

1-1-1993

## Values, nation building and control: The Singapore mass media in the next lap

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**VALUES, NATION BUILDING AND CONTROL: THE SINGAPORE MASS  
MEDIA IN THE NEXT LAP**

**By**

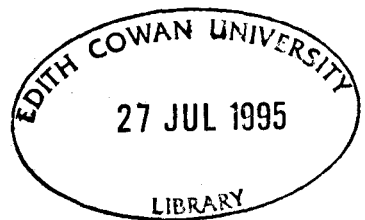
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University).**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of**

**Master of Arts**

**at the School of Language, Literature and Media Studies,  
Edith Cowan University.**

**Date of Submission: December 1993**



## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

### Abstract

1990 marked a significant change in the political history of Singapore - it was the year Mr. Lee Kuan Yew handed over his role as Singapore's leader to Mr. Goh Chok Tong. Termed 'The Next Lap', this new period of Singapore's history was heralded in as a period of change and new directions for Singapore and Singaporeans.

This thesis explores the introduction of the Next Lap, the promises of positive changes and the potential effect this new era may have on the Singapore Government's intimate relationship with and control of the media as a Nation Building apparatus. It looks at the Government's continued desire to control the media and struggle to re-negotiate its position due to the development of new media technologies, such as satellite television, which have the ability to elude direct control over its broadcasting capacity.

The mass media in Singapore have always been strictly controlled through the practice of censorship, strict broadcasting guidelines (and severe penalties for those who do not abide by these guidelines) as well as self-censorship. Through strict control of the mass media, the Government has been able to use it to promote desirable values which have been identified as crucial to the process of Nation Building. These values include putting the nation before community and the community before self, the

importance of the family as the basic unit of society and racial and religious harmony. However, recently there have been signs that the Singapore Government has realised the need to make some changes to their broadcasting policies. The change coincided with the transfer of leadership from the former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, to the current Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong. When he came into office, Prime Minister Goh promised that there would be more openness. This thesis examines how the policy of 'openness' applies to the mass media and the possible consequences of the changes implicit in the new policy on the mass media.

Results of the change in political climate are reflected in the recent introduction of three pay television channels in Singapore and a review of the censorship laws. To many Singaporeans, this is a welcome sign, an opportunity for more choice. To the Government, it involves an important question: To what degree should they relax control over the media and bow to the demands of the public for more freedom and choice.


The relationship between the Next Lap and the mass media will be examined through the application of Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of 'invented traditions', Bhabha's (1990a) discussions on the difficulties of locating a nation's cultural identity and Foucault's (1979) analysis on the art of government. By applying these theories, I will show

that the Next Lap is an ongoing process of Singapore political and social construction.

With the apparent change in the political climate in Singapore, it is timely to explore the relationship between the Government and the mass media after 25 years of independence. By looking at the important social and political variables, I will show that the relaxation of mass media in the Next Lap represents a continuation of the Singaporean government's desire to control the media for Nation Building activities.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature.....  
Date.....21/1/94.....



## Preface

As a media student who has been brought up in Singapore, my interest in the Singapore mass media has led me to take on the challenge of writing this thesis.

In writing this thesis, I have discovered that my upbringing in Singapore has resulted in my struggle to question and analyse the political and social aspects of Singapore society. Like most young Singaporeans, I have been accustomed to receiving the constructed images and have taken them to be the norm, not to be deconstructed or questioned. I grew up reciting the national pledge almost every school day, singing the national anthem and participating in Nation Building activities without fully understanding or thinking about the significance of it all.

Writing this thesis has enabled me to understand Singapore society in greater depth and has led me to appreciate the complexity of the mechanisms which have been put in place. I hope that my experiences as a person who grew up in Singapore and have spent the last 5 years in Australia will present a different analysis of the Singapore mass media in the Next Lap.

I am grateful to a number of people who have been instrumental in the writing of this thesis. Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Brian Shoesmith, for all his invaluable guidance, patience and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. David

Birch for making available to me a copy of his monograph, Singapore Media: Communication Strategies and Practices, prior to its publication. My appreciation also to Eva Wong and Janice Yeo for providing me with important research information, Tanya Knott for proof-reading and commenting on this thesis, the Doncons for the use of their computer and to Andrew Woods for his continual support and comments on the thesis in the various stages of its development. Lastly, I would especially like to extend my gratitude to my parents whose encouragement has contributed greatly to the completion of this thesis.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the relationship between the mass media and Nation Building in Singapore, especially in the Next Lap. Singapore's Next Lap began in 1990, when Mr. Goh Chok Tong was inaugurated as the new Prime Minister. No longer under the leadership of former Prime Minister (now Senior Minister) Lee Kuan Yew, who had ruled Singapore since self government in 1959, Singaporeans were told to anticipate the announced promises for a more open society.

Since the Next Lap is to mark a difference in the political and social spheres, this thesis will explore the effects of political and social changes implemented in the Next Lap on Nation Building in the mass media. Since there has always been a strong connection between Nation Building, the mass media and the Government in Singapore, it is appropriate with the change in political outlook since the installation of Goh Chok Tong as the new Prime Minister to re-examine this relationship in this period of the Next Lap.

As a country, Singapore's identity has been invented and reinvented on many occasions. Each invention or reinvention gave Singapore a new identity and purpose, based on some form of continuity with the historical past (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1). These inventions of nation - statehood coincides with the major stages of Singapore's relatively brief history.

The past is often used to negate the present. A good example of this is the emphasis the Singapore government places on the need for hard work and unity to avoid the poverty or racial crises that Singapore had experienced in the past. The use of the past (invented or otherwise) presents " 'necessary illusions' for social management by stressing the reality of failure or a crisis" (Birch, 1993, p. 73). 'Necessary illusions' can hence be seen as an extension of Anderson's (1991) discussion on the constructed nature of a community. Images of a united community are often used to install a feeling of belonging to the community (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). In the same way, the 'necessary illusions' continuously used by the Singapore government intend to keep the nation working together because all Singaporeans are part of a greater community which needs their support to remain successful.

For the last three decades or so, the mass media have been an active agent in establishing the various stages of Singapore's "invention" as a nation. The mass media have been utilised successfully by the Singapore government to relay each new Singapore identity (and its relation to the past) to the population in order to enlist their support for the new direction that their country is taking.

In 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles discovered the island of Temasek and renamed it Singapore, the country of Singapore was first invented. This newly discovered island became part of the British empire and remained so until 1959. The

achievement of self government by the People's Action Party (PAP) in 1959 under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew is another historical event. Although Singapore was still part of the Malayan archipelago, it was no longer part of the colonial government. It was at this time that Singapore was reinvented as a state independent from its colonial past. The Nation Building process was initiated to emphasis the fact that the future of Singapore now lay in the hands of Singaporeans and no longer influenced by their former colonial masters. The next process of reinvention occurred when Singapore gained its independence from Malaysia in 1965. Singapore than became a completely independent state.

The term 'The Next Lap' is a carefully chosen one which carries a powerful imagery. The previous lap was run successfully under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew and now Goh Chok Tong has the task of keeping Singapore ahead in this important race of economic survival. This image portrays a Singapore which is always in a race against other nations (Birch, 1992a, p. 26) and to keep ahead and reap the benefits of success, Singaporeans have to work hard. Singapore has become an affluent country, very dependent on economic success. The Government has always set the country's economic, political and social agenda and make no secret of the fact that Singapore's current success has been intricately linked to the Government's foresight. By reminding Singaporeans of the danger of losing their current standard of living, the Government is indirectly re-establishing the people's reliance on the Government and

Government policies for an economically (and therefore socially) better life.

The Singapore government's promise of change coincides with the handing over of leadership in the Next Lap. It seems that the Government saw it appropriate for the change to be identified with the new Prime Minister. After all, Lee's rule had been characterised by the strict control of Singapore society for economic survival. To have introduced a change during Lee's leadership would be met by Singaporeans with much scepticism. Appropriate as it may seem, the promise of change appears to be more of a change on the surface rather than any thing more substantial.

However, in promising a more open Government, Goh is now faced with the important question of how much control the Government should have over the mass media and to what extent should they bow to the demands of the public for more freedom and choice. An increasingly high standard of living has translated "into demand for foreign travel, a greater degree of political freedom and participation in the public sphere" (Clammer, 1993b, p. 34) which the Singapore government is trying to accommodate in the Next Lap. The PAP knows that it has to respond to at least some of the demands because if they did not, there is the danger that other political groups might do so (Cotton, 1993, p. 5).

Although the mass media in Singapore have been strictly controlled in the past, changes have been made as a result

of the Government's promise for more openness. The mass media in Singapore have been used by the Government as the site for the promotion of desirable values which have been identified by the Singapore government as crucial to the process of Nation Building. These values include putting the nation before the community and the community before oneself. The interest of individuals and communities (for example the Chinese or Malay communities) may have to be set aside if they do not contribute to National interest as a whole. Each ethnic community is encouraged to promote their traditions but to preserve racial unity, too strong an identification with one's ethnic roots is seen as detrimental to Singapore's racial unity. Singaporeans are encouraged, first and foremost, to see themselves as Singaporeans rather than Malays or Indians.

However, these recent changes indicate that the Singapore government has realised the need to make some modifications to their broadcasting policies. This realisation comes at a time when the presence of satellite television is rapidly expanding in the region as well as the need to re-access the perceived loss of support from the educated Singaporeans who appear to be yearning for a more open society.

One of the changes to the mass media which has been introduced is a new film classification system which allows films to be screened with less censorship. The other, and perhaps more important change, is the introduction of pay television into Singapore. The television broadcasting



industry in Singapore prior to the Next Lap has always been state-owned. This was to ensure that the mass media could be controlled and fully used for Nation Building purposes. However, with the threat of competition in the form of satellite television reaching Singapore in the future, the Singapore government has decided that it is time to privatise the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) (which runs most of Singapore's radio stations and all of Singapore's three terrestrial television channels) to make it more competitive. By privatising SBC, the Singapore government is trying to make programs more market / commercial orientated and therefore more appealing to local viewers. Indirectly, it is also an indication of the government's willingness to relinquish, to some extent, its strong hold on the mass media in Singapore.

- 4 Currently, Singapore households (with the exception of banks and financial institutions) are unable to receive satellite television programs because the ownership of satellite dishes is illegal. In the future, the Government realises that it will be difficult to enforce the ban on satellite dishes because of two main factors. Firstly, as satellite dishes become smaller and more difficult to detect, the Government will not be able to successfully implement the law. Secondly, while the rest of Asia is gradually allowing their people access to satellite television, Singaporeans will be questioning the Government's policies and demanding the same access. The privatisation of the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) and the introduction of Singapore Cable Vision's

(SCV) pay television channels are the Singapore government's attempts to make the local media industry more competitive and hopefully be able to compete with the eventual flood of satellite television programs. However, Singapore does not have an established local film industry and locally produced Chinese television programs have only recently been exported overseas. It seems unlikely that Singapore will be able to be very competitive in the face of competition from satellite television unless they rely heavily on imported programs.

In order to effectively explore the relationship between the mass media and Nation Building in Singapore, this thesis will look at how the mass media have always been used as an important tool in the development / invention of the nation. At the time of Singapore's independence, the Singapore government realised that for such a small and racially diverse country to succeed, certain attitudes or values had to be inculcated in the people. Values such as working hard for the benefit of the society have been stressed to Singaporeans over the years. Singaporeans were also made aware of their national identity - that of being Singapore citizens. The mass media are perceived by the Singapore government as possessing the ability to influence the minds of people and can therefore affect their attitudes and way of life. Hence, the Government saw the need to use the media in a positive way, to cultivate what they felt were the right attitudes:

Lee and his colleagues recognise that human beings rely on the media to shape the images and perceptions of a world that is outside their direct experience but that bears in upon them more and more. The media can support or destroy national identity. It would therefore be gross dereliction of duty to allow the communists or fellow-travellers to work the system in order to overthrow it. Equally, pedlars of any deeply held chauvinism or hucksters of the permissive society must not be tolerated. The media should present wholesome and truthful pictures of national life, based on the accepted values and on sensitive and objective feedback about public opinion (Minchin, 1990, p. 231-232).

The Singapore government sees it important, even in the openness of the Next Lap, to still maintain some form of control over the mass media in Singapore. The mass media remains the main channel of communication between the Government and the people. In the past, this communication was basically top-down and people only found out about Government policies through the mass media after they had been decided by the Government. However, with the openness of the Next Lap comes the implementation of more channels for people participation. While most of these channels are Government organised bodies such as the Government Parliamentary Committee, the television program, Feedback, offers an opportunity for Singaporeans to voice their concerns through the mass media (Birch, 1992a, p. 21).

Despite these channels, Singaporeans' lack of willingness to express their point of view will be discussed later in this thesis.

To better comprehend the relationship between the mass media and Nation Building in Singapore, it is important to have an understanding of what Nation Building is and its significance. Chapter 2 sets the scene through an analysis of Nation Building in Singapore and how the mass media have been utilised as an ideological tool of the Government to convey the Government's Nation Building policies to the people.

The process of Nation Building in Singapore can be described as the Singapore government's attempt at constructing or inventing / reinventing a nation. This was seen as necessary to unite the multi-racial population of Singapore and to give them an identity and reason to work towards the progress of the nation. In discussing the issue of Nation Building, various accounts of constructions of a nation will be examined. Benedict Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community' (1991) and Eric Hobsbawm's "The invention of Tradition" (1983), provide a useful framework for this analysis. These two authors argue that nations are not natural occurrences but are carefully constructed or invented to serve a government's purpose. This is relevant to the Singapore context because in constructing a common identity and heritage for Singaporeans, the Singapore government is effectively inventing / reinventing or constructing a nation where one had not existed before.

Homi K. Bhabha's (1990b) work on the nation as a form of narration is also employed in this analysis. The objective of using Bhabha's theory is to go beyond the restrictive concept of the nation as an ideological state apparatus (1990b, p. 3). It is important to look at how authority within a nation is constructed and what are the vehicles used to execute it. In Singapore, the media are one of the many possible state apparatuses in the Nation Building process.

The Next Lap is an important part of Nation Building because it reinforces national identity by reminding Singaporeans of their responsibility to the nation. Chapter 3 examines the role of the mass media and their relationship to Nation Building in the Next Lap. This chapter looks at the promises made by the new Government, the changes introduced and the effects these changes have on the mass media. It also looks at how the Next Lap, as part of the Nation Building process, is portrayed in the mass media.

Foucault's theory on the art of government (1979) is used in chapter 3 to analyse the aspirations of the Singapore government in the Next Lap. According to Foucault (1979), the art of government is an extension of "oeconomy" (p. 10). "Oeconomy" is in situation in which the father as the head of the family, is ultimately responsible for his family. It is in the interest of the father to be in control or watchful of the family members. The model is

relevant to Singapore because, as new Prime Minister of Singapore and the leader of the Next Lap, Goh urges the people to support him as the head of state, or as a father, and allow him to set the agenda for the survival of the family.

Although Lee is often thought of as the 'father' of the 'family' which is Singapore, Goh needs to project himself as the next head of the family not only to be accepted by the citizens of Singapore, but also to be respected and therefore more or less unquestioningly obeyed.

This chapter also explores how the Singapore government consolidates its rule over its people by rallying the support of the mass media. A compliant mass media has, to a large extent, resulted in a compliant population.

In the construction of a national identity and heritage, the Singapore government has identified five core values as Singapore's nation values. Chapter 4 discusses the role of these national values which are considered by the Singapore government as the bedrock of Singapore's society and are intended to preserve what the Government defines as Singapore's traditional Asian values from the increasing influence of decadent Western values. The Singapore government seems to be convinced by "a sort of Gresham's law of culture which argues that good values will be driven out by bad values, and that the media is the principle agent for this movement" (Birch, 1992a, p. 19). It also shows that the Government holds the opinion that 'cause and

effect' make up the structured underlying theory of media consumption. This is the reason why the Government genuinely fears that Singaporean's lack of Asian (good) values will result in the embracing of Western (bad) values.

The introduction of the five core values is also an attempt by the Government to maintain a national identity based on an Asian heritage. Using Bhabha's theory, the problems of location (1990a), Chapter 4 discusses the problems of locating Singapore's core values as being inherently Asian. Bhabha's theory reveals the fact that there is no such thing as pure cultural values. All cultures are effected to some degree or other by external cultures and are therefore hybrids. This means that it is inaccurate for the Singapore government to label Singapore's core values Asian and create the binary where Asian is equated with being good and Western with bad.

One of the more significant changes made in the Singapore mass media in the Next Lap is the introduction of pay television to Singapore. Pay television in Singapore has evoked different responses from Singaporeans. While some Singaporeans welcome the opportunity for more choice, others are concerned about the harmful effects of watching too much television. The political and social dimensions of the debate on pay television in Singapore will be explored in Chapter 5.

The main issue concerning the Singapore government regarding the increasing presence of satellite television in the region is that of control. Chapter 5 looks at how the expansion of satellite television in the Asian region is threatening the Singapore government's current control over the nation's media and therefore its control over the 'oeconomy'. Singapore is keen to participate in the advent of satellite television and the possibilities of broadcasting to other countries in the region but when it comes to foreign signals beaming into Singapore, they respond with great concern.

To lose control over the mass media, or the ability to control what the people are exposed to through the mass media, would mean the loss of the Singapore government's main channel of the communication of Nation Building policies to the people. The Government also fears that a loss of control will lead to the increasing presence of foreign programs in the country eroding the nation's core values. At the same time it would also demonstrate a loss of control of the 'oeconomy' and thus, the right to rule. The mass media have always been used by the PAP to control the state of affairs in the nation and to loss control over the mass media could critically reduce the PAP's ability to reach out to the nation.

In the analysis of the issue of control and satellite television, Foucault's theory on Governmentality (1979) will again be used. Foucault feels that the art of good government involves the ability to have sovereignty or



control over the subjects (p. 5). It is with this control that the government will be able to set laws which the people are expected to obey (p. 12). Hence, a government with no control is an ineffective one. The Singapore government realises the need to retain some form of control over the mass media and this chapter looks at the dilemma facing the Singapore government in their decisions regarding satellite technology.

Satellite technology also poses another problem to the governments of Asian nations like Singapore. Not only are the governments unable to control the satellite signals beamed into their territory, it also begs the question of spatial location which is an extension of Bhabha's (1990a) theory of location (p. 64). While Bhabha argues that cultural boundaries cannot be set up because cultural purity does not exist due to external influences, satellite television has rendered geographic definitions of boundaries useless because it can transgress them. As these spatial boundaries are easy to cross, the definition of what constitutes a nation needs to be re-considered. Geographically, a government has sovereignty over its territory but control of the area above the territory is gradually diminishing.

The introduction of pay television was seen as a safe alternative to satellite television because it allows some form of control. As in the case of the privatisation of SBC, the private pay television operators in Singapore are still subjected to a certain amount of government influence

over programming policies. Singapore's pay television channels are provided by a company situated in Singapore where all material is subjected to censorship and has to comply with Singapore's censorship laws before they are screened. Satellite television, on the other hand, is direct and live, making it impossible to be censored before reaching the viewers.

While pay television is a safer option for the Singapore government than satellite television, it does raise questions about the Government's Nation Building policies. Pay television channels carry some or no advertising space which means that there will be limited possibilities for the Singapore government to promote national policies through these channels. Although SBC will be privatised, there is no doubt that it will still be an active communication channel for the Government's Nation Building policies.

The issue of control of the mass media is linked to the Government's ability to ensure that materials circulated in the country have been censored. The censorship system implemented over the years in Singapore has been put in place by the Government to protect the 'invented' national values and therefore Singapore society from the harmful effects of undesirable materials. Chapter 6 covers this area of censorship using Hobsbawm's discussions on the invention of tradition (1983, p. 1-14). According to Hobsbawm, values and rules established to dictate correct behaviour are invented and passed on as traditional to give

a nation a sense of history and national heritage. It is in fact a necessary step in the establishment of a nation because it provides a form of cohesion within a community. It is the desire to establish a nation that led to the 'reinvention' of Singapore and the start of the Nation Building process in 1959. Censorship has been used since then by the Singapore government as a way of preserving Singapore values, especially the identified core values, and in so doing the Government is therefore preserving the unity of the nation. Chapter 6 looks at how a carefully constructed censorship system is used by the Singapore government to carry out the task of the preserver of Singapore society.

Singapore's censorship laws are based on a simplified causal theory of media effects. The Singapore government fears that undesirable materials, perceived as detrimental to Singapore's social and political survival, will result in socially not 'acceptable' behaviour among Singaporeans, especially the young. Although the censorship system has undergone considerable change recently, it is still influenced by the causal theory of effects. Excessive sex and violence are still not permitted in the mass media because they are perceived to be promoting permissive and violent behaviour. Materials which may incite religious and racial unrest continues to be banned to prevent the chance of social disharmony.

This thesis will also show that in assuming a simple and unproblematic cause and effect theory, the Singapore

government is assuming that the audience is passive. It is a theory deformed by the insensitivity of bureaucracy that does not allow room for multiple readings of signs / signals. However, images used in the mass media to convey the Nation Building messages, such as images promoting a harmonious multicultural Singapore, are not intended for multiple meanings. Singaporeans are expected to see such images as a reminder of a united, tolerant, multi-racial community; as universal. They are not expected to question the constructed nature of the image or the possible existence of racial discrimination in the nation. By denying the possibilities of a multiplicity of readings, the Singapore government is effectively consolidating its point of view through the elimination of alternative readings.

The conclusion of this thesis will reveal that despite promises of change, the changes to the mass media are actually minimal and superficial. The social and political mechanisms at work remain largely the same and the Government appears to be reluctant to change them. Although the people are more involved in the discussions on national issues, decisions are still made by the centralised Government. This reluctance to loosen the reins too much indicates the difficulties the Singapore government has in facing their decision to open up the mass media. At the same time, the Government is aware that unless things change, they might well lose the support of the people who anticipate the need for the transition. Therefore, in order for the Government to retain control,

some compromises have to be made in order to maintain the right to rule. In Bhabha's opinion, the best way to deal with the challenges of developing a nation is to recognise the different levels of complexities and to respect them instead of fighting or denying them, power does not institute itself in a binary but around the notion of ambivalence (1990a, p. 77).

The appearance that the Singapore government is willing to loosen the reins is illusory and perhaps another 'necessary illusion' to retain control over the nation. Analysis shows that the willingness has not translated successfully into action. However, the exercise of the Next Lap has been successful when seen in the context of providing the Government with the means to still maintain substantial control over Singapore's social and political future.

