

The PAP-State: Housing, Health, and Resilient Authoritarianism



Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity 2017

by
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Abstract

The thesis aims to explain the continued durability of state authoritarianism in Singapore. This durability is usually attributed to citizens acquiescing to Singapore's authoritarian state on account of the prosperity it has delivered. The thesis argues that the contemporary resilience of authoritarianism and undergirding stability of state-citizen relations is better accounted for by two factors.

First, the state is apparently able to address evolving policy demands brought forward by citizens. Addressing contemporary 'hot button' issues through policy change produces popular support for the regime and eliminates the basis for serious political challenges. The thesis stresses the increasing role played by the state's provision of social protection and nation-building with respect to regime legitimation. Second, citizens are often able to sidestep authoritarian state practices in everyday life. The thesis argues that this can make authoritarian state practices more bearable for Singaporeans and thus further abates the emergence of pressures for political liberalisation.

The thesis analyses economic and social policy to make these arguments while focussing on the public housing and healthcare programmes as central case studies. It also draws on fieldwork data about state interventions, and how these interventions pan out 'on the ground' in Singapore. Beyond the case of Singapore, the thesis speaks to the resilience and re-emergence of state authoritarianism in other countries. The thesis also contributes to state theory and discussions about the reconfiguration of states' economic and social functions in the face of economic globalisation.

For my parents, Astrid and Eberhard

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List of acronyms

CC	Community Centre
CCC	Citizens' Consultative Committee
CBD	Central Business District
CPF	Central Provident Fund
DBS	Development Bank of Singapore
EDB	Economic Development Board
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GE	General Election
GLC	Government-linked company
HCS	Health Corporation of Singapore
HDB	Housing and Development Board
HOS	Home Ownership Scheme
HPB	Health Promotion Board
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies
ISA	Internal Security Act
KBE	Knowledge based economy
MNC	Multinational corporation
MND	Ministry of National Development
MOH	Ministry of Health
MP	Member of Parliament
NTU	Nanyang Technological University
NUH	National University Hospital
NUS	National University of Singapore
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSC	Our Singapore Conversation
PAP	People's Action Party
PGP	Pioneer Generation Package
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PR	Permanent Resident

RC	Residents' Committee
SDP	Singapore Democratic Party
SGH	Singapore General Hospital
SMRT	Singapore Mass Rapid Transit
TC	Town Council
THL	Temasek Holdings Limited
URA	Urban Redevelopment Authority
WDA	Work Development Authority
WP	Workers' Party

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1. The question of the PAP-state's durability

Singapore has been upheld as prime example of successful state-led development. Little more than a 'fishing village' at the time of national independence in 1965, the island-nation has turned into a global metropolis. The ascend "from third world to first" (Lee, 2000), as modern Singapore's 'founding father' Lee Kuan Yew titled his memoir, has been steep. Much of this economic success has been attributed to the firm rule of the People's Action Party (PAP). In power since 1959 (Chua, 1997:131), the PAP has advanced Singapore's industrial transformation and integration into the global economy with break-neck speed.

While economic and social development has been remarkable, so has the resilience of state authoritarianism and apparent stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore (George, 2000; Krastev, 2011). Authoritarian rule is "characterised by concentration of power and the obstruction to serious political competition with, or scrutiny of, that power" (Rodan, 2004:2).¹ Leveraging state power against its political opponents, the PAP and Singapore's state have become amalgamated to the point of being jointly referred to as 'PAP-state' (Tremewan, 1994:48; Wee, 2007:7). But pressure for political liberalisation remains largely conspicuous by its absence in Singapore. This stands in relief to the other 'Asian Tigers' of South Korea and Taiwan, where in the 1980s pro democratic movements successfully pushed for political liberalisation (Castells et al., 1990:6).

In this thesis, I aim to explain the continued resilience of the PAP-state and the underpinning stability of state-citizen relations. In pursuit of that objective, I focus on

¹ Real-world manifestations of authoritarianism vary. I argue that Singapore's brand of authoritarianism is 'competitive' where political contest is not entirely absent or meaningless although the playing field is slanted in the incumbent's favour (section 2.1).

Singapore's public housing and healthcare programmes as central case studies of state intervention. Around 85% of Singapore's population is living in state-provided housing (Mah, 2011:6) and even more are covered by public healthcare (Ministry of Health, 2014). The two programmes have thus become vital nexuses between state and citizens. Both are deeply embedded in wider economic and social policy and have high political significance in the Singaporean context (Chua, 1997; Castells et al., 1990; Barr, 2008; Lim, 2013). The two social policy programmes are thus excellent case studies for analysing the negotiation of state-citizen relations that underpin regime resilience, as I will show.

The literature has predominantly explained citizen acquiescence by pointing towards the PAP-state's ostensibly high degree of 'performance legitimacy'. According to that argument, the state's successful promotion of economic growth and better living standards produces popular support for, and acquiescence to, the PAP-state (Brown, 1998; Chua, 2000; Lai, 1995). I will show that contemporary political developments in Singapore cast doubt on that argument. The PAP-state's "growth fetishism" that brought with it welfare austerity, immigration-fuelled population growth, and socio-cultural change, has become increasingly unpopular (Low, 2014a:171). We thus need to develop a more nuanced explanation for stable state-citizen relations. I aim to do so.

I focus on the public housing and healthcare programmes as central case studies to argue that continued durability of state authoritarianism can be accounted for by two factors. On the one hand, the PAP-state is apparently able to address evolving policy demands brought forward by citizens. Beyond securing rising living standards, the PAP-state increasingly provides social protection, and fulfils nation-building functions even as this

hurts growth. I suggest that addressing contemporary ‘hot button’ issues like social inequality and immigration through policy change helps to contain serious political pressures for regime change.

On the other hand, I argue that Singaporeans are often able to selectively sidestep and evade authoritarian state practices in everyday life. I propose that such imperfections in state authoritarianism can further abate pressures for regime change because authoritarianism thus becomes more bearable in citizens’ daily life. Taken together, the apparent responsiveness of the PAP-state to popular policy demands and ability to sidestep authoritarian state practices alleviates pressures for political liberalisation.

That state-citizen relations are ‘stable’ does not imply, however, that relations are unchanging. Indeed, if we understand ‘citizenship’ in terms of rights and obligations extended by the state to its ‘citizens’ (Marshall, 1950), I will argue that the PAP-state has adjusted its roles in economy and society not least by extending welfare entitlements.² By the ‘stability’ of state-citizen relations I thus mean that Singaporeans are not, by and large, challenging the PAP-state’s authoritarian rule.

Logically preceding the thesis’ central research concern and argument is the theoretical question of how to conceptualise *the state* and state-citizen relations. For, *the state* is an amorphous concept, often serving as “convenient shorthand whenever the pressure of semantic precision is relaxed or ignored” (Jessop, 2007:55). As Mitchell points out, the border between state and society is blurred, shifting, and permeable. It is impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins (Mitchell, 1991:84).

² I apply this conventional understanding of citizenship even as Singaporeans do not necessarily conceptualize their rights and obligations qua citizens in statutory terms as discussed in section 2.2.

However, modern states often rule precisely by appearing to stand above and apart from society. Mitchell calls this illusion the state's 'ideological effects' or the 'state effect' (Mitchell, 2006). Reinforced through public displays like military parades, government buildings, or international frontiers (ibid.:180), the state is thus also an idea "projected, purveyed and variously believed in in different societies at different times" (Abrams, 1988:58). To anticipate the more detailed discussion that will follow, I henceforth distinguish between the 'state' qua political and more or less coherent bureaucratic organisation and the 'State' (capitalised) as idea.

The 'state' pursues economic, political, and social aims through interventions. And the 'State' refers to an entity variously imagined as larger than life, hyper-rational, and standing over and above its citizens. I will argue that making this distinction is crucial from a theoretical perspective but also for engaging the state/State empirically and to achieve something akin to 'construct validity' (Cronbach and Meehl, 1995). That is, roughly, to achieve a high degree of congruence between the aim of inquiry and the actual object observed through the methods and theory applied.

We thus need to understand the PAP-state's interventions and policies with their publicly voiced intentions, but also how Singaporeans perceive this, engage with incarnations of the 'state', and hence imagine the 'State'. Not to take this distinction seriously is to make unfounded assumptions about why authoritarianism under the PAP continues to be broadly accepted by citizens. As I will show below, this is reflected in the literature's regurgitation of the 'performance legitimacy' argument and its emphasis on the state's economic functions. I argue that at this juncture, citizens can also see the 'State' as legitimate due to the PAP-state's recent commitment to building a more 'socially inclusive' society and its nation-building functions.

I make this argument based on fieldwork data gathered in Singapore and analysis of the academic literature and political trends. Fieldwork data includes qualitative interview data, participant observation of life in the public housing ‘heartlands’, and analysis of a variety of documents. The benefit of case study research and fieldwork is that it allows tracing “complex causal relations” (George and Bennett, 2005). In my case the relations of interest are those between ‘state’ practices, ‘State’ images evoked, and citizen acquiescence. I discuss my methodological approach and its limitations in detail later.

Having laid out the thesis’ overarching research concern with the resilience of state authoritarianism in Singapore, this introductory chapter proceeds as follows. Section 1.1 discusses the literature’s account of contemporary state-citizen relations and the ‘performance legitimacy’ argument. As noted above, the ‘performance legitimacy’ argument holds that Singaporeans acquiesce to the PAP-state because of the prosperity it has delivered to the population. In section 1.2 I argue that while all evidence suggests that the PAP-state continues to draw popular support, the validity of the ‘performance legitimacy’ argument can no longer be taken for granted. Section 1.3 concludes the chapter by providing an overview of the remainder of this thesis and argument developed therein.

