

## Embodying Society's Best: Hegel and the Singapore State

Terence Chong\*

[ABSTRACT: The Singapore state has been described as a "patriarchal state" and a "hegemonic state," among others. The sheer variety of theoretical models applied by different scholars reflect two contradictory truths about the Singapore state - firstly, it is a sophisticated and complex entity that continues to evade fixed characterisation, and yet, secondly, its concentration of power looms steadily across all state-society relations, confirming the basic premise of these models, that is, the sheer efficacy of state institutions and apparatuses in legitimising and fulfilling ruling class interests. This article problematises specific models by excavating contrary examples of civil society activism and relations with the state in order to demonstrate the descriptive limits of these models. This article goes on to argue that the Hegelian concept of the state continues to be of particular relevance to the Singapore condition in the way the People's Action Party understands and legitimises itself, and its discursive positioning and prescribed role of civil society in Singapore.]

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In *Beyond the State*, John Hoffman (1995) examines various approaches to the state, with special attention to liberalism, Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism. Hoffman argues that contemporary states, with the industrialisation of warfare, are now capable of annihilating humanity, the very thing it was designed to protect, and urges us to consider alternative forms of political organisation "beyond the state." A key feature of his argument is the need to accentuate the distinction between state and government, as this distinction allows for the evaluation of these alternative critiques. This article seeks to modestly echo Hoffman's endeavour by examining various models of the Singapore state but shies **away** from the provocative clarion call to look beyond the state for sheer lack of imagination as well as keen sensitivity to the political realities in the local. This article will, instead, suggest that it is the very conflation of ruling party and the state in Singapore that has underlined the need alternative analysis of the Singapore state.

The author wishes to thank the anonymous referees of JCA for their constructive criticism and feedback. \*Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119614. E-mail: [terencechong@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:terencechong@iseas.edu.sg)

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Singapore's political experience as a one-party state since independence in 1965 has had profound influence on the erasure of conceptual divisions between the People's Action Party (PAP) and the mechanisms of the state. This erasure was, according to Lee Kuan Yew (1959), acceptable because "[t]he mass of the people are not concerned with legal and constitutional form and niceties. They are not interested in the theory of the separation of powers and the purpose and function of a politically neutral civil service under such a constitution." The absence of competitive politics expected in liberal democracies, together with the sheer managerial efficiency of the PAP, has, in public perception, led to the merging of the essential features and mechanisms of the ruling party and the state into a cohesive unit where institutional functions, loyalties, and interests are seemingly homogenous in character. This public perception of political homogeneity may be sociologically explained by Weber's (1991: 78) definition of politics, that is, the "striving to share power or the striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or groups within the state," a definition that leads us to conclude that the absence of real power struggle in Singapore is the clearest sign that the PAP and the state are collapsed into a singular managerial authority. This erasure is reflected in various slices of the academic literature. The term "PAP state" has been used to blur the distinction between party ideology and state apparatus in the description of the Singapore government's expanding occupation of civil society space (Rodan, 2003). On a structural level, it has been asserted that the PAP government began to co-opt the "administrative structure by exposing senior bureaucrats to party ideology" (Hill and Lian, 1995: 23), while others have explicitly argued that:

[T]he PAP rulers chose to remove the demarcations between civil servants and political rulers. Once they had taken the view that a politically neutral civil service was untenable as well as undesirable and that the service had to have a loyalty to the PAP government and a commitment to its objectives, it was a logical step for them to encourage the movement of civil servants into politics. Many second generation leaders of the PAP were later to be recruited from the ranks of the civil service. The distinction between civil servants and politicians had been almost entirely removed and the two, as a result, were able to work together effectively to secure the objectives of the government (Vasil, 1992: 57).

Such academic observations are by no means isolated. Chan (1975: 65) writes that the "increased role and importance of the bureaucrat in Singapore is staggering," while Khong (1995: 117) observes that, "[t]he civil service must therefore do more than just work with the government: it must help mobilise popular support and build a consensus in favour of government policies." It is thus no surprise that the higher levels of civil service have been increasingly fused with the political elite and, as a result of being shielded from electoral processes, have become less accountable (Seah, 1999). In addition to the homogenisation of interests and objectives of the civil service and government, Weber's (1991) notion of the "gift of grace" or the "charismatic leader" is also useful in understanding the convenient folding of party, government, and state into a single entity. The local legitimacy and electoral popularity enjoyed by Lee Kuan Yew, a founding member of the PAP and acknowledged as father of independent Singapore, would be explained by Weber to be the result of "charismatic domination." Lee is recognised as possessing individual qualities of leadership that are, in turn, accentuated by the state-controlled media, along with cultural ideologies such as Confucian ethics

which presupposes respect for authority, thus turning the exalted Individual to a postmodern free-floating signifier of ruling party, government, and the state, and whose charisma constitutes one of the three Weberian "legitimations of domination"; the other two being tradition and legality. Indeed, the role of the charismatic leader in Singapore is recognised in the academic literature. Goh Chok Tong's succession of Lee in 1991 led one scholar to conclude that,

Whether he wishes it or not, Lee remains at the centre of the network of patronage and personal relations which animates Singapore's party and state. However much he may wish to abstract himself from everyday politics, his personal role is still crucial. How his institutions will work without him is an issue problematic in the extreme (Cotton, 1993: 14).

Elsewhere, in Weberian terms, Lee's "charisma" is associated with his ruthlessness, toughness, determination and pragmatism (Ho, 2003), and this is reinforced by his penchant for justifying policy-making or decisions solely on the basis of his personal, albeit vast, experience. In 1999, for example, popular PAP backbencher Tan Cheng Bock argued that the PAP's policy to proactively woo global talent had been implemented overenthusiastically, resulting in many Singaporeans feeling increasingly alienated as citizens. Lee Kuan Yew, the prime initiator of this policy, replied brusquely, "You [Members of Parliament] have to decide whether you think he knows more or I know more. You have to decide whether you think he will give you the answer to Singapore's future or I am likely to give you the better road to the future" (*The Straits Times*, 15 August 1999). On the issue of high ministerial salaries, another hotly debated policy issue, Lee justified it simply by saying, "I am prepared to put my experience and my judgement against all the arguments the doubters can muster. In five to ten years, when it works and Singapore has got good government, this formula [of high ministerial salaries] will be accepted as conventional wisdom" (quoted in Ho, 2003: 96). Bordering on the monarchical absolutism of the *'etat c' est moi* discourse that sees a seamless conflation of the individual and state, Lee's charisma is nonetheless institutionally legitimised by the voting booths, thus interweaving the individual's personality into the practice of governance and statecraft.