## Chapter 2

### Setting the Scene

#### **Mass Media and Nation Building**

In order to understand how Nation Building began in Singapore, it is necessary to consider the history of the country. Originally an island inhabited by fishing villagers, Singapore is one of the smallest and youngest nations in Asia. This equatorial island, with a current population of 2.7 million, gained its independence from British rule in 1959 and subsequently broke away from the Malaysian Federation in 1965.

Today, Singapore has become one of the most successful countries in Asia economically. In just over twenty-five years, it has managed to achieve the second highest standard of living in Asia (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 57). However, at the time of Singapore's independence, the future of the island state was far from secure. Singapore had few natural resources and very high unemployment. Its community was an "agglomeration of ethnically and culturally diverse settlers without a tradition and history of its own" (Heidt, 1987, p. 137 - 138). This left Singapore with no common national or social identity. The People's Action Party (PAP), under the leadership of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, came to power at this time and they realised the task of building a united and prosperous nation would be difficult.

Nation Building was the result of the PAP's decision to implement policies to give a sense of belonging and to evoke loyalty for the Party from a socially fragmented country. In this sense, the concept of Nation Building is similar to the concept of nationalism defined by Plamenatz (1973) as:

the desire to preserve or enhance a peoples' national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened, or the desire to transform or even create it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking (p. 23 - 24).

According to Michael Leifer (1972):

building a nation has become a commonplace if none too meaningful expression. As a piece of prescription for the decolonized world it refers to the creation by government of a cohesive political community characterized by an abiding sense of identity and common consciousness (p. 1).

It was necessary for the Singapore government to promote a common identity as it was the only way to unite the different races and to ensure they would live together without any conflict. The multi-racial population of Singapore consists of four basic ethnic groups; a Chinese majority followed by the Malays, Indians and people of other ethnic groups such as Eurasians (Statistics as of

June 1991 - Chinese 77%, Malays 14%, Indians 7% and other ethnic groups 1%). When Singapore became an independent state, the people from the various racial groups were migrants from other countries such as China and India. Although each ethnic group in Singapore maintains its own culture and traditions, the national Government felt that this had to be supplemented with a common heritage and a common goal.

Today, Singapore's population is still made up of a Chinese majority. In politics, although all racial groups are represented, there is a Chinese majority. However, there have been no open indication that this is a problem that needs to be addressed as the Government makes it a point to consider the needs of the different communities.

The question of a 'shared identity' was crucial to the Singapore government as it not only served to unite the people, but allowed the government to draw on the sentiments of the importance of being Singaporean to evoke loyalty to the Government. The Government embarked on the process of establishing an agenda whereby people could share a common national identity - that of being 'Singaporeans' no matter what their ethnic origins were. Underlining this aim was the desire to create a national identity (being Singaporeans) while encouraging the preservation of each ethnic group's (Chinese, Malay, Indian or others) cultural traditions. By encouraging the maintenance of the diverse cultural heritage of the people, there was no need to create a common cultural identity.



Singapore's cultural identity was based on its multi-racial nature. Hence, national identity and cultural identity in Singapore became two separate but related issues.

Anthony Smith (1991) believes there is a strong relationship between national identity and destiny (Smith, 1991, p. 3). In introducing a shared national identity, the Singapore government was indeed presenting the people with their destiny; that of being Singaporeans and part of a united country with a lot of potential. The migrants in Singapore were encouraged to accept Singapore as their new home and were told that their destiny lay in Singapore. By mapping out their destiny in Singapore, the Government was also ensuring that the people would work relentlessly towards Singapore's progress and prosperity.

Singaporeans are constantly reminded of their destiny. In a Government publication, Singapore: The Next Lap, Singaporeans are told that the success of Singapore lies in the hands of its citizens, the destiny of the country is in their care:

To succeed, this programme (the Next Lap) needs the support of all Singaporeans. The government alone cannot make Singapore prosper, or make schools and universities lively and exciting. Success depends on every Singaporean putting his (sic) best, and building together what none of us can accomplish separately" (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 13).

This statement not only stresses the fact that Singaporeans are responsible for the future of their country, they also need to work together, again drawing on the need for unity in order for the country to progress.

Nation Building also aims to harness the full potential of the people in order to maintain a competitive and successful country. Singapore depends heavily on its people and considers its people to be the country's most valuable resource. The Singapore work force has been the key to Singapore's economic success for many years. In 1991, Singapore workers were voted the best in the Business Environment Risk Information (BERI) labour force ranking exercise (Tan, 1992, p. 221). In fact, it has been the number one work force in the world since 1980.

Since such importance is placed on the people of Singapore, it is therefore not surprising that the Government takes great pains to ensure that the people cultivate the right attitudes for the survival of the country. Of particular concern has been the perceived negative influence of the more liberal values from the West on positive values which are promoted by the Singapore government (which will be discussed in depth in chapter 4). Hence, this cultivation of positive values was considered a vital part of Nation Building.

In 1991, five core values were identified by the Government and set up as a framework of shared values for Singaporeans

to remind them of their national identity and responsibility to the nation. These values are:

- 1 - Nation before community and society before self
- 2 - Family as the basic unit of society
- 3 - Community support and respect for the individual
- 4 - Consensus not conflict
- 5 - Racial and religious harmony

The introduction of these values has several functions. Other than preventing the influence of undesirable 'Western values' and to instil an 'Asian' and acceptable set of values, the Singapore government sees these values as a means to ensure the survival of the country. These core values are considered by the Singapore government to be beneficial to the Singapore society not just economically and socially but politically as well. It is believed that a stable political climate, with no racial tensions and conflict, will lead to economic success as people are more willing to invest in a country with political stability. As a result, society will reap the benefits.

These common values also work towards preserving and enhancing the concept of a group of people with a shared purpose. Leifer (1972, p. 1) identifies the creation of a common consciousness as an intrinsic part of nation building. Anthony Smith (1991) recognises this use of shared values as well:

Nations must have a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland (p. 10).

The link between the nurturing of a common identity and the use of the media is identified by Smith. In his opinion:

The task of encouraging a common public mass culture has been handed over to the agencies of popular socialization notably the public system of education and the mass media (1991, p. 10).

The five core values identified by the Singapore government have always been part of the Government's ideology and have been articulated in the mass media through the promotion of the importance of the family and the community. The act of actually introducing these values to the public as a set of identified national values is to reinforce values the Government feels that Singaporeans have neglected or forgotten.

Most of the Government's Nation Building policies have been introduced to the public in the form of campaigns which are enunciated across the mass media. These campaigns, which were carefully planned and coordinated, are very common. Between the years of 1958 and 1985, there were over seventy campaigns (Minchin, 1990, p. 230). Recent campaigns

include the campaign to encourage Singaporeans to marry and not to delay having children. The government perceived an increase in the number of graduates remaining single which affected population increase. The outcome of this was a series of messages in the mass media showing images of old people regretting their concentration on their careers and neglecting to have a family.

Singaporeans are told to value marriage and parenthood (see figure 1) and to have three children, or more if they can afford it, instead of stopping at two (as was previously encouraged). This is in line with one of the five core values which states that the family is the basic unit of society. Another reason for the need to advertise the importance of the family is the fact that the growing Singapore economy requires a larger number of people in the work force, and currently this is being met by overseas workers who provide labour for both blue and white collar jobs. Singapore is a popular location for workers in the region and their presence has not posed any threat to Singapore.

In the advertisement on family life (figure 1), a picture of a father with his new born child is the main focus. He is seen showing the affections of a proud father. The title "Your family is your future" and the text:

"It's all too easy, when we're working hard to  
build our careers, to forget what life is all  
about. That's why getting married and starting a

**Your family is your future.**



*It's all too easy, when we're working hard to build our careers, to forget what life is really all about.*

*That's why getting married and starting a family is so important. It gives you a direction, a purpose.*

*And most of all, it gives you a future.*

**Figure 1.** Family planning advertisement.

family is so important. It gives you a direction, a purpose. And most of all, it gives you a future"

sums up the idea that to have a family is a natural part of life. Without it, a person's life cannot be totally fulfilled.

The campaign is an example of how the Singapore government assumes power to legislate all aspects of society, not just in the economical and political realms but the social realm as well. Not only are the people guided in what they should achieve economically, they are also expected to abide by the social expectations of the Government. The people are expected to take heed of the messages transmitted by campaigns such as this because they are told it is for their own happiness. The underlying fact that Singapore needs to maintain a certain level of population growth in order to meet the increasing need for people in the work force is not mentioned.

Although it may be important for the Government to encourage Singaporeans to accept the idea of the importance of the family, this advertisement can also be seen as an indication that Singaporeans are becoming too concerned with their own success, a product stemming from the Western concept of individualism and materialism. This is in opposition to the need for Singaporeans to be more family and community orientated.

Other campaigns which have been introduced through the media are the 'Courtesy' campaign and the 'Speak Mandarin' campaign. These campaigns position Singaporeans in a particular relationship to the Government. The Government issues the directions and the Singaporeans are expected to carry them out for the benefit of the nation. For example, the courtesy campaign not only worked towards making Singapore a more pleasant place to live, it also increased Singapore's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

The 'Speak Mandarin' campaign was introduced to encourage the common use of Mandarin among Chinese Singaporeans. The aim of the campaign was to provide a common factor to enable the Chinese of different dialect groups to communicate with each other. The campaign was also aimed at inculcating Chinese and therefore Asian values in Chinese Singaporeans through the promotion of the language and culture.

There has been a revival of this 'Speak Mandarin' campaign since it was first introduced and the latest one introduced a few years ago has changed its focus. It is no longer confined to promoting the use of Mandarin among Chinese Singaporeans but targets English speaking Chinese. In light of the Government's recent concerns about the increasing trend towards 'Westernisation', the purpose of this change in focus can be seen as an attempt by the Singapore government to instil Chinese culture amongst the English speaking Chinese. This move is expected to give the English speaking Chinese a cultural identity so that



they will be less prone to accepting the more liberal 'Western' cultures as their own.

In the Government's Nation Building exercise, images of a united community, 'regardless of race, language or religion' (Singapore's National Pledge) are more than often used in the media, especially television. Photographs used to promote government policies (in the form of campaigns) use the images shown in figures 2 and 3.

The photographs (figures 2 and 3) are from two Singapore government publications, Singapore: The Next Lap (1991) and Singapore 1992 (1992). These books are intended to evoke national sentiments and therefore, the images are used to promote a strong indication that Singapore has succeeded in becoming a racially united nation.

The first photograph is a well composed image of racial harmony. All the three main racial groups are represented (left to right - Malay, Indian and Chinese) in their traditional outfits, joining hands and smiling. It projects an image of happy young Singaporeans standing together regardless of their race. The fact that these girls are young points to a positive future where today's young Singaporeans will work together to bring about a better tomorrow for all Singaporeans to enjoy. It is also a good example of the Singapore government's policy of encouraging people to first and foremost see themselves as Singaporeans rather than their ethnic group.

Figure 3 portrays a group of multi-racial Singaporean workers dressed in uniform singing in harmony, presumably a national song, indicating their dedication to the nation. Again there is a careful blend of the different ethnic groups. Such well composed images reinforces the fact that Singapore has come so far because it has been a united country and has to remain so to continue to progress.

The presence of these images makes It is difficult for any Singaporean to not be exposed to the concepts of Nation Building. In Benedict Anderson's terms, the created nation of Singapore is therefore an imagined community:

"It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6)

Although the nation of Singapore may be an 'imagined' community, the images of a united people have been promoted so often that it is strongly engraved in the minds of the people who appear to have accepted the message. In this respect, the vision of their imagined unity has therefore achieved the purpose of a national identity.

In addition to the use of images, the Singapore government has also introduced national symbols or devices (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 7) such as the national flag, national pledge and national anthem. It is not unusual for school children in



Figure 2. From Singapore: The Next Lap.





①

Figure 3. From Singapore 1992.

Singapore to begin the day with a flag raising ceremony where the national anthem is sung and the national pledge recited. The start and end of television and radio broadcasting are marked by the playing of the nation anthem. Every practice works towards constantly reminding Singaporeans of their constructed national identity.

The ability of the Singapore government to actively promote its Nation Building policies is the result of the support it receives from the various media organisations. The press, radio and television stations see their role as being one of assisting in the promotion of Government policies rather than that of a watchdog keeping the Government in check. This is something which distinguishes the Singapore media from its Western counterparts.

### **The Press**

There are currently eight daily newspapers in Singapore. Of these, The Straits Times, The New Paper and The Business Times are in English and three (Lianhe Wanbao, Lianhe Zaobao and Shin Min Daily News) are in Chinese. There is only one Malay newspaper - Berita Harian and one Tamil newspaper - Tamil Murasa.

In an article on the role of the press in the Next Lap, Leslie Fong (1991a) stressed that the press should not consider itself to be society's watch-dog, neither should it be the tool of any political party but:

there is an important difference between being the tool of a political party, any political party, and taking a position, whether individually or as a paper, to support a party or government that has, by universal acclaim, done wonders for Singapore.

He goes on to say that the two main roles of the press in Singapore are:

- 1- To help to build and maintain a national consensus, amid the clamour for more democracy and debate and
- 2- To help to prevent the erosion or eclipse of those values that underpin Singapore's success.

Leslie Fong's view on the role of the press is, therefore, to promote Nation Building by establishing a common consensus, a shared understanding amongst its readers. He feels that newspapers have a responsibility to help with the progress of the nation because in a society with a high literacy rate, the press plays a major role in shaping the opinions of its readers. In the creation of a national consensus through the newspapers, narratives are used. However, in the construction of a narrative, some things can be left out:

imagine again and again that when a narrative is constructed, something is left out. When an end

is defined, other ends are rejected, and one might not know what those ends are (Spivak, 1990, p. 18).

When a consensus is established, there is the possibility that the 'ending' chosen by the state is the one best suited to the Government's aim of Nation Building and that it has been done by excluding alternative readings of the chosen narrative. By excluding alternative readings of the constructed narrative, the people are consequently left with a common view and become united in thought.

One example of how alternative readings are disregarded can be found in the case of the ban on chewing gum in Singapore. In January 1992, chewing gum was banned for two main reasons (refer to Appendix 1). The Environment Ministry told the press the ban had been enforced because chewing gum litter had disrupted MRT (Mass Rapid Transport) Train operations and created a general nuisance in public places. The article in the press which communicated this ban to the public (Nathan, 1992) said that although there were people who found the ban too drastic, the general consensus was that the ban on chewing gum was a practical solution to an ongoing problem.

The article by Nathan (1992), which gives details on the difficulties faced by Town Councils and the MRT, gives the impression that despite some protest, the ban is practical and should therefore not be questioned or challenged. It is in line with the clean image the Singapore government

wants to promote. However, what it also does is eliminate or reduce opposition to the Government's policies.

### Radio and Television

The role of the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), which runs three television channels in Singapore, and nine out of eleven local radio stations, is mapped out in its 'mission statement'. According to this statement, SBC's mission is to:

- Help foster national unity by promoting awareness of a shared past and consensus as to the goals to be achieved and the challenges to overcome to ensure a lasting legacy for our (Singapore's) children.
- Reflect the diverse heritage of our (Singapore's) society and help nurture the growing Singapore identity.
- Support and explain national policies and goals
- promote Singapore abroad through the broadcast and distribution of SBC productions overseas.

(Quah, 1990, p. 59)

In accordance with this 'mission statement', SBC promotes Government campaigns through advertisements and broadcast national songs such as Stand Up for Singapore and Count on me Singapore during the period leading up to the National Day celebrations which help to nurture the growing Singapore identity.



The three television channels in Singapore are SBC 5, SBC 8 and SBC 12. To preserve the cultural identity of the various ethnic groups, programs are broadcast in the 4 official languages - English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. SBC 5 provides mainly English and some Malay language programs while SBC 8 screens mainly Mandarin and a number of Tamil programs. In 1984, SBC 12 was set up as an arts channel to fulfil a perceived role:

In educating our people to be more alive to the important issues, discoveries and developments around us. It also has the task of improving the cultural taste and the awareness of our people... It is time that the average Singaporean extends his intellectual and cultural horizons beyond immediate material gratification. We must give Singaporeans greater opportunity to be exposed to high quality historical, literary and cultural programs to improve appreciation of the best works of man in music, literature and art. (S. Danabalan in Heidt, 1987, p. 162)

Thus, SBC 12 was set up with the aim to inculcate the appreciation of what is termed 'high culture'. It is also based on the assumption that knowledge of and appreciation of 'high culture' will lead to the making of better, more cultured Singaporeans. In fact Singapore intends to be the arts centre of Asia and has proceeded to build the required facilities. The Government feels there is a need to

complement the quest for material wealth through the arts. This can also be interpreted as another attempt at moulding a Singaporean identity. Singaporeans are not only expected to be career minded, they are also supposed to be 'culturally' aware.

The intentions of SBC's channel 12 are similar to those voiced by Lord Reith (known as the father of the British Broadcasting Corporation) about the role of the media; to inform, educate and entertain the people. Interestingly, SBC 12 programs are not as popular as programs on SBC 5 and SBC 8.

In addition to the three pay television channels, three channels from neighbouring country Malaysia can also be received in Singapore. Two of these channels (RTM 1 and 2) are run by the Malaysian government and the third (TV3) is a private channel.

SBC has enjoyed the near monopoly of television audiences in Singapore since the inception of television in the country. However, this high level of control was challenged a few years ago by a private Malaysian television channel - TV3. TV3 airs popular Cantonese serials from Hong Kong which have not been screened in Singapore because of the 'speak Mandarin campaign'. As mentioned above, the 'speak Mandarin campaign' was introduced to promote Mandarin as a common and unifying language among the different Chinese dialect groups. As a result of this policy, no programs in dialect are allowed,

all Chinese programs have to be in Mandarin. The main concern of the Government is that the Cantonese serials would entice the Singaporean audience away from the SBC channels. In addition to the serials, TV3's video hits appealed to the young in Singapore who do not have much access to them on SBC. A possible reason for the lack of popular music videos in Singapore could be the difficulty faced in editing out excessive sexual and violent images found in most videos.

The television schedule of TV3 is not printed in the official television guides in Singapore because the Government did not want to encourage Singaporeans to watch programs on TV3. The policy restricts Singaporeans' access to a large extent but TV3's limited exposure to the Singaporean audience was the result of a bigger obstacle. This was due mainly to the fact that a special antenna was needed to receive the programs and government housing blocks in Singapore, which accommodate a majority of the population, do not install them. Satellites for household use is currently banned in Singapore so it is not possible for those living in housing blocks or anywhere to by-pass this problem.

A similar, but more difficult, experience was faced by the radio section of SBC in 1988. SBC may have control of the radio signals within Singapore but it cannot control signals coming into the island. The 'Perfect Ten' radio station was introduced as a direct result of the need for a popular music station to compete with an Indonesian radio

station whose signal can be picked up in Singapore. This Indonesian radio station, broadcasting mainly popular western music from a nearby island (Batam), was called 'the amazing FM: Zoo 101.6'.

This was indeed an 'amazing FM' incident because it presented a strong, unexpected challenge to SBC's radio's monopoly. At that time, Singapore did not have a purely popular music station. Radio Zoo became so popular so fast that SBC became concerned about losing advertising revenue and its impact on listeners (Balakrishnan, 1989). 'Perfect Ten' has succeeded in drawing back the listeners from the Batam station with popular music programs and phone-in quizzes, so much so that the setting up of a second Batam station proved not to create the same anxiety in SBC as the first Batam station did.

In all, there are eleven radio stations which are locally owned. Of the nine that are based in SBC, four broadcast in English, two in Malay, two in Mandarin and one in Tamil. The other two (FM 100.3 and Radio Heart) are operated by the National Trades Union Congress which have a close affiliation with the PAP. FM 100.3 is a Mandarin language station and Radio Heart is the only multilingual station in Singapore (Birch, 1992b, p. 75). In addition to these stations, the British Broadcasting World Service is also available in Singapore.

## Changes in the approach to the mass media in Singapore

Former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew's leadership has been characterised by the heavy-handed control of Singapore's society for economic survival. Goh Chok Tong, as the new Prime Minister, has indicated that his government is willing to loosen the reins

Almost all aspects of life were controlled by Lee's government to ensure Singapore's survival. Strict Nation Building policies set the agenda for the progress of the nation. The Singapore government's family planning campaign, launched while Lee was Prime Minister, was designed to set out what social norms best benefited the country. Although families are now told to have more children, in the seventies things were the opposite. In order to control the population explosion, Singaporeans were subjected to a campaign with the slogan "girl or boy, two (children) is enough". In keeping with this policy, the first and second child were given priorities when places at schools were being allocated.

Economic prosperity was the aim of Lee's Government because without it, the Government feared that would be dissatisfaction amongst its people which would lead to political unrest. Lee's policies to achieve this end were often strongly criticised in foreign publications. In turn, these foreign publications were accused by Lee's Government of interfering with domestic policies. The term 'interfering with domestic policies' refers to the act of:

publishing material intended to generate political, ethnic and religious unrest; indulging in slanted, distorted or partisan reporting; or persistently refusing to publish [the] Government's replies to refute misreporting and baseless allegations (Quah, 1990, p. 59)

To exercise some control over reports on Lee's government in foreign publications, the Ministry of Communication and Information was given the power in 1986 to restrict the sale or distribution of foreign publications which engaged in Singapore's domestic politics (Quah, 1990, p. 59).

Papers and journals which crossed Lee's government usually suffered. Time magazine's circulation was drastically reduced in October 1986 after it had refused to publish in full a letter from a Government spokesman. The magazine was accused of engaging in domestic politics. Other magazines such as Asiaweek and The Asian Wall Street Journal had their circulation limited for the same reason (Malik, 1988). In 1986, the Malaysian newspaper - The Star - received a more severe sentence from the Singapore government when it was banned from circulating in Singapore altogether. The move was the direct result of what were regarded as damaging comments made by the paper against the Singapore government regarding the suicide of a minister. Lee also issued a libel suit against the paper (Clad, 1989, p. 136). In recent years however, the restrictions on some publication's circulation have been loosened.

The strained relationship between the Singapore government and the foreign press is examined in James Clad's book Behind The Myth: Business, Money and Power in Southeast Asia (1991, p. 135). Lee did not mince words when he was asked for his comments on the foreign press when he was in Washington in 1988. In his opinion, journalists from the West were:

interested in purveying their set of values. They start off with those premises, particularly the Americans. They come from the most wealthy civilisation. They believe that if we (Asia) follow them, we will become wealthy like them ... now the strange thing is that the Japanese have not followed them and are getting wealthier. And those who follow the Americans are getting poorer. (Lee in Clad, 1989, p. 135 - 136)

Indeed many foreign journalist have criticised the Singapore government, saying that it does not run a democratic country and does not respect the freedom of speech or freedom of the press. Lee feels very strongly that the system works for Singapore and Singapore has the economic success to prove it.