Beyond the Singapore literature, the thesis contributes to state theory more generally and hopes to advance a better understanding of how states are adjusting their economic and social functions according to economic and (domestic) political pressures. This is pertinent given Singapore’s status as role-model for policy reform in other countries (see Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2014; Barr 2008; Sim, 2006). Furthermore, the

thesis speaks to the phenomenon of ‘authoritarian revival’ (Gat et al., 2009) and the unexpected resilience of state authoritarianism elsewhere around the world – China, Russia, Turkey, and Hungary are prominent examples (Diamond, 2016a; Brownlee, 2007).

1.1 The case of Singapore and the ‘performance legitimacy’ argument

This section discusses the PAP-state’s enduring reign and Singapore’s rapid socio-economic development that is said to produce popular support for the authoritarian regime. According to what I have dubbed the ‘performance legitimacy argument’, there exists an “unspoken social contract whereby Singaporeans have been prepared to accede to the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered” (Henderson, 2013:217). Intertwined with this ‘performance legitimacy’ argument are the PAP-state’s social policy successes, including the provision of public housing and healthcare that will serve as my central case studies.

In the following I thus briefly outline modern Singapore’s history and the PAP-state’s place within it. I suggest that the ‘performance legitimacy argument’ is an extension of the PAP’s own justification for its hold to authoritarian power. That justification is based in Singapore’s national narrative, which I also discuss below.

National independence, economic ascend, and the PAP-state

Modern Singapore was born out of a short-lived ‘marriage of convenience’ with Malaysia that started in 1963 and ended on 9 August 1965 – the day of Singapore’s “reluctant independence” (Teo, 2010:339). Singapore’s expulsion from the federation itself was the

result of prolonged disagreements and antipathy between Singapore's ruling PAP and Malaysia's leadership (Tan, 2008; Lau, 2008).

Sudden independence created a 'crisis mentality' in Singapore (Low, 2001). On the one hand, independence left the newly-born nation with its polyglot population (mostly made up of migrants from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India)³ surrounded by the Muslim countries of Indonesia and Malaysia, the latter of which had just been antagonised. On the other hand, PAP-elites saw the nation and their own rule vulnerable to domestic instability given the multi-ethnic population and threat of communism if living standards were to fall (Doner et al., 2005:347-348).

National independence had thus elevated the importance of economic growth, at least for the PAP. But Singapore's small size, natural resource scarceness, and then miniscule national industry made its pursuit exceedingly difficult (Castells et al., 1990:194). Further complicating matters, Singapore's Chinese entrepreneurial class was suspected to sympathise with the PAP's communist political adversaries (Low, 2001:416). Due to the limited domestic market and to not strengthen the politically suspect domestic capital, the PAP thus adopted a form of industrial policy largely reliant on inward foreign direct investment (Huff, 1995:1423-1426).

By all accounts, the economic strategy (discussed in detail in chapter 4) has been highly successful. Gross domestic capital (GDP) per capita increased almost ten-fold from \$3.905 in 1965 to \$29.008 in 1995, reaching \$51.865 in 2015 (the three figures are at constant 2010 US\$). Adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), GDP per capita was at

³ The exact proportions in 1957 were 75.4% Chinese, 13.6% Malay/Indonesian, and 7.0% Indian (Lim, 2010:86). Census data shows relatively little fluctuation in the population's ethnic composition. By 2010, the proportions were 74.1% Chinese, 13.4% Malay/Indonesian, and 9.2% Indian (Singstat, 2010).

\$80.892 in 2015 – the world’s third highest (The World Bank, 2016a). Over the same time period, average life expectancy at birth improved from 67.1 years in 1965 to 76.3 in 1995, and 82.6 in 2015 (The World Bank, 2017a). Increasingly fuelled by immigrants looking for a better economic future in Singapore (Rahim, 2015; Yeoh and Lam, 2016), the island nation’s population also grew considerably from 1.887 million in 1965 to 3.525 million in 1995, and 5.535 million in 2015 (The World Bank, 2017b).

The PAP-state’s long-running firm control over Singapore has become almost synonymous with the rapid socio-economic developments. The PAP itself was formed in 1954. Still under British colonial rule, the PAP celebrated its first electoral history when receiving 45.1% of the popular vote in the Legislative Assembly election. Following internal divisions, the PAP’s left wing faction broke away in 1961 and formed its own party, the *Barisan Sosialis*, or ‘Socialist Front’ (Rodan, 2006:6). Under Lee Kuan Yew’s now unchallenged party leadership, the PAP consolidated its hold on power and remains in office even after Lee’s gradual retreat from politics and passing in 2015 (Chin, 2016). The PAP won every general election (GE) since independence, averaging a vote share of about 70%, albeit with some fluctuation over the years. Its strongest result came to pass in GE 1968 when the PAP received 86.7% of the popular vote, contrasted by GE 2011 where the PAP ‘only’ received 60.1% – the PAP’s worst electoral performance since independence (Mahbububani, 2015:20). The result from 2011, and what to read into it is discussed in more detail in section 1.2.

At the higher levels of organisation, not too much is known about the internal workings of the PAP and its inner circle, the *Central Executive Committee*. Like the state itself, with which the party had become increasingly amalgamated since national inde-

pendence, the PAP's inner circle has the power to avoid close scrutiny. It is known, however, that the party's recruitment is highly selective, drawing on top-performers from Singapore's universities, the civil service, and private sector (Mauzy and Milne, 2002:118-126).

Every year, only approximately 100 candidates are invited to interview for cadre membership. To qualify, interviewees must come recommended by a senior PAP member, and applicants undergo three separate interviews by panels consisting of cabinet ministers and MPs (Tan, 2015:63). The process weeds out those with "extreme or alternative views" and "filters like-minded members into the inner circle" (Tan, 2015:64). Under the successive governments led by Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok tong, and Lee Hsien Loong, the PAP has thus continued to renew itself while maintaining a high degree of internal cohesion (Mauzy and Milne, 2002).

Mirroring the selective recruitment of party cadres, the PAP also actively employs mechanisms to 'spot' and recruit 'talents' within universities for higher duties within the PAP-state. Prestigious government scholarships help channel this 'talent' into statutory boards and government agencies when serving their scholarship bonds (Tan, 2015:64). Competition for high level positions in the bureaucracy is intense given the prestige and high compensation attached – salaries of high-level officials can reach over S\$ 1 million annually (Calder, 2016). Helping to uphold prestige, cohesion, and a strong work ethics in the bureaucracy (Gat et al., 2009:152), corruption is subject to draconic punishments and has remained low (Quah, 2011).⁴ Despite the "close working relationship between

⁴ In rare cases of corruption, perpetrators are also publically shamed in the state-owned national newspapers. On the one hand, this discourages corrupt behavior in the bureaucracy, on the other, it helps to maintain the image of clean government (see Quah, 2011:199).

the civil service and its political masters”, recruitment and promotion in the bureaucracy has thus remained competitive and meritocratic (Chew, 1997:26).

Repression of the political opposition

On the flipside of Singapore’s economic successes, the PAP is infamous for leveraging state power against its political opponents in an authoritarian fashion. The state’s authoritarian “hard edge” was first revealed in the 1963 ‘Operation Coldstore’ (Tremewan, 1994:32). Authorised by the Internal Security Council, the operation led to the arrest of more than 100 opposition leaders, trade unionists, and journalists (Rajah, 2012:49). Accused of communist dealings, some of the arrested remained imprisoned without trial for nearly 20 years (Tremewan, 1994:28). Since then, and despite communism no longer representing the “threat to ‘the nation’” it once did (Rajah, 2012:113), domestic security regulations have not been retracted but were updated to the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The ISA introduced legal provisions for arrest and indefinite incarceration without charge or trial (McCarthy, 2006:108). As means for authoritarian control, the ISA continues to be used for “transforming dissent into a security threat [while] accusations need never be scrutinised or substantiated because the state claims to be preventing and pre-empting an emergency” (Rajah, 2012:17). Similarly, in regard to defamation lawsuits against leaders of the political opposition, “Singapore courts have adopted the state’s reasoning in holding that the reputations of political leaders are especially vulnerable to public opinion” (ibid.:18).

While opposition parties have been allowed to compete in all GEs and the occasionally occurring by-elections, they have thus been kept weak through authoritarian

state practices. Besides the mentioned legal means, the PAP-state harasses its political detractors through the state-controlled media (George, 2000). By 1963, the PAP-state had also brought the unions under its hegemonic control, absorbing trade unions into the newly formed National Trade Union Congress (NTUC). Control over the unions eliminates opportunities for the political opposition to organise and draw popular support (Tremewan, 1994:32). Grassroots organisations and NGOs are largely monitored or co-opted by the PAP-state with the same effect (Lai, 1995:98; Chong et al., 2005). The education system and security apparatus have also been brought under state control, further limiting the inroads that opposition parties can make on the PAP's dominant position (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008; Castells et al., 1990:192; Tremewan, 1994:67).

In national elections themselves, the PAP also engages in tactics to hamstring the political opposition. For instance, the PAP-state only allows a campaign period of nine days before each GE, during which parties are allowed to air political advertisements and openly compete for Singaporeans' votes (Willnat and Aw, 2006:406). Under the country's first-past-the-post election system, the PAP-state also handicaps opposition parties by engaging in gerrymandering practices (Fetzer, 2008; Yeo, 2002). As a further impediment, in 1988 the PAP introduced group representative constituencies (GRCs), where parties have to nominate a team of candidates in each electoral constituency. This has been recognised to hurt opposition parties that often lack the resources and depths of credible candidates to challenge the PAP within GRCs (Tremewan, 1994:166-168).