As such, while classical sociological definitions of the state - the monopoly over the use of legitimate violence (Weber, 1991) or as inextricably intertwined with notions of "centrality," "territoriality," and "control" (Mann, 1984) - are helpful in mapping out conventional institutions and locations of power, the erasure of conceptual divisions is, in actuality, a particular Singaporean condition that looms large in both the everyday discourses of ordinary citizens as well as that which is recognised by scholars of the Singapore political landscape. This has made scholarly analyses of the Singapore state *de facto* analyses of the PAP, and vice versa. These include the Singapore state as "corporatist state" (Deyo, 1981; Rodan, 1989; Brown, 1993; 1994), "paternalist state" (Chua, 1995); "developmental state" (Low, 2001); "patriarchal state" (Tan, 2001); "strong state" (Malhotra, 2002), and "hegemonic state" (Worthington, 2003). Much of this analysis is replete with the discourse of authoritarianism, hegemony, and repression, and has sought to describe the Singapore state in terms of its use of power, the function of its apparatuses, and its relations with society, all of which are in constant flux. This article does not seek to trace the conventional conceptual divides between the ruling party and state,

because this would ignore the local realities mentioned above. Instead, this article seeks to revisit specific analyses of the Singapore state for three reasons. Firstly, such analyses and discourses, by virtue of the power of interpellation, obscure or misread the variety of identity politics, social resistance, and civil spaces that often occupy the interstices between existing legal and political institutions. Secondly, they also often depict the state or PAP as operating mechanically in a socio-political vacuum, free from local or global pressures. The PAP state, this article argues, is in reality a responsive state, sensitive to the shifts in global forces as well as the changing demographics and interests of its polity. And thirdly, state-society relations are still playing out in an as yet unfolding political climate wrought by the change in administration from Lee Kuan Yew to Goh Chok Tong to Lee Hsien Loong in a space of fourteen years. This demands the constant revisiting of these analyses and discourses. This article then proceeds to examine several contemporary instances 'of state-society relations, along with the PAP's unrelenting pursuit of self-renewal and relevance, within a Hegelian framework, to argue that the concept of the Hegelian state and civil society have continued application to Singapore. I argue that, unlike most previous characterisations of the Singapore state, the Hegelian state is fluid and reflexive enough to address the organic and responsive nature of the PAP state, its shifting relations with local civil society, and its deeply ingrained need for self-renewal and change.

The variety of theoretical models applied by different scholars reflects 'rather contradictory truths about the PAP state. Firstly, it is a sophisticated and organic entity that is responsive to external challenges and internal demands, thus evading fixed characterisation. And yet, secondly, its undeniable centralisation of power looms steadily across all state-society relations to confirm the basic and common premise of these models, that is, the sheer efficacy and imprimatur of state institutions and discourses in legitimising and fulfilling ruling class interests. It is certainly beyond the scope of this article to perform a comprehensive deconstruction of the different models of "Singapore states" mentioned above. Instead this section will focus the discussion on two models - the "patriarchal state" and the "hegemonic state" - in order to demonstrate that, while broadly useful as conceptual characterisations of state-society relations and policy initiatives, such characterisations fail to be reflexive and fluid enough to capture the shifting interests of new administrations and civil society efforts in the local. The selected issues discussed here are not constitutive of an argument to dismiss the descriptions of the Singapore state as a patriarchal, strong or hegemonic state, but to demonstrate the empirical blind spots of these models, and to reiterate the need for constant revisiting of fluctuating state-society relations.

### **Critiquing the Patriarchal State**

The patriarch is conventionally taken to mean the father or male ruler of the 'tribe, and has metaphorical significance as the Church or religious order. Weber's (1978) usage of the term in mapping a typology of power and authority in different social orders has shown patriarchy to be a means of domination that is legitimised by traditional asymmetrical power relations such as the "authority of the father, the husband, the senior of

the house, the sib elder over the members of the household and sib; the rule of the master and patron over bondsmen, serfs, freed men..." (Weber, 1991: 296). Sociologically, a patriarchal order or patrimonialism refers to a power relationship in which the leader commands the obedience of an administrative staff based on his "patrimony" and their personal loyalty to him. Obedience was *demande*d from subjects and not *persuade*d from members such that their political and economic rights, as social entities, were one and the same thing. Feminist discourse gave the term "patriarchy" a new lease of life by ushering it into the realm of ideology (Andermahr et al., 2000). The term was expanded to signify an overarching system of male dominance and, in many cases, the exploitation and subjugation of women. As an ideology, the patriarchal relationship between individuals and groups is extrapolated onto a national level such that the patriarchal state is conceptualised as the protector and guarantor of male-privileged interests and strategies. To be sure, the continued presence and importance of Asian kinship, clans, and ethnic groupings, both in the literature and in empirical settings, have endowed the patriarchal state with theoretical currency in describing Southeast Asian societies and political order. As noted by Case (2004: 79),

despite rapid socio-economic change throughout much of the region, many analysts have asserted the persistence of "traditional" outlooks, giving rise to a large literature on patrimonialism and patron-clientelism that in different societal settings articulates as "feudalist" protectors", "godfathers," "big men," *caciques*, and "bossism."

Scholars have described the Singapore state as "patriarchal" and "paternalist." In terms of the former, the general thesis is that the role of the family is enshrined in state discourse as the basic unit of Singapore society: The central role "of the family in the Asian values discourse also ushers in the authority of the patriarch and legitimacy of gender constructions to endorse the interests of the Singapore patriarchal state (Tan, 2001). The overtly patriarchal interests and attitudes of the Singapore state are argued to be either "tolerated" by a highly educated female population because of the PAP state's success in delivering economic growth (Chan, 2000), or disguised and expressed as capitalist logic or consumerist culture (Peterson, 2001). Meanwhile, shifting from male-female to a father-child binary, the Singapore "paternalist" state is where state-society relations are ideologically played out as the "wise father" counselling and advising a child (Chua, 1995; Tan, 2003). The Singapore patriarchal state is generally described as one that is structurally and institutionally progressive yet culturally and ideologically masculine. Progressive legislations and institutions would include the Women's Charter which accords to women the same legal status as to men; outlaws polygamy; and also gives women a share of matrimonial property even though they may not have financially contributed to its acquisition, among others. The government's recent lifting of the quota on the number of female students allowed to study medicine is another piece of progressive, albeit long overdue, regulation, while the PAP's constant urging of local women to join politics so that their voices may be part of the parliamentary process suggests that state patriarchal interests are not as widespread as they are often made out to be. Other recently dismantled patriarchal policies include allowing the medical benefits of female civil servants to be extended to their children (previously only male civil servants were allowed to extend their benefits to their de-

pendents) and the bureaucratic ease with which the children of Singaporean women with foreign husbands can now become Singaporean citizens. This is not to say the PAP state no longer holds patriarchal attitudes but rather, the concept of the patriarchal state is too monolithic and rigid to capture the constant changes and ideological shifts that come along with each new administration. Indeed, critiques of the state as institutionally patriarchal have to confront the globalisation literature which argues that states in advanced capitalist societies, though likely to retain their sovereignty, are less autonomous than before and are open to influences from human, informational, and capital flows (Held et al., 2000). These flows, together with an increasingly educated female polity, are already challenging and, in many cases, weakening existing patriarchal structures and institutions. Instead much of feminist contention lies in the cultural and ideological realm.