Goh Chok Tong's promise to 'loosen the reins' heralds a new era in Singapore politics. This promise of more openness has left some Singaporeans sceptical. They feel that:

declaring an open political culture, as Goh did, is one thing. Actually achieving it is quite another. There is not an open political culture in Singapore, and not likely to be one for a long time (Birch, 1992a, p. 22).

Goh has only been in office a few years but there already are signs that the atmosphere in Singapore, with regards to the media, is becoming more relaxed. The new government has indicated that journalists will be allowed more freedom but some boundaries will still be set ("More freedom for journalist", 1991) . The government will not permit the press to take a determined stand against anything it considers fundamental to the security of the nation such as the inciting of racial and political unrest. As the boundaries are not clearly marked, journalists will have to rely on their discretion and practise self-censorship. The latest incident of journalists being condemned for lack of discretion involved The Business Times. A leak of what was considered private and confidential information only to be made public after a certain date lead to the trial of those deemed responsible.

The effects of the promise of a more open society has made an impact on the mass media in Singapore in two other areas, which on analysis are related to one another in important ways. These two areas are the introduction of pay television in Singapore (which will be examined in chapter 5) and the introduction of a classification system



for films allowing less censored films to be screened (discussed in chapter 6).

Since the mass media in Singapore, especially television, play such a major role in the nation building process, it is important to examine the impact of the introduction of pay television on the Nation Building process. With pay television providing an alternative to the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation's channels which are used in communicating Nation Building policies, there is the possibility that less people will be attracted to the local station and therefore not be exposed to the Nation Building messages. The increasing presence of satellite television beaming into the region poses another concern to the Singapore government. At the moment they are able to control signals coming into Singapore by banning satellite receiving dishes. However, the Government acknowledges that this will not be as easy to control due to advancing technology and the miniaturisation of receiving dishes (George, 1991a). Aware of these challenges, the Government has made moves to make SBC more competitive by privatising its operations.

The future does hold challenges for the Singapore government, which for so long has had almost total control over the mass media, using it to gain much needed access to the people. As technology changes rapidly, the Government is grappling with the promise for more openness and the need to still have some control over the media in the country for their Nation Building purposes. Even in these

times of relative prosperity, the Government sees the need for Nation Building and unless alternatives to the mass media are found, the Singapore government will continue to devise means to exercise some form of control over the mass media in the country.

### Chapter 3

#### The Next Lap: Promises of Change

The Next Lap heralds a new era in the history of Singapore. It marks the change over in leadership of the Singapore government after twenty-five years from the first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew to the current Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong. The significance of this new period does not lie only in the inauguration of the new Prime Minister, but rather in the indication of a willingness by the new Government to create a more open atmosphere.

Lee's government was known for its strict and often heavy handed ruling over the nation. Although widely criticised as Lee's leadership may have been, it was successful in creating a developed nation while other countries in the region are still struggling to fight unemployment and poverty. However, there is a feeling amongst Singaporeans that now Singapore is politically, socially and economically stable, it is perhaps time to review the old methods of government. What these policies were originally intended for (a united and successful nation) has been achieved and now it is a case of maintaining the status quo. Therefore, it is possible for the new Government to rule with less severity and more openness.

The Singapore government appears to agree with the notion it is time for a change and that it is appropriate the change coincides with the new period in political history. While the stress on science and economics as areas of

importance to the nation are still present, there is a move in the Next Lap to pay more attention to the areas of the arts, sports and the mass media. The Government argues it will allow Singaporeans to take time out from their stressful lifestyle and find time to "smell the roses".

This chapter will examine in particular the significance of Goh's promise for more openness in relation to the mass media. In discussing the effect of the changes on the mass media in Singapore, I will be drawing on Foucault's (1979) theory on governmentality. Foucault argues that the art of government requires the head of state to manage correctly and efficiently the territory and people under his or her command to ensure that the country thrives (p. 10). The aim of a government is also to retain power over his or her sovereignty (p. 13). This chapter will show how Singapore's government system, especially the relationship between the Government and the people articulated through the mass media, is an interesting text-book case of Foucault's concept of governmentality. On analysis, the Next Lap is part of the Singapore government's plan to reinstate its authority as the head of the state and, with the cooperation of the people, to maintain economic prosperity for the nation.

### **Running the Next Lap**

The change in leadership and the introduction of the Next Lap is more than just an indication of a new phase in the

history of Singapore. From the point of Nation Building, the Next Lap is important as it is responsible for reinforcing and possibly increase the national consciousness of Singaporeans. Increasing the national conscience of Singaporeans reminds them of their responsibility to the nation and the need to work towards Singapore's success. In introducing the Next Lap, the Singapore government used the strong Nation Building sentiments to evoke the people's patriotism. It was a time to remind Singaporeans that they should not forget the basics:

stay united, work hard, save, look after each other, be quick to seize opportunities and be vigilant to internal and external threats to our (Singapore's) national security. No one owes us (Singaporeans) a living - we have to earn it ourselves (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 15).

The Next Lap also presents a smooth transition of power from former Prime Minister Lee to new Prime Minister Goh by acquainting the people with Goh as their new leader through the mass media. The creation of a smooth transition represents what Hobsbawm (1983) refers to as the invention of historical continuity in order to use the past to empower / justify the present (p. 7). Lee's handing over of the torch to Goh is a more than a symbol of the change in leadership, it also signifies the transfer of authority. The respect and obedience of the citizens is expected to be

transferred from the former Prime Minister to the new Prime Minister. Creating such a smooth transition does not mean the writing of a new book, which would imply a disjointed history, but rather just another chapter in the continuing history of Singapore.

While the Singapore government and the people of Singapore have successfully started writing a new chapter in the history of the nation, a book outlining the purpose and aspirations of the Next Lap was written. This move, aimed at familiarising Singaporeans with the Next Lap, somewhat contradicts the invented continuity of the smooth historical transition. Instead of implying that the Next Lap is a new chapter in Singapore's history, the publication of this book gives the impression the Next Lap is separate from the previous lap and is a totally new era to look forward. Published by the Government of Singapore, this book was appropriately titled Singapore: The Next Lap (1991). It has been described by the publishers as a book which "represents the hopes of a new generation of Singaporeans and their leaders" (p. 13). The publication is a good example of how the media is appropriated by the government to promote the cause of the new era. In the opening pages of the book, Prime Minister Goh was quoted as saying:

Singapore can do well only if her good sons and daughters are prepared to dedicate themselves to help others.

I shall rally them to serve the country.

For if they do not come forward, what future will we have?

I therefore call on my fellow citizens to join me, to run the next lap together (The Government of Singapore, 1991).

The art of government is described by Foucault (1979) as the extension of "oeconomy" which is "the correct manner of managing individuals, good and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making it thrive" (p. 10). Although this comment is based on Machiavelli's The Prince, it is relevant in the current Singaporean context. In Singapore, the Government has made it a goal to manage the people as a resource to achieve enough wealth for the country to prosper and ensure the country continues to thrive by always planning ahead.

A strong image of the family is used in Goh's statement where he refers to the citizens as the nation's "sons and daughters". As the head of the state, he is the 'father' of the family. In order to be a good father to his people and to make their home (the nation) thrive, Goh calls for their cooperation and support. Failure, therefore, will not be completely the fault of the 'father' but the result of the lack of unity within the family. This family imagery is poignant to Singapore because there is a strong emphasis on the family in Singapore society. This emphasis on the family unit is also one of Singapore's core values and is based on a wider Asian view where the family is seen

to be the basic unit of society, an institution where cultural and moral values should be inculcated. Increasing the level of national consciousness is a way of developing moral and cultural values which will unite the family of Singapore as a whole.

The statement above also calls for the people of Singapore to give the mandate to Goh or to accept that Goh has the mandate to lead them. To give the mandate to Goh is to approve of him as the 'father' of the country. Foucault (1979) argues that throughout the Middle ages and classical Antiquity, one of the major concerns of a prince (or ruler) should be "securing the acceptance and respect of his subjects" (p. 5). In urging Singaporeans to run the Next Lap with him, Goh is making a strong attempt to secure the confidence of the people. By promoting a more open and consultative style of government, Goh hopes to further convince the people of Singapore to endorse him as the leader of the Next Lap.

The Singapore government describes the Next Lap as a program to make Singapore "more prosperous, gracious and interesting over the next 20 to 30 years" (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 13). Using the analogy of running the lap is very fitting as Singapore sees itself as always having to be competitive and to keep ahead in the race for economic prosperity. The general direction of the next lap remains unchanged - to achieve economic and political stability. However, Singaporeans will be able to take some time out of the race (because they have consolidated a



significant lead) to "smell the roses" (Birch, 1992a, p. 28) and hence, lead a more gracious and interesting life.

Goh, as the head of the family, has to manage the family well in order for the conditions of the family to improve. He has also decided that the Next Lap will be a period when Singaporeans will be given more stake in the country. However, if they want to receive their share of the fruits of prosperity, they have to be committed to the country:

We (the Singapore government) will find ways to give Singaporeans a greater stake in this country. Emotively, we must strengthen our national identity and national consciousness. To progress in this uncertain world, we must stand united as one people and one nation. (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 29).

Again the image of a loyalty of the children to the good father is evoked. In Confucian tradition, it is important for children to respect the elders in the society. Drawing on this tradition, the ties of the individual to the family of Singaporeans and therefore Singapore (as the people make up the country) must be strengthened. To stand united as one people and one nation means to put the community before the individual. As one of the core values mentioned in the previous chapter, this view is seen as necessary if Singapore is to remain ahead in the race.

In the construction and promotion of these images of a united country where the obedient citizens work relentlessly towards its success, the mass media are seen as a powerful tool in reinforcing this image to the Singaporeans. The Government has in the past successfully utilised the mass media to make the public aware of Nation Building policies. Messages promoting the benefits of the use of Mandarin or the joys of having children are advertised rather aggressively in the mass media. The media is an integral part of the Singapore government's Nation Building agenda.

Government messages and images of the big family which is Singapore, are displayed prominently as posters, banners, and television / radio advertisements. Lately, reminders of the fifteen-year-old Speak Mandarin campaign are making their presence strongly felt. Besides the usual outlets, Speak Mandarin messages can be found on the pay slips of national service men and letters from Singapore telecom (Wang, 1993).

National campaigns launched by the Singapore government receive the support of the media, especially the press. The Government feels that it is the responsibility of the media to convey the Government's messages to the people. Newspapers back the government's campaigns and national policies by giving local issues plenty of coverage. Local matters, such as new Government policies, are given priority to encourage Singaporeans to included it in their day-to-day conversations (George, 1993b).

Although this relationship between the Government and the mass media is unusual, it is the result of several factors. Firstly, sections of the mass media which have not toed the line in the past have been strictly dealt with either by license withdrawals or the imprisonment of journalists (Birch, 1992a, p. 35). Secondly, it is common for the Government to include a member nominated by the Government to serve on the Board of Directors of all media organisations (Birch, 1992, p. 34) to oversee the operations of the mass media in Singapore. Thirdly, there are people in the mass media who genuinely believe that the role of the mass media is to work with the Government, not against it. Journalists like Leslie Fong agree with the Singapore government's point of view that cooperation between the Government and the mass media is in the best interest of the nation. According to Fong, "Preserving the national consensus must be upper-most in the mind of the press as it seeks to report a Singapore in flux - accurately and with great sensitivity" (Fong, 1991a). All these factors ensure the cooperation of the media in clearly defining and explaining the Government policies regarding the Next Lap to the public.

The main constructed image of the Next Lap in the mass media is that of a loosening of the reins and improving the quality of life for Singaporeans. The pledge of a more relaxed style of government can be read as an acknowledgment by the Government of the fact that the more controlled system under the leadership of Lee was often

unpopular. It can also be understood as an attempt to please and therefore enlist the support of the people by giving them the opportunity to participate in the policy making process. As more and more Singaporeans achieve higher education and affluence, it is no longer possible for the Government to suppress their need to question.

When the Government decided to make a rule against the use of too much Singlish in local television programs, Singaporeans wrote in to the press to voice their concerns on this issue.

Education, especially outside Singapore, has taught Singaporeans to be analytical and critical, something that has led to their discontent with the need to always do what the Government deems good.

Singaporeans who are unhappy with the Singapore social and political situation have left Singapore for greener pastures. This 'brain-drain' has become such an important problem that the Government has considered it in their policies for the Next Lap:

Living in an open society, Singaporeans are free to stay or leave. Singaporeans generally have little difficulty adapting to life in developed countries. But we must minimise this outflow. We have to make Singapore not just a pleasant place to work and live in, but also a home (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 29).

As the 'children' of Singapore become more demanding, the head of the family can either compromise and listen to their needs or suppress their voice even more and risk becoming increasingly unpopular and losing their loyalty. Goh's government undoubtedly wants the family to remain united. Therefore, it has chosen the path of change.

The promise of more grassroots participation has been reflected in the mass media. One channel in which this open communication between government and people from all walks of life is encouraged is Feedback - a weekly program on television (Henson, 1992). This program includes discussions on national issues and dialogue sessions with Government Ministers. The Chairpersons of Feedback are usually Members of Parliament (MP). The reason given for this is the fact that it is easier for a MP to gain access to information especially through Parliamentary sittings, luncheons and meetings. It also means the Government's view will be included, explained and defended if questioned. In 1991, Feedback held 19 dialogues in groups of about 30 on issues such as the National budget. The participants in the discussions are usually experienced in the areas being covered (Henson, 1992).

Despite its name, Feedback has more of a top down approach where the views of those participating will be taken into consideration but in the end, the core values still have priority. Interests of minority groups and individuals will be heard but if they cannot be accommodated in the official agenda, they will be reminded to look at the

larger picture and put the progress of the nation before their personal needs.

The Feedback program allows the Singapore government to achieve two objectives - how to govern others (by exercising power) and how to get the people to accept the government. These two points are described by Foucault (1979) as an integral part of the art of government (p. 5). Therefore, Feedback allows the Singapore government to consolidate their authority.

By addressing the issues that concern Singaporeans through the Feedback television program, the Singapore government is reiterating the Government's official policies and therefore retaining control over the people. Although the people are encouraged to speak up about Government policies, they are reminded in the program of the purpose of the Government policies. Hence, Feedback becomes another media opportunity to explain the Government's position to Singaporeans. By doing this, the Singapore government is hoping that its policies will be accepted and hence, its rule will be accepted as well.

Newspaper forum pages also carry out debates on local issues. The issue of National values and culture proved to be the particular concern of many Singaporeans. Tan Keng Kiat (1991) felt that Singapore's obsession with the issue of culture and a Singapore identity needs rethinking:

Culturally, can we be one people and one nation? Only time can tell for culture evolves with time. It is not possible for (the) government to put all the cultural ingredients into a crucible and with the art of alchemy turn up a homogenous amalgam that is identifiable as a Singapore cultural entity. It can only provide the impetus and be a catalyst. We have begun with the acknowledgment of various cultures in Singapore, let us proceed to acculturate and assimilate. Then only will we have a soul and be able to say, "This is my own, my native land" (p. 23).

Yap Bee Sian (1992) criticises the praising of Asian values such as filial piety. It was correctly pointed out by this reader that Asian values such as women being submissive and obedient to their male counter-parts are far from the desirable image of Asian values painted by the Government as Singapore's national values. Although a mainly 'Asian' society, Singapore has its share of successful women in business as well as political realms.

Western values should not be equated with decadence and Asian values as desirable. Instead, there needs to be a cultivation of 'right' values. Gertrud Rupert-Goh (1992), a Westerner in Singapore, wrote about how insulted she felt by the need to put down Western values to make Asian values look good.

Besides creating outlets for feedback from the people, the Next Lap has been responsible for creating more freedom in the areas of arts such as literature, film and television. With a review of the old censorship laws completed (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 6) Singaporeans flocked to the cinemas to watch films which would have otherwise been censored or banned. The arrival of pay television has been another indication of the attempt to introduce more flexibility and variety in the mass media. Pay television programs are still subjected to in-house censorship but what it signifies is the Singapore government's willingness to distance itself, however slightly, from having total control of the mass media. It is the Prince "securing the acceptance and respect of his subjects" (Foucault, 1979, p. 5) ironically by relinquishing some control over its subjects.

### **Constructing the Next Lap in the Mass Media**

Since the Singapore government recognises the fact that the mass media play an important role in the Nation Building process, it is unlikely that it will relinquish control to the point where programs such as the news and current affairs will denigrate into info-tainment programs. There is also the fear that a loss of control will allow for an influx of foreign programs which the Government sees as capable of eroding the national values and encouraging decadent behaviour. Politically, the Government does not want to allow open criticism of the Government which could lead to political instability. The Singapore government



has always been extremely careful with the mass media and is very likely to be watching over the mass media in the Next Lap just as closely.

In the Next Lap, the Singapore government has decided to develop the arts and the mass media to encourage creativity. However, the Government is careful about how much freedom it is going to allow to encourage this creativity. The Government does not allow the type of creative energy that could upset Singapore society. This means that sensitive issues of racial and religious harmony cannot be ridiculed, even in the arts.

Although Goh's government has plans to develop the areas of arts, sports and the mass media, it is vital that the current comforts enjoyed by Singaporeans are not diminished. A careful balance has to be struck in order for Singapore to stay ahead in the race of nations. The Government wants to appease the people but does not want to do it at the expense of national interest. In this section, some new changes which have been implemented will be examined to see whether the need to maintain the balance over-rides the intention of creating a more open climate.

Obedience to the law (or in this case, Singaporeans abiding by Government's policies), is described by Foucault (1979) as a common good because it benefits the sovereignty (the Singapore Government) (p. 12). By obeying the Government, the people are indicating acceptance of their ruler. Campaigns are also attempts by the Government to exercise

some form of social engineering. Social engineering is often deliberate and part of the government's plan to develop a nation (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 13). It aims to steer the population's social attitudes and behaviour in a direction which will benefit the nation.

In the past, political success for the Singapore government has been the consequence of its ability to maintain a good standard of living for the people. Hence, the link between politics and economics. However, Goh has decided that the Next Lap is an appropriate time to include the arts and sports in the main agenda. Included in this category is the mass media. Recently, a mass communications department at the National University has been established and there are plans to develop a film industry in Singapore. Before, the areas of film and mass communication in general were considered less important than the areas of commerce and science and were left with little Government support.

The Singapore government's decision to develop Singapore's arts and the mass media is part of the ongoing strategy of Nation Building. In developing these areas, the Government is recognising the importance of culture and communication in moulding Singaporeans national identity. Culturally, Singaporeans are told that they are Asians and therefore should cherish Asian, national core values. By increasing cultural activities, which are chosen by the Singapore government as desirable, it will increase Singaporeans' national identity of being Asian and Singaporean. The Government's decision to develop the mass media means a

development of the communication channel between the Government and the people.

Singaporeans are often told through the mass media that the Government has to be careful in planning national policies because all that has been achieved in the past could be lost very quickly if the people are careless and take success for granted. The past is therefore used to write the future (Birch, 1992a, p. 18). However, this past does not hold a lot of significance to many of the younger generation. They have no experience of the hard times faced by the older Singaporeans. This does not stop the Government from drawing on the experiences of the past to instil in the people the importance of hard work:

The past writes the future, therefore, and the main instrument of the writing of that political process in Singapore is a mass media which functions as both an agent of consensus-positioning its audience to acquiesce with government policy - and, increasingly in the last few years, as an agent of cautious change, establishing a climate for the formation of opinions which, in part at least, has tested the system and brought about some policy revisions, but which as a general rule, has reinforced established, i.e. government thinking (Birch, 1992a, p. 18)

The right of reply which the Government demands (to comments made about itself or its policies) provides the Government with the opportunity to explain the reasons behind its political decision to the people. By doing this, the Government hope to position the people to accept the official discourse and come to an agreement with Government policies. This right of reply extends beyond local boundaries. It is also used as means of curbing foreign journalists from meddling in the affairs of the state. While there is a move towards more political freedom within the country, the Government is still intolerant of foreign articles criticising the Singapore government.

The Singapore government recently had a disagreement with an English Journal The Economist. The magazine had failed to print promptly, and occasionally in full, letters from the Singapore government in reply to a number of allegations made in articles about the Singapore government. The penalty handed out to the publishers included the restriction of the journal's circulation in Singapore and a requirement of a S\$200,000 deposit to be placed with the Government ('A Singapore Sage', 1993 and 'Economist runs Singapore Government reply in latest issue', 1993).

By contrast, the local press has maintained a good relationship with the Singapore government over the past few years. The Singapore press does not act as a social watch-dog as is the case in the other democratic countries:

Singapore newspapers do not provoke the same degree of passion and controversy, sound and fury, nor do they engage in tireless probes and investigations, exposes and revelations which have come to typify the role of the media in the West (Tan, 1990, p. 1).

The general consensus between the Government and the press appears to be one of mutual cooperation, working together to build a better Singapore (Fong, 1992b). With the introduction of the Next Lap, the Government has made a pledge to allow journalists more freedom. However, the Government "will still draw the line between what the press can and cannot do" ('More Freedom for journalists but Government will still set the boundaries: Prof Koh', 1991).

George Yeo, Minister for Information and the Arts, claims the reasons for shifting boundaries is to enable the Singapore media to blossom and become more analytical, sophisticated and outward-looking. The shift in boundaries have indeed resulted in journalists, such as The Straits Times journalist Cherian George ('Censorship debate: Don't Sweep politics under the carpet', 1992b and 'Press for more openness on the grounds that you want it', 1993a), becoming more vocal in their constructive criticism of Government policies. Other than setting the parameters for the press, the government controls the newspapers through licences and the allocation of management shares under the Newspaper and

Printing Press Act ('More Freedom for journalists but Government will still set the boundaries: Prof Koh', 1991).

In line with creating a more open environment in the Next Lap is the Government's decision to move towards decentralisation in a number of areas. The Singapore government has recently decided to decentralise power by giving the members of parliament (MP) the authority to dictate what goes on in their area of jurisdiction (their constituency).

Decentralisation is a bold move in a island state where the Government has central control over almost everything (Ibrahim, 1992). Central control is the Singapore government's way of exercising power and providing a form of surveillance. The head of state, like the head of a family, has to be watchful of the household and its goods (Foucault, 1979, p. 10). However, with a more open style of politics in the Next Lap, this form of surveillance needs to be changed from a central one to a decentralised one in order for the Singapore government to retain its sovereignty. It is a move which appears to be in direct response to the recent election where the government did not win by a margin as comfortably as they would have liked. Although the PAP secured more than half of the votes, there was a small but nevertheless worrying drop in the percentage of PAP voters. By having each MP responsible for the running of their constituency, the Government hopes that Singaporeans will become more

responsible voters as their votes will directly effect their living environment.

