

Deliberative Democracy in Singapore

Introduction

Singapore is frequently criticised by NGOs and international organisations for the limits it places on political speech, ranking 154th out of 178 on the World Press Freedom Index.¹ Public debate is far from non-existent, however, and indeed has been growing increasingly diverse over recent years. While opposition party politics and the letters pages of the *Straits Times* have always provided a space for complaint and criticism of the government, the potential for public discussion has grown massively with the spread of the internet. Lively communities of political commentators can be found both on local sites such as sammyboy.com and hardwarezone.com.sg, as well as on international discussion boards such as Reddit and 4chan. Similarly, vibrant social media communities have sprung up in recent years surrounding various blogs and “new media” outlets online, both state-owned/influenced and independent. The internet has also facilitated the expression of political viewpoints in the real world, notably via the annual Pink Dot rallies held in support of LGBT rights since 2009.

Singapore’s restrictions on free speech can be traced directly back to the circumstances that surrounded the nation’s birth. The decolonisation process in Southeast Asia was a fraught one, taking place against a Cold War background dominated by communist threats – whether real, imagined, or exaggerated for political ends. Throughout the 1950s and 60s violence was commonplace among Singapore’s neighbours. The First Indochina War was followed almost immediately by the Vietnam War. Communist insurgents were still fighting British and Malayan troops on the Malaysian Peninsular. And the Indonesian government was pursuing its *Konfrontasi* policy of border incursions and terrorist attacks intended to prevent the formation of Malaysia (of which Singapore was briefly a part). Singapore’s multi-ethnic make-up also created tensions, leading eventually to the race riots of 1964 and 1969.

This created a climate that favoured strong political control over public debate, a feature of Singapore’s political landscape which continues – albeit in a somewhat moderated form – to this day, and which remains widely accepted by the public at large.²

British and Malaysian efforts to contain communism during the Malayan Emergency created a legal framework that allowed the detention without trial of politically subversive individuals under the Preservation of Public Service Ordinance, many of the provisions of which were replicated post-independence by the Internal Security Act. Similarly, the Sedition Act prohibited speech and publications that “bring into hatred or contempt or... excite disaffection against the Government”. Acts or publications susceptible to threaten racial and religious

¹ World Press Freedom Index 2016, Reporters Without Borders, 20 April 2016, retrieved 4 April 2017: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

² *Our Singapore Conversation*, OSC Final Report, Ministry of Manpower, 26 August 2013.

This case was written by Jennifer Dodgson in collaboration with Hawyee Auyong, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKY School), National University of Singapore and has been funded by the LKY School. The case does not reflect the views of the sponsoring organisation nor is it intended to suggest correct or incorrect handling of the situation depicted. The case is not intended to serve as a primary source of data and is meant solely for class discussion.

harmony were also prohibited,³ while section 33 of the Films Act banned films about domestic party politics.⁴ Similarly, tight control was maintained over local television and press. While foreign channels are available, all 14 free-to-air channels in Singapore are owned by MediaCorp, a state-owned company. MediaCorp also ran 13 radio stations and one newspaper, *Today*. All other daily titles are published by Singapore Press Holdings, whose management and shareholders are all government-appointed. Foreign publishers are subject to heavy restrictions, including censorship, gazetting, and the payment of a \$200,000 deposit prior to publication.⁵ Similarly, local blogs and news website receiving over 50,000 visits from Singaporean IP addresses per month had to provide a \$50,000 bond and take down prohibited content within 24 hours.⁶

However, the government's position has evolved over the years. While the legal measures allowing for strict control over public debate remained in place, their implementation mellowed somewhat. While occasional prosecutions brought against individuals accused of threatening racial and religious harmony online had a certain chilling effect,⁷ subjects and forms of expression that would once have been considered taboo or even illegal were shared freely on internet fora. To cite one notable example, a large proportion of posts in the "religion" forum at Sammyboy.com were technically illegal under Singapore law, but the government has appeared uninterested in prosecuting such low-impact transgressions. Moreover, though frameworks allowing for the mass arrest of subversive elements or opposition politicians remained in place, such a policy would be unthinkable in the current climate.

Over time, in parallel to the official statutes limiting free expression, an informal system of "OB⁸ markers" has grown up. This referred to the tacit understanding that exists among the government, the population, and the press regarding the subjects that can and cannot be debated in public due to their perceived sensitivity. The OB markers themselves have changed over time – for a long time homosexuality was considered OB. As social mores changed, this was no longer the case. This has led to a certain amount of confusion regarding their exact nature. During the "white elephant incident" a group of schoolgirls who sold t-shirts with slogans that referred to delayed infrastructure projects were issued police warnings, something that was later described as an overreaction by Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng.⁹ Nevertheless, they represent an effort on the government's part to adapt to social mores concerning free speech.

³ Sedition Act, Revised Edition 2013 (Original Enactment: M Ordinance 14 of 1948), retrieved 3 April 2017: <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId%3A%221f6d9e4b-1cf1-4575-9480-da4bdeff9ef4%22%20Status%3Apublished%20Depth%3A0;rec=0>

⁴ Films act, Revised Edition 1998 (Original Enactment: Act 22 of 1981), retrieved 4 April 2017: <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId%3A%22536052a1-84d8-4939-b05d-20225a477a6d%22%20Status%3Ainforce%20Depth%3A0;rec=0>

⁵ Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, Revised Edition 2002 (Original Enactment: Act 12 of 1974), retrieved 4 April 2017: <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId:%224a71c728-6dbf-4de2-a730-a121b679ffac%22%20Status:inforce%20Depth:0;rec=0;whole=yes>

⁶ Melanie Chua, *How Should the Singapore Government Regulate Online News Sites?*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, 2013.

⁷ High profile cases include the closing down of the Real Singapore website and the Amos Yee and Roy Ngerng prosecutions.

⁸ Out-of-Bounds.

⁹ Channel News Asia, "Police overreacted to white elephant T-shirt incident: DPM Wong," 21 January 2006.