For example, national service in Singapore has been argued to be culturally constructed as exclusively masculine activity while the city-state's falling birth rates are seen to be the burden of womanly duty to "reproduce the nation" (Tan, 2001). Tan (2001) goes on to argue that the patriarchal state has moved from the "politics of emasculation" (strict and draconian regulations that deny civil liberties) towards the "politics of feminisation" (softer governance emphasising public consultation and active citizenry). There is, I argue, no inherent reason for an authoritarian patriarchal state with unchallenged power to volunteer this transition from "emasculation" to "feminisation." If one accepts that such a transition is less likely to be the result of a magnanimous decision of the PAP state to relinquish power, then one has to entertain the possibility of the PAP state being responsive, even vulnerable, to global shifts and international communities. I have argued elsewhere that the compulsion for such transitions comes from globalisation-induced pressures on governments with global city ambitions to relinquish, at least in form, tight controls over civic spaces if only to win international legitimacy and to succeed in the global competition for human talent (Chong, 2004). The PAP state is thus responsive and organic. Tan (2001: 112) admits as much in noting that, "The increasingly complex and fast-changing nature of problems facing the globalised nation-state has come to require wider perspectives to solve including those of people at the frontlines, and also gives rise to crises beyond the control of anyone government," although much of the responsiveness and ability of the so called "patriarchal" PAP state to reconsider, review, and reverse patriarchal structures and regulations is lost in the insistence of the local literature in gendering the ruling class.

On the other hand, the views of former Prime Minister, now Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, are the concern of Chan (2000: 52), who quotes Lee as admitting that the "government [had] been 'young, ignorant and idealistic' when it gave women equal rights." Chan (2000) also recalls Lee's initiation of the Great Marriage Debate in which the government sought to promote marriage and childbirth among graduate women with generous tax grants in 1983. Conversely, lower-educated women were requested to "stop at two," preferably one, with a cash sweetener of S\$ 10,000. Chan (2000) fails, however, to follow up with the fact that the PAP state stoically ignored the public outcry

that ensued over this blatant discrimination and confidently went to the polls in the following year in 1984, where it lost an additional 12% of the popular vote, resulting in the opposition gaining ground with 37% of the vote. This poor showing, by PAP standards, was later diagnosed as the result of unhappiness over the graduate mother policy, as well as the general arrogance of the PAP government. The women's rights group Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) was formally registered in 1986, and has become the leading feminist institution in Singapore. The shock of the 1984 election results later led to the formation of the Institute of Policy Studies dedicated to national policy discussion and research. The resistance of voters to deeply patriarchal policies, the civil society work of AWARE, and the PAP's persistent calls for women to join its ranks all do not square comfortably with Chan's (2000: 54) conclusion that the Singapore feminist movement is not like "feminist movements within democratic patriarchal states [which] have access to arenas in which their voices may be heard." These arenas for discourse and advocacy do exist in the interstices of political discourse and regulations. This is not to suggest that the PAP state encourages or is even uncomfortable with such discourses and advocacy, but rather, regards it as a necessary form of liberalisation or socio-cultural change in the face of inward global flows and a highly educated society.

In general, two broader points can be made. Firstly, it is said that states may be *intrinsically* patriarchal but it does not follow that they are *exclusively* patriarchal (Hoffman, 1995). In other words, in addition to male bias, states are also prone to privileging simultaneously a variety of ethnic, religious, and class identities. As such, a rigid patriarchal critique of the state is not only deadened to the dynamics of other state-identity relations, but also fails to be flexible enough to capture the competitive relations between state and feminist interests, set in a background of globalisation and greater education among women, the outcome of which is never quite as clear as it is often made out to be. Secondly, as will be shown, there is little theoretical or empirical distinction between the patriarchal state and patriarchal culture in the local academic literature. This raises two fundamental questions. The first is a causal inquiry - who influences who? Is "Singapore culture" an amalgamation of American, Japanese, and Taiwanese popular culture, and an Asian values discourse, all embedded in the metaculture of mass consumerism and neo-capitalism, inherently patriarchal? The second is of an ontological nature - if there is no distinction, then state and culture bleed into each other, losing their definition and meaning. Descriptions of patriarchal elements in popular culture and everyday Singaporean life, though important, should not be extrapolated into the functioning logic of a patriarchal PAP state if the latter is to retain its specificity.

### **Critiquing the Hegemonic State**

Scholars have also found Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" useful in describing and analysing the Singapore state and its state-society relations. As noted by Worthington (2003: 2):

Terms such as ideological hegemony, a hegemonic programme, PAP hegemony, and more

specifically, "a Gramscian ideological hegemony imposed by the political leadership over society" have been used [to describe Singapore] in recent years (see also Chua, 1995; Lingle, 1996; Khong, 1995).

The reasons for applying a Gramscian framework are obvious. Singapore's centralisation of state power; its exercise of this power through state institutions and ideological apparatuses; the overriding meta-discourse of the PAP state of survival, pragmatism, and economic well-being as rational; and the PAP state's ability to define "national interests" and "public good," have all endowed the Gramscian lexicon with theoretical cache.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is based on the assertion that the state cannot retain control over a pluralist society with physical force or legalism alone. The state, in addition to its monopoly over legitimate violence, must also employ cultural or ideological methods - or hegemony, that is, the power that emanates from intellectual and moral leadership. The ruling class creates and perpetuates its hegemony over society by achieving cultural and political "consensus through trade unions, schools, mass media, the church, and other state or civil associations, thus engendering the practice of a "false consciousness" and the creation of values" and life choices which are seen as the norm (Gramsci, 1971). In Singapore, the bureaucratic, military, professional, and business elite are identified and integrated into the PAP, which uses the ideology of meritocracy, educational achievements, and economic pragmatism to legitimise and perpetuate itself through state-controlled apparatuses like the mass media and trade unions, both of which rationalise their functions as contributing to nation-building. And "[b]ecause of the high degree of penetration of the state, into the market arid society, the party-selected elite also penetrate these sectors" such that "[t]he party has been transformed into the state and the instruments of propaganda and hidden coercion have been developed and implemented for a considerable time" (Worthington, 2003: 10, 11).