In relaxing Government control in this political sense, the government is not relinquishing total control. On the contrary, by making the citizens more aware of the benefits of the PAP, the Government's overall motive is still to maintain power, to protect the principality. After all, the aim of any body in power is to establish a relationship with the people that will ensure the continuation of their rule:

The objective of the exercise of power is to reinforce, strengthen and protect this principality which is not meant in its objective sense as the entity constituted by the subject and the territory, but rather in terms of the Prince's relation with what he owns, with the territory he has inherited or acquired and with his subjects (Foucault, 1979, p. 8)

Decentralisation is also taking place in the realm of the mass media. The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) is due to be privatised in 1993. As in the case of political decentralisation, privatisation will not totally remove the Government's control on the mass media. Besides the self-censorship that is practised by those involved in the mass media, the Government will still have close ties with SBC. The new general manager of SBC is Moses Lee Kim Poo, the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary since

1987 (Birch, 1992a, p. 70). In addition to this, a statutory board would be set up to regulate radio and television broadcasting. The duties of the board include maintaining high moral standards and quality of public broadcasting after the privatisation of SBC ('BG Yeo: SBC to be privatise in 2 years time', 1991).

The Government's intentions for SBC's privatisation is to introduce more competition and flexibility in the television industry in Singapore. Privatisation will make broadcasting a more competitive industry, not just locally but internationally as well. The current three television channels will be privatised as two or three separate companies. SBC radio will be initially kept as a whole to form one company ('BG Yeo: SBC to be privatise in 2 years time', 1991).

The privatisation of SBC has raised a number of issues. The main one is whether commercialism will affect the quality of the productions although a statutory board will be in charge of quality control. Important public service programs such as news, current affairs and documentary producers might have their editorial judgement affected by commercial concerns. Instead of providing relevant and intelligent insights into Singapore life that people deserve, producers may end up making "info-tainment" programs (George, 1991d).

Although the Government has made some changes towards more openness in the Next Lap, Singaporeans are still subjected



to the control of almost all aspect of their lives. This is an extension of the governing of the state as a family (oeconomy). Watching over the citizen's wealth and behaviour is a form of surveillance likened to that of a father who carefully watches over his family, household and goods (Foucault, 1979, p. 10). Seen in this context, the Government has a legitimate reason for closely monitoring the citizens, including the mass media, regardless of whether they approve of it or not. Hence, the establishment of quality control boards for SBC after its privatisation. It also shows a reluctance on the part of the Singapore government to allow too much freedom.

In the Next Lap, this method of bringing the Government's message to the people in the form of campaigns has not changed. One such campaign which has been actively promoted in the mass media, and reflects the Government's ability to have command over almost all aspects of life in Singapore, is the Family Planning campaign.

Family planning campaigns have been in place in Singapore since 1966 (Chuo-Ng, 1993). The aim of the various family planning campaigns over the years has been to educate the Singapore population on the importance of marriage and the planning of a small and happy family. These campaigns are based on the Government's population policies. In the sixties and seventies, the trend in Singapore was to have traditionally big families which the Government foresaw would create a problem of over population in the future. Consequently, a policy was developed advocating that

couples have smaller families. This policy was widely promulgated in all aspects of the Singapore mass media.

In the mid 1980s, a decline in the number of new born babies brought about a new population policy. Singaporeans were encouraged to have three children or more if they could afford it. The declining rate of births was seen as potentially problematic since Singapore's growing economy needs a substantial work force. The media were again mobilised to enunciate the change in policy, thus maintaining the close relation between the state and the mass media in Singapore.

Recently, the latest policy regarding families is the offer of financial help to the poorly educated and low income couples if they stop at two children ('Goh offers poor cash to limit birth', 1993). According to Prime Minister Goh, this small families improvement scheme aims to encourage poor families to help themselves by having not more than two children. This new scheme is based on the fact that most children who dropped out of school came from big families where the parents were not well-educated. This policy is another example of how the state acts as manager of the "oeconomy" (Foucault, 1979, p. 10) in the Singapore context.

Education is also considered very important by the Singapore government which feels that Singapore cannot afford to have unskilled labourers. Unskilled Singaporean labourers would have to compete with the growing number of

unskilled labourers from the other parts of Asia. This scheme is not available to families which have disbanded through divorce. This seems to reinforce the Singapore policy that families are an important unit of society but it overlooks that families may break up due to severe incidents, such as wife or child bashing.

Family planning and population policies are an integral part of Nation Building although they are portrayed in the mass media as being beneficial to the individual's long term happiness. These directives are controlled to provide the best results for the progress of the nation and are constantly monitored by the Government.

The Next Lap may be one of more openness but in fundamental ways, Singaporeans procreative lives are still strongly directed by the Government. The latest scheme to curb low-income families from having more than two children can also be seen as reminiscent of Lee's remarks about encouraging the educated to have more children because their children will be more intelligent citizens. Lee's statement was criticised for encouraging the creation of a superior population but he felt that he had the best intentions for Singapore in mind. From the point of governmentality, this exercise of sovereignty is the Government's method of controlling their subjects to lead to a convenient end (Foucault, 1979, p. 10-11). By promising the less educated financial benefits for having less children, Goh is trying to raise the overall education standards of the nation by lowering the number of school dropouts.

The Singapore government's decision to improve the quality of life in Singapore extends beyond material aspects. The effort to stop the 'brain-drain' of educated Singaporeans leaving for greener pastures is a case in point. Singaporeans who are not comfortable with the controlled and fast paced life-style of Singapore are often enticed by the life-styles of other countries such as America and Australia. They find it difficult to accept the unquestionable authority of the Government to dictate all aspects of life and "read different, non-economically driven, values into the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, achievement and so on" (Birch, 1992a, p. 12)

This fear of a 'brain-drain' is compounded by the fact that one in four tertiary educated Singaporeans are educated overseas (America being the most popular country) and have been exposed to the different way of life which many prefer (Ho, 1993). In order to encourage these young and highly educated Singaporeans to return to Singapore, the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) was established to promote communication links between Singapore and overseas Singaporeans so that they would be able to keep up with what is happening in Singapore. Other than assuring them that they have a positive future in Singapore, Singaporeans who have decided to live abroad are inspired to still call Singapore home and maintain their Singapore identity. This is done through an SIF publication, appropriately called Singapore, which is distributed to subscribers of The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition (a weekly summary of

the Singapore newspaper The Straits Times to keep Singaporeans in touch with local news).

### **Allowing the Cultural Desert to Bloom**

Singaporeans have given Goh the mandate to lead them into the Next Lap and Goh's government has given Singapore permission to let the "cultural desert" bloom. However, the Government feels that this should not be done at the expense of the core values of Singapore:

By all means let Singapore's "cultural desert" bloom but let there be beautiful and wholesome bloom, and not too many prickly pears or weeds (Dr. Tay Eng Soon in 'Let cultural desert bloom, but not at the expense of values', 1992)

To ensure that the core values are not eroded in the expression of artistic freedom in the area of arts and the mass media, censorship laws are used. Censorship laws (discussed in chapter 6) have changed with the times as part of the openness of the Next Lap.

The Government's focus on the arts comes at the Next Lap because it is part of a means of improving the quality of life for Singaporeans. Now that they have time to smell the roses, there has to be roses to enjoy. By encouraging artistic freedom, the Singapore government hopes that the arts will flourish and Singapore will be an international

cultural hub where the citizens appreciate culture and the arts:

Now that we have achieved a measure of affluence, we can better address the other dimension of art and sports. We want to be a flourishing hub for culture and the arts, with both local and international participation ... Our objective is to be a cultured and a rugged society (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 16)

Newly found artistic freedom has led to an increase in the number of local English books published and hitting the best sellers list. Bonnie Hicks' "kiss and tell" book Excuse Me, Are You A Model and Gopal Baratham's erotic novel Sayang (Love) are two daring experiments which made it to the top. These books contain accounts of sexual experiences previously banned because they challenged Singapore's strict censorship practices by dealing with matters contrary to the offered ideology. Topics which used to be banned because they were considered taboo are now allowed on the stage as well, although some have been restricted to mature audiences only. The popularity of local comic book series - Mr. Kiasu (Chinese dialect term for a person who does not like to lose out in any way) exceeded all expectations. At the recent Singapore Book Fair, over 24,000 copies were sold ('Number of young Singaporeans hooked on local comics increasing', 1993). This comic book looks at 'Kiasu-ism' which is a special Singaporean trait and makes Singaporeans laugh at

themselves. These books not only exemplified the pool of talent available in Singapore but the public's consumption of their work also signals that this literary freedom is welcomed by readers and writers alike.

The Singapore government is also serious about developing the media industry in Singapore. The Government's media policy is to make the country the media capital of the region. However, this does not mean an easing of censorship laws or allowing greater freedom of speech. What the government intends to do is to bring into Singapore the slice of wealth that media enterprises are generating. So far, HBO (Home Box Office) has opened new premises in Singapore as its Asian base. In 1992, Reuters set up its regional headquarters in Singapore (George, 1993a).

The desire to develop the film industry and reap the profits gained from productions stems from the popularity of films in Singapore and the region. Singaporeans are avid movie goers and as they become more selective, multiplex cinemas will become the norm to cater to their varied and discerning taste. The Singapore Film Festival has become an international event and the Government aims to make it a major cultural event which will eventually include Singapore made films. Singapore does not have an active film industry at present but the Singapore government is attracting foreign film companies to Singapore to become part of the media hub. It is expected that by doing this, there will be work available to

Singaporeans in support areas. These are expected to, in turn, provide locals with the avenues for work and artistic expression (The Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 106).

The reasons for developing the mass media in Singapore appear to be economically driven as well. In encouraging the development of the film industry, the main aim is to benefit the local economy by attracting to Singapore the large amounts of money generated by the industry. The creative side is secondary to the financial benefits. Areas of the media industry which have set up in Singapore, such as HBO, are dealing more with distribution and using Singapore as a base than the development of Singaporeans talent.

This typifies the Singapore government's belief that the nation's survival depends on their ability to harness opportunities and plan ahead. As was the case in the previous lap, economic consideration still plays a very important role in the Next Lap.

#### **Time to Smell the Roses ?**

The cautious changes made by the Government have not brought about very significant differences to Singapore's society. Perhaps the appearance of a more open society is to placate the demands of the people. In reality, the only significant changes that have taken place are in the way these policies are being introduced:



The next lap and the promises of more openness is in many ways a facade to Participatory politics and a more 'open' media, does not mean more open issues and policies - it can often mean that another strategy is being found to maintain the same sort of controls that existed before (Birch, 1992a, p. 63)

Foucault (1979) defines a government's task as "not a matter of imposing laws on men, but rather of disposing things, that is to say to employ tactics rather than laws, and if need be to use the laws themselves as tactics" (p. 13). The Singapore government has indeed used laws as tactics in the case of insisting on a right of reply and having the final right to set boundaries for journalists. These examples are not legislated law but fall into that category by nature of the fact that no exceptions will be made to them. By making them 'law', the Government is putting in place tactics to control what is said about it.

The establishment of Singapore as the media capital of the region is another matter which questions the promise of more openness in the Next Lap and the presence of the roses Singaporeans have been encouraged to take time out to smell. On one hand, the Next Lap is presented as something exciting to look forward to. It is the Government's attempt at encouraging the mass media to develop in the country. However, the fact that economics, in the form of financial benefits, is the underlying factor proves that this push for more openness is not the significant change

it has been made out to be. The general attitude of the Singapore government, that of "oeconomy" (Foucault, 1979, p. 10) where the prince has to carefully look after the land and its wealth, is still based strongly on the economic survival of the nation.

In the area of artistic expression, although the Government has not set definite limitations on how much artistic, creative and political freedom is permitted, the closed culture which has been characteristic of Singapore in the twenty-five years prior to the Next Lap still lingers in the minds of Singaporeans. Self-censorship is still practiced and will continue to hamper the maturation of the Singapore mass media for some time yet.

## Chapter 4

### Defining National Values: Preserving the Cultural Ballast

I have established in the preceding chapters that the mass media are perceived by the Singapore government to be a powerful tool, vital in disseminating Nation Building policies. In this chapter, the issue of the construction of a system of national values (as part of Nation Building) through the mass media will be examined.

The Singapore government's intention in identifying a set of core values to serve as the country's national values is to promote what they deem are 'desirable' values. A White Paper by the Singapore government was produced in 1991 to study the establishment of a value system for Singapore. What is understood by the Government as 'desirable' values are those that are defined as Asian and beneficial to the Nation Building process. As discussed in chapter 2, the national core values are:

- 1 - Nation before community and society before self
- 2 - Family as the basic unit of society
- 3 - Community support and respect for the individual
- 4 - Consensus not conflict
- 5 - Racial and religious harmony

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Although the Singapore government defines the core values as Asian and therefore naturally Singaporean, this chapter will show that these values are constructed and not "natural". Bhabha's (1990a) "problematics of location" will also be employed in this analysis because of Singapore's position (status) as an Asian nation which expresses itself through a Western colonial language. Singapore may be an Asian nation with respect to its geographical location but Bhabha (1990a) argues that the values of a nation are inevitably influenced by external influences and therefore Singapore's national values cannot be defined as purely Asian. Drawing on Bhabha (1990a), I will also show that the contradiction, systematically suppressed in the offered (official) articulation on values, between location and discourse, leads to an 'incommensurability of values' (p. 67) which undermines Singapore's official construction of itself.

In defining Singapore's national values as Asian and desirable, the Singapore government has set up a dichotomy between Asian values and Western values. This chapter examines the equation that assumes Western values to be decadent and Asian values as desirable. Bhabha's (1990a) theory of 'hybridity' (p. 67) will be used to show that Singapore's national values are not inherently Asian but are hybrids.

## The Problem of Location

While locating Singapore's geographical position may be easy, locating Singapore's social and cultural position is a difficult and complicated task. As a country positioned in the Asian region, the national values of Singapore can be expected to be Asian in origin. However, Singapore's significant position in South East Asia has opened the country to influences from other parts of the world which have exposed Singaporeans to cultural values from other regions.

Singapore's location in the Asia Pacific region is a major contribution to the economic success of the country. It lies at the crossroads of South East Asia, where major shipping and transportation routes between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean intersect (Kuo and Chen, 1983, p. 5). This strategic location has not only opened up Singapore to the world, it has also led to the Government's plan to develop the country into an international hub. The Government intends to achieve this by encouraging foreign investors / companies to set up their financial and operating bases for the region in Singapore.

Interestingly, it is also precisely this unique location which provides easy access to the rest of the region and the world is responsible for introducing external influences into Singapore. The Government fears these external influences may not be necessarily beneficial to the country because they are likely to be Western and

therefore not desirable. They are afraid that these foreign values will affect the Asian based cultural positioning of the country.

While the Singapore government is quick to recognise the threat of foreign values, such as individualism, eroding Asian concepts of community before oneself, they are not willing to admit that the years of colonial rule under the British has started an irreversible process. Singapore has been influenced by the presence of the West and has become a hybrid. The "spatial dimension of inherited cultural theories" are questioned by Bhabha (1990a). In his opinion, hybridity is not a celebration of colonialism, it is:

a kind of syncretic, adaptive politics and culture that questioned the imperialist and colonial notion of purity as much as it questions the nationalist notion (p. 64).

Singapore has been open to non-Asian values since colonial times and it is therefore inaccurate to persist with the view that Singapore's values are purely Asian. Singapore's national values are hybrids.

**Western versus Asian Values: Setting up the binary opposition**

To accurately evaluate the differences between Western and Asian values, it is necessary to first define what constitutes Asian and Western values.

There are several interpretations of Asian values. Ho Wing Ming (1976) interprets Asian values as denoting:

not a particular set of attitudes, beliefs and institutions which all Asian people share in common, but rather to refer to the great diversities which characterise Asian values as such, and which in the context of this discussion pose serious difficulties to the task of modernising Asian for social, economical and political development (p. 11).

Ho's definition implies that there is no such thing as a common set of Asian values which are seen as diverse, representing cultures from different parts of Asia. There is also the suggestion that Asian values go beyond attitudes, beliefs and institutions and that the traditional methods of state-craft are capable of hampering the modern social, economic and political growth of a nation. This point of view contradicts the official discourse which recommends Asian values as the pillar of Singapore's growing economy.

In Ho's opinion, 'modernisation' is a Western concept of progress and development while Asia is aligned with the technological backwardness associated with third world



countries. The differences in the way the West and Asia deal with administration is distinguished by Ho as the reason for Asia's slower pace of modernisation. The Western countries, influenced by the legacy of the ancient Greek civilisation, base their governing systems on a rational and empirical system. The Asians, on the other hand, had a system of government which evolved around the whims and fancies of individuals or were based on ancient arts such as the casting of horoscopes (p. 4).

Another example of the disparity between Asia and the West provided by Ho is the lack of consultation between the people's representatives and the people. Western democratic administration involves the practice of consulting the people's representatives and members of communities to help plan policies. This act of approaching the people to find out what their opinions are is not a common practice in Asian countries. Ho also argues that the Asian traditions of state-craft which in the past used to be based on astrologers and soothsayers lack rationality and scientific methods of state planning. According to Ho, they need to be replaced by factual data and relevant knowledge (p. 4).

In order for a nation to free itself administratively from the limitations imposed by traditional values, these negative characteristics have to be addressed. Asian nations need to "reform pernicious attitudes, beliefs and other forms of rigidities and inhibitions so as to facilitate the implementation of programs for national

development" (Ho, 1976, p. 3). Although Ho does not adequately address the success of Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore, it is true that in order to progress, countries like Singapore have adapted the business and administrative infrastructure from the West.

In exploring Ho's explanation of Asian values, there is the need to make a distinction between Asian moral values and Asian administrative values. Although the state-craft and cultural values of a nation are closely related, it may be possible to separate the two concepts. In the case of Singapore, the Government is Westernising or modernising the economic and administrative front of the nation while attempting to preserve Asian cultural values. However, Ho regards cultural values as much a culprit of Asia's backwardness as the administrative values. Ho uses the caste system in India to illustrate this. The caste system hampers development because it prevents class mobility and segregates the community rather than uniting it (p. 13). This supports the Singapore government's argument on the importance of a united country and the need to provide better lives for all Singaporeans, regardless of their race or social class.

According to Foucault (1979), both values and administrative matters have to be controlled by leaders of a states in order for them to retain their sovereignty. To be successful, the government needs to address the questions of how to govern others and how to accept the leader who is to govern (p. 5). The art of governing

others lies in the establishment of a successful administrative system. In order to gain acceptance as a leader, the government needs to put in place positive values which will encourage the people to unite, respect and obey the government. Singapore's national values, which highlight the importance of the nation before oneself, are an example of the Government's use of values to encourage the people to accept Government policies, even if they do not personally approve of them, because they have to put the needs of the nation ahead of their own.

Despite painting a negative relationship between Asian values and modernisation, Ho (1976) acknowledges the fact that modernisation has unfavourable aspects as well. However, these aspects are attributed to materialism, not modernisation itself. Modernisation is perceived as both desirable and necessary, allowing countries to cope with economics. Even though materialism, as a by product of modernisation and development is 'evil', it is a necessary evil because modernisation is the better option than poverty (p. 15). In line with the need to accept the lesser evil of modernisation rather than the greater evil of suffering and poverty, the Singapore government took on an economic policy which saw the rapid development of the Singapore economy.

Ho's sentiments regarding Asian values are contradicted by journalist Cheng Shoong Tat (1992) who feels that Asian values are beneficial to Singapore's society. He does not refer to the obsolete practices of oracle readings and

horoscopes mentioned by Ho but the Asian tradition of placing an emphasis on the community. However, in denying the presence of negative Asian values identified by Ho, Cheng is unfairly criticising Western values for being 'less superior' to Asian values.

In Cheng's opinion, there are distinct contradictions between Western and Asian cultural values and these values are therefore incompatible, "Between the two (Western / American and Confucian tradition), the fundamental philosophical heritage and the consequential assumptions about social organisation and their institutional manifestations cannot be more different" (1992). The West is described by Cheng as chaotic and rights-based where individuals are "endowed with certain rights from birth, including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" ". In contrast, the Confucian way of life establishes "individuals being born, right from the beginning, into and inextricably linked to, a wider context like family, society and nation" (1992).

The Western emphasis on the rights of the individual are seen by Cheng as the downfall of Western values. They promote selfish behaviour because each person then becomes preoccupied with seeking self satisfaction at the expense of the community. Confucian values, on the other hand, hold the belief that everybody belongs to a community and has a responsibility to that community. This is the concept adopted by the Singapore government. They do not deny the rights of individual but believe the community

takes priority over the rights of the individuals. Individuals will always have different preferences so to create a united community, a common goal (serving the community) has to be created.

The Confucian system of philosophy put forward by Lee Kuan Yew and Cheng as a vital part of progress is rejected by Ho who dismisses Confucianism because it "consistently inculcated the precept of unquestioned reverence for the teachings of some hoary ancestors to the point of prohibiting inventiveness and innovation on the part of bright and inquiring minds" (Ho, 1976, p. 7). Although Confucianism can affect creativity and innovation in the sense that it promotes unquestioned reverence, it is a belief which benefits the Singapore government. Confucianism encourages respect for authority, which in the case of Singapore means unquestioned obedience towards the Singapore government.

In Cheng's opinion, the endorsement of a hierarchy is not a set back but rather a vital component of economic growth. Hierarchy is deemed necessary for the Singapore government's Nation Building policies to succeed. The respect for authority enables the Government to implement policies through the mass media smoothly without having to constantly face questions or justify its policies. The people are accustomed to following Government's directions without questioning the wisdom behind it because what is decided is generally presented as the best option for the nation. It furnishes the nation with stability by limiting

dissent. It also consolidates the Government's authority over the people.

Cheng strongly believes there is a dichotomy between Asian and Western values. Unlike Bhabha who believes that nations cannot remain culturally pure (Bhabha, 1990a, p. 64), Cheng believes values are not geographically and socially-blind. They are either Western (bad) or Asian (good). Hybrids do not exist. Cheng insists that social and cultural upbringing affects all individuals who cannot develop their own values system through individual choice. What Cheng misses is the fact that this very process of cultural upbringing in Singapore has already been affected by 'Western' influences, whether they are from the colonial period or modern mass media. Singaporeans cultural upbringing is therefore not purely Asian but are actually part of a hybrid.