In the face of these authoritarian tactics and the PAP-state's strength, few political parties have managed to challenge the PAP successfully. In fact, to date, only two parties have managed to make a dent in the PAP's popular vote share and parliamentary

majority (Dayley, 2017). These are Workers' Party (WP) and the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP).

Founded in 1957, the WP was the first political party to break the PAP's parliamentary monopoly when J.B. Jeyaretnam won the 1981 by-election in the Anson district (Tremewan, 1994:57). Under Jeyaretnam's leadership that lasted until 2001, the WP has defended its presence in Parliament by winning at least one seat in all GEs since (Nasir and Turner, 2012:8). In GE 2011 and GE 2016, the WP even managed to increase its presence to six MPs (Ortmann, 2011:153; Welsh, 2016:120). Meanwhile, the WP's overall share of the popular vote remained at roughly 13% in both elections – and thus in line with its performance since 1984 (Elections Department of Singapore, 2017).

The SDP was established in 1980, winning its first seat in parliament in GE 1984 and under the leadership of its founder Chiam See Tong (Thum, 2014:153). Garnering electoral support of between 10% and 12% in the following GEs, the SDP increased its presence in parliament to two MPs in 1991 and three in 1997 (Dayley, 2017). However, and following defamation lawsuits against the party and its leaders, as well as internal divisions, the SDP was unable to hold onto its seats in the subsequent GE 2001. Since then, the party failed to enter parliament again and only received 4.1%, 4.8%, and 3.8% during the last three GEs (Elections Department of Singapore, 2017).

Notwithstanding the limited inroads made especially by the WP, Singapore remains authoritarian, albeit of the 'competitive' type (section 2.1). With a score of 52/100, *Freedom House* ranks Singapore 122nd out of 2010 countries in its 2018 'Freedom in the World' index that attempts to measure polities' political freedom. Singapore thus falls into the 'partly free' category of countries. Its score is on par with that of Kosovo, while

ranked lower than the Ukraine (in 103rd place), or Moldova (in 108th place) (Freedom House, 2017).

The national narrative and 'performance legitimacy' argument

The PAP has justified its authoritarian form of rule by appealing to the country's state-backed national narrative. The narrative contrasts the purportedly chaotic immediate post-independence era with "the relative peace and stability created by the illiberalism of successor governments" (Thum, 2014:140). Propagated through the education system, the media (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008), and public speeches like at the yearly National Day Rally (Tan, 2012), this national narrative implies

continuity from the colonial period in the progressivism entailed in the Singapore version of 'Our Island Story'. The original constitutionalist direction of the British 'Story', though, is re-cast so that it is economic development and the freedom of markets backed by the rule of law that move forward, rather than individual freedom (Wee, 2007:66).

The twin goal of maintaining domestic stability and attracting international capital was established as the overriding national priority (Barr and Skrbiš: 2008:39). Accordingly, maintaining domestic stability to promote growth became the main justification for authoritarian government. For Singapore to persist in the face of FDI-dependence, democratisation is argued to be a luxury that Singapore can ill-afford. As former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, put it regarding the possibility of increased democratisation:

They say, oh, let's have multiparty politics. Let's have different parties change and be in charge of the Government. Is it that simple? You vote in a Division Three government, not a Division One government, and the whole economy will just subside within three, four years. Finished. (Today, 2008 August 15).

Similarly, in 1987 Lee justified far-reaching interventions in citizens' daily lives to instil the multi-ethnic population with shared virtuous habits that would turn Singapore into an attractive location for international capital and labour:

I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. [...] And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters – who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right (cited in Tremewan, 1994:2).

Finally, the national media presents recent cases of terrorism in the name of Islam as reaffirming the necessity of limiting freedom of speech and practicing censorship in an ethnically and religiously diverse country. The national media's extensive coverage of the 2015 killings of twelve journalists and cartoonists at the headquarters of 'Charlie Hebdo' in Paris was a prime example of this. While echoing condemnations of the attacks, Singapore's main newspaper 'The Straits Times', also depicted the slayings as the price that Western countries pay for upholding what were said to be excessive freedom of the press and speech (The Straits Times, 2015 January 10). For instance, one opinion piece emphasised that

just like our city-state, the French capital is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan with the influx of immigrants. And, just like many Western societies,

the French take great pride in their respect for human rights and freedom of speech. [...] If only proper statutes had been put in place to counter senseless mockery of religions, the bloody attacks could have been averted (The Straits Times, 2015 January 15).

As far as the official narrative goes, Singapore's population thus needs to be protected from its own internal differences. Authoritarianism and paternalism are justified as purportedly necessary for economic prosperity and social harmony. Failure to achieve this is painted in apocalyptic terms. The PAP holds dear to its justification of state authoritarianism and its own position as "vanguard party" (Teo, 2011:3) that turned Singapore from obscure fishing village into global metropolis. Given the economic dependence on foreign capital, prosperity is said to be never secure and always conditional on the PAP-state's management of economy and society.

Scholars have taken the PAP-state's narrative and *justification* for authoritarianism and turned it into an *explanation* of regime resilience (see Brown, 1998; Chua, 1997; Lai, 1995). The PAP-state is thus said to have "gained legitimacy among Singaporeans" chiefly because "it has delivered the economic goods as reflected in the vast improvement in living standards and per capita GDP since 1959" (Quah, 2011:205). Or, as Henderson put it, "Singaporeans have been prepared to accede to the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered" (Henderson, 2013:217).

The wide reproduction of this narrative and explanation of regime resilience does "not represent some sort of conspiracy between historians and the PAP historical agenda" (Wee, 2007:59-60). But recent attempts to question the national narrative notwithstanding (see Thum, 2014), "a certain vein of historical thinking has been naturalised" (Wee, 2007:59-60).

As part of the 'performance legitimacy' argument, scholars have also pointed towards state provision of social services. Especially quasi-monopolistic provision of housing and healthcare by the state is said to produce regime legitimacy. At the same time, the public housing programme is sometimes decried as an authoritarian control mechanism. I turn towards these political functions of the two social policy programmes now.

Public housing and healthcare provision as tool for regime legitimation

Modern Singapore's public housing programme was launched with the creation of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) as a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development in 1960 (Chua, 2000:47). Faced with a severe housing crisis, the HDB's initial task was to provide decent housing for citizens in need (Castells et al., 1990:228-230). But the housing programme soon became more ambitious.

With increased supply of public housing and systematic demolition of non-state provided housing, the share of Singaporeans living in 'HDB-flats' steadily rose from around 10% in the early 1960s, to 50% in the mid-1970s (Field, 1987:152-153). Since the 1980s, around 85% of the citizen population is housed in HDB-flats (ibid.; Mah, 2011:6). Under the 1964 Home Ownership Scheme, Singaporeans have been allowed to 'buy' their HDB-flat by purchasing a 99-year lease (Sim et al., 2003b:296-297). In 1971, the PAP-state then allowed the (re)sale of HDB-flats to other citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs). This has created a flourishing resale market for public housing flats and by now close to 95% of HDB-flat occupants 'own' their flat (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:279; Low, 2014b:104).

With close to the entire population housed in HDB-flats, Singapore's constituency of HDB-flat resident-owners incorporates a wide social and income spectrum. This includes "financially-challenged families, solid blue-collar families, and also the upper middle class and young-upwardly mobile professionals" (Goh, 2003:64). The remaining 15% of the population is housed in 'private' and generally upmarket housing condominiums or single-detached dwellings (Wang, 2012:369). Through quasi-monopolistic housing, the PAP-state has thus created a constituency of HDB-flat resident-owners that includes close to the entire population.

To realise Singapore's ambitious housing project, the HDB was given "tremendous resources and authority" (Castells et al. 1990:283). It even produced its own bricks from 1972, and in 1976 it acquired the largest granite quarry in Singapore to ensure resource availability (ibid.:236). Increasingly, the HDB would also get its way when it came to land usage plans that are decided under Singapore's Master Plan Committee (Yu and Sing, 2016:24). By the mid 1980s it was well recognised that the HDB would win approval for "whatever land-use proposal it submitted [to the Master Plan Committee]" even if these plans conflicted with other government bodies because of its track record in "getting things done" (Castells et al., 1990:296).

With increased size and responsibility, the HDB itself underwent several rounds of restructuring since its creation. It is now split into three divisions, namely 'Building', 'Estate', and 'Corporate'. As the names suggest, the former two divisions are tasked with the building and maintaining of HDB-housing estates while the latter is concerned with the HDB's corporate functions – including corporate development, finance, and so on. All divisions report to the HDB's Chief Executive Officer who is overseen by the HDB's Chair-

man (Housing and Development Board, 2018). In keeping with the tight relations between the PAP and the statutory boards (Tremewan, 1994:173-176), the organisation's leading positions are held by PAP trustees (Castells et al., 1990:284-286).

In terms of regime legitimation, public housing provision is often singled out as the “most visible index of the government's outstanding performance” in delivering prosperity and increased living standards to the people (Tay, 1989:860). HDB-housing blocks dominate the majority of Singapore's cityscape (*image 1* and *image 2*) and “virtually the entire physical face of Singapore” has “the imprint of the Housing and Development Board” (Rodan, 1996:23). Quite literally ‘bringing growth home’ to those living in subsidised HDB-housing, the public housing programme has made state-led development more inclusive and tangible for Singaporeans. Chua thus argued it should be a “truism that defies challenge” that “successful national housing policy generates political legitimacy for the ruling government” (Chua, 1997:124). Chua later also claimed that the wide provision of public housing has turned citizens into ‘clients’ of the state (Chua, 2000:46).