The application of the concept of "hegemony" also has a sub-history in the Singapore literature. Political scientist and diplomat Chan Heng Chee's seminal essay "Politics in an Administrative State: Where has all the Politics Gone?" (1975) argued that the PAP state had transformed into an administrative state where bureaucrats and technocrats had come to govern, resulting in a uniquely orderly and rationalised society inhabited by a thoroughly depoliticised citizenry. Chua (1995) refutes Chan's assessment first by noting Chan's narrow definition of politics as limited to formal party politics. He argues that the absence of competitive organised party politics and the lack of opposition in parliament does not necessarily denote an absence of politics as it precludes mundane acts of public criticism of the government. Secondly, he argues that a depoliticised citizenry, which Chan takes to mean as non-ideological citizenry, is the consequence of the PAP state's "history of repression" through "legalised social control mechanisms." Chua goes on to assert that what Chan sees as non-ideological is actually the ideology of pragmatism, which is carefully inculcated by the PAP state. Pragmatism, materialism, and survivalism, Chua reminds us, are ideologies that may be mistaken, as in Chan's analysis, for objective perceptions of reality - hence the power of hegemony.

The power of hegemony however, according to Gramsci, is both perpetuated and countered by civil society. For Marxist theory, Gramsci sought to excavate civil society

from the depths of the economic base by locating civil society between the economic structure and the state. And though Gramsci's conceptualisation of civil society as a crucial space in which cultural and ideological support ensured the legitimacy of European capitalism values, it was also held responsible for the emergence of counter-hegemony narratives that expressed themselves through the competition of ideas (Gramsci, 1999; Ehrenberg, 1999). In Gramsci's view, civil society was necessarily fragmented, demarcated by different interests and highly competitive, and a constellation of civil institutions, social groups, and associations with the dual ability to either *perpetuate* or *contest* the hegemonic state. This view of civil society was a radical breakaway from traditional Marxist suspicions for mechanisms such as an independent press, freedom of speech or assembly, and voting rights, all of which were, seen by Marx as the forms through which only bourgeois power is consolidated, while Gramsci preferred to see them as institutions with open-ended possibilities.

Many Gramscian-influenced analyses of Singapore politics, unfortunately, are satisfied with establishing the PAP state as hegemonic state, and do not extend their examination to local civil society. For those that do, Singapore civil society is invariably cast as either a perpetuator of state hegemony or an entity so comprehensively saturated by the PAP state that it is void of any contesting potential. It is typically observed that "with its particular ideological programme and hegemonic conventions, the PAP has used political power to undermine civil society and maintains an intense programme of co-option of it so as to discourage the development of political pluralism and of power centres outside its hegemonic grasp" (Worthington, 2003: 63). The Singapore state's co-option of civil society is well documented (Tanaka, 2002), while others have written about the expansion of the PAP state into civil society space (Rodan, 2003). Nonetheless, the undeniable co-option of civil society groups and the existence of pro-establishment civil society groups only flesh out partially the functions of Gramscian civil society. They reveal the capacity of civil societies to perpetuate hegemony, but fail to articulate on going examples of counter-hegemonic activities in Singapore civil society.

Take for example the Singapore theatre community and performance space, which has been described as a "critical space" (Chua, 2004). Singapore theatre has had a history of counter-hegemonic activities, beginning with highly polemic and government-critical Chinese-language social theatre in the 1970s. Leaving behind its communist oriented play-scripts after the PAP state began to usher in economic progress and material affluence, the genre turned its attention to issues of socio-cultural displacement and economic marginalisation as result of rapid industrialisation. With rural areas cleared out in the name of national development, many people were forced from their *kampongs* (villages) and rustic lifestyles into sanitised but socially isolating high-rise buildings, resulting in the eradication of traditional livelihoods such as small-scale farming and fishing. As the late Kuo Pao Kun (quoted in Lo, 1993: 139), the doyen of English and Chinese theatre, recalled

The involvement of the theatre with politics, not necessarily party politics, but politics, ideological debate, was quite inevitable, arising from the volatile situation in the sixties when Singapore first became independent. It was a time of strife - there was the pressure to succeed, particularly economically, on the part of the government which was expressed in radical eco-

conomic and social changes like the evacuation of people, of farmers from their land for new development.

Chinese theatre's counter-hegemonic activities led to the PAP state's crackdown on its practitioners via the enforcement of the Internal Security Act (ISA), which gave the state power to detain without trial. This effectively spelt the demise of Chinese social theatre. Since the late 1980s, the burden of counter-hegemonic activities has been taken up by the relatively younger and resolutely middle class practitioners of English-language theatre. According to Peterson (2001: 3-4), "English-language theatre [is] a primary lens through which to view the politics of culture in Singapore... because throughout the 1990s, theatre in English showed itself to be the single most dynamic and volatile form of cultural expression." To be sure, Peterson's observations apply less to commercial or impresario theatre but to that of English-language avant-garde social theatre. The ISA intruded into the theatre world again in 1987. A total of 22 individuals from different walks of life were accused of plotting, behind the veil of the Catholic Church's liberation theology, to overthrow the government. Among the detainees were members of *The Third Stage*, an English-language social and political theatre. Today, Singapore theatre continues to function as a critical space, resisting and contesting state hegemony such that "the responsibility for critical commentary on society, culture and politics has ended up disproportionately on the shoulders of the arts, particularly theatre" (Chua, 2004: 320).

Other sectors of civil society, though not as provocative as theatre, have also demonstrated counter-hegemonic tendencies. These sections of civil society generally comprise of ideologically-driven associations like arts groups, environmental groups, and identity-politics groups such as feminist and parenthood organisations that actively counter the survivalist mentality and economic pragmatism of Singapore. Such a civil society is invariably manned by the highly educated, culturally sensitive, and aesthetically sophisticated (Chong, 2005). As Tay (2002: 9) observes,

In an imaginary perfect society, there will be no civil society, only blissful individuals basking in the glory of themselves. Thus imperfect governments cannot help but produce discomfort in their intelligent classes, And since governments cannot undo themselves or become perfect, the more they succeed in satisfying the masses, the more they create discomfort in the thinking class.