The OB marker concept is not the only method that the government has to govern mass opinion in the censorship process. The Protection from Harassment Act,¹⁰ officially intended as a means of countering online bullying, effectively functions as a means for private citizens to “denounce” content that they find objectionable. In the years since the law’s enactment it has been used not only as a means for media personalities to court publicity and pursue private feuds,¹¹ but also as a channel for the both public and the state to debate what is and is not acceptable. To cite one well-known example, when blogger Amos Yee published a video attacking both the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and various forms of organised religion, 32 complaints were made by members of the public under the Protection from Harassment Act. The authorities eventually declined to pursue the charge (though other indictments related to his offensive remarks concerning Christianity were maintained) – a noteworthy incident where the public’s appetite for censorship was apparently greater than that of the government.¹² Interestingly, when the Ministry of Defence attempted to use the same statute to prevent new media website *The Online Citizen* from publishing opinions that it had breached intellectual property law, the judges in the case decided that the government or branches thereof are not entitled to the protection of the act.¹³

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, in fact, the government was seen to be moving away from coercive control of public debate, and towards a model based on the co-optation of alternative viewpoints. A series of large-scale public consultation exercises was held: The Next Lap (1991), Singapore 21 (1999), Remaking Singapore (2003), and most recently Our Singapore Conversation (2012).¹⁴ Similarly, small-scale consultations were held regarding individual laws or projects via the government’s REACH website, and most public-facing agencies maintained several channels for feedback.

Discussion between citizens and the government regarding the state and the future of Singapore was not limited to formal consultation channels, however. Over the years, a succession of relatively minor news stories has sparked active discussion between citizens and government. Seemingly trivial controversies such as the renaming of a museum or the culling of animals allowed citizens, government, and the media to express themselves fully without any risk of running up against OB markers or triggering prosecution. Such incidents gave space for all actors not only to establish and experiment with their places in society, but also to practice the skills needed for participation in a functioning deliberative democracy. They also offered opportunities for ordinary citizens to take a stand on symbolic issues, and thus to tacitly stake out positions for themselves on the nation’s political spectrum. Similarly, they gave the government an opportunity to take the temperature of public opinion and observe the preferences of the electorate.

¹⁰ Protection from Harassment Act, 15 November 2014, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;ident=4d9a026f-6eef-4738-849b-69bef881979b;page=0;query=DocId%3A07275b05-417a-4de5-a316-4c15606a2b8d%20Depth%3A0%20Status%3Ainforce;rec=0>

¹¹ Channel News Asia, “Blogger Grace Tan files for protection order against Xiaxue,” 31 March 2015, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/blogger-grace-tan-files/1758302.html>

¹² *Today*, “Assault on Amos Yee draws sharp criticism,” 30 April 2015, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/amos-yee-back-jail-after-no-one-posts-bail-him?singlepage=true>

¹³ *The Straits Times*, “Is Government a person? Court rules on anti-harassment law provision,” 17 January 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/is-govt-a-person-court-rules-on-anti-harassment-law-provision>

¹⁴ Guo, Yvonne, and Charles Phua, *Our Singapore Conversation: Bridging the Great Affective Divide*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, 21 April 2014.

This study will take four such cases from various points in time: the Graduate Mothers Scheme (1984), the Wee Shu Min controversy (2006), the renaming of the Syonan Gallery (2017) and the chicken culling by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) in 2017. In each case, we will look at the thinking underpinning the government's response to public criticism, and the way in which the incident in question fits (or fails to fit) particular templates of deliberative democracy.

The Graduate Mothers Scheme (1984)

In the years immediately following independence in 1965, Singapore underwent a population boom, leading to fears of an unsustainable population and prompting a raft of government policies – the “Stop at Two” initiative that was aimed at reducing the number of children born. In 1965, the average Singaporean woman had 2.08 children. Thereafter, the birth rate dropped precipitously as per-capita income rose, and by 1980 had fallen to 0.86 children per woman, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.¹⁵

Since then, various strategies have been put in place to encourage Singaporeans to have more children, including the Foreign Maid Scheme of 1979¹⁶ (which made live-in childcare cheaper) and the creation of the Social Development Unit (SDU, a state-sponsored dating service) in 1984.¹⁷

However, the government went further than just encouraging a general increase in the birth rate. While the belief that intelligence is largely hereditary is widespread in Singapore,¹⁸ former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was a particularly strong advocate of the idea, saying in his 1983 national day speech: “If you don't include your women graduates in your breeding pool and leave them on the shelf, you would end up a more stupid society...So what happens? There will be less bright people to support dumb people in the next generation. That's a problem.”¹⁹ The comments were widely reported in the press²⁰ and immediately stoked controversy, with *The Straits Times* devoting the following day's front page to angry public reactions.²¹ The topic continued to make headlines throughout that year, with regular articles appearing on women graduates' reluctance to marry less well-educated men while their male classmates happily paired off with non-graduates.²²

As a result, natalist policies were increasingly designed to target those regarded as the elite in society, notably university graduates. In early 1984 the various measures making up the Graduate Mothers Scheme were announced. SDU dating activities were to target university students and graduates in particular. The National University of Singapore (NUS) was ordered to achieve gender-parity in its new intakes (previously female students had been in the majority), married women with a junior high level education earning less than \$750 a month were offered a \$10,000 grant if they agreed to be sterilised. Most controversially, graduate mothers with three or more children were given priority in choosing schools.²³

¹⁵ *LA Times*, “‘Stop at 2’ Campaign Works Too Well; Singapore Urges New Baby Boom,” 21 June 1987.

¹⁶ Dodgson, Jennifer. *Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore: Social and Historical Perspectives*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, 26 October 2016.

¹⁷ *The Straits Times*, “PA's cupid will start work soon,” 19 November 1985.

¹⁸ Chadwick, Ruth, ed. *Ethics, reproduction and genetic control*, Routledge, 2006.

¹⁹ Lee Kuan Yew, “Talent for the future” (1983) in *Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005.