Another problem in Cheng's argument is the fact that his differentiation between Western and Asian values is too simplistic. The individual is not always responsible for confusing the boundaries or choosing to develop their values system by individual choice. It is not necessarily a conscious decision. As external influences in Singapore become increasingly prominent, they become familiar and part of a Singaporean's' cultural upbringing:

cultural difference becomes a problem not when you can point to the Hottentot Venus, or to the punk whose hair is six feet up in the air; it

does not have that kind of fixable visibility. It is as the strangeness of the familiar that it becomes more problematic, both politically and conceptually (Bhabha, 1990a, p. 72).

The process of the familiar (traditional Asian cultural values) becoming strange is often seen as the direct result of Western cultural imperialism (Krishna in Heng, 1992). Through the mass media, which is predominantly Western, what is popular then becomes the familiar.

Geraldine Heng does not see the Western cultural invasion as a completely negative influence. Western culture may be responsible for introducing Western cultural values but it is wrong to assume that Singaporeans are merely unconscious recipients of popular culture. Singaporeans are also active agents, "sifting, manipulating and re-deploying popular culture for their own specific purposes" (Heng, 1992). For example, rap music which is a Western form, is used by Singaporean artists. While some rap music pieces are used to promote Government campaigns, other Singaporean musicians such as Dick Lee have cleverly used it to depict themes related to Singapore and often incorporates the use of Singlish (a form of street language spoken in Singapore which is discussed later in this chapter). Rap is a form of popular music that the younger generation of Singaporeans can relate to. Hence, the use of it is perceived to be more affective in reaching out to the younger age group.

The West is usually used as a scapegoat to explain the presence of undesirable cultural values in Singapore, "Western values are frequently blamed for social disorders which are actually inherent in the process of modernization itself" (Clammer, 1985, p. 27). Geraldine Heng feels that it is wrong to only associate undesirable cultural values with the West because Asia is equally responsible for contaminating Singapore's national culture. Violent and erotic films from Hong Kong are as much to blame for the introduction of harmful cultural values. Their depictions of sexual and violent scenes are compatible with those from Hollywood. While some may argue that film industries in countries like Hong Kong are inevitably influenced by Hollywood, triads and gang rivalry have been present in Hong Kong for a long time. Rather than seeing the violence depicted in the films as a result of the need to compete with Western films, it can be understood as reflecting life in that country.

The Singapore government holds the opinion that Singapore needs to preserve its pure Asian heritage because Asian values are more beneficial to Singapore society than Western values (Quah, 1990, p. 1). Former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, strongly believes that Confucian values, such as nation before self and consensus-building, provide the reliable foundation on which the nation must be built for it to prosper and succeed. Asian values are therefore accepted as beneficial to the country by the Singapore government because Asian values are understood to be able to offer the correct attitudes and environment for the



country's success . In this sense, national values are a part of nation building because the government's policies of nation building are aimed at the long term progress of the nation socially and economically, and appropriate national values make nation building possible.

Due to the Singapore government's perception that Asian values are positive, Asian values are promoted as providing the "cultural ballast" (Clammer, 1985, p. 22) of the nation. External Western influences are blamed for 'polluting' this cultural ballast by promoting values such as individualism which challenge and contradict the Asian focus on the community. This notion of "Social Pollution":

was believed to follow upon the invasion of irrelevant ideas from 'the West', carrying with them an outlook inimical to the development of a true 'Asian morality'. The imagery was (and remains) that of the germ theory of disease: the notion of 'social pollution' implies that Singapore is an organism with vulnerable body boundary of which must be protected at all costs (Benjamin, 1976, p. 123).

By pitting Asian values against Western values, a binary opposition is set up. Asian values, such as the importance of the family, are promoted through a range of campaigns in the media as desirable, conducive to the success of the country, as virtuous and as good. On the other hand,

Western values are positioned as undesirable, decadent, polluting and destructive.

This distrust of Western values is strongly exemplified in the Singapore government's reaction to the recent loss of China's bid to host the year 2000 Olympics to Australia. It is interesting to see how this incident quickly turned into a debate about Western values versus Asian values (see fig. 4). Senior Minister Lee saw China's 'failure' as a Western act of over empowerment and denial of Asia ('West wanted to cut China down to size', 1993). Although Australia is considered part of the Asia-Pacific region, choosing Sydney over China was still seen as a triumph of the West over Asia. Han Fook Kwang (1993b) saw this incident as a clash of cultures, the West blamed for not understanding Asia well enough. The human rights issues brought up by the West to criticise China's allegedly appalling human rights record was seen as an insult to Asian values and government. He also felt that because a majority of the delegates were unfamiliar with China, they feared the unknown and decided not to vote for it. The fact that Sydney could have won the bid because it was a better venue with better facilities was not given much consideration. It was all too easy to seize this as an opportunity to indulge in the West versus Asia debate.

In establishing this dichotomy between Asian values and Western values, the two sets of values are presented as incommensurable (Bhabha, 1990a). Western values are also



Figure 4

From The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition  
1993, October 2, P. 15.

regarded as being too different from Asian values and unworthy of comparison with Asian values. However, Bhabha's concept of the colonising discourse of ideology has to be taken into consideration. Bhabha (1990a) suggests that when we look at one culture, we do so by comparing it implicitly with another culture. No matter how we try to separate the two, we cannot avoid the continual association of one culture with another:

The colonising discourse of ideology plays up, plays within, and plays in the elision between the fixity of the subject in a particular culture and the subjects' continual refraction in another culture of values (p. 66)

In Singapore, it is common for discussions on national values found in the local newspapers to use Western values as a yard stick against which Asian values are measured. The use of the term 'Western' in public discourse, "is usually devoid of any historical or geographical content; it serves simply as a pointer towards whatever the speaker happens to dislike" (Benjamin, 1976, p. 123). The comparison between Asian and Western values is used to prove to the public that Asian values are indeed superior to those from the West. Therefore, although Asian values and Western values are presented as separate and different, in the attempt to promote the 'pure' Asian heritage of Singapore, the fixity of Singaporeans in this culture is based on the use / comparison of the Asian culture with another culture. An example of this is the way racial

conflict in other countries such as Bosnia and Germany are cited as being strong reminders of how volatile racial issues are ('Do not take racial, religious harmony for granted: PM Goh', 1993) and emphasise why the cherished value of racial harmony and problem solving through consensus cannot be neglected or forgotten.

### **Negotiating the Cultural Ballast**

The new generation of Singaporeans (who are in their twenties and thirties and have no experience of the postwar hardships of the 1950s) have been identified by the Singapore government as being in danger of losing their Asian values because they find Western values attractive and acceptable. This issue seems to have been founded on the fact that although these young Singaporeans are Asian and therefore fixed in a particular culture, they are aware of other cultures and tend to understand their own culture by comparing it to other cultures.

In dress and music, the main trend among the young is to follow the Western scene. While some Singaporeans give their children first names in addition to the traditional ethnic names, it is common for young Singaporeans without Western names to choose one for themselves. From the mass media which provides a diet of mainly American programs, the youth gain access to the less restricted moralistic Western cultural values which differs from the more traditional cultures (Malay, Indian or Chinese) in which they have been raised. About half of all foreign programs

telecast in Singapore come from America ('Singapore's majority shopper', 1992). Although Singapore is gradually developing its own television programs, it is still more cost effective to purchase television rather than to produce them locally.

A recent comprehensive survey of sexual behaviour found that young Singaporeans are starting to have sex much earlier than their parents did (Veloo, 1992). The overall picture showed Singapore as a conservative country when compared to countries like America but the increase in allegedly promiscuous behaviour is an indication of a changing trend in the values of young Singaporeans. This raises fears about young Singaporeans losing their Asian identity because of the assumption that sexual promiscuity is a Western activity. This connection is based on the fact that such behaviour is often depicted in the media from countries like America. Thus, this change in behavioural pattern signals a movement away from the more conservative Asian tradition and towards what the Government sees as Western liberalism.

The more 'liberal' cultural values of the West are used by the younger generation of Singaporeans to mediate their own cultural values. Western culture has displaced Asian culture to a large extent by making Asian traditions seem old fashioned. This displacement of values creates a situation which young Singaporeans are trying to negotiate. They are attempting to 'locate' themselves in a culture they find appealing and modern while being constantly

reminded of their Asian roots. Freud's theory of the displacement of value comes into play here:

value is always in a blur in a displacement of value, in a retroactivity, in the way in which a character or an individual is able to value his or herself or history or culture through the mediation of another which was located somewhere else (Freud in Bhabha, 1990a, p. 66)

An analogy that can be used to describe young Singaporeans' attempt to negotiate their cultural positioning is one that likens them to 'bananas'; yellow (Oriental) on the outside and white (Western) on the inside. Perhaps this analogy is too strong because it assumes that Singaporeans have lost all traces of Asian culture and have become truly 'white' on the inside. This image also suggest that it is possible for the oriental or Asian exterior to be removed or peeled off, leaving it completely white and more vulnerable. It is as though the Asian exterior in itself provides Asian Singaporeans with the reminder that even though they may be white on the inside, they cannot avoid their racial heritage of being Asian. Dick Lee, a Singaporean entertainer, feels that it is more realistic to credit young Singaporeans with embracing healthy doses of both Asian and Western cultural values ("Foreign Correspondent", 1993).

Even though the Singapore government is justified in its concern that young Singaporeans are attracted to the West,

this is not a totally new phenomenon in Singapore's history. During, and after, the colonial period many older Singaporeans became instilled with the notion that goods from the West were superior. Anything from the West was considered good and desirable. This attitude may have diminished after Singapore's independence from colonial rule but it does not appear to have totally disappeared. Over the past few years it seems to be in revival, but with the focus being on America instead of Britain.

The problem of location in Singapore is not confined to the Asian community. It has also affected the non-Asian population who have lived in Singapore for a significant number of years. They feel that a binary opposition equating all matters pertaining to the West as bad is grossly unfair. This is particularly problematic for Singaporeans whose parents (or a parent) are Western (for example, within the Eurasian community of Singapore) but have been brought up in Singapore. They may not be Asian but consider themselves more Singaporean than Western and are enraged at being linked to a 'decadent' West because of their race. Non-Asian Singaporeans may be a minority but their existence proves that it is wrong to assume all Singaporeans Asian.

Non-Asians working in Singapore are alienated and unimpressed with the mould they are expected to fit into. Ironically, the Singapore government wants to attract more foreign workers to work in Singapore but are simultaneously making the social environment hostile by setting up a 'we



are better than you' mentality. Despite the fact that Asian values are considered superior to Western values, perhaps the national value of 'racial harmony and tolerance' should include a sensitivity towards the non-Asian population of Singapore.

### **Language, National Values and The Media**

The debate surrounding language in Singapore evolves around the philosophy that language and values are closely connected. Knowledge of a language usually coincides with an understanding of the cultural values of the country / countries in which the language is used. In Singapore, it is a major contributing factor to the problem of location. The English language has not only made young Singaporeans better educated, it has also made the comparison or mediation between Western and Asian cultures more prominent in these recent years because young Singaporeans are more fluent in English than the older generation. Their knowledge of English allows them to better understand the Western culture they are exposed to through the mass media. Hence, their cultural orientation becomes more Western than Chinese, Indian or Malay (Quah, 1990, p. 15).

Another contributing factor to this problem, stemming from a proficiency in English, is the exposure experienced while travelling or studying abroad. Young Singaporeans are more inclined to travel than the older generation of Singaporeans. In short, the younger generation of

Singaporeans are more likely to be influenced by non-Asian cultures and values.

Lee, former Prime Minister of Singapore, agrees with the fact that English has played a role in changing Singapore, "I am not at all sure that the things we set in motion as necessary for our survival - like teaching the population the English language - [were] wise because we are in the process of becoming a different people" (Balakrishnan, 1992). English may be important economically but Lee also strongly believes that Confucian values which are transmitted through Chinese, have contributed to the economic success of the nation.

The introduction of the teaching of English as a first language in schools in 1966 was intended to make the nation more productive economically. Malay is the national language of Singapore because the Malays are recognised as being the original inhabitants of Singapore but English was chosen as the first language because it is the lingua franca of the financial world. It gives Singaporeans the skill to deal with and learn Western technology and business strategies but has unconsciously led them to retreat from their cultural roots (Quah, 1990, p. 15). English is also promoted as a common, unifying language for all the different races in Singapore. At school students are taught their ethnic languages (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) as a second language and English as a first language. The rationale behind this bilingual policy was to enable people

from different ethnic groups to communicate and interact with each other (Quah, 1990, p. 56).

The Singapore population has the highest percentage of English speakers in Asia (Balakrishnan, 1992). Since most of the programs on television are imported from countries outside Asia, it is not surprising that the large English speaking population of Singapore are exposed to other cultures and values. This contributes to the fact that the mass media is blamed for bringing into Singapore influences from the West which are regarded as less than desirable by the moral guardians. The control of the mass media through the use of censorship is a means by which the Singapore government attempts to prevent too many "negative" Western influences from seeping into the country. The role of censorship and the mass media will be discussed in Chapter 6.

English has also been identified as responsible for the decline of respect for Asian values because of the accessibility it provides to Western influences. An example of this lies in the distinction between the English-educated Chinese and the Chinese-educated Chinese. Chinese who have been in Singapore for many generations and have lost the ability to speak fluent Chinese are classified as English-educated or Straits born Chinese. Chinese who are only second or third generation Chinese from China and still use the language are classified as Chinese-educated. The terms Chinese and English educated can be misleading because education in Singapore schools is

mainly in English. It might be more appropriate to base the distinction on the language spoken at home.

The English-educated Chinese are considered by Singaporeans at large to be pro-Western and to have less regard for tradition. They are more liberal in their attitudes while the Chinese-educated Chinese are more conservative and traditional in their outlook. Dr. Ker, the Minister of State (Information and the Arts and Education), claimed the Chinese-educated are usually reserved about their abilities and achievements, which might come across as a lack in confidence. They are also considered "respectful to their elders and leaders and were willing to group together to follow the call of their leaders" (Siow, 1992). The English-educated Chinese, on the other hand, are described by Dr. Ker as "eager and confident in accepting challenges. They tend to question all matters which affect them individually and as a group. They also wanted to have their views considered, and could be persuaded once they saw the logic of the opposite views" (Siow, 1992).

Dr. Ker appears to assert that the Chinese-educated are influenced by Asian values and the English-educated by Western influences. The Chinese-educated are humble, submissive and willing to cooperate with the Government and therefore exhibit a respect for authority. However, the English-educated are the rebels. They are described by Dr. Ker as having the tendency to question all matters which affect them individually or as a group which implies that they are pro-Western because they are more concerned about

themselves rather than the community as a whole. However, the English-educated are not dismissed as totally uncooperative. With some amount of persuasion, they could be made to agree with Government policies.

This division between the Chinese-educated Chinese and English-educated Chinese has been fuelled even more by comments from the Chinese-educated that Singapore society is biased towards the English-educated Chinese. The Chinese-educated Chinese believe that they are disadvantaged by their lack of English skills in a nation where English is the working language. They feel that they are looked upon as having a lower working ability and that they are a minority of the majority segment of the multi-racial society (Siow, 1992).

Indeed the language debate has sparked a range of issues which question Singapore's position as an Asian country which articulates itself and unites its people through a colonial, Western language. The most recent debate on language is on the use of Singlish in the mass media.

Often incorporating Malay and Chinese words, Singlish often consists of breaking grammatical rules but catchphrases such as musician Siva Choy's 'Why U (you) So Like Dat (that)' and television entertainer Jacintha Abisheganaden's 'Join me, join me, don't shy' have been made popular by the mass media. In fact, Singlish is the primary source of Singapore English humour (Guo, 1992b). In a way it is similar to vernacular languages or language derivations

such as creole or pigeon English which are characteristic of countries like Papua New Guinea and former French colonies. It is not a mockery of the English language but an adaptation of it.

It has been decided by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) that the use of Singapore's unique style English on television will be greatly reduced. This is the result of the controversy over the use of Singlish in a number of new English entertainment programs. Some Singaporeans welcomed the use of Singlish on television because Singlish is part of the Singaporean identity and as such should be reflected in television programs. However, there were others who objected to it because they were afraid their children would be encouraged to speak badly ('SBC cans Singlish', 1993). Another concern voiced was that the use of Singlish on television would give foreigners a poor impression of Singapore.

SBC has decided that Singlish will only be used in dramas and in the correct context. It is allowed when the character portrayed is uneducated ('SBC cans Singlish', 1993). A spokesman for SBC explained "As far as SBC is concerned, there should be no confusion, especially in the minds of the young, that standard English is the norm to aspire to" ('SBC cans Singlish', 1993). What this new policy does is associate the use of Singlish with the uneducated and therefore cannot be used in the more 'serious' genres of current affairs or news.

SBC has even divided English spoken on television into three categories and in what types of programs they should be used:

1) Standard English - which is grammatically correct and pronounced in the correct way.

This is to be used in news, current affairs and entertainment programs.

2) Local English - which is grammatically correct but spoken in a recognisably Singaporean accent. This type of English could include some local terms and expressions such as 'kiasu' (a Chinese dialect expression for a person who does not like to lose out in anyway).

This form of English can only be used in entertainment programs.

3) Singlish - which is ungrammatical English spoken by those with a poor command of English. Singlish will not be used unless it is in a drama and should be made clear that it is not the legitimate form. ('SBC cans Singlish', 1993).

By not permitting the use of Singlish on television (unless it is in an acceptable circumstance) Singaporeans are being indirectly told that it is better for them to use grammatically correct English. This new policy also suggests that Singlish is a part of the Singapore identity and should be suppressed because it is associated with the

less educated and endorses the proper use of English as a means of becoming superior. The English-educated Singaporeans appear to have cultivated a superiority complex over the less educated Singaporeans and perceive themselves as "having overcome linguistic debacles and moved on to respectable anglo-eloquence" (Guo, 1992b).

It is unfortunate that a more distinctive use of English in Singapore is discouraged while "proper" English, derived from the West, is promoted as the norm. SBC's new policy assumes that Singlish is only spoken by Singaporeans who have a poor command of the language. However, it is also commonly used by educated Singaporeans, often consciously because they are comfortable with it. It is ironic that in trying to promote a clean image of Singapore linguistically, the mass media has unwittingly promoted the use of a language with Western origins.

### **Deconstructing Singapore's National Values**

It is not appropriate to define Singapore's national values as specifically Asian or Western. Although the national values are referred to as Asian, it is impossible to totally filter out perceived 'polluting' Western influences. This does not necessarily mean that Singapore is a nation handicapped by external influences. What it implies Singapore's national values are selected on the criterion that they are beneficial to the nation's social, economic and political growth. These values are not necessarily Asian nor imply that other influences are bad.



What becomes important is the contribution the national values have towards the nation.

The national values of a country, regardless of whether they are from the West or Asia, usually aim to encourage development. Modernisation may be a term with Western origins but:

many of the values that accompany modernisation are not "Western" at all, they are simply the values that necessarily accompany technology - concepts of rationality or efficiency for example. If one looks at the definitions of modernization proposed in Singapore it is apparent that in fact they have little to do with the West as such (Clammer, 1985, p. 27).

Many members of the Singapore government still maintain that Singapore is unquestionably an Asian society. Dr. Tay (Senior Minister of State for Education) stated that Singapore is still a conservative and traditional (therefore Asian) society, not comfortable with the public and explicit discussion of sexuality and what it considers deviant values ('Let cultural desert bloom', 1992). This was in reply to the public's reaction to the more sexually explicit scenes that have began to appear on television and cinema screens. In Singapore society, any discussion on the issue of sexuality is usually centred around procreation and family life. This is seen by the

Government as the only acceptable way to discuss or portray matters relating to sex.

Professor Tommy Koh, Singapore's Ambassador at large, offered an alternative to the usual trend of relating Singapore's national values to Asian values. He remarked that values promoted in Singapore are not uniquely Asian but universal. Professor Koh also attributes Singapore's success to the fact that Singapore had taken the best from the East and the West ('A Singapore Identity will emerge', 1991). This statement appears to address the issue of the unfair characterisations of Western and Eastern values which many members of Government still hold on to.

Singapore's national values have made cultural location problematic. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the core values are Asian or universal, the values can to a large extent be seen as constructed. The constructed values are based on both Asian and Western cultural values and are selected according to their ability to contribute to the progress of the nation. For example, promoting a focus on community and family instead of the individual better serves the country by promoting a notion of selflessness and dedication. This will enable people to work towards the good of society, not just for their benefit but for the benefit of society as a whole. When conflict is eliminated and consensus used in its place, the country will prosper without any difficulties. Hence these values are constructed to preserve a better life for the people.

In the process of cultivating constructed national values in the people, a displacement of values occurs. Singapore will always be exposed to other cultures and cultural changes will continue to take place. Bhabha (1990a) refers to these influences as an "infiltration" or an "adulteration" (p. 77). In Singapore, it is recognised as having a 'polluting' effect on the otherwise pure Asian culture. By setting up the binary between Asian values and Western values, the Singapore government appears to be empowering itself but according to Bhabha, power does not institute itself in a binary, it brings about the notion of ambivalence instead (p. 77).

On the moment of incommensurability, Bhabha writes that:

There is always going to be this problem of a non-unificatory time, a non-unitary subject. So it's not a question of equal but separate development. It's a question of each construction of this position being also a displacement of that position. So it's not just the responsibility of the powerful to recognise the differential time and somehow to respect it, because the powerful are themselves standing on slippery sands (Bhabha, 1990a, p. 84).

This can be applied to Singapore because in the attempt to identify and construct the national values, the perceived role of Asian values becomes displaced. It is no longer

possible to maintain that Singapore's national values are only Asian and therefore superior.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that on analysis of the Government's official discourse on the core values lies a complex and intriguing situation. The Singapore government's introduction of national values are more far reaching than the need to preserve the perceived Asian values of Singapore. It is all part of a complex Nation Building process whereby the national values are aimed towards reinforcing a common national identity. Most importantly, the core values play a vital role in consolidating the Government's authority.

## Chapter 5

### Pay Television as a Representative of Change

Broadcasting technology, particularly satellite television, has presented the Singapore government with an acute problem they had never previously encountered. It presents a challenge to the Singapore government's current authority over the mass media by reducing government control over the content of programs broadcast into the country.

The introduction of pay television to Singapore is the Singapore government's response to this problem. This chapter looks at how the Singapore government has, for the moment, resolved the challenge posed by satellite television by introducing pay television as a compromise between the people's demand for more viewing choices and the Government's need to maintain some form of control over the mass media in Singapore and retain them as vehicles for Nation Building messages. To fully understand the challenge that satellite television has presented to the Singapore government, it is necessary to examine the challenge posed by satellite television in a pan-Asian context.

Over the past decade, there has been a steady growth in communications and satellite technology in the Asian region. At present, there are six operational domestic systems (Indonesia, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India and South Korea - excluding Australia) employing sixteen satellites.