Close to this is Chng's (2002) notion of civil society as the ability of Singaporeans to reclaim history, national narratives, and social knowledge from the state. This ability to recover national, historical and cultural discourses from the state is a means for social and political empowerment, and when framed against the broader literature, echoes Gramscian conceptions of civil society as a site from which counter-hegemonic narratives may emerge to, unlike a "civic" society, allocate agency a central role in its activities. In sociological terms, this concept of civil society seeks the accumulation of cultural capital, not to perpetuate or legitimise dominant ideology as Bourdieu (1993) would have it, but to challenge it by offering alternative non-state sources of knowledge, information, histories, and ideologies, in order to influence the identity construction of citizenship. Individuals who possess the required cultural capital in the Singapore context include members of the arts community, liberal intellectuals and academics, and

well-educated and well-heeled civil society activists, most of whom are heterodox, that is, in possession of beliefs and values that challenge the status quo and received wisdom. This concept of civil society recognises the hegemonic tendencies of the authoritarian state, while its actors are educated with the requisite cultural capital to question and challenge state narratives, and are more inclined towards a liberal-pluralist civil society where contestation and resistance are seen to be a natural part of state-society relations (see Chong, 2005).

If one accepts that Singapore civil society demonstrates the dual ability to either perpetuate or to contest hegemony, it is then logical to conclude that the PAP state's hegemony is not as absolute or deeply ingrained as it is often made out to be by advocates of the "hegemonic state" thesis. These advocates fail to pay enough analytical attention to the Gramscian recognition of civil society's potential to engender autonomous cultural and social institutions that may challenge state hegemony. Perhaps most critically of all, the "hegemonic state" thesis fails to account for global processes and flows that have transformed the global cultural economy into a variety of "scapes" (Appadurai, 1990). The disjuncture, connection and integration of people and ideas in the local - ethnoscape and ideoscape - is undermining state hegemony by introducing alternative and novel socio-cultural vocabularies and concepts to citizens in order to fragment, neutralise, even ridicule, state discourses and official visions to achieve some sense of personal sovereignty and empowerment. Furthermore, the growing proclivity for classes, professions, and marginal identities such as gay or feminist organisations to identify and collaborate with their counterparts in other countries strongly suggest that even if hegemonic powers continue to retain their formal qualities and institutional presence, they are steadily becoming less substantial and meaningful in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.

#### **Embodying Society's Best: Confucian Ethics and the PAP**

We are left with several impressions of the PAP state from the discussions above. Firstly, the PAP state is highly responsive to local and global shifts. Secondly, its elitist and administrative character is driven by a deeply held belief that its members are the products of meritocracy and, above any other class, ethnic or civil society group, are the best qualified to govern. Thirdly, its elitist and administrative character has made it easier for the state to portray itself as interest-free and thus able to represent national interest or public good. These observations generally fall within the endeavours of sociologists who have thematised the functions of the state and its role as the key political institution of modernity. Hegel was one of the most controversial and influential political philosophers with the *Philosophy of Right* representing his most comprehensive and systematic attempt at defining and explaining the modern state. Much of the controversy stems from the literal interpretations of Hegel's ideas even though he would argue that no existing state could ever match the philosophical or divine idea of the state he so vividly sketched in his work. This has led to criticisms that the Hegelian state is but an entity abstracted from social and historical forces that created it, and that Hegel ignored the social context of human relations, resulting in the over-rationalisation of existing social

organisations. As such, a Hegelian interpretation of the state is today not only unfashionable but also heavy-laden with popular commentary, one of which is blithely delivered by Bertrand Russell (1950: 22) who writes that "If follows from his metaphysics that true liberty consists in obedience to an arbitrary authority, that free speech is an evil, that absolute monarchy is good, that the Prussian state was the best thing existing at the time when he wrote..."

This article does not seek to rehabilitate the Hegelian state from such impressions given the existing array of authoritative works that have eloquently (re)interpreted *Philosophy of Right* (Avineri, 1972; Taylor and Pippin, 1979; Hardimon and Pippin, 1994), but rather, to unearth Hegelian dimensions in the Singapore state, and suggest that the concepts of the Hegelian state retain the theoretical flexibility needed to explain the PAP state's dynamism and responsive nature better than most. It is also suggested that the Hegelian state is a better analytical approach because it does not privilege a group, class or interests, like patriarchal state in explanations of the state's functioning, and lastly, it accounts for the state's responsiveness in addressing the challenges of a lethargic national economy and the demands of an open globalised cultural economy.

Since the 1960s, state analysis has been on the agenda of political sociology for a variety of reasons. They include the need to determine the role and future of the European welfare state; the changing nature of civil society and its relationship with the state; and more recently, the character of the Asian state, its links to the Asian miracle, and its instrumental deployment of the Asian values discourse. The instrumental use of the Asian values discourse, specifically Confucian ethics, by the PAP state was more than just a culturalist explanation of economic development, but also reflects the basic Hegelian belief that the highest values and best traditions of a society could be politically embodied and expressed by the state. This political embodiment and expression began in the mid-1970s when the Socialist International, of which the PAP was then a member of, accused the ruling party of losing its democratic and socialist ideals. This prompted the PAP to resign from the international body. The PAP defended its mode of governance by appealing to its economic track record, and claimed to have found a "Singapore way" that prioritised socialism, democracy, and human rights according to the needs of national interests (Nair, 1976). Left with an ideological vacuum created by its resignation from socialism, the PAP state began to look towards an ethnic- and culturally-based set of values; one which the academic symposium on "Asian values and Modernisation" seemed specifically designed to fill (see Seah, 1977). The project eventually developed into a particular reading of Chinese values and Confucian ethics by Lee Kuan Yew which came to embody the PAP state's Asian values discourse where traits such as state- and family-centred social networks, hard work, thrift, respect for authority and elders, and education, among others, were lionised. With its rhetorical insistence that it was made up of the intellectual and moral elite - or in Confucian-speak, *junzhi* (honourable men) (see Government of Singapore, 1991) - and Goh Chok Tong's public exaltation of Lee Kuan Yew as the "modern Confucius" (see Kuo, 1996), the PAP state thus represented itself as the embodiment of Singapore society's highest values and traditions. This intermeshing of Confucian ethics with state apparatuses allowed the

PAP state to employ the Asian values discourse as a justification for authoritarianism by rejecting Western concepts of "civilisation." This echoes the way in which modern German imperial advocates of *Zivilisationskritik* (critique of civilisation) fended off democratic modernity by appealing to *Kultur* (culture). The implication was that "One could be modern and retain one's "Asianness" just as industrialised Germany of the nineteenth century maintained its distinctive, non-Western "*Kultur*" (Thompson, 2000: 664). This combination of cultural sovereignty, the spectre of external threat, and real economic development, enabled the PAP state to consolidate and centralise its power in ways that reflect the characteristics of the Hegelian state.

### **Hegelian Dimensions in the PAP State**

The Hegelian state has several characteristics. Firstly, the state is "altruistic" and its interests "transcend" those of the individual and civil society (Avineri, 1972; Hardimon and Pippin, 1994).

Hegel views the state not as an arrangement aimed at safeguarding man's self-interest (this is done in civil society), but as something transcending it. The state to Hegel is universal altruism - a mode of relating to a universe of human beings not out of self-interest but out of solidarity, out of the will to live with other human beings in a community (Avineri, 1972: 134).