Image 1: view of HDB-housing blocks in Clementi district



Image 2: HDB-housing blocks in Woodlands district⁵

The importance of public housing as a tool for regime legitimation is also reflected in the depiction of HDB-housing on various Singapore Dollar (S\$) denominations (see *image 3* and *image 4*) and has been widely recognised in the literature (Hill and Lian, 1995; Castells et al., 1990; Haila, 2015).



Image 3: 1-Cent and 10-Cent coins depicting HDB-housing blocks

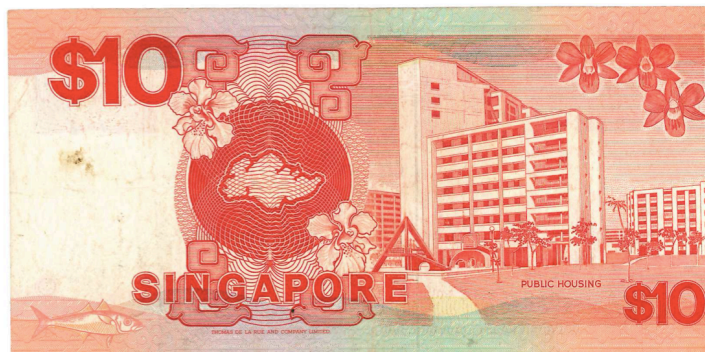


Image 4: S\$10 bill depicting HDB-housing on its reverse

⁵ All images and photos are the author's unless stated otherwise.

Covering all Singaporeans under the 'MediShield Life' insurance programme, Singapore's public healthcare system has gained even further reach than the public housing programme (Ministry of Health, 2014). The basic concern of state run healthcare systems is to combine good health outcomes with some kind of rationing system that discourages overutilization of healthcare services. In this respect, the combination between exceptionally low levels of national healthcare expenditure and some of the world's best health outcomes is the most striking aspect of Singapore's healthcare system (Lim, 2013).

In 2005, adjusted average life expectancy for a new-born child was 79.4 years and infant mortality was 3 per 1,000. This compares favourably to the same data from South Korea and Taiwan and is on par or better than outcomes in Europe, including the Scandinavian countries (Schmidt, 2010:279; Karim et al., 2010:50). Based on this and other parameters, Singapore placed first in Bloomberg's 2012 ranking of healthiest countries in the world (Bloomberg, 2012). Good health outcomes are achieved despite Singapore only spending around 4.2% of GDP on healthcare each year, which makes the island nation one of the lowest healthcare spenders among developed countries. For comparison, EU countries spend an average of about 10% of GDP on healthcare while the USA's healthcare expenditure runs roughly 15% of GDP. The (other) East Asian countries including Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan average healthcare expenditures of 5.2% of GDP (Karim et al., 2010; Wagstaff, 2007; Schmidt, 2010).

Singapore's healthcare system is characterised by quasi-monopolistic state provision of inpatient care through public hospitals (Chiu et al., 2012) and heavy reliance on citizens for financing healthcare. The healthcare financing system is often described as the '3Ms', albeit somewhat misleadingly because it disguises citizens' direct contribution to healthcare cost recovery (Wagstaff, 2007:445). The '3Ms' stand for *Medisave*,

MediShield, and *Medifund*. Medisave is a personal medical savings account to which Singaporeans make mandatory contributions throughout their working life. Singaporeans use their Medisave-account balances to pay for part of the cost when seeking healthcare (Barr, 2008:397).

MediShield is a health insurance scheme designed to cover catastrophic healthcare costs in case of hospitalisation. MediShield insurance premiums are commonly paid for from a person's Medisave-account (Lim, 2013). On 1 November 2015 MediShield was replaced by the compulsory 'MediShield Life' which covers 100% of Singapore citizens, making public healthcare insurance universal (Ministry of Health, 2014). The final of the 3Ms, Medifund was introduced in 1993 and acts as payer of last resort to underwrite hospital bills for those deemed unable to pay even the subsidised rates offered in public hospitals (Luk, 2014:90-91; Chew, 2012:227). Given good health outcomes and provision of healthcare services by the state, scholars have thus also pointed to the role of public healthcare provision in regime legitimation (Lim, 2013; Chua, 2000; Barr, 2008).

But besides potentially legitimising the PAP-state's authoritarian rule, other scholars regard quasi-monopolistic provision of social services as the PAP-state's "basis of social control" (Tremewan, 1994:208-209). Especially the HDB-housing programme has an undeniably authoritarian side: during the housing programme's early years, dispersal of 'opposition hotbeds' through forced resettlement of the population "drain[ed] the pond in which the opposition fish swam" while "disrupting as far as possible the social base of opposition political organisation" (ibid.:46).

Over the years, the PAP has continuously increased its means for authoritarian social control in the HDB-housing new towns. Authoritarian state practices include the

setting up of PAP-dominated town councils, infiltration of resident associations in the 'HDB-heartlands' by the PAP-state, and the provision of rewards to HDB-housing neighbourhoods supporting the PAP in elections (Sim et al., 2003b; Lim, 1989; Barr, 2008; Minchin, 1991).

Clearly, the 'performance legitimacy' argument has some appeal. It holds that the PAP-state has been 'delivering the goods' in terms of economic growth and social provisions. And Singaporeans have acceded to the PAP-state's authoritarian hold to power "in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered" (Henderson, 2013:217). However, I will now show that the 'performance legitimacy' argument has become question-begging. Most importantly, the argument has become increasingly incongruent with recent political developments in Singapore. Rising social inequality (Rahim, 2015) and a nationalist groundswell (Yeoh and Lam, 2016) are attributed to the PAP-state's economic and social policy regime and have threatened to strain state-citizen relations.

1.2 Questions and doubts about the 'performance legitimacy' argument

The problem with the literature's 'performance legitimacy' argument is perhaps best illustrated by a short discussion of the 2011 general elections (GE 2011) where the PAP suffered its worst electoral performance since 1959 (Lim et al., 2014:19). With the PAP's share of the popular vote at a high 75.3% in GE 2001, electoral support had been sliding to 66.6% in GE 2006, bottoming out at 60.1% in GE 2011 (Mahbubani, 2015:20). In GE 2015, and following policy reforms discussed later in this thesis, the PAP's share of the popular vote then bounced back to almost 70% (Chin, 2016:141).

So, what led to the PAP's underperformance in 2011? Singapore scholars quickly assessed that the PAP did badly because it fell victim to its own "growth fetishism" and "the belief that [growth] was a necessary and sufficient condition for the well-being of citizens" (Low, 2014a:171). The PAP had ostensibly become 'out of touch' with the electorate and the perceived negative consequences of Singapore's long-running economic and social policy regime.

These included "widening income disparities, wage stagnation, and cost of living pressures" (Rahim, 2015:160), as well as "rising home prices, and the excessive reliance on foreign workers" (Low, 2014a:169). Besides contributing to rising prices of social services (Teng et al., 2015:14), Singapore's high level of immigration also produced "an acute sense of displacement and identity erosion among local Singaporeans" (Lim et al., 2014:19). The emergence of a (then) PAP-critical nationalist groundswell demanding a de-linking of Singapore from the global economy was the result (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2).

The "groundswell of public discontent" (Rahim, 2015:160) in GE 2011 thus suggested that the long-running social contract between the PAP-state and the citizenry had become "hardly desirable or sustainable" on the social or political level (Low, 2014c:216). And if economic and social policy had become politically problematic for the PAP, I suggest that the problem with the literature's versions of the 'performance legitimacy' argument is three-fold.

Problems with the 'performance legitimacy' argument

First, GE 2011 and the surrounding analysis suggest that the positive effect of economic growth on the perceived legitimacy of the PAP-state is waning. As outlined above (section

1.1), the national narrative paints Singapore as always teetering on the edge of economic and social collapse. Given Singapore's dependence on international capital and labour, prosperity is said to be never secure but always contingent on the PAP-state's management of economy and society.

That this narrative seems to be losing some power as tool for regime legitimation is perhaps not entirely surprising. As suggested by modernisation theory (chapter 2), authoritarian states tend to undermine their own *raison d'être* once they have succeeded in producing social and economic development. And indeed, why would Singapore's by now wealthy citizenry buy into this narrative? As mentioned, Singapore's GDP per capita at PPP is already the world's third highest. The unemployment rate oscillates around a low 2-3% (Ministry of Manpower, 2013). And the HDB-flat homeownership rate of over 90% makes Singapore a 'nation of home owners' (Mah, 2011:75).

The first major contention, then, is that the literature fails to argue why Singaporeans would continue to regard the PAP-state's economic functions as crucial enough to accede to its authoritarian claims to power. And as suggested above, recent events indicate that fewer Singaporeans do so. If the PAP's result in GE 2011 is attributable to the PAP's "growth fetishism" and "belief that [growth] was a necessary and sufficient condition for the well-being of citizens" (Low, 2014a:171) the 'performance legitimacy' argument loses traction. This does not mean that the state's economic functions have become irrelevant but growth alone seems to no longer produce overwhelming citizen acquiescence.

Second, similar considerations suggest that pointing towards the PAP-state's social provisions as explanation for regime durability has become equally unconvincing. Supply of social services, especially of public housing, increased the PAP-state's political

credibility and legitimacy in the 1960s when the PAP competed against the political left (Park, 1998:282). But the impact of public housing and healthcare provision on state-citizen relations has become more complex since. For one, the proportion of the population living in HDB-housing is stable at around 85% since the late 1980s (Field, 1987:152-153; Mah, 2011:6). Home-ownership, too, had already reached 90% in 1995 (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:279). Having bought an HDB-flat thirty-odd years ago would appear to be a weak motive for Singaporeans to endure authoritarianism and support the PAP-state today.