²⁰ *The Business Times*, “Birth Trend Spells Trouble, Says Lee,” 15 August 1983.

²¹ *The Straits Times*, “It's got the town buzzing...” 16 August 1983.

²² *The Business Times*, “Local women graduates – most may end up unmarried,” 29 August 1983.

²³ *The Straits Times*, “School entry rules changed,” 24 January 1984.

The result was a mass outcry, largely on the part of the very people that the policy intended to benefit: university-educated women. A petition against the plan that circulated among NUS students attracted over 3000 signatures, and 500 Nanyang Technological Institute students also protested against the measures. A flood of letters criticising the policy were published in local newspapers. The press itself got involved in the debate, interviewing participants and constitutional experts about the new policies. The main complaints were centred on the issue of school choice and the fact that young, educated women felt that they were being unfairly scapegoated for the nation's problems.²⁴

While few people objected to the idea that intelligence may be influenced by genes, many were outraged by a policy designed to give additional favours to children already perceived as advantaged. As future-Minister Vivian Balakrishnan wrote in a letter to the *The Straits Times*,

*“The child of an educated parent already has significant academic advantages. This scheme will further handicap the child who does not have the good fortune to be born to a graduate mother. If we allow changes like this to ossify, we will inevitably develop a rigid class system.”*²⁵

Members of the government and the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) made repeated attempts to put the policy to the people in a more persuasive manner, trying to counter allegations that the policies favoured particular groups and gave them an unfair advantage. National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Secretary General Ong Teng Cheong argued that:

*“We are doing it because we want to raise the level of Singapore's population, not for the love of anyone but for Singapore's future... If our government only pursues popular policies to please the people then we are doomed.”*²⁶

Over time, as opposition failed to die down, even PAP MPs began to question the policy openly. Dr Ow Chin Hock addressed some school students, saying:

*“We know the problem, we know the tremendous resentment and bitterness created because of this scheme among non-graduate mothers. But I would like to hear from the young what would be the solutions or incentives to encourage graduate mothers to have more children. Or should we leave it to nature?”*²⁷

In November 1984, a forum on the topic “Women's choices, women's lives” was held at the NUS, with the Graduate Mothers Scheme as the central topic of discussion. Many of the speakers resented the state's attempts to push them towards a particular role, whether that of career-woman or wife and mother. Participants also argued that the policy devalued the contributions of less well-educated women, and contained an inherent bias against Malay and Indian families, who tended to both have more children and lower levels of education. A group of women present at the forum later went on to found AWARE, a major women's rights organisation in Singapore.²⁸

²⁴ Ong, Aihwa, and Michael G. Peletz, eds., *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*, Univ of California Press, 1995.

²⁵ Balakrishnan, Vivian, “No such thing as perfect equality, but...”, *The Straits Times*, 1 February 1984.

²⁶ *The Straits Times*, “Mr. Ong Explains the School Priority to Grassroots,” 27 February 1984.

²⁷ *The Business Times*, “Students asked view on graduate mother plan,” 22 June 1984.

²⁸ Arora, Mandakini, ed., *Small Steps, Giant Leaps: A History of AWARE and the Women's Movement in Singapore*. Association of Women for Action and Research, 2007.

In the general election of December 1984, the PAP's share of the vote dropped by 12.9 percentage points, a decline that was widely attributed to public unhappiness regarding the Graduate Mothers Scheme. For many Singaporeans this was a watershed moment. As one anonymous letter writer put it:

“Those who speak up are not trying to be fashionable or popular but are trying to see that only the best is good enough for Singapore... This is not the time for the PAP to bemoan the passing of the praises but to sit up and take notice of the people's voice; to re-examine policies with respect to public opinion.”²⁹

While the government had at first insisted that the scheme would be maintained despite public opposition, the school choice aspect was in fact repealed in 1985. The Graduate Mothers Scheme as a whole was replaced in 1987 with a raft of less controversial policies (such as tax rebates) aimed at achieving the same outcome.³⁰

Much later, in his memoirs, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew said that the main problem with Singapore's population policies had been the failure to implement the Graduate Mothers policies in the 1960s, when people would have been more likely to acquiesce in the face of the decision: “We should have foreseen that the better-educated would have two or fewer children, and the less-educated four or more.”³¹

He added later in a separate interview that “I cannot solve the problem, and I have given up. I have given the job to another generation of leaders.”³²

The Wee Shu Min Elitism Controversy (2006)

In September 2006, private tutor and public speaking coach Derek Wee wrote a letter to the *The Straits Times* responding to an article quoting PM Lee Kuan Yew exhorting young Singaporeans to be committed and make a difference in society. The letter was not published, so Mr Wee created a Blogspot site and uploaded the text there. In the piece he argued that Singaporean companies were focusing too much on the young, making it difficult or impossible for older people to find work. He argued that:

“Onus is really on the government to revamp the society. A society that is not a pressure cooker. A society that does not mirror so perfectly, what survival of the fittest is. But a society, where it's people can be committed, do their best and not having to fear whether they will still wake up employed tomorrow. Sadly, Singapore does not offer such luxuries and security anymore.” [sic]³³

The blog post received a large number of comments, mostly agreeing with the tenor of the piece, as well as bringing up other concerns, such as the importation of “foreign talent” to fill jobs and worries about social mobility.

²⁹ ‘Not a Silent Gentlemanly One!’, “Dissent can be a good sign,” *The Straits Times*, 24 July 1984.

³⁰ Mauzy, Diane K., and Robert Stephen Milne, *Singapore politics under the People's Action Party*, Psychology Press, 2002.

³¹ Lee Kuan Yew, *From third world to first: The Singapore story, 1965-2000*, Vol. 2, Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd, 2012.

³² Lee Kuan Yew, *One man's view of the world*, Straits Times Press, 2013.