One way in which the PAP state perpetuates its power is the way it represents itself as non-partisan, above the competition of group interests. This was necessary firstly because Singapore, with its Chinese majority, could not afford to be seen as a 'third China' by neighbouring Muslim countries; and secondly, the domestic communal, religious, and ethnic fissures further impressed upon the predominantly middle class English-educated party the political need to be seen as impartial and unfettered by communal interests in order to secure popular legitimacy. This position has allowed the PAP state to perpetuate the belief that its interests are ethnically and religiously neutral, driven by a broader, more inclusive vision of social and political harmony, and thus capable of mediating polemical concerns. It takes pains to constantly remind its citizens that while communal interests exist, it is its role to govern with national interests in mind. This self-proclaimed ability to transcend narrow self-interests parallels the Hegelian state.

The PAP state's position, more importantly, privileges it as final arbiter and mediator in any interest contestations. In a liberal pluralist civil society where ideas and interests jostle, the state is one of many voices contending for public attention. In Singapore however, the state's economic track record and efficiency has won it the consent of the governed, a source of legitimacy which allows it to act as final arbiter in socio-political disputes. Take for example the leadership dispute within the Air Lines Pilots Association - Singapore (Alpa-S). In late 2003, members of Alpa-S ousted its leadership on grounds that it had been too compliant with the management of Singapore International Airlines (SIA), the national carrier. The leadership ouster signalled a desire amongst the pilots for a more competitive pay-scale and benefits, and consequently triggered government fears that the episode could inspire labour unrest and leadership disputes in other trade unions. Alpa-S was not under the umbrella of the government-led National

Trade Unions Congress (NTUC) and its move was deemed potentially dangerous to the harmonious tripartite relationship between government, unions and workers. The PAP state took it upon itself to intervene in the form of the then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew who met with the new leadership and made clear in no uncertain terms "that if the unions wanted to nitpick and stonewall, they will become an intolerable obstacle to the airline's success" (*The Straits Times*, 27 February 2004). More significant than the PAP state's unsurprising heavy-handed intervention was the fact that there was little public criticism or challenge to the government's imposition. It can be argued that the dispute over medical and welfare benefits for a small number of pilots, a well-paid profession, did not elicit the empathy of the general public. Nonetheless, the state as final arbiter of disputes and contestation is not only deemed by the PAP state as its right but also by the general public as unproblematic, legitimate, even necessary, thus disguising ruling class interest as "neutral" or "impartial."

Secondly, the Hegelian state is a rational state. For Hegel, the family was the realm of emotions and feeling while civil society that of individual self-interest, and it was only in the form of the state that human reason could be fully expressed, and where there was the power available to fulfil it. The state is an "ethical movement" in which subjective consciousness and objective order was reconciled perfectly such that the will of the state was the only passageway to true freedom. This was, of course, a reflection of Hegel's metaphysical conclusions whereby human history was a linear and dialectic process in which Logos would actualise itself. Hegel's political theory cannot be completely divorced from his logic (Wolff, 2004), and it is here that Hegel is most vulnerable to criticism, the most common of which is the deterministic and evolutionary nature of the state. This determinism is evident in the PAP state's rationale for authoritarianism and interventionism. The PAP constantly justifies its regime by excavating historical episodes of ethnic violence and social disharmony, and appealing to economic priorities, all of which are discursively designed to suggest that a strong and decisive state is needed to rise above the emotions, hubris, and fickleness associated with the general public. Here, the PAP state's rationality takes a pragmatic form, a commonsensical, often economically driven logic that measures and privileges material and quantitative considerations over other concerns in policy-making exercises. This has been the underlining rationale for social eugenics, the graduate women policy, the population control policy that encouraged parents to stop at two children, and the banning of chewing gum, among others.

Thirdly, the PAP state, like the Hegelian state, is the personification of national interests and public good. According to Hegel, "[i]t has often been said that the end of the state is the happiness of its citizens... If all is not well with them, if their subjective aims are not satisfied, if they do not find that the state as such is the means to their satisfaction, then the footing of the state is insecure" (quoted in Avineri, 1972: 179). This gives rise to an ideological tautology: a state would not infringe on its citizens' rights and happiness; therefore, all states are trustworthy, or they would not be states in the first place. Again, as with performing as final arbiter, the PAP state is able to disguise its own interests with appeals to notions of "national interests" and "public good."

Echoing shades of the patriarchal or paternalist state, the PAP state here is able to tell its citizens what is good for them, direct them towards certain actions, and make them accept certain policy decisions, all for their own good. For instance, on 16 May 2001, in response to criticism in parliament of the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation's (GIC) lack of financial disclosure, then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong argued that it was not in the nation's interest to disclose investments made by the government. He called this brand of governance "representative democracy" in which the people elect the government and the government determines public interests, and governs accordingly.

Fourthly, only the state, and not civil society or any other institution, can guarantee individual freedom. In Averini's view (1972: 179), the "state, then, is based on rational freedom, organised in such a way as to enable each to realise his freedom in conjunction with others, while in civil society one can realise one's ends only by disrespecting everyone else's aims." For Hegel, civil society was itself a product of the modern state, without which there could be no civil society. Made up of diverse competing interest, the occasional socio-political discord that played out:

led Hegel to view civil society as prone to instability and conflict, despite its natural tendency towards a natural equilibrium. To ensure "civility" and stability, he concluded, the state which in his view was the only entity capable of representing the unity of society and furthering the freedom of citizens - had to order civil society. Hence state intervention to guide and govern civil society was legitimate (Alagappa, 2004: 28).

It is the Hegelian conception of civil society that has found the most intellectual currency in describing the Singapore condition. Given the state's perception of civil society as conflict-ridden, it takes it upon itself to define limited spaces for activism and freedoms to flourish; and in so doing, the state not only exercises its considerable power, but also justifies it by pointing to an unruly and contradictory civil society's potential for chaos. As such, it is no surprise that the Singapore civil society literature is filled with leitmotifs of descriptions of a strong state, political legitimacy and a weak civil society.

The PAP state's concept of civil society is expressed as "civic society" (Yeo, 1991). This notion of civic society involves an ideological siphoning of competing interests, liberal values, and marginal voices from the public activities of citizens, leaving only a politically congruent society where there is not only a presumed absence of competition between non-government organisations for political legitimacy and material resources, but also one that has little need for the application of agency. Civic society's "reconciliation" of state and non-state interests invariably renders the need for individual struggle either redundant or gratuitous, denies any form of systemic or institutional oppression, and is capable of mobilising the discourse of "national interest" as a means to de-legitimise and neutralise alternative voices. The normative functions of a civic society are informed by the dynamics of other local state-society relations like those between the state and trade unions and the local press, and, to some extent, academia. Without the autonomy and independence enjoyed by their counterparts in liberal democracies, these three communities are locally legitimised by a variety of tropes including the discourse of survival, nation-building, and the need for state-soci-

ety partnership, all of which advance the political language of compromise and non-confrontation in the promotion of communal or national interests, resulting in a dominant ideology that is conservative, conflict-shy, and void of competitive politics. .