For another, the problem with evoking state provision of social services as straight-forward explanation of regime legitimacy is that the literature describes welfare provisions as minimal and *receding* (Chiu et al., 2012; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Teo, 2013). In fact, the state's share of healthcare spending has declined since colonial times. Today, it only accounts for one third of healthcare cost recovery – the lowest in the developed world (Schmidt, 2010:279). Similarly, Singapore's overall social spending level only averaged 6.4% of GDP between 2007 and 2014 (Ministry of Finance, 2013; 2017) compared to the OECD's 21% average since 2009 (OECD, 2016). Singapore even underbids Mexico, the OECD's lowest spender where social spending has recently accounted for around 7.5% of GDP (OECD, 2014; 2016). The low level of social spending is justified by the allegedly detrimental effects that generous welfare entitlements would have on Singapore's economic competitiveness (chapter 4).

But all evidence suggests that low welfare provision in the name of economic competitiveness has become politically problematic. For instance, and leading on from assessments that the PAP's "growth fetishism" has become unpopular (Low, 2014a:171),

the PAP's lacklustre performance in GE 2011 has also been attributed to rising social inequality (Rahim, 2015:160). Political pundits and academics thus argued that economic development had "not [been] sufficiently accompanied by policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth" (Low, 2014a:169). At this juncture, pointing towards the state's provision of social services as straight-forward explanation of regime resilience is thus unconvincing.

The final problem with the 'performance legitimacy' argument is that the focus on economic outcomes and material provisions has diverted attention from alternative sources of support for the PAP regime. This appears increasingly problematic. The contemporary political landscape and discourse is dominated not only by issues of social inequality, but also grievances about immigration that have produced a "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). Given Singapore's economic reliance on foreign workers, the proportion of non-Singaporeans living in Singapore has increased from 7% of the population in 1970 to 38% in 2012 (Rahim, 2015:166).

A 2012 representative survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (chapter 3) revealed that around half of Singapore citizens preferred to have less immigration and a "slower pace of life", "even if it translated to slower growth and jobs" (REACH, 2013b:7). For politics and policy-making, such popular sentiments have

triggered major questions that have quickly spilled over from the straight-forwardly economic sphere to other more complex arenas including Singapore's demographic future, its social landscape, and fundamental identity as a nation-state (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2).

Overall, the literature's 'performance legitimacy' argument thus loses traction. It is incongruent with social changes that have transpired and many policy issues that Singaporeans seem to care about (more) strongly at this juncture. The social and economic policies that have traditionally been said to produce the PAP-state's 'performance legitimacy' appear to have become politically problematic for the PAP.

In line with citizens' grievances and willingness to pressure the PAP-state at the ballot-box in 2011, Chua (2015) thus pointed towards the possibility of Singaporeans pushing for political liberalisation. In an interview with historian P.T. Thum in the lead up to GE 2015, Chua suggested that "50 years of continuous economic changes [...] and 50 years of continuous investment in education must have radically changed the people [who] inevitably will begin to demand different ways of being governed".

But in GE 2015, electoral support for the PAP then resurged to almost 70% (Chin, 2016:141). This is the PAP's fourth strongest result in the last four decades (Mahbubani, 2015:20). What I suggest in this thesis is that if 'the people' have changed, so have (some of) the functions pursued by the PAP-state since 2011. And it is due to these changes, rather than 'performance legitimacy' as it is described in the literature, that state-citizen relations remain stable despite continued authoritarianism. And while the literature has been slow to recognise what I will argue are *fundamental shifts* in the state's roles in economy and society, scholars have begun making out the reasons for resurging electoral support.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the issues identified as having hurt the PAP in GE 2011, the result in 2015 has thus tentatively been attributed to changes in economic and social policy (Welsh, 2016; Yeoh and Lam, 2016; Singh, 2016). As I will show in detail in

the following chapters, this includes the extension of more social support, improved affordability of public housing and healthcare, and increased nation-building efforts. The PAP-state has also curbed the inflow of international capital and labour to protect social service affordability and increase Singapore's wages *despite negative effects on the economy*.

I argue that by beginning to readjust its roles in economy and society, the PAP-state is thus addressing citizens' demands. This produces popular support for the PAP-state and eliminates the political basis for challenging its authoritarian rule. That is, in my terms, the 'State' can be seen as legitimate because it is addressing (diverse) demands and expectations levelled towards the state by Singaporeans. Beyond the continued promotion of economic growth, these demands include building a more 'socially inclusive' Singapore, and protecting Singapore's distinctive national identity.

And I will argue that, paradoxically, citizens' ability to selectively sidestep authoritarian state practices can make authoritarianism more bearable in daily life. This reduces popular discontent with the authoritarian form of rule. Taken together, this reduced discontent and popular support for the PAP is so far pre-empting strong domestic pressures for political liberalisation from emerging. Relations between state and citizens remain stable.

The PAP-state's popular support base

One obvious objection to any argument attributing the resilience of authoritarianism to the PAP-state's popular support is that the appearance of such support is meaningless in

an authoritarian context. But all evidence suggests that the citizenry has not simply been bullied into submission by the PAP-state. I highlight two considerations here.

First, Singapore's form of authoritarianism is '*competitive*' (chapter 2). That is, formal democratic institutions allow *some* political contest although "incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters" (Levitsky and Way, 2002:53). But democratic processes are not entirely absent, nor are they meaningless. There is no blatant electoral fraud like miscounting of votes and political opposition parties are tolerated even if their political leaders are harassed. In the case of Singapore, harassment takes place through legal means like defamation lawsuits levelled against the PAP's political opponents (section 1.1).

Second, the citizenry is able to exert political pressure on the PAP-state through regular elections. While the electoral backlash was harsh in GE 2011, citizens' use of the vote to provide 'feedback' to the PAP-state and evoke policy change is well recognised. George (2000) has dubbed this electoral behaviour 'opposition for opposition's sake' where Singaporeans vote for opposition candidates to provide political feedback rather than to produce regime change. This is practiced especially in occasional by-elections where citizens can express discontent about policy issues by voting for the political opposition without threatening the PAP's parliamentary majority (George, 2000:86). Similarly, Ortmann and Thompson argue that "elections in Singapore matter because they force the ruling party to defend its policies and respond to citizen demands" (Ortmann and Thompson, 2016:43).

Singaporeans' ability to show strong support for the political opposition in general elections and by-elections thus "demonstrate[s] a capacity for surmounting the imposed

constraints on political activity” (Brownlee, 2007:9). And while the authoritarian political system discourages using election results as *absolute* indicator of the PAP-state’s popular support base, “elections under authoritarianism tend to reveal political trends” (ibid.). Singaporeans’ voting behaviour therefore unambiguously reveals that the electorate is strategically engaging with the PAP-state and successfully exerting political pressure on the government.

As I argue, the PAP’s apparent ‘responsiveness’ to such pressure is a significant reason for the regime’s continued broad public support and stable state-citizen relations. To re-emphasis: by ‘stability’ I do not mean that the state’s roles in economy and society are unchanged. Indeed, I argue that *the state’s roles have changed*. By ‘stability’ I mean the absence of serious challenges against the PAP-state’s claim to (authoritarian) power. To trace the evolution of state interventions and state-citizen relations I focus the analysis on economic and social policy, specifically the case studies of Singapore’s public housing and healthcare programmes. And I draw on fieldwork data to analyse how the state’s roles play out ‘on the ground’, conjuring images of a legitimate ‘State’ despite authoritarianism. The following provides an overview of the succeeding chapters.

1.3 Overview of the thesis and argument

Having outlined the thesis’ research concerns with the contemporary resilience of authoritarianism and the stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore, the argument proceeds as follows.

In chapter 2, I engage with wider theories concerned with (the stability of) state citizen-relations under authoritarian regimes. I argue that they fall short when applied to

Singapore and the 'performance legitimacy' argument. Based on the theoretical discussion I advocate developing a more nuanced account of state-citizen relations. Doing so, I draw on the concept of "responsive authoritarianism" (Weller, 2008) and citizens' ability to stage "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1985) to elude authoritarian state practices in daily life. I also ground the distinction between 'state' and 'State' in theory. The distinction allows taking seriously that citizens imagine the 'State' in various ways so that the PAP-state has multiple sources of legitimation, including the state's economic, social, and nation-building functions.

Completing the theoretical discussion, I then turn towards the PAP-state's (changing) roles in economy, society, and nation-building. All three policy areas are currently dominating Singapore's political discourse and are, as I argue, central to the contemporary stability of state-citizen relations. The resulting theoretical framework serves as the basis for engaging with state-citizen relations underpinning regime durability empirically.

Chapter 3 then presents the thesis' research methods. I outline methods applied for investigating (evolving) state interventions, how these interventions conjure diverse images of the State, and create bonds between state and citizens. I argue that the public housing and healthcare programmes are ideal case studies in the Singapore context. Both are related to virtually the entire gamut of economic and social policy including social protection, nation-building, authoritarian social control, and the attraction of FDI. Being of high political importance and speaking towards the state's wider functions in economy and society, the two cases allow deep analysis of state-citizen relations (Low, 2014b; Chiu et al., 2012; Chua, 2000).