There are also three regional systems (AsiaSat, Intelsat and Palapa 2) employing five satellites. One of these satellites, the Palapa Pasifik (formally Palapa B-1), is capable of sending signals to an area which stretches from Hawaii to China's coast (Schwarz, 1992). In addition to these satellites, there are a number of other satellite systems which cover parts of the region.

The growth in communication technology and the explosion of satellite television in the Asian region have posed a significant problem to the governments of Asian countries. The majority of the governments in the Asian region resent satellite technology because they feel that ownership of the space segment over their countries must rest exclusively with them (Khushu, 1993) and not with the satellite owners who are generally representatives of Western companies. Satellite technology renders spatial boundaries obsolete because satellite signals easily transgress them. This differs from pay or cable television where a decoder is used by subscribers to receive the scrambled signals. Free-to-air satellite television (where no decoders are needed) means that governments do not have control over the signals travelling into their territory.

The issue of control of the media is an important one for Asian governments who use national broadcasting for national development projects and community announcements. Satellite television threatens the use of the media as a means of communication for the government by introducing more attractive alternative programs. For countries like

Singapore and Malaysia, control of the media is also necessary to ensure the political and social stability of the country. Freedom of the media is not encouraged because these Governments feel that at times, freedom of the press could upset multi-racial harmony (Scott, 1991).

The Singapore government is aware of the new challenges posed by the rapidly expanding area of satellite television. In a bid to meet public demand and still maintain some control over the mass media, pay television was introduced to Singapore in April 1992. By tracing the spread of television transmissions via satellite in the region and the impact it has had on Singapore, this chapter will also look at the ways in which the Singapore government is attempting to accommodate satellite technology and its social implications.

Satellite television has introduced new dimensions to the problems of control over the mass media and therefore, also has an affect on the relationship between the mass media and Nation Building in Singapore. In this chapter, this issue of control over the mass media in light of the increasing presence of satellites in the region, will be explored. Foucault's theory on governmentality (1979) will be used to analyse this need to control the media and the exercise of power. In Foucault's opinion, the art of government involves exercising power over the country. Satellite television is problematic because it undermines the government's authority to exercise that control.

Bhabha's theory of location will also be employed to analyse the issue of satellite televisions' ability to cross boundaries and the problem that poses. According to Bhabha, the definition of space can be divided into two categories - geographic and cultural. In trying to control their geographical space, governments in the region, such as the Singapore government, are hoping to be able to prevent what they see as the country's specific cultural identity and location from being 'invaded' by foreign programming.

### **The Expansion of Satellite Television in the Region**

Asia has become the focus of satellite television companies around the world. Companies such as the American Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) are trying to tap into the consumer power of the rapidly increasing middle class of Asia - a result of the economic boom Asia has been experiencing. Their leisure spending and newly acquired taste are a target for advertisers ('Asia switches on to imported TV shows', 1992).

The vast potential of the Asian market is not only due to the fact that Asia is prospering financially. The size of the population in the region is another key factor. It has about half of the world's population which is predicted to reach two-thirds by the end of the century (Amdur, 1993a). To be established in this region will therefore give



companies and advertisers access to an exceptionally large market.

Competition for a part of this market is intensifying as more and more companies vie to establish themselves in the region. The economic affluence of Asia is setting a demand for high production values and will increase rival bidding and promote higher program prices. Well produced, glossy Hollywood productions will likely fetch high prices from satellite television stations wanting to have an edge over the other stations (Amdur, 1993b).

The main player in the region at present is STAR (an acronym for Satellite TV Asian Region) TV, owned by the Hong Kong conglomerate - Hutchison Whampoa. Recently, media tycoon Rupert Murdoch agreed to pay more than \$ 500m for a 64% interest in STAR TV, illustrating his faith in the potential of the company and the market. In doing so, "Mr. Murdoch is buying into the idea of a middle-class Asia" ('Murdoch's Asian bet', 1993).

STAR TV has been broadcasting unencrypted (signals which are not in code form and are available to anyone with a satellite dish) since 1991 on Asia-Sat-1. AsiaSat's footprint covers 38 countries and has a potential audience of three billion people (half of them in China), living under its beam ('Asia switches on to imported TV shows', 1992). Before Star TV launched its five-channel satellite television services, the average person in Asia had access

to only 2.4 channels, compared with an average of 25 for Europeans and Americans (Amdur, 1993a).

The main drawback for Star TV at the moment is the reluctance of a number of governments in the region to allow private ownership of receiving devices. However, HutchVision is sure that a trend towards more liberal attitudes in Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore is a positive indication of the acceptance of satellite television in the region and will lead to a rapid proliferation of dishes (Westlake, 1991).

HutchVision holds one-third of AsiaSat's shares and the other owners are Cable and Wire of Britain, China International Trust and Investment Corporation, and China's overseas investment arm. This ownership of AsiaSat allows HutchVision to work towards creating a monopoly by having exclusive rights to broadcasting from AsiaSat. Ten of AsiaSat's 24 transponders are booked by HutchVision (the remainder are reserved for individual countries telecommunication services or TV relay use by various countries). Since AsiaSat is one of the few satellites available for a few years for full TV broadcast coverage of the region (Indonesia's Palapa Satellite only covers 6 countries in the South-East Asia area) HutchVision has substantial control of market entry by any other potential pan-Asia TV service in the short term ('Reach for the Stars', 1991). Other satellites to cover the region include the expected launch of a satellite in 1994 by the US Unicom Satellite Corporation which will have a longer

north-south footprint from Japan to New Zealand. Currently, AsiaSat's footprint extends from Iran to Tokyo and from North Korea to Singapore (see figure 1).

The Business News Network (BNN), which is based in Hong Kong and owned by a consortium of Hong Kong and Taiwan businessmen, are unhappy about HutchVision's' monopoly of the AsiaSat satellite. They were looking at regional and / or global distribution of television programs via satellite (Westlake, 1991) and HutchVision has temporarily blocked their aspirations.

HutchVision may have successfully captured the region's market, but they are faced with some restrictions. The Hong Kong government gave the go-ahead to HutchVision to use Hong Kong as its base on the condition the network would serve an audience principally outside of Hong Kong. This official policy was meant to end the feud between local satellite and cable television interest. Hong Kong Cable Communications Limited (an international consortium led by Hong Kong tycoon Sir Yue-Kong Pao's Whart Group) was concerned about the impact of competition from Star on their operations. To further ease the tension between these two groups, Hong Kong's policy-making Executive Council imposed a three-year ban on Cantonese programs carried by satellite. Cantonese is the predominant Southern Chinese language spoken in Hong Kong and by putting the ban in place, Star will not be able to cater to the local audience (Westlake, 1991).

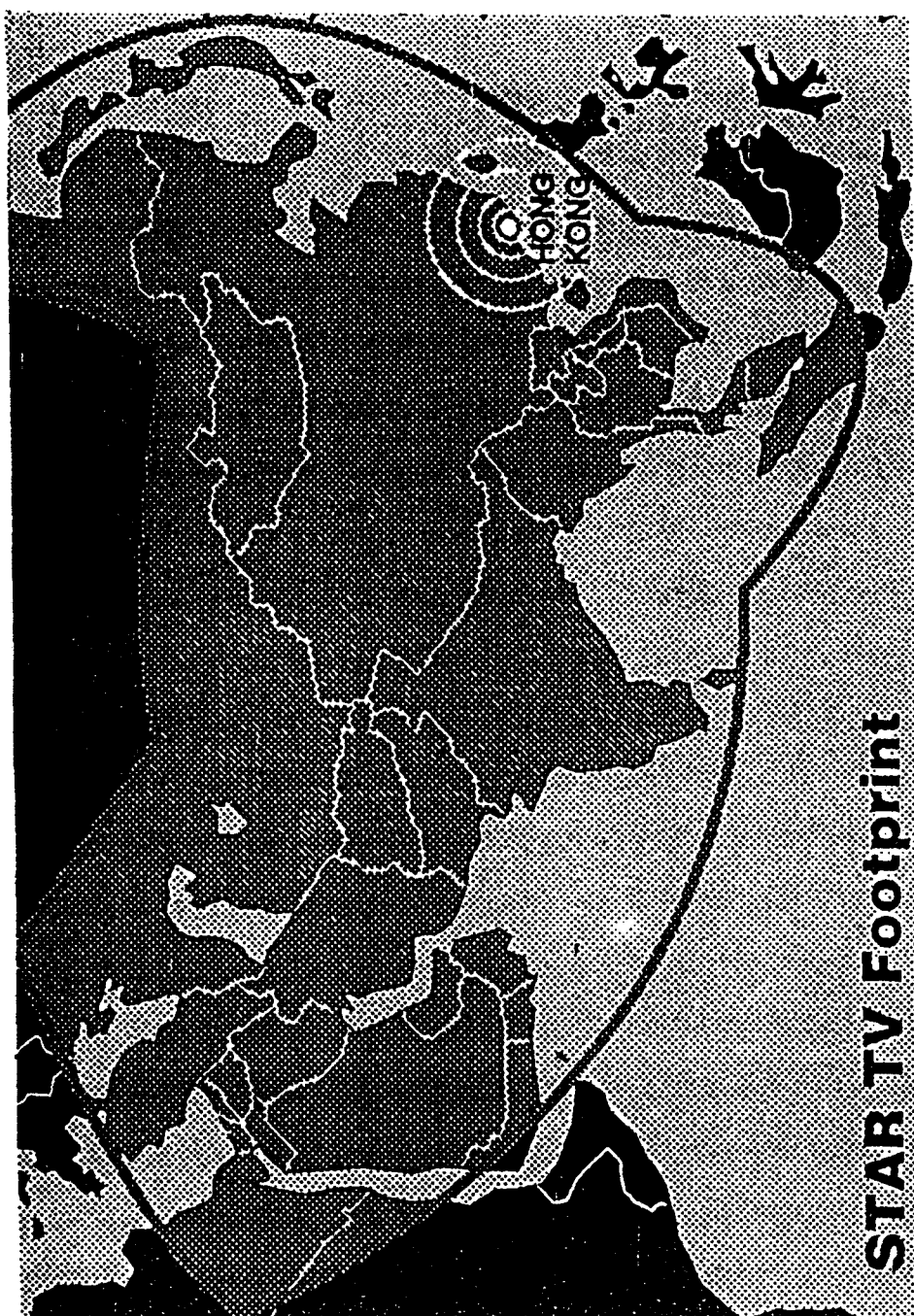


Figure 5

From The West Australian  
1992, December 5, p. 64.

Although HutchVision has established a firm hold on AsiaSat, Indonesia's Palapa Satellite is providing strong competition, despite its much smaller footprint. Palapa covers about 41.3 million households in Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Since 1991, foreign broadcasters have been allowed to use the Palapa satellite to broadcast in the region. The competition is made even more acute by the fact that satellite dishes have to point in different directions to pick up either signals ('Asia switches on to imported TV shows', 1992). Home Box Office (movie programmer) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Service (ATVI) are using Palapa to transmit their programs. Other countries such as Singapore are looking into using Palapa for broadcasting purposes as well (Jacob, 1992). Recently, a new satellite television service based in Singapore, Asia Business News (ABN), started broadcasting on Indonesia's Palapa satellite (George, 1993f).

The American Cable News Network (CNN) is extending its services into Asia to deepen its foothold in the Asian region by using an Intelsat satellite. CNN is opening more bureaus in Asia (in New Delhi and Bangkok) as part of their commitment to the region as a source of news. Governments of the Asian nations are assured that they should not fear the presence of CNN because it is not the "armour of the American government", and is also not bent on a mission of cultural imperialism. ('CNN plans to start news subscription channel', 1991). Joining CNN as a news network on satellite television is the British Broadcasting

Corporation's World Service Television Network (WSTV). WSTV runs a 24 hour news and current affairs channel across Asia over Hong Kong's Star Television channels.

Rules and regulations regarding satellite dishes differ from country to country in the region. In 1990, Hong Kong officials lifted the ban on satellite dishes allowing people to own them without the need for licenses. Satellite dishes are legal in the Philippines but a license is required. As of 1990, South Korea had 150,000 satellite dishes. The use of satellite dishes was legalised in Taiwan in November 1988. Soon after that, the number of satellite dishes in Taiwan rose to 100,000.

A large number of private dishes or "parabola" can be found in Indonesia. Indonesia has one state-owned television and three private television stations which can be received by viewers across the archipelago by satellite. The satellites in the archipelago can also pick up foreign programs, especially as foreign broadcasters have been allowed to use the Palapa satellite for regional broadcasting. Private dishes or "parabola" are neither banned nor sanctioned. The relatively relaxed attitude of Indonesian officials in Jakarta with regards to this issue stems from the fact that they do not see satellite television as a threat to the country. Satellite television programming is mostly in English or another foreign language which the average Indonesian cannot understand. The Indonesians do not appear to be concerned about the foreign images such as permissive behaviour which

are contrary to the national Muslim religion. Perhaps like the other countries who have legalised the ownership of satellite dishes, the Indonesian government realises that it would be very difficult to police the issue in the vast archipelago.

Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore still ban satellite dishes for households. Malaysian authorities make an exception for royalty who are allowed to own satellite dishes and Singapore has allowed the American Embassy and SBC to set up dishes. In 1991, the Singapore government made it possible for financial institutions to apply for licenses to install satellite dishes for business purposes. Other than these institutions, Singapore law prohibits the possession and sale of satellite dishes, except for export (Han, 1989).

Singapore's stand on satellite dishes arises from the fear about satellite television which is both socially and politically based. In the opinion of the Singapore authorities, foreign programs on satellite television are capable of transmitting unlimited access of unacceptable values and lifestyles which could be harmful to a young nation with different races, religions and cultures ('Satellite TV gets mixed reception in Asia', 1990).

As far as possible, Singapore authorities would like to filter the foreign programs on television screens in Singapore to remove materials which are felt to be unhealthy for Singapore's social life. Foreign influence

in the Singapore media is restricted by the prohibition of foreign ownership of the media. This law has been put in place prevent foreign owners from generating political undertones which could be a problem because they have the potential to be used for political activity which could undermine the Government (Han, 1989).

HutchVision's STAR TV, with its location in Asia, is hoping to have an advantage over the non-Asian satellite television services since their material will abide by Hong Kong's broadcast laws. The assumption is that Hong Kong would have more stringent standards than those services originating from the non-Asian region. To cater for the Asian audience, HutchVision has made a deal with the American based MTV to provide an Asian version of Music Television.

Although the broadcasts are sent to the satellite from Hong Kong and the content of all programs must conform to Hong Kong regulations, programs may still not be acceptable to some Asian nations (Westlake, 1991). Singapore is not fully convinced that STAR TV's materials are totally compatible with the Singapore standard. The pay television service in Singapore monitors all the material it receives, even those from Hong Kong, before relaying them to the subscribers.



## Pay Television Comes to Singapore

While the Singapore government and other governments in the region are not prepared to release the ban on households installing satellite dishes, pay television or cable television has been more widely accepted. Satellite dishes enable people to pick up the direct (unscrambled) signals from a host of "free-to air" satellite television stations whereas cable or pay television requires signals to be unscrambled in order to receive the service. Subscribers of pay or cable television have to pay to receive television services but "free-to-air" satellite television signals are available to anybody with a receiving dish.

Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have introduced some form of pay television and in South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong extensive cable franchises are being developed. Taiwan is looking towards legalising cable television. Cable television is officially banned in Taiwan but there are about 300 unlicensed cable TV stations. Although some of these are very small operations, they serve about 350,000 of Taiwan's four million households ('Asian governments face the challenge of satellite TV', 1993).

To be able to exercise power and control over the territory and its people is, according to Foucault (1979), the main aim of any government:

Sovereignty is not exercised on things, but above all on a territory and consequently on the subjects who inhabit it (P. 11).

The Government needs to be able to exert power over its people because without the people, there will be no one to govern and therefore no government (Foucault, 1979, p. 17). By controlling the people's access to the mass media, the government is effectively attempting to control the way the people think. It is the government's way of securing the acceptance and respect of the people by not allowing any materials which may challenge their authority over their territory.

Satellite television is therefore an issue of government control over its territory because satellite television challenges the notion of sovereignty. Governments are basically powerless because they have no control over the television signals beaming into their territory. At present, the only form of control that can be achieved is by banning receiving dishes but as:

satellite broadcasting has become a fact of life that can no longer be ignored, national regulators will sooner or later need to re-evaluate their policies, especially as advancing technologies will make it extremely difficult to enforce restricting regulations (Khushu, 1993, p. 10).

Governments who are not in favour of satellite television are not ready to surrender their power to decide what their citizens ought to hear or see. One way to cope with this problem is to continue banning equipment used to receive the signals until they become too small in size in the future to monitor (Han, 1989). Cable or pay television is a reasonable alternative to satellite television because some form of control can still be exercised.

The Singapore government, by introducing pay television to Singapore and allowing greater choice in television channels, is meeting the demands of the people half way. Not only is the Government not able to continue ignoring the demands of the people, they are more aware of the growing presence of the new technology in their region. Cable television would be a better option for Singapore than satellite television because with cable it is more possible to keep a check on potential foreign influences and not risk serving the financial sector at the expense of national interest. Cable television programs can be screened and selected ('Cable TV a better bet', 1991). The Singapore authorities see a need to monitor the commercial media because commercial stations have a reputation for carrying maximum advertising without considering what values it transmits. Mr Mah, Minister of State (Trade and Industry) feels that "They (commercially driven stations) were unsuitable for a developing country like Singapore where the broadcast media, especially television, were key instruments in nation building" ('Mah: Harmful values easily passed on', 1990).

Singapore had its first taste of cable television during the Gulf War. For about a month, twelve hours a day, CNN brought news first hand and in real time to Singaporeans. This immediacy was important to the financial community, especially future traders, who requested the service. To them, minute-by-minute global political and economic updates as vital in making split-second multimillion dollar decisions. Singapore is a country driven by a need to succeed economically but the quick decision to meet the request of the financial community for instantaneous information access was surprising ('Cable TV a better bet', 1991). The CNN service which was broadcast over normal (terrestrial) television channels, where anyone with a television set could gain access to it, was sponsored by a number of financial institutions. It appears that the Singapore government felt the financial benefits of the Cable News Network was important enough for them to relax their attitude towards cable television in this instance.

Shortly after the Gulf War, the law regarding the ownership of satellite dishes in Singapore was modified. The Ministry for Information and the Arts (Mita) made the decision to allow banks and financial institutions to install previously forbidden satellite dishes so that "the new information order may be kinder and gentler than the old" and that access to information would help the financial community in making important decisions ('Mita's new good news', 1991). The institutions are required to apply for licenses. To get the application approved, the

support of the Monetary Authority of Singapore or the Economic Development Board is required, perhaps as a means of authenticating the applicants as valid banks and financial institutions. The licences are only for a satellite dish, or a television receiver only (TVRO) dish, which enables the user to pick up television programs from other countries including America and Australia. These licenses are issued by SBC at a cost of S\$ 1,000 per annum (Loh, 1991).

In March 1991, Brigadier-General George Yeo (Minister for Information and the Arts) announced that Singapore would have two or three more television channels which will possibly be based on a subscription basis because it will allow the government some form of control over programming. The condition behind this move to introduce pay television appears to be the ability to maintain Singapore censorship laws over the programs screened in the country. However, this move follows a relaxation of the law which now allows hitherto banned satellite dishes to be installed in banks and financial institutions. Negotiations between SBC and satellite / cable television companies such as HutchVision started soon after the announcement ('SBC tie-up with HK Satellite firm?', 1991). By June 1991, SBC had secured a deal with CNN for news coverage ('Wider Choice', 1991).

The Singapore government's efforts to liberalise its attitude towards the mass media is a well calculated one. Economic factors prompted the legalising of satellite dishes for the financial community. However, to introduce

satellite television to households and therefore legalise household ownership of receiving dishes is a risk the Singapore government is not currently prepared to make. Pay or cable television will give them the option of purchasing foreign programs and censoring them if necessary before they are transmitted to the subscribers. At the same time, they are giving Singaporeans more programs to choose from and thus, meet their demands for more choice.

Although some Asian governments like the Singapore government have introduced cautious changes, they are aware that they will have to surrender the battle in the future. However, while there is still a fighting chance, they will continue to battle with the problem. Brigadier-General George Yeo admitted that "one day it may not be possible to regulate, but for as long as it is possible ... let's have some controls in place" (George, 1991a). This attitude shows a reluctance on the part of the Singapore government to relinquish control over the mass media. At the same time, they acknowledge the challenges ahead of them and are realistically facing them.

Western diplomats have described the Asian governments' fear of satellite television as a fear of a diminution of their powers of social and political control which may be questioned if citizens have wider freedom of choice ('Satellite TV gets mixed reception in Asia', 1990). Richard Broinowski (former ABC coordinator of international projects) argues that the increasing presence of satellite television in the region has resulted in a change in the

official thinking in the region about the electronic media. "At the least they (governments in the region) are no longer seen as being capable of remaining the preserve of centralised government bureaucracies, or of being exclusive mouthpiece of government policies" (Malan, 1992).

It is obvious from these statements that it is widely perceived by the West that the media in Asia is heavily and undemocratically controlled by the respective Asian governments. Asian governments are just as critical of the West. They feel they have to control the media to avoid the West's culturally imperialist attack which pushes Western programs onto Asian television screens. Broinowski (Malan, 1992) and Meredith Amdur (1993a) feel that the invasion of foreign productions will benefit Asian producers. It would make it a lot easier for local programmers to find the right product for their market. It could also become a driving force for local industries in Asia, forcing them to produce better local programs in order to compete with foreign ones.

However, to argue that the influx of foreign programs will benefit local productions is not very convincing. If foreign producers are going to be put at a disadvantage, why are there so many foreign companies willing to put up millions to secure a channel? It could be possible that the Asian production companies will not have the same financial advantage as Hollywood. Asian companies can aspire to create glossy productions since there are established film companies in Hong Kong, Taiwan and India

but whether their products appeal to the Asian population which is looking increasingly towards the West is yet to be seen.

### **Singapore Cable Vision**

April 1992 saw the launch of Singapore CableVision (SCV), the company which runs Singapore's 3 cable television channels under the directions of general manager Chang Long Kiat. The groundwork for Singapore CableVision was carried out by SBC. Singapore CableVision is 65% owned by Temasek Holdings a subsidiary of Singapore International Media. The other 35% is owned by SBC but in the long term it may be publicly listed ('Singapore's first subscription TV channel goes on the air tomorrow', 1992).