In a politically neutralising civic society, the Hegelian constellation of the family, civil society, and the state is revealed to be largely aligned with that of the PAP state's. At one end of the spectrum is the family, the realm of personal altruism whereby individuals are expected to care and provide for their family members. This altruism of the family is not expected to bleed into civil society. On the other end of the spectrum is the state. Here, the state is not concerned with safe guarding the interests of individuals but is expected to transcend them. For Hegel this was "universal altruism" (Avineri, 1972), and for the PAP state, this is expressed as a "civic republican citizenship" where citizens are defined by the fulfilment of duties such as the paying of taxes, obeying the laws of the land or conscription. Both universal altruism and the civic republican citizenship emphasise not individual rights, but the shared commitment to a common endeavour for the collective good of society, as defined by the state. Right in the middle is civil society. Like Hegel, the PAP state views civil society as the realm of self-interest, incapable of governance, designed for the achievement of individual, selfish interests. It is this very picture of civil society that is conjured up whenever the PAP state warns against ethnic and religious politics, and its volatile nature. The bloody spectre of the 1964 racial riots between the ethnic Chinese and Malays is constantly revived by the PAP state in order to illustrate the dangers and self-interestedness of civil society, reinforcing the Hegelian point that it is only through the state that true freedom may be actualised, hence the non-negotiable right for the state to intervene when necessary.

Nonetheless, civil society was also seen by Hegel as the mediation of particular wills vis-à-vis socio-political engagement and a way for individuals to be educated (*Rildung*) through their efforts and struggles toward a higher universal consciousness. It is this latter characteristic that the PAP state is interested in using to foster a greater sense of belonging for nation-building purposes. The PAP state's discourse of "active citizenship," for example, emerged from the early 1990s as response to a younger generation of Singaporeans with vastly different material experiences and political expectations from their parents (Chong, 2005). These younger Singaporeans, more educated and sophisticated, were deemed by the PAP state to be likelier to leave the country unless they were offered some form of civic participation. Instead of sidelining these individuals, as was the previous practice, the PAP state has responded to the shifting expectations and interests of its citizens by engaging and co-opting them while, at the same time, steering them away from alternative politics and strident advocacy in the fulfilment of self-prescribed nation-building interests.

### **The Self-renewal of the PAP State**

One of the most overlooked characteristics of the PAP state is its ability for self-renewal. The dominant ruling party's ability to renew itself for continued relevance is noteworthy as this is not in response to domestic political challenges but from internal political will, and is a specific feature of the PAP state that is not captured by conven-

-tional state models. The patriarchal state, for example, is a value- and tradition-oriented regime that is resistant to change, and, as an analytical model, is more concerned with the identity interests of power. It does not possess the analytical vocabulary to articulate the PAP's adaptation to the external environment because its strength lies in explaining beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of state power and dominant interests. The hegemonic state, on the other hand, expresses state power as the ability to perpetuate false consciousness. As a state model, it understands power renewal or power consolidation as the capacity to absorb and co-opt new social and cultural institutions, and pays little attention to self-renewal. According to Minister, Mentor Lee, "The key to PAP's longevity is self-renewal, continually inducting younger men and women of ability and integrity, with high energy levels... to remain vigorous, sensitive to changes, and never complacent" (*The Straits Times*, 22 November 2004). Self-renewal here suggests a realism-based understanding of the external environment as dynamic and ever-changing; an understanding that is matched by the strong political will to self-transform by replacing existing mindsets and personnel with those which are more familiar to newer situations and milieus in order to respond efficiently to new challenges. The discourse of self-renewal consists of purging old values, obsolete ideas, and even once-useful individuals that have become contradictory or even less expedient to the larger body for the purpose of survival through evolutionary refinement. According to the Minister for Home Affairs, Wong Kan Seng (2004), "leadership renewal" was:

about responding to the "generational" change in our society - the rise of the post-Independence generation of Singaporeans. These younger Singaporeans, born after Independence; now form the majority of our population. The political leadership must, therefore, rejuvenate itself with the infusion of younger men and women who are able to connect and empathise with them.

This relentless drive to self-renew has resulted in older PAP members complaining about being retired while at the prime of their professional life. The ruling party routinely "retires" a third of its MPs' (members of parliament) at each general election as part of its renewal process for various reasons ranging from the age factor; their relevance to emerging conditions, and their connections with the younger electorate (*The Straits Times*, 6 August 2005). And consequentially, "[t]hey felt annoyed that they had to make way for fresh outsiders 'who were not even party members'; but this was, nonetheless, "a conflict that was confined within itself" (*The Star*, 27 February 2005). The PAP's fixation with self-renewal and continued relevance has even mirrored the Hegelian dialectic whereby a thesis produces its antithesis, between which there is conflict, and from which a new synthesis emerges. Take for example the PAP proposal to form its own "shadow cabinet" (*South China Morning Post*, 8 November 2001). During the 2001 general election campaign, in response to growing criticism that the PAP's dominance was resulting in poor quality parliamentary debates, Prime Minister Goh suggested that PAP MPs could form a shadow cabinet amongst themselves if less than two opposition MPs returned to parliament. The idea was later called the "People's Action Forum" where elected ruling party MPs could undertake the role of opposition MPs in order to raise the level of parliamentary debates, voice alternative views and interests, and to, presumably, challenge the relevance of opposition MPs in parliament.

Significant was the way in which the PAP state envisioned itself playing both the roles of ruling and opposition party, coming into contestation, refining itself, and evolving into a more efficient and superior entity.