Typical for qualitative case study research, I draw on fieldwork data collected in Singapore. Fieldwork data includes qualitative interview data, participant observation of

life in the 'HDB-heartlands', and analysis of a variety of documents (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4). Documents consulted during and outside of fieldwork include the academic literature, policy papers, newspaper articles, and pieces of art. Total fieldwork duration was nine months. During that time, I lived in various HDB-housing flats, visited public hospitals, and interviewed 154 HDB-flat resident-owners and citizens utilising the public healthcare system. Interviews and participant observation helped analysing the varying ways in which Singaporeans see and engage with the 'State'. I also conducted 'expert interviews' with politicians, policy makers, academics, real-estate agents, and healthcare practitioners to find out about ongoing policy issues and changes. In the chapter, I justify my methodological choices, debate its limitations, and discuss research ethics.

Chapter 4 then turns towards an analysis of the PAP-state's interventions in economy and society and implications for Singapore's political economy. I argue that, contrary to some scholars' analysis (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16; Liow, 2011), social and economic policy is not liberalising. Most importantly, the PAP-state has not given up the pursuit of industrial policy despite partial privatisation of state-owned companies. Similarly, the PAP-state remains the quasi-monopolistic provider of most social services, including housing and healthcare. The state thus continues to play a directive and participatory role in Singapore's economy. It also remains the quasi-monopolistic provider of social services, based on which images of the State can emerge among citizens.

I argue that the PAP-state's interventions in economy and society and Singapore's ensuing political economy have three important implications for the resilience of authoritarianism. First, continued control over domestic capital and the PAP-state's alliance with foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) prevents the PAP's political opponents from gaining the finances or political clout necessary to challenge the PAP effectively.

Second, quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the state has tied citizens to the PAP-state. Besides being a boon for the PAP, this has also forced the PAP to be 're-sponsive' to citizens' demands as the latter can exert political pressure on the PAP. Third, Singapore's state-backed integration into the global economy is becoming politically contentious, forcing the state to renegotiate Singapore's relation to international capital.

The thesis then goes on to analyse the contemporary policy demands levelled against the State as it was variously imagined by Singaporeans in detail. In particular, I highlight three (contradictory) images of the State that emerged from fieldwork. These are the image of the State as (i) hyper-rational economic actor, (ii) vanguard protecting the economically and socially disadvantaged, and (iii) champion of the loosely defined 'Singapore way of life'. I give these three images of the State equal exposure in this thesis. For one, because they emerged as predominant among my interviewees. And for another, because these images speak towards the contemporary policy issues that are dominating public opinion and post GE 2011 policy discourse in Singapore. I argue that at this juncture support for the PAP-state can emerge with respect to all three images of the State. The state is fulfilling nation-building functions and is increasingly providing social support while so far keeping the economy on an even keel. The three State images, related popular policy demands levelled against the state, and policy adjustments are outlined and discussed in chapters 5-7.

Chapter 5 presents the first of these State images: that of *the State as hyper-rational economic actor* on which Singaporeans (can) rely to deliver prosperity and income opportunities. I argue that this State image results from Singapore's long-running economic and social policy regimes. For as argued in chapter 4, the PAP-state continues to pursue industrial policy and remains the quasi-monopolistic provider (*but not financier*)

of social services like housing and healthcare. I argue that these highly *visible* economic functions that the PAP-state pursues on the small island of Singapore conjures the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor. The chapter thus presents a refined version of the 'performance legitimacy' argument *as one way* of seeing the State as legitimate at this juncture. Contrary to the literature, however, I provide an explanation for *how* the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor is conjured and *why* the state's economic functions can continue to legitimise the PAP-state.

I argue that Singaporeans' continued felt need for the state to secure economic prosperity is a result of the public housing and healthcare programmes. Both programmes require Singaporeans to largely directly finance their own consumption of public housing and healthcare. In the relative absence of social security provisions, both thus institutionalise the need for Singaporeans to be gainfully employed and draw a steady income throughout their adult lives. This is especially the case with regard to the public housing system where HDB-flats represent most Singaporeans' biggest lifetime investment and old-age security (Chua, 2000; Vasoo and Lee, 2001). Defaulting on a housing mortgage as a result of an economic downturn and joblessness is thus catastrophic for most Singaporeans. I further argue that the need to generate income is exacerbated by social pressures towards conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare.

However, the same set of state interventions can conjure varying State images depending on citizens' actual interactions with the state. As touched on above (section 1.2), creeping income inequality and rising prices of social services have made parts of the population resentful of the previous decades' policy focus on economic growth rather than social outcomes. Diametrically opposed to interviewees who pictured the State as hyper-rational economic actor, chapter 6 thus presents the second predominant State

image that emerged from fieldwork data: that of *the State as vanguard protecting socially disadvantaged citizens*. The State, so imagined, is thus to promote social equality and a more socially inclusive society rather than income growth per se. According to these views, the PAP-state is to abandon 'productivist' social policy with its emphasis on welfare austerity and the maintenance of national economic competitiveness (Choi, 2012; Wood and Gough, 2006).

I argue that, upending conventional wisdom about Singapore's social policy, the PAP-state has increasingly addressed such calls. Pace the literature that characterises social welfare in Singapore as minimal and *receding*, the PAP-state is currently increasing the provision of welfare support to Singapore's financially overstretched lower and middle classes. This takes place in the arenas of public housing and healthcare but is also observable in regard to wider social policy. At the same time, the PAP has throttled the inflow of foreign (financial and human) capital that had created upward pressure on prices of social services and downward pressure on wages. Increasingly fulfilling such 'protective' welfare functions, the State can thus be seen as legitimate by those demanding more social protection. The State emerges as vanguard protecting the socially disadvantaged.

Chapter 7 argues that the literature's predominant focus on material aspects of state-citizen relations has created a blind spot for a third State image emerging as prevalent from fieldwork: that of *the State as champion and protector of a 'Singapore way of life'*. Loosely defined in terms of harmonious living in the 'HDB-heartlands', use of the 'Singlish' dialect, and love for local food, this 'Singapore way of life' is feared to be eroding. The erosion is attributed to increasingly modern lifestyles, immigration of non-Singapore-born residents into the 'HDB-heartlands', and constant re-modelling of the built

environment. In the face of this, questions of community and nation-building through social policy emerged as paramount in Singapore politics (Yeoh and Lam, 2016; Rahim, 2015). Singaporeans are thus calling on the PAP-state to protect the public housing 'heartlands' from further degeneration.

I argue that by rebalancing the "contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity" (Chang, 2012:619), the PAP-state is addressing these citizens' demands in two ways. First, the PAP-state continues to crack down on individuals threatening to upset harmonious, multiracial life in the 'heartlands' and elsewhere. And second, the PAP-state is pursuing a number of community and nation-building initiatives that draw on grassroots conceptions of the 'Singapore way of life'.

Cerny argued that economic globalisation "hinders the capacity of state institutions to embody the kind of communal solidarity or 'Gemeinschaft' which gave the modern nation-state its deeper legitimacy" (Cerny, 1997). The opposite seems to be the case here. The State is presumed able to protect and preserve communal solidarity and a 'Singapore way of life'. This gives the State, so imagined, its deeper legitimacy and *raison d'être*. In regard to this third State image, too, the State is thus seen as addressing citizens' policy demands. This helps alleviate pressure for political change and stabilises state-citizen relations, as I argue in this thesis.

Chapters 5-7 thus present 3 images of the State and correspondingly evolving state interventions that I propose can account for continued popular support for the PAP-state despite authoritarianism. Chapter 8 examines Singapore's brand of authoritarianism itself, and how authoritarian state practices pan out 'on the ground'. In the chapter,

I argue that the effectiveness of many of the PAP-state's authoritarian control mechanisms is limited. Fieldwork revealed various instances and strategies used by citizens to sidestep authoritarian state practices in the public housing estates and elsewhere. For instance, Singaporeans are able to elude the PAP-state controlled local neighbourhood organisations and use the internet to sidestep limitations on freedom of speech and association. And despite the PAP-state's efforts to disperse 'ethnic enclaves' through control of the built-environment and housing regulations, Singaporeans regularly congregated in accordance to ethnic affiliations.

Given the apparent relative ineffectiveness of some authoritarian state practices in citizens' everyday life, authoritarianism can thus be experienced as more bearable than presumed by the 'touristic intelligentsia' (L'Heureux, 2010:142). Too often, academics have looked at state institutions but not at how Singaporeans negotiate these and how the state becomes manifest in citizens' daily life. The point is thus not that authoritarianism is not real or politically ineffective. It is rather that authoritarianism's impact on everyday life is limited. At the same time, political alternatives to the PAP are made unattractive and avenues for open and legitimate political discourse are shut down. When it comes to addressing the increasingly complex issues and concerns brought forward by Singaporean citizens, the PAP-state diversely imagined as State(s) thus emerges as bearable and only viable option.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis, summing up the three types of State images dominating interviewees' subjectively felt relation to the State as they variously imagined it. The State is simultaneously to be a promoter of jobs and prosperity, a vanguard that protects the socially disadvantaged, while also meant to preserve a 'Singapore way of

life' from deteriorating. I argue that the PAP-state is addressing these increasingly complex and potentially contradictory concerns of the citizenry.

Continued durability of state authoritarianism and support for the PAP-state can thus be explained by its apparent responsiveness to citizen demands. Addressing various contemporary policy issues produces popular support for the PAP-state and helps to eliminate political pressures for regime change. At the same time, imperfections in state authoritarianism can stabilise state-citizen relations because the inconveniences that authoritarianism imposes on citizens in daily life are limited. Taken together, the apparent responsiveness of the PAP-state to citizens' policy demands and ability to sidestep authoritarian state practices alleviates political pressures for political liberalisation.