³³ Wee, Derek, “Future of Singapore,” 3 October 2006, retrieved 6 April 2017: <http://derekwee.blogspot.sg/2006/10/future-of-singapore.html>

By 19th October, the post had gained sufficient reach as to come to the attention of Ms Wee Shu Min (no relation), an 18-year-old student, who wrote a highly critical rebuttal on her own blog. She finished the post saying:

“dear derek is one of many wretched, undermotivated, overassuming leeches in our country, and in this world. one of those who would prefer to be unemployed and wax lyrical about how his myriad talents are being abandoned for the foreigner’s, instead of earning a decent, stable living as a sales assistant. it’s not even about being a road sweeper. these shitbags don’t want anything without “manager” and a name card. please, get out of my elite uncaring face.” [sic]³⁴

This response attracted outrage from netizens, the condemnation growing particularly fierce after it was discovered that Wee Shu Min’s father was Wee Siew Kim, an MP for the PAP.

The exchange rapidly went viral, being felt by many netizens to be symptomatic of a variety of issues within society: fear of mass immigration, worries regarding external pressure to be financially successful, concerns over retirement adequacy, and most of all a growing anxiety that Singapore had been gradually developing its own hereditary class structure (an issue that had also been prominent in the graduate mothers debate).

While Singapore had taken justifiable pride in its meritocratic approach to government in its early years, by the 2000s – with the birth of second and third generation Singaporeans – many were beginning to worry that the old meritocratic ideals had degenerated into elitism for elitism’s sake, and that the system was producing insufficient elite turnover.³⁵ Many commentators felt that Wee Shu Min used a position granted to her by her family connections to look down on those who had not been born with similar advantages. As one response put it:

“We always long to see the “truthful” side of MP of what they actually think. Thank goodness, now we discovered at least how they think because Like Father Like Son mentality. We perhaps need to dig more blogsite by relative or those close to MP and future leaders.” [sic]³⁶

Though some of the comments agreed with Wee Shu Min’s points, her tone was almost universally condemned. As one person writing under the name of “e beng” said to Derek Wee:

“ppl can call you sour grapes, cos that’s what it sounds like. I dun really care about what she’s like cos I could get it wrong. She’s talking about hard work underneath that bitchiness.” [sic]³⁷

Both bloggers were apparently surprised by the scale of the response. Derek Wee published a second post saying that he did not wish to become a regular blogger and that it was “beyond

³⁴ The original post was taken down, but the full text can be found copied into the comments on Derek Wee’s blog.

³⁵ Tan, Kenneth Paul, "Meritocracy and elitism in a global city: Ideological shifts in Singapore," *International Political Science Review* 29, no. 1 (2008): 7-27.

³⁶ Wee, Derek, 2006.

³⁷ Ibid.

my wildest imagination that my commentary has created such a furore.”³⁸ Wee Shu Min, for her part, shut down her site and apologised via another blogger’s page, saying that her initial post was:

“quite obviously, a rant in the heat of the moment. In addition I don’t believe that my blog has the wide readership of derek wee’s, (...) and my intention was more to vent my own frustrations than a public denouncement.”[sic]³⁹

The uproar was such that Wee Shu Min’s father was drawn into the debate, responding via the *The Straits Times*:

*“I think if you cut through the insensitivity of the language, her basic point is reasonable, that is, that a well-educated university graduate who works for a multinational company should not be bemoaning about the Government and get on with the challenges in life. Nonetheless, I have counselled her to learn from it. Some people cannot take the brutal truth and that sort of language, so she ought to learn from it.”*⁴⁰

The choice to respond was an unfortunate one. Not only did the *The Straits Times* article bring the incident to a wider audience, but the apparent suggestion that the controversy was the fault of over-sensitive netizens increased public outrage. They responded not only with more complaints, but also by tracking down personal photographs of Shu Min and making threats against her.⁴¹

Two days later, Wee Siew Kim was obliged to issue a proper apology, saying: “I should not have said what I did about people’s inability to take the brutal truth and strong language.”⁴²

Nevertheless, the incident served to spark off a public debate, with various articles being published about the problems of “intellectual elitism” and touching upon the issue of elite reproduction.⁴³

In a parliamentary speech warning about the dangers of class conflict, PAP MP Sin Boon Ann referred obliquely to the case, saying that “The perception exists that Singapore is a society bifurcated between the elites and the commoners, the scholars and the normal streams, the gifted and the ordinary, the [public housing] dwellers and the private property owner, the rich and the poor” and that it was necessary to “break down the institution of snobbery within our society”.⁴⁴

³⁸ Wee, Derek, “My Comments,” 30 October 2006, retrieved 6 April 2017:

<http://derekwee.blogspot.sg/2006/10/my-comments.html>

³⁹ Wei Kiat, “Wee Shu Min’s Apology,” Wei Kiat’s Blog, 24 October 2006, retrieved 7 April 2017:

<http://weikiatblog.blogspot.sg/2006/10/wee-shu-mins-apology.html>

⁴⁰ *The Straits Times*, “A Lesson Learnt, Says MP and Dad Wee Siew Kim,” 24 October 2006.

⁴¹ The Intelligent Singaporean, “Wee Shu-Min Affair”, October 31 2006. Retrieved 12 April 2017:

<https://intelligentsingaporean.wordpress.com/wee-shu-min/>

⁴² *The Straits Times* “Wee Siew Kim apologises for remarks,” 26 October 2006.

⁴³ See, for example: Chua Mui Hoong, “How meritocracy can breed intellectual elitism,” *The Straits Times*, 10 November 2006.

⁴⁴ Au, Alex, “Mixing welfare and elitism in Singapore,” *Asia Times*, 23 November 2006, retrieved 19 April 2017: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HK23Ae02.html

Renaming the Syonan Gallery (2017)

On 9 February 2017, the revamped Old Ford Factory museum of local history was opened to the press under its new name of The Syonan Gallery.

That name – recalling the period when Singapore was renamed Syonan-To by Japanese occupiers – was the source of much debate. This official use of the name “Syonan” (昭南), which means “Light of the South”, but which also makes reference to Emperor Hirohito’s reign name (昭和 or Showa), was seen by many Singaporeans as effectively condoning – or at least accepting – the occupation.

