is one that requires constant renegotiation and responsiveness.[100] The flows of migration, in the form of temporary foreign workers, foreign talent, and permanent residents, when coupled with a high-tech urban environment, do reveal Singapore to be a global city. The movement of young "cosmopolitan" Singaporeans, for study and work, while being an integral part of the global city phenomena, also calls into question ideas of belonging and citizenship.[101] The desire of the state to keep young Singaporeans connected to the nation necessitates the continuation of the rhetoric of fragility.

The majority of Singaporeans were born after Independence, revealing the established nature of Singapore rather than its newness. While Singapore is not alone in stressing the role that young people will play in the future nation, the emphasis on a young nation makes the connection more obvious. However, the government's attitude towards Singapore's youth is contradictory. On the one hand, youth are represented as the potential of the future nation, while on the other, they are constructed as a threat to the

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[98] Craig, A. L. 1998. *Dance of life: Popular music and politics in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

[99] Thomas, B. 1995. Globalisation and regionalisation in Singapore: A public policy perspective. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 3*(2), 50.

[100] Selvaraj, V. 2007. *Responding to globalization: Nation, culture and identity in Singapore.* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

[101] Elaine, L. H. 2006. Negotiating belonging and perceptions of citizenship in a transnational world: Singapore, a cosmopolis? *Social and Cultural Geography, 7*(3), 397.

nation. Considerable attention is given to regulating and disciplining young Singaporeans so that they work towards national goals and not contrary goals. The significant role of young Singaporeans as consumers contributes to a rhetoric that emphasises the PAP's role in guiding the nation into the future. In consuming and competing, young Singaporeans are simultaneously doing what they "want" and what the PAP has constructed as necessary. An awareness of the Singapore narrative is further inculcated in them, which reinforces the legitimacy of the PAP. The link between competitiveness, conformity and consumerism is made clear in a poem by Alfran Sa'at:

> When I awoke I was twenty, being asked
> If I had a happy childhood. Yes, the one
> We all have: filled to the brim
> With the love of absent things.[102]

Liberal Western observers tend to think a well-educated, economically comfortable, and technologically savvy population of young people will be inevitably drawn towards democratic values and individual freedom. The example of Singapore suggests that these commentators are incorrect.

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[102] Alfran, S. 2001. Autobiography: *A history of amnesia*. Singapore: Ethos Books.