While providing an explanation of the stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore, I do not aim to develop a fully-formed general theory of regime resilience. I also do not analyse in detail the inner workings of the PAP-state, how policies are made, or how the PAP-state has managed to remain relatively free of corruption or gross inefficiency despite its long reign (Quah, 2011; Lee, 2009). Such questions are crucial for low- and middle-income countries that struggle with institution and capacity-building but lie beyond the scope and possibilities of this thesis.

Nonetheless, the Singapore case should not be seen in isolation. Although Singapore is often depicted as an 'exception', the main reason behind durable authoritarianism may be more banal.⁶ Like other states, the PAP-state fulfils multiple and shifting economic and political obligations by adjusting its roles in society and economy. Authoritarian hold on power allows relatively dynamic policy re-adjustment and the authoritarian

⁶ This exceptionality is variously grounded in Singapore's small physical dimension, unlikely economic success, resilient authoritarianism, and so on (Low and Vadaketh, 2014; Teo, 2010).

state, although imagined in diverse ways qua 'State', is seen as legitimate given these adjustments.

Beyond the case of Singapore and authoritarianism, the thesis thus speaks to wider questions of the re-configuration of state-interventions in an increasingly economically integrated and connected world. For as Cerny proposes, "international and transnational constraints limit the things that state and market actors believe the state can do" to keep the national economy competitive (Cerny, 1997:259). Given Singapore's growth trajectory and economic competitiveness, Singapore is emerging as a role-model for policy reform elsewhere.

But while in international comparisons the island nation continues to be judged one of the most attractive places to do business (The World Bank, 2016c), the trajectory of recent state interventions points the other direction. Social expenditure and taxation are on the rise to cover increased welfare spending (Today, 2015 February 23). Immigration – even of 'foreign talent' – is being more tightly controlled (Yeoh and Lam, 2016). And there is a return to state-backed emphasis on *Singaporean* living and communities, signalling efforts to "readjust [Singapore's] relationship with globalisation in order to remain Singaporean" (Low, 2014c:215).

A note on the connection to the MPhil thesis

This DPhil thesis builds on my 2013 MPhil dissertation which dealt with Singapore's public housing system and political economy. The dissertation aimed to explain the high degree of contemporary popular support for Singapore's long-running ruling party. For the DPhil thesis, I was thus able to draw on data and analysis from the MPhil project, especially in

regard to the state's role in public housing provision and the economy. I was also able to utilise interview data from more than 40 open-ended interviews conducted with HDB-flat resident-owners in Singapore from June to August 2013.

Because I had not distinguished between 'state' and 'State' in the MPhil project, the different theoretical approach in the DPhil thesis necessitated renewed analysis and evaluation of the interview data, however. Two additional fieldwork trips of three months each were carried out during my DPhil studies: from January to March 2015 and then from October 2015 to January 2016. As discussed later (chapter 3), this format of intermittent fieldwork allowed for analysis and reflection between fieldwork stints, helping me to return to the field with new questions and perspectives. Having already done research on Singapore's public housing programme when starting research for the DPhil thesis I focussed more on the public healthcare side during my latter fieldwork trips.

2. Resilient authoritarianism and the distinction between 'state' and 'State'

In this chapter I develop the theoretical foundations for the remainder of this thesis. I establish the theoretical underpinnings of the distinction between 'state' and 'State', and the thesis' conceptualisation of state-citizen relations. The chapter picks up the theoretical discussion about states' (halting) transitions from authoritarianism to more democratic regimes. I also discuss the state's economic, social, and nation-building functions in a more globally integrated world where states compete with one another to attract mobile capital. I focus on these three areas of state intervention as they reflect the three State images that emerged as paramount from fieldwork. The theoretical framework developed in this chapter serves as starting point for analysing state-citizen relations and advancing an explanation for continued regime durability.

The theoretical discussion is divided up as follows. Section 2.1 focuses on state-citizen relations under authoritarian regimes. Such relations are expected to become unstable under 'competitive authoritarian' regimes like Singapore. I place explanations of the (unexpected) durability of Singapore's authoritarian regime in theory and argue that these explanatory attempts fall short in the case of Singapore. I advocate a more nuanced understanding of state-citizen relations under authoritarianism that does not depict citizens as helplessly subject to authoritarian state practices, or the state as unresponsive to citizens' demands. In this respect, I suggest that closer theoretical examination of what we mean by *the state*, and what modern states 'do' to intervene in economy and society helps to build a better understanding of state-citizen relations.

Section 2.2 then provides theoretical engagement with how the state/State can be conceptualized, how states exert power over their citizens, and how state interventions may be negotiated by Singaporeans. Roughly following Abrams, I distinguish between the 'state' as bureaucracy and set of institutions from the imagined 'State' that sometimes appears as monolith standing over and above society. The distinction between 'state' and 'State' allows explaining how the state with its multiple roles in economy and society can be imagined differently by different observers. For, as I argue in this thesis, Singaporeans imagine the State in diverse ways based on everyday experiences of the PAP-state's interventions in economy and society.

Focussing on Singapore and the other 'Tigers', section 2.3 then engages in theoretical debates about states' roles in a more globally integrated world where capital is highly mobile and states compete with one another to attract this capital. In line with the three predominant State images emerging from fieldwork, I focus on economic policy, social policy, and states' nation-building functions. As I show throughout the thesis, it is through simultaneous (and often-contradictory) interventions in these three policy areas that Singapore's State can be seen as 'legitimate' and 'responsive' to citizens' demands. I suggest that this apparent responsiveness stabilises state-citizen relations as the latter have fewer reasons to challenge the PAP-state (chapter 8).

Section 2.4 concludes this chapter. I suggest that theory needs to account for the diverse ways in which power is exerted by the state without fixed preconceptions of how state power manifests itself in the lives of citizens. As complex phenomenon "no single theory or theoretical perspective can fully capture and explain [the state/ State's] complexities" (Jessop, 2007:1). We thus need a theoretical eclectic approach to analyse state-

citizen relations, the state's multiple roles in economy and society, and how citizens imagine the State.

2.1 The resilience of state authoritarianism

The continuation of state authoritarianism in Singapore must be seen as speaking – and in connection – to the resilience and renaissance of state authoritarianism elsewhere: prominent examples include China, Hungary, Turkey, or Russia (Brownlee, 2007; Diamond, 2016a). This resilience and renaissance is in need of explanation also because the mentioned states did often introduce (limited) democratic reforms at some point, which seemed to signal a move away from authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2002). For as Huntington argued, “liberalised authoritarianism is not a stable equilibrium; the halfway house does not stand” (Huntington, 1991:137). In fact, state-citizen relations and authoritarianism under such ‘hybrid’ regimes have proven to possess a high degree of stability (Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011). The ‘halfway house’ has often proven to be a fortress (Brownlee, 2007:16).

The following outlines the literature's assessments of state-citizen relations under such ‘hybrid’ regimes and reasons for their expected demise. I then examine theories that aim to explain authoritarianism's resilience while turning towards the case of Singapore in particular. Finding such explanations lacking, the section highlights the need for developing an alternative understanding of state-citizen relations and the usefulness of the distinction between ‘state’ and ‘State’ for doing so (section 2.2).

'Competitive authoritarianism' and its expected demise

If 'hybrid regimes' – those judged not democratic but also not staunchly authoritarian – have become ubiquitous since the mid 1990s (Carothers, 2002), so have attempts to classify and analyse them (Diamond, 2002). Self-titled 'watch-dog' organisations like 'Freedom House', too, are continuously engaged in ranking regimes according to how 'democratic' or 'authoritarian' they are (Freedom House, 2017b).

But while real-world manifestations have thus led to a myriad subcategorization of authoritarian regimes (Brownlee, 2007:25), the basic tenet of authoritarianism is more straightforward (Sim, 2006:145). In an early definition, Linz (1964) described authoritarian regimes as "political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism". Mobilisation of a political opposition is lacking and an elite "exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones" (Linz, 1964:297). Authoritarian regimes are thus "characterised by a concentration of power and the obstruction of serious political competition with, or scrutiny of, that power" (Rodan, 2006:2).

While I abstain from further regime subcategorization, the key characteristic of such loosely defined hybrid forms of authoritarianism is that they are 'competitive' in nature. That is, formal democratic institutions allow some political contestation although "incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters" (Levitsky and Way, 2002:53). Under 'competitive authoritarianism', the political playing field is thus slanted towards incumbents who control institutions like the media, the education and legal systems, and possibly the security apparatus.

But democratic processes are not entirely absent or meaningless. Blatant electoral fraud like miscounting of votes is absent and political opposition parties are tolerated even if their political leaders are harassed. In the case of Singapore such harassment takes place through legalistic means like defamation lawsuits (Rajah, 2012; Low, 2014c). Furthermore, with free travel and access to information and knowledge sources via the Internet being the norm rather than the exception, these regimes' tactics are also less coercive towards their citizens than, say, North Korea or perhaps China (Chapter 8). However, contrary to initial expectations, such 'vegetarian' forms of authoritarianism (Krastev, 2011:8) may in fact prove to be more stable than more overbearing brands with totalitarian ambitions.

Reasons for which this stability was considered unlikely are manifold. Huntington (1991) and Diamond (1989) saw authoritarian regimes as caught in a bind: if they do not 'perform' by generating improved living standards they lose legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens. Such loss of legitimacy would lead to popular protest, uprising, and produce challenges to the state itself, thereby either leading incumbents to employ more repressive tactics or step down. But if they do 'perform' and produce socio-economic change, "they tend to refocus popular aspirations around political goals for voice and participation that they cannot satisfy without terminating their own existence" (Diamond, 1989:236).