As law professor and heritage expert Kevin Tan said “I think a more appropriate name might have to be found because it suggests a celebration of the time period.”⁴⁵ Daniel Teo, whose grand-uncle died in a Japanese prison, was harsher in his condemnation, saying “My elders had suffered during the war, and Syonan glorified the might of our invaders. So the name Syonan Gallery had hit me very strongly.”⁴⁶

Other commentators were more concerned about the traumatic memories that the name could awaken for those who experienced the war. “Doesn’t the word ‘Syonan’ carry negative and painful meaning, especially for those who actually lived through the occupation?” asked one netizen.⁴⁷

The reactions were not all negative, however. Retired teacher, K. Nadarajah, resident in Singapore during the war, shrugged off the name-change, saying “enough time has passed”,⁴⁸ while heritage blogger Jerome Lim argued that the new name was a “good way to jolt those less aware of the horrors associated with the war”.⁴⁹ Others, such as commentator Andrew Fong, saw the renamed gallery as a useful warning for future, saying “We simply cannot hide from what happened and it should be used to highlight the dangers of what happens when one nation enforces its superiority over others.”⁵⁰

By 11 February the public debate surrounding the name had spread to the point at which the National Library Board – whose advisory panel chose the name – had to release a statement explaining the choice, saying that “The new name of the gallery reminds us how brittle our sovereignty can be, as Singapore lost not only its freedom but also its name during the Japanese Occupation.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ *The Straits Times*, “Syonan Gallery: Revamped war museum’s name sparks questions,” 10 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017:

⁴⁶ *The Straits Times*, “Syonan Gallery renamed: ‘Never any intention to cause pain’,” 18 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/naming-of-gallery-never-any-intention-to-cause-pain>

⁴⁷ *The Straits Times*, “Syonan Gallery: Revamped war museum’s name sparks questions,” 10 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/revamped-war-museums-name-sparks-questions>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *The Straits Times*, “NLB explains its rationale for war gallery’s name,” 11 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/nlb-explains-its-rationale-for-war-gallery-name>

⁵¹ Ibid.

The Singapore Government also defended the name initially, with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong posting on Facebook that “We cannot erase our history or bury the past. The exhibition is a reminder of a traumatic period in our history”.⁵²

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information, said that the name ‘Syonan Gallery’ was not intended to express approval for Japanese actions, but that the occupation was a historical fact and “we should call it what it was”.⁵³

Similarly, Ho Chi Tim, an advisory panel member, also published a justification on his personal Facebook page, saying:

*“Wartime Singapore holds a broad and diverse range of complex human experiences (yes including those that makes us uncomfortable) that can help us better appreciate its legacies, Singapore’s place in the world, and the multiple meanings of ‘Syonan’.”*⁵⁴

However, as the online furore refused to die down, the Government made a gradual U-turn on the subject, with Dr Yaacob Ibrahim endorsing the removal of the word ‘Syonan’ from the museum’s signs and publicity materials on 17 February:

*“Over the past two days, I have read the comments made on this issue, and received many letters from Singaporeans of all races. While they agreed that we need to teach Singaporeans about the Japanese Occupation, they also shared that the words ‘Syonan Gallery’ had evoked deep hurt in them, as well as their parents and grandparents. This was never our intention, and I am sorry for the pain the name has caused.”*⁵⁵

On Facebook, PM Lee reinforced the government’s new position, saying:

*“Many Singaporeans of all races suffered terrible atrocities during the Japanese Occupation, or had family members who did. My colleagues and I honour and respect these deep feelings. So we have renamed the exhibition to bear witness to these painful memories.”*⁵⁶

The change was generally well-received by the public, with one visitor to the museum saying “I’m actually quite impressed that there’s a readiness to listen to how some people feel very strongly about this - especially those who lived through it, and what that name meant to

⁵² Lee Hsien Loong, “Photo by Alex Qiu”, Facebook, 15 February 2017, retrieved 8 April 2017:

<https://www.facebook.com/leehsienloong/photos/pb.125845680811480.-2207520000.1487232418./1367733926622643/?type=3&theater>

⁵³ Today, “Syonan Gallery flap: Singapore cannot bury the past, says PM Lee,” 15 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/strong-reactions-syonan-gallery-understandable-yaacob>

⁵⁴ Ho Chi Tim, “Syonan Gallery”, Facebook, 19 February 2017, retrieved 8 April 2017:

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/ho-chi-tim/syonan-gallery/10154182834896576/>

⁵⁵ Ibrahim, Yaacob. “Statement from Minister for Communications and Information on “Syonan Gallery: War and Its Legacies”, MCI, 17 February 2017, retrieved 8 April 2017: <https://www.mci.gov.sg/pressroom/news-and-stories/pressroom/2017/2/statement-on-syonan-gallery-war-and-its-legacies?page=3>

⁵⁶ The Straits Times, “PM Lee thanks all who shared views on Syonan Gallery, says such conversations bring S’poreans closer,” 18 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pm-lee-thanks-all-who-shared-views-on-syonan-gallery-says-such-conversations-bring>

them.”⁵⁷ However, others took a more cynical viewpoint, with the satirical *New Nation* website publishing an article under the headline “Renaming Syonan Gallery shows S’poreans have power to effect useless change”.⁵⁸

AVA chicken culling (2017)

On 1 February 2017, *Today* reported that the AVA had culled 24 wild chickens living in the Thomson View and Sin Ming Road area, in response to complaints from residents. The AVA said that it had received 20 complaints from residents regarding the noise made by the birds, and that – relocation not being an option in land-scarce Singapore – the decision had been made to euthanise the chickens. In a straw poll of 10 residents carried out by *Today*, seven were pro-chicken, while only three supported the complainants.⁵⁹

Internet opinion, however, almost unanimously favoured the chickens. Many netizens shared their own reminiscences of growing up around Singapore’s wild chicken population. Others pointed out that the AVA had not carried out a proper survey to find out what proportion of locals wanted the chickens gone. As one put it:

“20 complaints??? Out of how many residents in the area? How about euthanising those 20 idiots! Car not noisy? Bus not noisy? Hell lah....your neighbours not noisy?” [sic]⁶⁰

The point was also picked up by MP and animal-welfare activist Louis Ng, who argued that the AVA should have made an effort to get an “accurate sense of sentiments on the ground” before taking action.⁶¹ Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin also addressed the issue from a social harmony point of view, saying:

*“We live in close proximity... Many people are pet lovers, but there are people who also don’t like pets. We need to exercise mutual understanding and give and take.”*⁶²

While there was a certain amount of sentimental attachment to the chickens themselves, the story also resonated with many Singaporeans worried about rapid, high-density urbanisation

⁵⁷ *The Straits Times*, “Visitors to former Syonan Gallery welcome change of name, new signs to be up in a month,” 18 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/visitors-to-former-syonan-gallery-welcome-change-of-name-new-signs-to-be-up-in-a-month>

⁵⁸ *New Nation*, “Renaming Syonan Gallery shows S’poreans have power to effect useless change”, 18 February 2017, retrieved 8 April 2017: <http://newnation.sg/2017/02/renaming-syonan-gallery-shows-sporeans-have-power-to-effect-useless-change/>

⁵⁹ *Today*, “Noisy chickens’ in Sin Ming Avenue put down after residents’ complaints,” 1 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/noisy-chickens-sin-ming-avenue-put-down-after-residents-complaints>

⁶⁰ The Online Citizen “AVA defends culling of Sin Ming Ave “chickens” by stating free-ranging chickens pose threat to public health,” 2 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2017/02/02/ava-defends-culling-of-sin-ming-avenue-chickens-by-stating-free-ranging-chickens-pose-threat-to-public-health/>

⁶¹ *Today*, “Culling of 24 chickens in Sin Ming ruffles feathers,” 2 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/sin-ming-chicken-culling-ruffles-feathers>

⁶² *The Straits Times*, “Give and take needed over animals: Minister,” 3 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/give-and-take-needed-over-animals-minister>

and the corresponding loss of community spirit.⁶³ The satirical *New Nation* website picked up on these sentiments, publishing an article entitled “AVA to euthanise noisy Singaporeans”.⁶⁴

Faced with media enquiries, the AVA told the press that:

*“Free-ranging chickens can pose a potential threat to public health, especially if their population is left unchecked. There is a likelihood of an incursion of bird flu into Singapore, as bird flu is endemic in the region.”*⁶⁵

As the furore refused to die down, the AVA reiterated the bird flu argument, with Director-General Dr. Yap Him Hoo saying that:

*“The noise issues only serve to bring attention to the relatively high numbers of free-roaming chickens in certain areas, which in turn raise the exposure risk to bird flu in these localities.”*⁶⁶

The public, however, remained cynical. As one hardwarezone.com.sg member put it:

“This guy is a state sanctioned liar. The reports that accompanied the culling specified only noise complaints that led to the culling. It took him a few weeks to come up with a statement saying it is because of “bird flu”?”

Others pointed out that other birds, such as mynahs and koels, were a far greater source of noise pollution as well as being a vector for bird flu.⁶⁷

With the dispute dragging on, Minister of State for National Development, Koh Poh Koon was obliged to answer questions in Parliament about the affair, and said that the birds could not be relocated for fear that they would “adversely affect the genetic stock” of Singapore’s endangered wild jungle fowl, which were capable of interbreeding with domestic chickens. Other MPs, however, brought up reports that some of the birds killed had themselves been jungle fowl. Nevertheless, Minister Koh promised that the AVA would make greater efforts to listen to residents’ points of view in future.⁶⁸

The Minister’s answers did little to convince many people. Economist and commentator Donald Low reiterated complaints regarding the AVA’s apparent misreading of public opinion on the subject:

⁶³ Lim Ah Bee, Ronnie, “Chickens are part of kampung living”, *The New Paper*, 4 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/your-views-chickens-are-part-kampung-living>

⁶⁴ New Nation, “AVA to euthanise noisy S’poreans”, 2 February 2017. Retrieved 9 April 2017: <http://newnation.sg/2017/02/ava-to-euthanise-noisy-sporeans/>

⁶⁵ *Today*, “Culling of 24 chickens in Sin Ming ruffles feathers,” 2 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/sin-ming-chicken-culling-ruffles-feathers>

⁶⁶ *Today*, “Chickens culled because of bird-flu risk, not noise: AVA”, 13 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/chickens-culled-because-bird-flu-risk-not-noise-ava>

⁶⁷ Joshua182, “AVA : Chickens culled because of bird-flu risk, not noise”, hardwarezone.sg, 14 February 2017, retrieved 8 April 2017: <http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/eat-drink-man-woman-16/ava-chickens-culled-because-bird-flu-risk-not-noise-5566550.html>

⁶⁸ *The Straits Times*, “Parliament: Koh Poh Koon cites health concerns as reason for culling chickens, says action is a last resort,” 20 February 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-koh-poh-koon-cites-health-concerns-as-reason-for-culling-chickens-says-action-is>

*“The main rationale seems to be the 20 complaints it has received about noise caused by the chickens over the past year. This is an extremely flimsy justification. The complaints may even have all come from a handful of people. In any society, there is always a small percentage of people who have an irrational dislike or fear of animals. Pandering to the few, while ignoring the preferences of those who are tolerant of animals, is policy-making driven by the complaints of a few.”*⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the Mothership.sg website (independent, but with links to the PAP) pointed out that a BBC nature documentary aired several years previously had identified the Sin Ming chickens as jungle fowl, and reiterated the criticism that the AVA had over-reacted to a relatively small number of complaints and then attempted to use bird flu as an excuse rather than apologising.⁷⁰

While the controversy died down after a few weeks, it was soon reignited as the *The Straits Times* reported that another culling of chickens, this time in Pasir Ris, had taken place at roughly the same time as the Sin Ming culling. Once again, residents complained that the AVA had not solicited their opinions, while the AVA insisted that it had received complaints regarding the noise made by the birds. Louis Ng re-joined the debate, asking whether the chickens could be vaccinated against bird flu, and arguing that:

*“The population of these birds will control itself as long as there is no external food source. The key is to not cull the chickens, but to tell residents not to feed them.”*⁷¹

Crisis Communications in Government

While a certain amount of research has been done into the ways in which businesses modify their communications strategies in response to adverse publicity, very little has been written about the issue from a government point of view. Partly this is because governments have tended to keep relatively quiet about their communications strategies, the mere fact of their existence being enough to create a perception among the public that those in charge are more concerned with spin than substance. Nonetheless, many governments have increased spending on communications over recent years, often outsourcing the work to dedicated PR agencies. In the case of Singapore, many government entities have used the firm WPP to handle their communications needs – from the National Library Board, to the Central Provident Fund, to the Ministry of Communications and Information.⁷²

The result is that strategies and approaches developed in the private sector often find applications in public sector communications, and frameworks originally developed to analyse corporate behaviour could be transposed to a government setting.

⁶⁹ Tan, Guan Zhen, “Economist Donald Low gives 3 good reasons why AVA shouldn’t have culled the Sin Ming chickens”, mothership.sg, 3 February 2017, retrieved 2 May 2017: <http://mothership.sg/2017/02/economist-donald-low-gives-3-good-reasons-why-ava-shouldnt-have-culled-the-sin-ming-chickens/>

⁷⁰ Tan, Jeanette, “Here are 3 problems with what Koh Poh Koon said about AVA’s culling of the Sin Ming chickens”, Mothership.sg, 21 February 2017, retrieved 9 April 2017: <http://mothership.sg/2017/02/here-are-3-problems-with-what-koh-poh-koon-said-about-avas-culling-of-the-sin-ming-chickens/>

⁷¹ *The Straits Times*, “Pasir Ris residents ‘cry fowl’ after AVA culling,” 20 March 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pasir-ris-residents-cry-fowl-after-ava-culling>

⁷² WPP, “WPP launches Government Public Sector Practice in Singapore”, 19 September 2016, retrieved 9 April 2017: <http://www.wpp.com/wpp/press/2016/sep/19/wpp-launches-government-public-sector-practice-in-singapore/>

William L. Benoit was the first to design a comprehensive schema of corporate responses to bad publicity, whether deserved or not:⁷³

Key circumstances/characteristics	Strategic response
<i>Denial</i>	
The organisation did not commit the fault alleged	Simple denial
The fault alleged was committed by someone else	Blame-shifting
<i>Evasion of responsibility</i>	
The fault alleged was carried out in response to external events	Claiming provocation
The organisation was unable to prevent the alleged fault from being committed	Claiming defeasibility
The fault was not deliberate	Highlighting accidental nature of fault
The organisation acted in good faith	Highlighting good intentions
<i>Reducing offensiveness</i>	
The alleged fault was committed but the organisation also has many positive qualities	Bolstering
The alleged fault was committed but not as serious as made out to be	Minimisation
A less serious fault than the one alleged was committed	Differentiation
A fault was committed, but there are more important considerations to be taken into account	Transcendence
The accuser's credibility is questionable	Attack accuser
Action taken to reimburse victims	Compensation
<i>Corrective action</i>	
A plan is developed to solve or correct the problem	Corrective action
<i>Mortification</i>	
The organisation apologises	Apology

⁷³ Adapted from Benoit, William L, "Image repair discourse and crisis communication," *Public relations review* 23, no. 2 (1997): 177-186.

W. Timothy Coombs, for his part, came up with an alternative, overlapping framework:⁷⁴

Nonexistence Strategies	Distance strategies	Ingratiation strategies	Mortification strategies	Suffering strategy
Denial Clarification Attack Intimidation	Excuse (denial of intention/volition) Justification (minimisation, victim-blaming, differentiation)	Bolstering Transcendence Praising others	Remediation Repentance Rectification	Soliciting sympathy

He also developed a matrix for identifying types of crisis and, consequently, the appropriate response:

	Unintentional	Intentional
External cause	Accident	Sabotage
Internal cause	Faux pas	Transgression

	Type of crisis			
Appropriate response	<i>Faux pas</i>	<i>Sabotage</i>	<i>Accident</i>	<i>Transgression</i>
	Distance strategies, non-existence strategies	Suffering strategy	Excuse strategies	Mortification strategies

As Benoit remarked, in all of these cases it must be noted that:

“perceptions are more important than reality. The important point is not whether the business in fact is responsible for the offensive act, but whether the firm is thought to be responsible for it by the relevant audience.”⁷⁵

This also applied to the responses: an organisation that knows it committed a fault but reasons that it has little or no chance of being found out may choose a strategy based on denying responsibility, for example.

Equally, it should be noted that these strategies are seldom used in isolation, and more often than not a combination of techniques is deployed.

Several of these techniques can be identified at work in the above-mentioned cases in Singapore. The official response to the Wee Shu Min scandal, for example, fits into these frameworks relatively well: the incident initially being perceived as a faux pas, Wee Siew Kim opted for a distance strategy – minimising the importance of the affair. When it became clear that the public saw it as a transgression rather than a faux pas, he switched to a mortification strategy, making a public apology on behalf of his daughter. In the Syonan and chicken culling cases, the authorities first attempted to combine clarification and justification,

⁷⁴ Adapted from Coombs, W. Timothy, "Choosing the right words the development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies," *Management Communication Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1995): 447-476.

⁷⁵ Benoit, 1997.

and - when this failed - switched to remediation and rectification, with a change in the name of the Syonan Gallery and a promise on the part of the AVA to consult communities prior to taking similar future actions. Even in the graduate mothers affair, which took place in an era before the widespread adoption of corporate public relations techniques within government, it can be seen that the government attempted to explain and justify the policy (differentiation, minimisation, transcendence), before finally getting rid of the most unpopular elements (remediation).