The logic of dialecticism may also be seen in broader policy decisions. It has become more and more common to see the PAP state casting aside economic models, censorship regulations, and certain moral stances, which were once the cornerstones of its governance in order to address a lethargic economy, as well as to meet the demands of globalisation. Very often this internal dialecticism reflects the PAP's own constant reviewing of its position and role, and Singapore's location, in the international division of production. Two examples come immediately to mind. In 1991, the national project to become a "Global City for the Arts" (GCA) was announced. The GCA ambition was fuelled by the economic potential of the cultural industry. Nonetheless it was acknowledged that the city-state's international reputation for strict censorship was a serious obstacle to realising this ambition. To continue adhering rigidly to draconian censorship regulations would deny the GCA project any global legitimacy. Hence, in the effort to reconcile local standards with international norms, the Censorship Review Committee (CRC) was formed. The CRC's report was released in October 1992, and it recommended several changes to the way censorship was applied to the arts and entertainment industry. With regards to cinema, it mooted a classification system whereby violent or sexually explicit films would pass through the censors relatively unscathed with an R(A) - Restricted (Artistic) - rating. R(A) has since been changed to R, and theatres soon adopted this classification system. Several conservative individuals and religious groups interpreted the easing of censorship as a move towards libertarianism and immorality, and calls were made to reject the recommendations but to no avail. The PAP state had decided that the previously restrictive and conservative regulations, long justified by culturalist arguments, were no longer relevant to the contemporary environment and had to be purged in order to make the city-state more attractive in the global competition for capital and human talent. This move, among others, resulted in some measure of international legitimacy when TIME magazine (July 1999) proclaimed "Singapore swings." The magazine went on to note that "once notorious for tight government control, the city-state is getting competitive, creative, even funky."

The second example is the decision to build two casinos in Singapore by 2009. The idea to build a casino was floated in late 2004 by the PAP state. Citing falling tourist figures, the need to inject excitement into the entertainment scene, and the promise of more jobs, the PAP state opened the issue to national debate. After months of public debate, the PAP state, in the face of trenchant opposition from conservative and religious quarters, announced on 18th April 2005 that two casinos, both set within larger entertainment resorts, would be built. This decision represents a complete turnaround from the moral stance adopted by first generation leaders during the industrialising years. Minister Mentor Lee (2005) in parliament recounted how he shot down proposals for a casino when he was prime minister: "I ruled it out. I did not want to undermine Singapore's work ethic and breed the belief that people can get rich by gambling, something that is impossible because the odds are against the gambler, because the banker or

'house' must win." Even the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2005), as late as 2002, rejected the idea, writing that while "There may be economic merits to setting up a casino in Singapore... [a] casino could also lead to undesirable activities like money laundering, illegal money lending and organised crime. Although one can try to mitigate these effects, the long term impact on social mores and attitudes is more insidious and harder to prevent." The Prime Minister (2005), however, went on to explain the reason for the policy U-turn a mere three years later: "Cities all round the world are reinventing themselves... We cannot stand still. The whole region is on the move. If we do not change, where will we be in 20 years' time?.. [The casinos are] one significant idea we must consider, that will help us reinvent Singapore."

Both examples demonstrate the ability to cast off old ideas and principles when they become obsolete. These ideas and principles are constantly reviewed under the harsh microscope of economic reality. There is little evidence of a specific driving ideology or sacred set of doctrines behind the PAP state to explain its actions except for the generation of the economic growth on which most of its behaviour is premised. It is this economic priority and the PAP state's single-minded mission to satisfy it that has kickstarted the recent process of cultural liberalisation from the easing of censorship regulations, to permitting bar-top dancing, foreign topless cabaret entertainment, and the turnaround on casinos. The PAP state's ability for self-renewal, together with national discourses and campaigns to "remake" or "reinvent" Singapore, not only has the effect of continuously affirming the PAP's relevance to the city-state, but also serves to implicitly reject arguments for a liberal-pluralist civil society and liberal democracy on the grounds that the PAP state is consciously co-opting new people and fresh ideas, open to the process of internal dialecticism, thus making the notion of civil society as a "marketplace of ideas" redundant.

## **Conclusion**

The need for theoretical flexibility and conceptual openness is increasingly vital as the PAP state responds and engages with the contemporary processes of globalisation. As boundaries become more porous, and as the ruling elite is confronted with the contradictory forces of globalisation, the relationship between the local, national, and the global will become more unpredictable and unstable, something which conventional state models are too rigid to capture. A more elementary and open-ended framework is needed to explore the PAP state as a concoction of interests, values, and ideologies designed to retain and legitimise power and consent amidst the processes of globalisation. The use of the Hegelian state as an analytical framework is not to cast the PAP state in a fixed theoretical mould but to draw parallels between the characteristics of the Hegelian state and various examples of state-society relations in Singapore. It puts into focus how the PAP state sees itself as an "impartial" and "rational" entity. In appealing to impartiality and rationality, the PAP state is able to neutralise not only ethnic- or religious-based interests in society, but is also prone to analytical slippage into rigid descriptions like "patriarchal" or "hegemonic." We have also seen how the PAP state believes itself to be a clear reflection of "public good" and "national interests." In be-

lieving that it embodies the best values of society, it is only natural that the PAP state's interests are conceived as national interests. This explains the basis for its stoic belief that it has the mandate of the people even when the majority of Singaporeans do not have the opportunity to exercise their vote in general elections because of various forms of gerrymandering such as the redrawing of the boundaries of electoral constituencies.

The Hegelian principle that the state is the only form of true freedom also sheds light on the way in which civil society in Singapore is perceived and managed by the PAP state. Civil society is, in both Hegelian and PAP eyes, chaotic and brimming with self-interest. It is not the realm in which consensus is tempered but one where the satisfaction of personal ends is achieved. Between the family and the state, civil society has neither the "personal altruism" borne from kinship and familial membership nor the "universal altruism" to transcend self-interest for the greater good. As such, true freedom is not to be found in civil society because the fulfilment of one individual's interests is the denial of another individual's interests. True freedom comes when the state is able to transcend self-interests to fulfil national interests. The logic behind this is discernibly utilitarian where national interests are assumed to be for the good of the largest number of people. What is unconsidered is whether a small, elite group is able to define and decide on the interests of marginal groups and identities, as well as who the people or groups that benefit most regularly and consistently from the fulfilment of "national interests" are. These questions are largely muted by the PAP state's consistent delivery of material freedoms, that is, economic growth, wealth distribution, and home ownership. These material freedoms allow for the flourish of other freedoms such as freedom from political strife and the freedom to accumulate economic and cultural capital.

Hegel, nonetheless, also saw civil society as the mediation of particular wills vis-à-vis socio-political engagement and a way towards higher universal consciousness. In other words, even though the state was rational and transcended self-interests, civil society, with all its flaws, offered vital routes towards personal enlightenment and self-realisation; for it is in keeping with Hegelian rationalism and idealism that the sphere of civil society is one where the pursuit of self-interests may lead to a universal consciousness. The PAP state, however, rejects the self-interestedness of civil society and, instead, attempts to exploit its ability to foster a sense of identity and self-fulfilment by co-opting it for nation-building purposes. Civil society is duly translated to "civic society" wherein activism and advocacy are channelled towards non-political ventures. In this sense, the PAP state becomes more Hegelian than the Hegelian state in its distrust of civil society to make the unhindered journey from self-interest to a universal consciousness.

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