Since SBC owns a substantial part of Singapore CableVision, the cable television channels are not completely independent of the main television broadcasters in Singapore. Although SBC may not be able to influence the running of SCV, it will benefit indirectly from the financial gains of SCV. The fact that SBC has a share of SCV may be a conflict of interest. SBC's planned privatisation is intended to make it more viable in the increasingly competitive media market and therefore it should be in competition with SCV. The Government decided it had no alternative but to privatise SBC as technology had forced the pace. If SBC does not privatise, the competition that would come with satellite television and



smaller receiving dishes would swamp SBC ('Private TV station here? Sure, in good time', 1992).

It appears that SBC does not see SCV as a major competitor. Perhaps at this point SBC sees SCV as playing a complementary rather than a competitive role. While SBC concentrates on the production of local dramas and variety shows, SCV provides the box office hits. Since pay television will have limited advertising and is funded through subscriptions, there is no threat of SCV attracting advertisers away from SBC.

SCV began its telecast with a news channel, NewsVision, the first cable channel to be launched in Singapore. It started on 2nd of April 1992 and subscription cost S\$ 29.95 a month. NewsVision's main source of news is CNN's international news coverage and includes other sources such as ITN and SBC news. The other two channels - MovieVision and VarietyVision, began broadcasting on the 13th of May, 1992.

MovieVision carries recently released blockbuster films as well as family entertainment, comedies, children's programs, documentaries, music, special interest features and Exclusive Classics from Time Warner subsidiary Home Box Office Asia. About thirty movies are shown a month on this channel which broadcast for 12 hours a day until January when it was increased to 18 hours a day. There are no commercial breaks on MovieVision which cost S\$ 34.95 a month in subscription fees.

The third channel - VarietyVision broadcasts Mandarin and Mandarin dubbed drama series, movies, comedies, documentaries, cartoons and sports programs from major program suppliers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. For S\$ 29.95 a month, subscribers are entitled to receive programs 18 hours a day except on Saturday when programs run for twenty-four hours. Commercials will be included in this channel but only between programs. A package for all three channels costs S\$ 49.95 a month.

Programs to be aired on Singapore CableVision's channels are received either via satellite or in video form by a satellite dish and are then relayed to SCV's UHF (Ultra High Frequency) centre in Singapore. At this point, programs can be checked and filtered to meet Singapore censorship criteria. Using the microwave band, the channel signals are then beamed to a transmitting facility before the signals are converted into a scrambled UHF signal and transmitted to the subscriber's home. A UHF antenna at the home picks up the scrambled signal and transfers it to the decoder which translates the signals into sound and pictures on the subscribers television sets (see figure 6).

While the service rates charged by SCV are within the reach of a majority of middle-class viewers, the commercial sector is finding the cost of pay television too high. Hotels are not finding pay television a viable option because they have to pay S\$ 0.50 a room a day for the services when it would be more economical to continue with

their own in-house entertainment services ('Pay television for commercial cost very much more?', 1992). Despite this problem, SCV seems to have successfully provided the average Singapore population with a wider choice of television programs.

### Control of the Media and Pay Television

#### **The Moral Dimension**

The Singapore government's decision to allow cable television in the country has pleased many Singaporeans but at the same time, has introduced grave concern over the negative effects of watching too much television. Leslie Fong, an editor with The Straits Times, holds the opinion that people should not be too ready to praise the advent of cable television because it is going to be more harmful than beneficial to Singapore society. "At the very least, it is likely to further erode the traditional values and ways of life, which are already under assault, no thanks to many of the imported programs telecast now" (1992a).

Fong, as a journalist with The Straits Times appears to articulate the Government's official position on the preservation of Singapore's Asian values. He has previously voiced his opinion that the role of the press is to support Government policies (Fong, 1991a) which indicates his position as a journalist with a national conscience. He is in agreement with the Singapore government's philosophy on the cause and effect theory of

## How You Will Receive Your Subscription TV

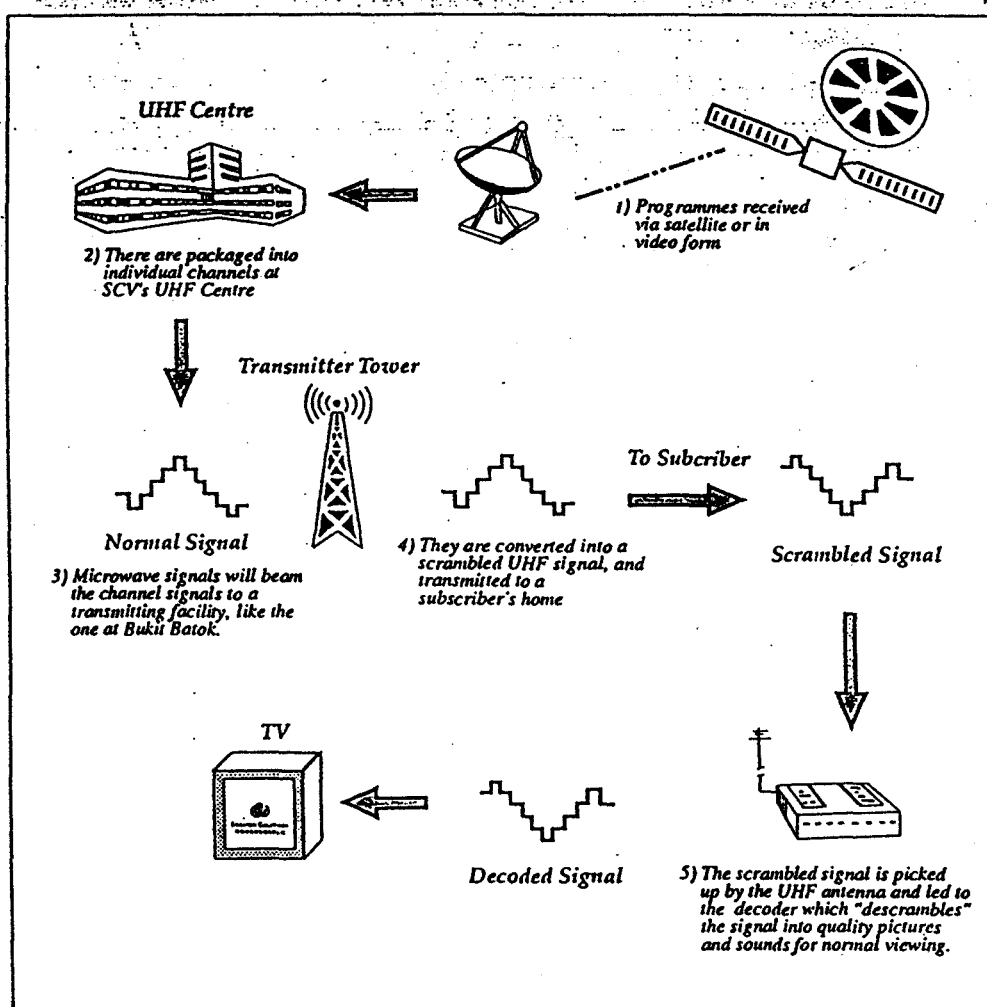


Figure 6

From Singapore CableVision's advertisement.

the mass media. He believes that imported programs will introduce values which will affect the national Asian values of Singapore. However, he is also unhappy with the Government's relaxation of its policies regarding the mass media and feels that it has been brought about by Singaporeans who are unaware of the 'allegedly' negative consequences of the increase in television programs introduced through pay television.

The assumption in Fong's argument about the injurious effects of pay television is that, given more television programs, people will watch more television. This may not necessarily be the case. Singaporeans live in an environment with long working hours and even students are under quite a lot of pressure to spend a lot of time on their studies and school activities. This does not completely rule out the fact that there can be a number of 'couch potatoes' in Singapore.

Leslie Fong believes that television is the opium of the masses because it will "undermine the addicted viewer's ability both to follow a line of thought and come to an informed judgement on any issue" (1992a). He claims that "TV appeals primarily to a viewer's emotions rather than his rational mind and thus often distorts his view of the world". Mr. Fong also feels that the art of watching is easy and an entirely passive activity which leaves no time for reading and reflection. He feels that reading is different because it requires concentration (1992a), a biased opinion since he is a newspaper journalist.

Research on audience studies by Paul Willis (1990) and Ien Ang (1985) have shown that audiences are capable of interactive viewing and are not always passive. This is especially true in the case of the younger generation at whom much criticism is directed. It is perceived that the younger generation of Singaporeans are the most likely to be influenced by the images and ideas of the mass media. This is the reason why the Censorship Review Committee Report (CRCR) of 1992 has recommended that in the censorship of materials, "particular attention should be paid to those that may be harmful to the young" (CRCR 1992, p. 11). The younger generation have been brought up in a world where they have been widely exposed to the mass media and are very media literate. Even though the education in Singapore has been accused of 'spoon feeding' information to the students, their abilities to 'read' the media should not be under estimated. To assume that they are merely passive consumers of the mass media is inaccurate.

Leslie Fong's attack on the amount of mass media being proportionate to the decline of society continues. He likens the infiltration of television programs to pollution:

The situation is not unlike a river into which sewage and other effluents are discharged. At a certain level of pollution, it might still be able to support marine life but once a critical point is reached, the fish just belly up (1992a).

The image of 'pollution', especially social and moral pollution, has constantly been linked to the West in debates on national values. It is a strong comparison but one that many find valid. However, Fong claims he is not attacking the West. Life imitating TV also happens in the Chinese speaking world. The main concern lies in whether Singapore's social life will start to imitate those that will be seen on the screens when satellite television becomes available to Singapore households. If Singapore's social life becomes influenced and dictated by foreign television programs, it means that the Government's control over the people will be greatly diminished, affecting its exercise of power (Foucault, 1979, p. 5).

### **The Political Dimension**

Concerns over the introduction of new technologies, such as satellite television, extend beyond the moral realm of cultural invasion and into the political realm. As mentioned above, the advent of satellite television has forced governments in Asia to rethink their traditional position with regards to their authority over the mass media in their country:

Perhaps the overriding impact of the emerging technologies of mass telecommunication will be psychological - forcing humankind to rethink many time-honoured concepts like nationalism,

sovereignty, patriotism, independence, cultural integrity, progress, education and transportation (Howell, 1986, p. 4).

The governments of most Asian nations have used the mass media to communicate government policies and official views of local and international events to the people. Satellite television will introduce views which may differ from official interpretations of the government. Even 'cultural propaganda' or 'Dallasization' as it has been called, have strong political overtones which worry many Europeans and would therefore be a major concern for Asian nations like Singapore as well (Peterson, 1990). These possible political influences will therefore threaten the natural independence of the local authorities and allow domination by the richer Western nations (Howell, 1986).

### **Using the Technology**

George Yeo, Minister for Information and the Arts, feels that the ability to convey news and information through satellite TV was an important step towards encouraging more Singaporeans to venture overseas to establish Business, cultural and other contacts. Through the satellite service, Singaporeans would be able to keep up with events happening in Singapore. Satellite television could also be used to promote South East Asia's heritage. Singapore is confident that broadcasting on a satellite television channel is a good idea because Singapore knows the region



well and would be able to provide a better insight than the Western services (Jacob, 1992).

At a seminar on the Social and Cultural Impact of Satellite Broadcasting held in Singapore on 1-3 February 1993, it was recommended that a pan-Asian public broadcasting satellite channel be set up. This is probably a better option than a Singapore-owned channel because Singapore may have difficulties in finding the expertise and finances to develop a satellite television channel on its own.

The need for a pan-Asian satellite channel was described by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) Secretary-General, Vijay Menon, as the need to take stock of the current and potential impact of satellite broadcasting. This is particularly relevant now that Asia's skies are becoming more crowded and Asian homes have become targets for American, Australian, British, French, German and Japanese transmissions ('Regional seminar proposes pan-Asian broadcasting satellite channel', 1993). It is a way for Asian countries to claim back a piece of their skies and prevent it from being controlled too much by the non-Asian countries.

Another plan which is currently being developed is to make Singapore a base or 'one-stop service centre' for firms involved in producing, packaging and distributing programs in the Asia-Pacific. This plan is being looked into by SBC ('SBC seeks foreign partners in regional broadcasting', 1992).

As mentioned above, Singapore has been chosen as the base for Asia Business News (ABN) in the region. This service is on air on weekdays for 18 hours a day and will provide news, analyses and live market reports fed directly from Dow Jones' Telerate. It will also include "The Asian Wall Street Journal On Air" and the "Far Eastern Economic Review". ABN has three shareholders who hold 29.5% of the shares each (Dow Jones, Tele-Communications Inc. and TV New Zealand) and Singapore has a 10% stake in the company through SIM ventures (which includes SBC and Temasek Holdings). The service, using Indonesia's Palapa satellite, started in November 1993 and could be picked by viewers from Jakarta (Indonesia) to Hong Kong and as far north as Taiwan. Unfortunately, home viewers in Singapore were unable to watch the news. SBC is yet to decide if they will pick up the signals and rebroadcast it to the homes (George, 1993f).

Although Singapore households could not receive the service, ABN executives felt the Singapore was the best place to establish the project. Singapore was chosen over Hong Kong because of its superior infrastructure (George, 1993f). The Singapore government's intention to make Singapore the centre for communications in the region is benefited by ABN's move. However, it seems ironic for companies to set up their offices in Singapore to broadcast to the region while Singaporeans do not have access to them. The Government's solution to this imbalance at the moment is to consider transmitting ABN's services either

*either via cable 1996/01*

through SCV or SBC. Considering the fact that the journals, Asian Wall Street Journal and Far Eastern Economic Review have been admonished by the Singapore government for interfering with domestic politics, it is not surprising that the Government is cautious about making ABN available to Singapore households.

The phrase 'if you can't beat them, join them' seems to be the main school of thought of the Singapore government at the moment. Not only is it a means of grappling with this difficult issue about the influence of satellite television. Financially, satellite television seems to also be promising a lot. This is also typical of Singapore's survival policy where the idea is to be innovative and keep at least one step ahead of competition. Whether or not Singapore will be able to put in place some display of still being in control will be fully revealed when it is no longer possible to ban satellite dishes within the country.

## Chapter 6

### Shifting the Boundaries: Censorship in the Next Lap

Singapore is a society torn between the desire to be accepted as a modern nation and yet cautious about exposure to the undesirable attitudes and values that are associated with modernisation. The negative attitudes cited by the Singapore government are materialism, violence and moral decadence. Censorship has been constructed so as to deny their presence within Singapore culture.

Censorship in Singapore can be divided into two categories - moral and political. While political censorship is as important as moral censorship, the main areas of concern have always been sex and violence in the mass media. The Singapore government believes that exposure to excessive sex and violence in the mass media will result in more promiscuous and violent behaviour among Singaporeans and eventually lead to the break down of Singapore's national values and therefore society.

The essence of the argument on censorship in Singapore centres around the perceived need to preserve the national core values and therefore the prince's or father's right to control. Censorship is also a way of defining national identity through the definition of national space in the mass media. National space is described by Michael Oakeshott (cited in Bhabha, 1990b, p. 1-2) as "constituted from competing dispositions of human association as *Societas* (the acknowledgment of moral rules and conventions

of conduct) and *Universitas* (the acknowledgment of common purpose and substantial end)". Therefore, in the Singapore context, the censorship laws are more than just a set of regulations as they establish the correct conventions of conduct within the society. Politically, the censorship laws are meant to prevent materials which will jeopardise the common purpose and destination of Singaporeans set down by the Government.

### **Censorship: Preserving Singapore's cultural values**

Singapore's Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, expressed the fact that "Censorship is not simply a matter of enforcement; it is also a public declaration of what we (Singaporeans) want our society to be" (CRCR 1992, p. 6). This is an example of censorship seen as not merely a set of moral laws but also as an indication of what is acceptable social behaviour (Bhabha, 1990b, p. 1-2). The Singapore government, in identifying what the nation's core values should be, has come to the conclusion that Singapore is predominantly a 'traditional' society. The core values of Singapore which are based on the importance of family life, the sanctity of marriage, racial and religious tolerance, the importance of the community and moral integrity, aim to preserve Singapore's traditional heritage against the potential cultural imperialism of other nations. Censorship is the means by which the Singapore government plans to promote and protect the identified 'traditional' values. Moreover, since the values serve to reinforce the Government's authority, the preservation of these values through the use of censorship allows the

"prince" or ruler to protect and retain his or her right to exercise control over the people.

The new Government, in its promise to allow more openness, have reviewed the censorship laws in Singapore. Although some changes have been made, the Government has ensured that the core values will be preserved. The changes have been made to prevent the impressionable young from being exposed to perceived negative influences. New censorship laws are the government's attempts to keep up with changing times but at the same time, the government is cautious about keeping the right balance between liberalising and protecting Singapore from harmful influences.

The Censorship Review Committee was appointed in 1991 to create a balance between being liberal and maintaining a wholesome society. In dealing with issues such as nudity, they recommended that it should be restricted to publications that only serve a small group of people. This basically refers to publications that are only available through subscription and not for public consumption or readily available in the stores. Nudity would be more strictly censored if it is for public consumption such as public posters and newspapers. If nudity is done tastefully, is relevant to the text and a work of art, it can be featured in newspapers. It should not, however, appear on the front page. Photographic nudity will also only be permitted if it is in good taste or relevant to the context (CRCR 1992, p. 12-13).

Nudity, if not portrayed in an appropriate context, is defined as pornographic and therefore banned in Singapore. The Singapore government associates nudity and pornography as having the potential to offend and promote promiscuous behaviour. To preserve moral integrity in the nation, materials containing nudity have to be very carefully considered before it is allowed to be circulated. As in the case of censoring excessive sex and violence in the mass media, there is the fear that undesirable materials will inevitably lead to negative behaviour, which is defined as 'Western' and detrimental to Singapore's 'Asian' values.

In order to maintain a 'morally wholesome society', Singapore has not hesitated to ban several magazines for publishing objectionable materials, including a local edition issue of a French magazine Marie Claire (Lau, 1993, p. 7). This magazine was banned because it carried an article on casual sex ('Government not relaxing', 20/2/93).

Casual sex is frowned upon by the Singapore authorities because it goes against the core values of the importance of the family and therefore the sanctity of marriage. They feel that such an article would encourage the readers to accept casual sex as a norm in Singapore society. This article was therefore banned for encouraging behaviour and attitudes that disregarding moral integrity and undermined the national values of Singapore. By keeping materials of this nature out of Singapore, the Government hopes that it

will not only prevent Singaporeans from getting the wrong ideas, but also preserves the national values.

An Australian magazine Cosmopolitan, which has been banned in Singapore since 1982 for promoting promiscuous values, was under scrutiny recently to see if the ban should be lifted. The magazine failed again to convince censors that it would meet Singapore's censorship standards ('Cosmo publisher disappointed', 1993).

Other publications which have been banned include an issue of American adult comic Deadline, an Australian woman's magazine Cleo, and a special supplement to the British music magazine, Q. These magazines were prevented from circulating in Singapore because they contained offensive illustrations and profane language. Cleo had illustrations of the male sexual organs which were considered offensive instead of educational. Q magazine was banned because it contained a full-frontal nude photograph of American punk rocker Iggy Pop ('3 foreign publications banned', 1991). The illustrations of the male organs in Cleo and the nude photo of Iggy Pop violate the censorship policy regarding nudity because they were easily available at book stores.

The incidents of publications being banned for carrying profanities and offensive illustrations of nudity reveal that the Government's attitude towards preserving moral integrity in the nation is based on conservative values. Since liberalism is equated with being Western, this conservatism is therefore associated with Asian values



which the Government deems as good. It also illustrates the Government's philosophy based on the 'cause and affect' theory, that to allow anything negative into the country will result in the promotion and encouragement of those anti-social values in Singapore.

Violence in the mass media was also the topic of much debate in Singapore. The argument centred around the possible effects that violence in the mass media might have on its viewers. There are genuine fears that the violence on television will translate into violence in society, "My (Home Affairs Minister - Professor Jayakumar) police officers feel that too much of this (violence) on TV may inevitably lead segments of our youth to believe that aggressive or anti-social behaviour is an acceptable way of dealing with others" (TV violence: Ministry, SBC to take a closer look', 1992).

Although there are arguments stating that there is no clear nexus between TV violence and crime in society, the Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, emphasised that Singaporeans must always err on the side of safety ('Violence on TV', 1993). The Government sees a connection between Western countries such as America having a high level of violence and the amount of violence on television and cinema screens.

The need to curb possible violence through the use of censorship underlines one of the core values - consensus not conflict. The Singapore government does not want to

encourage violent unrest in Singapore and therefore put national security at risk. They feel that censorship of violence in the mass media is not only a safe option, it prevents Singaporeans from thinking that conflict is the best way to solve any problem.

The concerns about the amount of violence on television and its potential repercussions led to SBC producers being advised to reduce the amount of violence in locally produced television dramas. Several locally produced dramas containing violence have been brought to the attention of the Government. Violence in a local setting was seen by the Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, as being particularly worrying because "There is an immediacy (in local productions) which is not there when we watch (scenes set in) Hollywood or even Hong Kong ('Violence on TV', 1993). There is the fear that depiction of violence in a familiar setting will legitimise the use of violence in Singapore. Censorship to prevent violence on television will therefore reduce the chances of the occurrence of violent activities in Singapore.

Again, Bhabha's theory of location (1990a, p. 64) becomes relevant. In placing an importance on the location setting of television violence, the Singapore government is trying to isolate the use of violence by limiting it to a location outside of Singapore. They assume that it is possible to fix the cultural boundaries of nations. However, what it fails to acknowledge is that young and presumably impressionable Singaporeans, are very capable of

negotiating his or her own cultural location through the mediation of another located somewhere else (Freud cited in Bhabha, 1990a, p. 66). What this implies is that there may not be a significant difference in the affect of violence in a local or foreign setting.

This fear of the effect of excessive sex and violence is based on a simple cause and effect theory which needs to be explored more deeply. It does not acknowledge the fact that alternative readings of such materials is possible, especially among the young who have been brought up in an environment saturated with the mass media. The Singapore government does acknowledge that there is no concrete evidence that materials containing what they have defined as negative attitudes will directly effect society. However, they also believe that there is no evidence to state that there is no link between negative themes in the mass media translating into anti-social behaviour. Faced with this argument, the natural reaction is to stay on the safe side and censor such materials.

Protecting Singapore's traditional values through the use of censorship is becoming increasingly difficult. The latest CRC Report acknowledges this. As they argue, enforcing of censorship rules will be difficult in the future because of the globalisation of the modern media and miniaturisation technology. Advances in technology enables individuals and entrepreneurs to disseminate any material with little or no control. To counter this problem, the committee has suggested that enforcement needs to be

carried out at the distribution level and "deterrent punitive measures" need to be imposed on offenders. Most importantly, the committee believes that the education system should "play a more active role in imparting sound values and the ability to make ethical judgements to the young. In this way, the young will be able to evaluate materials to which they are exposed and develop into critical and discriminating adults" (CRCR 1992, p. 18)

### Keeping up with the Changing Situation

The Censorship Review committee (CRC) of 1991 took the position in making its decisions that its censorship recommendations should serve to protect and uphold the values and institutions that the Singapore government has identified as core Singapore values. This is in line with the Government's intentions of using censorship to preserve national values.