However, the parallels between government and private communications are not absolute. While corporate public relations strategies have little impact beyond the producer-consumer relationship, the methods that governments choose to communicate with their citizens help to define the type of regime in place, being particularly crucial in the context of a developing deliberative democracy

Types of Deliberative Democracy

The Western liberal democratic model should be immediately familiar to all readers. Under this model, politics functions as a market, wherein voters select the party or individual that most appeals to them according to pre-established rules, and the party/candidate that secures most votes is allowed to implement its/their preferred policies.

By contrast, deliberative democracy, rather than aggregating preferences, attempts to find mechanisms whereby a compromise solution can be negotiated. The aim is to produce policies that do not merely have majority support, but are backed by the entire population. Following the theories of Jürgen Habermas on communicative rationality, supporters of deliberative democracy argue that free debate would allow everyone within society to pool their ideas and jointly identify the best ones.⁷⁶

However, just as liberal democracy can take many different forms, deliberative democracy can be implemented in different ways.

Arnstein, for example, pointed out that while many governments pay lip-service to citizen participation, often the effects on policy are limited or non-existent. Her “ladder of citizen participation” identified different types of participation according to the level of power that they accorded citizens.⁷⁷

Citizen control	Citizen power
Delegated power	
Partnership	
Placation	Tokenism
Consultation	
Informing	
Therapy	Non-participation
Manipulation	

⁷⁶ Habermas, Jürgen, *Moral consciousness and communicative action*, MIT press, 1990.

⁷⁷ Adapted from Arnstein, S.R., 1969, “A ladder of citizen participation,” *Journal of the American Institute of planners*, 35(4), pp.216-224.

As Arnstein explained:

“The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two rungs describe levels of “non-participation” that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to “educate” or “cure” the participants. Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of “tokenism” that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no “muscle,” hence no assurance of changing the status quo. Rung (5) Placation is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide. Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.”⁷⁸

Other authors offered different criteria for authentic deliberation. Fishkin and Luskin, for example, said that discussion must be informed, balanced, conscientious (intellectually honest), substantive (free of *ad hominem* arguments), and comprehensive (representative of all viewpoints).⁷⁹

Joshua Cohen, by contrast, took a more structural point of view, arguing that a deliberative democracy was largely a matter of institutional design. For him, a true deliberative democracy required willing long-term participation by citizens, specially designed institutions to favour discussion, pluralism, respect for the legitimacy of deliberative procedure, and recognition by all citizens of each other’s deliberative capacity.⁸⁰

However, deliberative democracy is not without its critics. Foucault pointed out that it was impossible to constitute a deliberative democracy in a vacuum: “good” and “bad” ideas as well as “acceptable and “unacceptable” modes of expression were defined by those who already have power within society, excluding those who are already marginalised.⁸¹ As Buchstein and Jörke put it, “the ‘rationally acceptable results’ are mainly a mirror of the power structure – or in Foucault’s terms – the discursive formation of the society. They reflect the accepted assumptions about the ‘common good’ and the main goals of politics” and “are biased insofar as they privilege mostly those political demands that are already hegemonic in the society.”⁸² While it might not be unreasonable to privilege majority ideas and beliefs, this can become problematic if it creates a sizable underclass that feels it has no way of expressing

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Fishkin, James S., and Robert C. Luskin, "Experimenting with a democratic ideal: Deliberative polling and public opinion," *Acta Politica* 40, no. 3 (2005): 284-298.

⁸⁰ Matravers, Derek, and Jonathan Pike, eds., *Debates in contemporary political philosophy: An anthology*, Routledge, 2005.

⁸¹ Foucault, Michel, and P. Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon, 1984.

⁸² Fischer, Frank, *The argumentative turn revisited: public policy as communicative practice*, Duke University Press, 2012.

itself within established institutions: a phenomenon which can easily lead to political violence.

From public relations to negotiation: the Singapore government responds to controversy

As the examples discussed above demonstrate, the Singapore government – like most democratic governments – tended to respond to incidences of bad publicity with attempts to calm public opinion, rather than to silence it. If this did not succeed, however, the government had two paths open to it: to weather the bad publicity and stick to its guns or to incorporate public criticisms and change its policy.

On matters that were seen to involve the nation's key interests – such as disputes with foreign powers or economic strategy – the government retained a thoroughly elitist position, maintaining that these issues are not a suitable topic for public debate. However, in recent years it has grown more receptive to the idea of public discussion on a wider variety of issues. While these tended to be seemingly trivial matters (such as the culling of chickens or the renaming of the Syonan Gallery), occasionally larger or more significant issues – such as immigration and gay rights – have been accepted as suitable topics for negotiation between voters and government. Notably, the government responded to protests against its planned immigration policy with policies to favour local employment,⁸³ and PM Lee Hsien Loong has said that the government was happy to follow majority sentiment on the issue of gay marriage.⁸⁴

While top-down, technocratic policy-making remained the norm, the Singaporean government has progressively come to accept that it was often to its advantage to attempt to integrate public opinion into policy-making decisions, rather than to silence or mollify complainants.

Discussion points

1. Which crisis communications strategy or strategies would you have adopted to deal with each of the four issues described above? Why?
2. In each of the above issues, what could have contributed to the government misidentifying the appropriate response strategies?
3. Where would you situate the government's responses in each case on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation? Where would you situate your own preferred responses?
4. Which of the debates between citizens and government described above constitute deliberative democracy? Why or why not?

⁸³ Matthews, Matthew and Zhang Jiayi, "Sentiments on Immigrant Integration and the Role of Immigrant Associations," *IPS Exchange Series*, No. 7, January 2016.

⁸⁴ *The Straits Times*, "PM Lee on BBC's Hardtalk: Most would back retaining Section 377A if a referendum was held," 1 March 2017, retrieved 19 April 2017: <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pm-lee-on-bbcs-hardtalk-most-would-back-retaining-section-377a-if-a-referendum-was-held>

Annex 1: Relevant news articles and official statements, listed by date

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27 February 1984: “Mr. Ong Explains the School Priority to Grassroots,” *The Straits Times*.

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