To gain an idea of how Singaporeans felt about censorship policies, a survey was commissioned. Public involvement was seen by the committee as necessary to keep up with a changing society (CRCR 1992, p. 17). The effort to involve the people in its decision making process revealed that Singaporeans are unprepared for rapid changes in censorship policy at this stage of the country's development (CRCR 1992, p. 17). This result is ironic because the main reasons for the Government's reforms in the Next Lap were to appease what the Government has identified as a growing number of dissatisfied, highly educated Singaporeans.

According to the report, safeguarding national interest continues to be the main concern. The committee felt that liberalisation should not come at the expense of Singapore's future:

Publications inimical to Singapore's national interests should continue to be disallowed. These would include materials that erode the core moral values of society, subvert the nation's security and stability, cause misunderstanding or conflict in our multi-racial and multireligious society, or denigrate any religion or race (CRCR 1992, p. 12)

The CRC also felt that a distinction should be made between materials for public display and private use:

Materials for public displays, such as posters and calendars, should be more stringently censored as they may cause offence to unwilling viewers. Materials for private use can be more liberally treated as they will be read or seen only by people who choose to see or read them (CRCR 1992, p. 11).

Advancing technology has required new forms of censorship. Of particular concern are computer bulletin boards through which pornographic materials can be obtained. Since all that is required to gain access to them is a phone line,

data communication software and a modem, the abuse of the bulletin board system is difficult to monitor. It is recommended that self-regulation should be used in controlling the electronic bulletin boards. Legislation has been suggested as another means to allow the government to act against bulletin board offenders. The committee also feels that heavy penalty should be meted out to those purveying pornography (CRCR 1992, p. 33)

In their deliberations, the committee recognised the fact that different media impact differently on their viewers or readers. Censorship should therefore vary according to the medium. This is a different and more sophisticated approach from the Governments 'cause and effect' model previously in place. All mass media have to abide by the rules of political and social censorship. Materials which can cause harm to the integrity of the government, glorify moral decadence or have the potential to upset racial and religious harmony are banned in the mass media. However, some forms of the media are more accessible to the public and the young and should be more strictly censored. For example, television censorship should be tighter than film censorship because it is more accessible.

The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) which runs the three local television stations has set down principles for censoring television programs:

- (a) the overall theme of a programme is more important than individual scenes, which may at times be objectionable;
- (b) censorship takes into consideration the time of telecast and the target audience for a particular programme; and
- (c) censorship of programs must take into account the prevailing moral standards and expectations of society, and it must be congruent with social responsibility and national interests (CRCR 1992, p. 34).

Guidelines on important issues like racial harmony, public morality, crime, violence and religion help in the censorship process.

The censorship process involves the examination of all programs (produced locally or overseas) by programme executives from SBC's Acquisition and Programming Division before they are screened. Programme executives are also provided with censorship feedback from SBC's Film Advisory Panel (FAP) and the programme Advisory Committee (PAC). The Board of Film Censors (BFC) sends details of its decisions on films to SBC to maintain consistency in film and television censorship (CRCR 1992, p. 34).

SBC's censorship was under the spotlight after a local production, Shattered Dreams, was raised in parliament because it contains "brutal scenes of marital disharmony and wife-beating" ('TV censorship tighter than cinemas:

SBC', 1992). After this incident, SBC assured the Government and the public that its television censorship is more stringent than that of cinemas. This is standard practise for all its three television channels (George, 1992a).

SBC expressed its concerns about the possible effects of excessive violence on television, especially on children. It also recognises the fact that its role is to promote Nation Building policies and therefore, it is in their interest to refrain from screening excessively violent movies to prevent the encouragement of violent behaviours in Singapore. Scheduling guidelines have been adopted to restrict screening of more violent scenes to late at night when children are less likely to watch it. They have adopted censorship guidelines to ensure that there is no excess of gratuitous violence ('TV censorship tighter than cinemas: SBC', 1992).

Using scheduling as a way of presenting movies with adult themes is a good alternative to having choices for screening on television limited because they have to meet the requirements of a general audience. It has also been suggested SBC should not be criticised for exposing the young to unsuitable viewing material. Parents need to take on more responsibility for their children's viewing habits instead of passing on the blame to SBC. If parents do not exert control over the programs watched by their children, other viewer's choice will be limited unreasonably (George, 1992a).



Homosexuality is another topic that has brought SBC under the spotlight. A locally produced Mandarin drama series which had homosexual scenes evoked strong responses. Singapore outlaws homosexual acts both in public and in private because it is deemed as unnatural sexual behaviour. The review committee accepts that homosexuality exist but people are uncomfortable with seeing pictorial depictions of homosexual conduct ('Homosexual scenes should not be shown on TV: Tommy Koh', 1993). Hostility towards homosexuals should not be encouraged but at the same time, the CRC decided that homosexual themes should not be included in television shows which are accessible to everyone. The mass media should not encourage homosexual behaviour but in the case of films, 46% of people surveyed approved of themes or sub-plots accepting homosexuality (CRCR 1992, p. 24).

Besides television, film censorship has also caused a considerable amount of debate in Singapore. In general, films screened in Singapore have to follow the general censorship rules which are binding to all productions and publications circulated in the country. Therefore, all films are scrutinised before they are shown at the cinemas. Films which are censored include:

- 1- Sex films which are highly erotic or themes with blatant and explicit love-making scenes
- 2- films that portray excessive violence, brutal killing, gangsters and excessive blood-letting

3- Religious and racial films that are derogative of a particular race or religion or contradict religious freedom

4- Morally objectionable films that glamorise drug addiction, free love, sexual perversion and sexual promiscuity

5- Politically objectionable films that promote an ideology inimical to our democratic form of Government

6- Films that contain excessive profanities.  
(four letter words can be heard if uttered in anger or disappointment)

(Tan, 1990)

The film censorship process and therefore the ability to screen 'undesirable' material is yet another example of the "prince" or ruler practicing 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1979) through the centralised control of materials that the people might be exposed to. Films are firstly viewed by a censor from the Board of Film Censors (BFC) and if they are uncontroversial, it will be passed. If the film has a controversial theme, a board meeting will be held. Censors will view the film together and discuss the film after viewing it. Their decision will be based on the above guidelines. A vote will be taken and a decision made.

If a conclusion cannot be arrived at after the board meeting, the advisory panel will be called in to view the film and to provide an opinion. The censorship board will use the opinion of the advisory panel to make a decision.

The board's decision is not final, the owner of the film can lodge an appeal to the Appeals Committee. The Films Appeals Committee comprises nine members, including the chairman and the vice-chairman. It is appointed by the Minister for Information and the Arts for a year. Its members are drawn from the various racial and religious groups and have respected professions. Under the Films Act the Film Appeals Committee has authority to approve, classify or recommend excisions to any objectionable parts of a film. Its decision is final (CRCR 1992, p. 38).

The case for publications is similar. All appeals are submitted to the Ministry for Information and the Arts, whose decision is final. With stage plays, all appeals are presently decided by the Minister for Home Affairs, whose decision is final (CRCR 1992, p. 38).

BFC is also in charge of video censorship. Video copies of films have to be consistent with the BFC approved film version. The video operator has to sign a statutory declaration stating that they are identical. Film trailers and film accessories such as promotional posters are subjected to BFC's censorship as well. BFC is also responsible for issuing licenses to all those all those engaged in the business, from distribution to importing, making and the exhibition of videotapes (Tan, 1990).

By putting the BFC in charge of all areas pertaining to film censorship, the Government can ensure that all products for public exhibition will abide by the censorship

laws. Recently, the BFC has been given a new task - to classify films to be screened. With the introduction of new and more liberal laws, films are subjected to less censorship and are given a rating instead.

The new film classification system was introduced by Goh Chok Tong's government in July 1991. Under this system, a "restricted" (R) category was introduced in the cinemas. The new category enabled people aged 18 and above to watch movies which suffered less under the censorship scissors. The reason for this modification was the perceived need to keep up with the changing social climate. Singaporeans were dissatisfied with the single-tier classification system. The single-tier system meant that all films screened had to be suitable for the general audience - both adults and children. Some adult films were shown with considerable cuts or not shown at all. When the controversial American film The Accused was screened in Singapore, the rape scene was reduced so drastically that the Singapore audience came out with the impression that the woman deserved to be raped (Birch, 1992a, p. 85)

Although the new "restricted" category films were subjected to less censorship from BFC, pornography, explicit sexual activity, sadistic and gratuitous violence, themes which promote a drug culture or incite racial and religious disharmony were still not allowed. They are deemed to be promoting values which are detrimental to the process of nation building and the Singapore society. The "general" viewing category remained and films with scenes and themes

that may not be suitable for children will be classified as "PG" where parental guidance is needed. Hence, a three-tier classification was put in place to keep up with changing society.

After the General Elections in September 1991, the government changed its policy. The age limit for "R" category films was increased from 18 to 21. The explanation for the change was not convincing. Some discontent had been expressed about the amount of sex and violence being screened due to new classification system ("R-films critics 'a vocal minority from many groups' ", 1991). This move, which can be seen as taking two steps forwards and one step back, is seen by Sree Kumar ironic:

the irony of this episode was that a government renowned for being strait-laced relaxed its hold over social norms only to find Singaporeans reacting against it (Kumar, 1992, p. 292).

The Singaporeans who reacted against this system of classification were found, according to a survey conducted by the Censorship Review Committee, to be a vocal minority. Two-thirds of those interviewed were supportive of the new film classification system although they did not necessarily support the move to lower the age limit from 21 to 18 (CRCC 1992. p. 45). This makes the decisions to change even more ironic. After all, it is not the consensus of the majority but the voices of a few who brought about the step backwards. There is also the possibility that the reason

given by the policy makers is an excuse to correct what they felt was the mistake of making quick rather than gradual changes.

With the change in policy, the age limit was raised to 21 and only films with artistic merit would be allowed under the new "Restricted (Artistic)" (R(A)) category. The Censorship Review Committee Report recommended that in assessing a film's artistic merit, the following considerations could apply:

- 1- The skill / technique used to create the work of art and the extent of its innovativeness.
- 2- Notwithstanding that the content may be ugly and shocking or subtle and fine, the form and structure should be aesthetically pleasing and must move and engage
- 3- The artistic vision must be true to human experience. The truth could be presented in realistic or symbolic or surrealistic form, but the audience / reader, drawing from his deepest experience. must find it recognisable.

(CRCR 1992, p. 48)

Films in the R(A) category must also be well-produced, with a strong story and credible cast. They must not exploit sex or violence and scenes of sex, nudity and violence should be relevant to the theme and plot and should not be inserted to titillate or excite. The film must be critically acclaimed or a possible award winner ("Basic

Instinct, L'Amant may be screened if passed by film censors", 1992).

The policies set to select R(A) films begs several important questions. For example, how do you define exactly which films are well-produced, have strong story-lines and credible casts? The CRCR's solution to this seems to be based on the films potential to win an award. If the film community approves of a film, than it has to be credible. However, an award does not ensure that the film's theme / themes are agreeable with Singapore's national values. It is also possible that the stress on a credible cast and strong story-line is to ensure that senseless sex and violence will not be shown as R(A) films. In Singapore, it appears that the BFC will be left to make the decisions as to what films fit into the R(A) category.

On the first day that two cinemas screened the R-rated movies Erotic Nights and Wild at Heart, a 100m long queue for tickets showed the public's favourable respond to the move towards introducing the "R" category. Two weeks after, the cinemas were still packed. The main movie goers were described as young, male and curious (Fernandez, 1991).

In the month that R-rated movies were introduced, cinema attendance increased by half-a-million. The first week after the R-rating was introduced, 46 out of 55 theatres in Singapore were screening R-rated movies ('First 'R' movies swell audience by half million', 1992). When cinema

attendance fell after the new R(A) policy was put in place, there were speculations that the novelty effect was wearing off. However, the fall in figures was not an indication of a declining interest in R(A) films. It was due to the fact that fewer R(A) films were screened. The popularity of such films could still be seen by the queues for tickets to watch The Unbearable Lightness of Being. More than a hundred days after it was first screened, it was still difficult to obtain tickets ('Are 'R' films still hot? No, says Dr. Ker - but long ticket queues tell a different story', 1992).

At the Singapore International Film Festival, Russian film The Aesthetic Syndrome was subjected to cuts in Singapore. This was a film that passed even the reputedly strict standards of the Soviet censors. The director, Kira Muratova, decided, on principle, to withdraw her entry rather than allow the censorship. The Singapore Film Appeals Committee said that the nude scenes in the film were gratuitous and bordered on pornography. The fact that the film won a Silver Bear in the Berlin Film Festival in 1990 did not seem to make any difference (Chong, 1991).

### Deconstructing the Changes

The changes made by the government are cautious and minimal. Creating more openness in the mass media through changes in censorship laws is in line with the policies of the Next Lap but they seem to more of a gesture of good will than a genuine willingness to liberalise. The government knows that if it loses too much control over the



mass media by allowing more freedom, they will lose their main vehicle for transmitting government policies on nation building. The media is, in their opinion, undoubtedly a powerful instrument in guiding the masses. In light of this, the caution behind the changes can be understood.

The Singapore government appears to also be coming to terms with the fact that complete control of the mass media through the use censorship will eventually be impossible. Laws would not be able to prevent 'undesirable' materials from getting into Singapore in the future. The introduction of the five core values and the efforts to make privatise SBC and therefore make local television channels more competitive and attractive to Singaporeans are ways of fighting the rot.

Other vehicles for preserving Singapore's values and promoting Nation Building have been suggested by the CRC as additional areas to cultivate. Education has been singled out as an important vehicle for transmitting values. Through education, Singaporeans can be prepared for this onset of new material. They should be educating to make 'correct' and responsible choices with regards to the mass media.

By introducing pay television and the film classification system, Singaporeans are being gradually exposed to more media choices. Perhaps their introduction is meant to gradually exposure Singaporeans to more choices so that

they would not be too overwhelmed by the vast array of satellite television when it arrives in Singapore.

The significant changes in censorship policies have been social rather than political. Journalist Cherian George (1992b) feels that the latest Censorship Review Committee's report as well as the 1981 report failed to address political censorship. Politics were swept under the carpet and in doing so, the committees were giving the impression that politics belonged in the untouchable realms of the elected politicians. Ironically, in neglecting to address political issues, the committees themselves are practising self-censorship. According to Cherian George, "Singapore's media environment is cleaned up with political as well as moral filters: both need addressing" (1992b)

The Singapore government does not censor items before they go to air, so in this sense censorship does not exist. However, "if censorship is taken more generally to mean policies and practices of the state that restrict the communication process, and prevent people from sending or receiving information that they want, then there is political censorship" (George, 1992b). Regardless of whether the existence of censorship is subtle or obvious, it nevertheless symbolises control and the "prince" or ruler exercising power over the territory and its people (Foucault, 1979, p. 5).

There is no doubt that there are restrictions in Singapore on the mass media. The issuing of licences is a form of

censorship because the government has the power to remove the licence if they are not content with the publication. Most importantly though, Cherian George identifies self-censorship as "the main means by which information is withheld in every sphere of cultural and knowledge production in Singapore is self-censorship" (George, 1992b).

The Singapore government has acknowledged the fact that rising educational levels, advances in technology and the increase in the amount of exposure Singaporeans have of the values and practices of other countries have led to the demand for more relaxed censorship. Unfortunately, it seems that they have chosen to ignore evaluating political censorship and decided to concentrate on social and moral censorship instead. Perhaps this is the Singapore government's idea of compromise, meeting the demands of the people half way. It could also be due to the fact that the Government is still insecure about opening up political discussions for fear of it destabilising Singapore's sound political climate.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

In this thesis, my argument has been that despite changes made to the mass media in Singapore in the Next Lap, the issue of Government control over the mass media has not been resolved. The mass media in Singapore remain under Government control; used principally for Nation Building and social control. The changes implemented are more in form than in substance.

The Singapore Government's establishment of the Next Lap conforms to Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of 'invented traditions'. According to Hobsbawm, there are three overlapping types of invented traditions:

- a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities.
- b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority.
- c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.

(Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 9)

The purpose of Nation Building in Singapore is to create social cohesion by giving Singaporeans a national identity and destiny. This unity is achieved through the use of 'necessary illusions' (Birch, 1992a, p. 26) and narratives.

In Singapore's case, national identity 'invents' an 'imagined (artificial) community' (Anderson, 1991) through the promotion in the mass media of images of a united, multi-racial country.

Establishing or legitimizing institutions and relations of authority, in Foucault's (1979) opinion, is the art of government. Like a prince working towards gaining the acceptance of his people, the Singapore government has established 'relations of authority' (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 9) through several channels, such as the introduction of campaigns enunciated across the mass media. More significantly, by attempting to practise consensus politics and therefore giving Singaporeans a greater say in the governing of their country, the Government is consolidating its authority by gaining the acceptance of the people.

In presenting Singaporeans with five core values and reviewing the nation's censorship laws, the Singapore government is establishing a 'convention of behaviour' (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 9). This process of socialisation also gives Singaporeans a common and standard set of behaviour which acts as a unifying factor. In addition, the core values and censorship laws set down by the Government works towards limiting opposition through the promotion of values such as encouraging the people to accept national policies as vital to the nation's development. Any opposition to these values are made to appear confrontational (Clammer, 1993, p. 46).

In the 'reinvention' of Singapore's direction in the Next Lap, the Singapore government has promised to allow for a more relaxed political culture. To this end, some changes have been introduced. The privatisation of SBC, establishing pay television and relaxing censorship laws, are the more important changes that have been made in the mass media in the Next Lap. However, as this thesis has discussed, the loosening of the reins has not meant a significant change in the Government's relationship with the mass media. Although direct authority has been relinquished, there are still mechanisms in place to ensure that some form of control is still in place. The most significant forms of control in Singapore are the censorship laws and the practice of self-censorship.

The Government's attempt to introduce changes is therefore not intended to allow for a complete liberalisation of the mass media. The intentions of the changes are two-fold. Firstly, it is to appease Singaporeans who are demanding change and the ability to participate in policy planning. Secondly, it allows the Government to retain the ability to control the mass media and therefore continue to use it as a Nation Building apparatus. Although minimal changes have been made, the structure put in place to oversee the media has been enhanced to cope with foreseeable future problems. By encouraging the local media industry to become more competitive, the Singapore government is bracing itself for the unavoidable invasion of satellite television. They hope that a more attractive local media would be able to hold the Singapore audience and therefore, maintain a vital

channel for the communication of Government Nation Building policies.

The changes may not amount to much but it shows that the Government is aware of the direction in which media technology is heading and therefore plan to establish mechanisms for control as the new technologies make regulation of the mass media virtually impossible. Control is still considered an important issue and the Singapore government are not willing to give it up completely. As Clammer acknowledges, the Singapore government's hegemony, is non-negotiable (1993, p. 35). It appears that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

# Chewing gum banned

## Move taken as used gum disrupted MRT services

By Dominic Nathan

The trains also had to be sent for cleaning. An SMRT spokesman had said that the increased cleaning costs might even force CHEWING gum to be banned in Singapore from faces up.

In a short statement issued on Monday, the Environment Ministry said that the ban was imposed because spent chewing gum had disrupted MRT train operations.

Also, it added, chewing gum litter had been a perennial nuisance at public places like cinemas and housing estates.

On the problem, the SMRT encountered with chewing gum, it said: "Spent gum has been found stuck in MRT trains. SMRT has to incur unnecessary cost to remove the chewing gum laboriously."

More seriously, spent chewing gum has caused train disruptions as it prevents the train doors from closing. As a result, passengers were inconvenienced. The Government, it added, has therefore decided to ban the import, sale and manufacture of chewing gum from Jan 3, 1992.

On two occasions in July and August, chewing gum prevented MRT train doors from closing fully, triggering a computerised safety measure which "froze" the trains.

The trains could only move again after all passengers had disembarked, creating considerable inconvenience to commuters.

carries a fine of not more than \$10,000 and a jail term of not more than one year or both, he added.

Second and subsequent convictions would mean a fine of not more than \$20,000 or a jail term of not more than two years or both.

It is not known if the mere possession of chewing gum would in itself be an offence.

The littering and other problems caused by chewing gum have been highlighted in recent press reports but the issue is not a new one.

In fact, a ban on its sale was considered way back in 1983.

Mr S. Dhanabalan, then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Culture, had said that a ban would be neces-

sary if other efforts like asking the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation to stop advertisements on chewing gum were not successful in removing the sticky problem.

A dozen Singaporeans contacted on Monday generally agreed that tough measures should be taken to deal with the problem.

But a fair number of them commented that a ban was too drastic a move. They said that moves to educate Singaporeans on the bad habit should have been intensified instead.

Housewife Mary Yong, 32, said: "I am all for the ban. It is a dirty habit, especially when people just spit out the gum or stick it to the back of

chairs in cinemas or bus seats."

Agreeing, Mr Tang Cheong Soon, 32, a civil servant, said: "If you can not import, make or sell chewing gum, then the littering and mischief problem is removed. Banning it solves the problem effectively although it seems too extreme."

He added that stiffer penalties and an education programme might have the same impact as a ban.

At present, the maximum fine for eating in the MRT premises is \$500.

No recent figures are available on how much Singaporeans spent on chewing gum, but a report on the problem in 1983 said that about \$4 million worth of gum was bought every year.

In public areas like cinemas and parks and in common areas of housing estates like lifts, staircases and corridors, littering by chewing gum is also a major problem.

For instance, the City Centre Town Council is buying a special high-pressure waterjet costing \$10,000 to remove the stains as the waterjets used for washing floors are not strong enough for the job.

In all cases, teenagers have been identified as the culprits.

Meanwhile, chewing gum was going cheap on Thursday at neighbourhood provision stores and supermarkets. Prices were slashed by as much as half to get rid of stocks before yesterday's deadline banning the sale, import and manufacture of chewing gum.

Boxes containing 20 packets each cost between \$3 and \$8 less at Dalmaru in Liang Court and Eng Ang Traders in Bedok.

Other stores enticed customers with "buy two get one free" offers and five cents discount per pack.

However, most of the 15 stores that The Straits Times visited on Thursday in the central business district, Bedok, Bishan, Toa Payoh and Ang Mo Kio said they did not expect to sell off all stocks despite the discounts offered.

Demand was not high enough and the time allowed to get rid of products was too short, said the shopkeepers.



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