Similarly, Bremmer (2006) argued that the relation between (economic and political) 'openness' and political stability follows a J-curve when plotting level of 'openness' on the x-axis and 'stability' on the y-axis. Starting from a 'closed' system on the origin of the x-axis and corresponding somewhat stable position on the y-axis, political regimes would start getting unstable when 'opening up' politically and economically. They would

continue to become more unstable until reaching a turning point from when on further increasing 'openness' leads to more stability. The middle ground is seen as untenable: under a somewhat 'open' regime, the population's rising living standards and exposure to liberal ideas from abroad forces autocrats to further isolate their country or increasingly open up politically and economically. Similarly, Mandelbaum (2007) predicts problems for autocrats that reign over countries with capitalist economies. Capitalism implies individual choice and "people who are accustomed to exercising free choice in their personal lives can be expected to demand the same right in the political sphere" (Gat et al., 2009:152).

More generally, the relation between socio-economic development and increased democratisation is predicted by 'modernisation theory':

societies experiencing sustained economic growth will be characterised by parallel social and political transformations that lead in the same direction: a democratic, constitutional, and nonideological state characterised additionally by mass participation (Gilley, 2008:6-7).

In terms of state-citizen relations, economic and social development is said to produce the domestic societal forces that challenge the state and force regime change (Epstein et al., 2006; Lipset, 1959). Indeed, in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan it has been argued that successful social and economic development eventually "undermine[d] the foundations of authoritarianism, opening the way for political democracy and social reform" (Castells et al., 1990:6).

Even as deterministic claims that “the emergence of democracy would be an inexorable consequence of development” have lost their appeal (Przeworski, 2000:3), recent evidence has given modernisation theory renewed credence. Inglehart and Welzel (2009), for instance, conclude from over 30 years’ worth of World Value Survey time-series data that as societies become richer, citizens’ predominant values shift from ‘survival’ to ‘self-expression’ values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2009:39-40). ‘Survival values’ imply preferences for policies promoting economic and physical security. ‘Self-expression values’, by contrast, emphasize freedom of expression, political participation and activism, as well as tolerance to differing lifestyles (ibid.:40).

This dynamic where citizens’ push for more meaningful political participation challenges authoritarian regimes is increased under ‘competitive authoritarianism’. If more than a semblance, political liberties allow citizens to organise themselves and exert meaningful pressure against the regime and the state itself. The expectation has thus been that if more than a mere façade, the presence of some democratic institutions “will eventually bite authoritarian regimes where it hurts” (Krastev, 2011:10). Thus, in terms of opening possibilities for regime change, “elections have a momentum that is very difficult to slow for a protracted period” and it can be argued that “semicompetitive elections” paved the road to democratisation in parts of Africa (Gilley, 2008:12).

Levitsky and Way (2002) had not considered Singapore to be ‘competitive’ authoritarian. But Singaporeans’ use of the vote to express dissatisfaction and to exert pressure on the PAP through elections firmly places the island-nation in that category (section 1.2). Theoretical considerations relating to the instability of state-citizen relations under ‘hybrid regimes’ and modernisation theory thus produced expectations of the PAP-state’s demise (see Rodan, 2006). The following turns towards theories attempting to

explain the resilience of competitive authoritarian regimes and their applicability to Singapore.

Accounting for durable 'competitive authoritarianism'

As the introductory chapter showed, the most common explanations for durable authoritarianism in Singapore point towards the PAP-state's supposed 'performance legitimacy'. According to these explanations, citizens are "prepared to accede to the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered" (Henderson, 2013:217). I argued that such accounts have become question-begging at this juncture. Policy issues dominating Singapore's political discourse post GE 2011 focus on Singapore's "demographic future, its social landscape, and fundamental identity as a nation-state" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). And Singapore scholars have attributed the PAP's electoral setback in GE 2011 (and to a lesser extent GE 2006 before that) to its apparent "growth fetishism" and lacking attention to such other policy issues (Low, 2014a:171).

From a theoretical perspective, the 'performance legitimacy' argument as it is presented in the literature thus raises more questions than it answers. Updated versions of modernisation theory suggest that incumbents that 'perform' by promoting economic and social development undermine the basis for regime legitimation. Increasingly educated and wealthy citizens will shed their 'survivalist' values in respect to which authoritarianism could be justified and instead demand to participate more meaningfully and freely in politics (Inglehart and Welzel, 2009; Epstein et al., 2006). While economic performance legitimacy has some explanatory power in cases like China where the population's standard of living is still relatively low and improving quickly (see Gilley, 2008), its

applicability to contemporary Singapore is less obvious. Given the high level of economic and social development, one would expect Singaporeans to have moved on from 'survival' to 'self-expression' values.

A second possible explanation for authoritarian resilience in Singapore resides in the state practices exhibited by some contemporary authoritarian regimes. Scholars have pointed towards the apparently non-ideological nature of such authoritarian states which could prolong regime durability. China, for instance, continues to employ the state media and courts system to propagate state ideology and justify authoritarian state practices (Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011; Lu et al., 2014). But Putin's contemporary Russia, by contrast, has shed most of its communist ideology, emphasising economic and political 'pragmatism' instead. The distinction is important because ideology requires constant reinforcement and reiteration while perceived reality must be roughly congruent with state ideology if ideology is not to degenerate into farce in the eyes of citizens. Authoritarianism justified by ideology thus "gives the regime's opponents a language and a platform by holding up an ideal against which the regime can be measured and found wanting" (Krastev, 2011:12).

PAP-state discourse is routinely also described as 'pragmatist' in respect to the proclaimed aim of furthering the twin goal of securing domestic stability and prosperity in a perpetual struggle to ensure national survival (Tan, 2012b). However, such 'pragmatism' is itself an ideology and an ideal to which Singapore's population and regime critics can hold the PAP-state. To successfully justify authoritarianism with reference to the state being 'pragmatic', Singaporeans would have to buy into this survivalist national narrative (section 1.1). And citizens would have to hold that the PAP is making good use of the extensive state power at its disposal to secure domestic stability and prosperity in

the perpetual national struggle. As argued above, however, there is little reason to take for granted that large parts of the population still buy into the survivalist narrative through which this 'pragmatism' is justified (section 1.2).

Sometimes linked to the performance legitimacy argument, a third explanatory attempt draws on 'Confucian values' that purportedly stabilise state-citizen relations even under 'competitive' forms of authoritarianism. Confucian values allegedly fundamentally emphasise a social collectivism where society is "structured hierarchically while providing a place for everyone" and "everyone should know his or her place and behave accordingly" (Jones 1993:202). These values are said to eulogize obedience to authority where the state is not to be questioned as long as it succeeds in securing an ordered and harmonious society (Lu et al., 2014:257). Singapore's authoritarianism has thus sometimes been seen as a manifestation of Confucian values that "champion order, a strong but moral state, and the needs of society as a whole over personal freedoms and limitations on government" (Roy, 1994:231).

But such accounts of regime resilience have been criticised not least due to the heterogeneity hiding under the blanket term 'Confucianism' (Henderson and Appelbaum, 1992:17). With Singapore's population running the gamut from Hokkien, Cantonese, Peranakan, and other Chinese minorities to Malay and Indian, the existence of a unified Confucianism in Singapore is doubtful. In a sense the PAP's efforts to promote purportedly common '*Asian*' values in Singapore (George, 2000:162; Vadaketh, 2014a:60) fuels that doubt (chapter 7). A second objection against the cultural argument is that 'Confucian' values in Korea or Taiwan did little to prevent regime change or to stop Korea's conglomerates from wresting power from the state in economic matters (Pereira, 2008; Park, 1998).

Discourses of ‘Confucian values’ and ‘Asian values’ are thus better regarded as rhetoric devices used by governments to encourage citizen obedience (Ortmann, 2009) – more or less successfully. This is not to say that culture, understood as a broadly common set of social values and practices among much of the population (Mead, 1937:17), is absent in Singapore or does not influence how the State is seen (section 3.3). However, it does mean that the effect of such values should be regarded as distant rather than proximate influence on state-citizen relations and resilient state authoritarianism.

Accounting for state-citizen relations under ‘competitive authoritarianism’

The above theories that predicate Singapore’s durable (competitive) authoritarianism on economic performance legitimacy, a reduced role of ideology in justifying authoritarianism, or culturalism thus fall short. They either fail to account for why citizens should accede to the state’s justifications for authoritarianism at this juncture, or are based on cultural stereotypes largely devoid of empirical evidence. As this thesis suggests, a better theory and account of contemporary authoritarian resilience may thus reside in a closer examination and reconceptualization of state-citizen relations themselves. We find the basis for such a more nuanced understanding of state-citizen relations in Scott’s (1985) work on peasant revolts in Vietnam and Burma, and Weller’s (2008) analysis of ‘responsive authoritarianism’.

With reference to peasants covertly staging acts of “every day forms of resistance”, Scott shows that citizens are able to resist authoritarian domination in subtle but meaningful ways (Scott, 1985). Forms of resistance and challenges against authoritarian states like subtle non-compliance or evasion may thus not be overt and can go by

unnoticed by political commentators and observers. But resistance may nonetheless “in the end make an utter shamble of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital,” unravelling the state machinery itself (ibid.:35-36).

This has two obvious implications for the case of Singapore and the thesis’ overarching research concern. First, there may be more discord in state-citizen relations and a higher willingness of the latter to eventually push for political liberalisation than meets the eye. And second, if citizens are able to evade and sidestep authoritarian state practices, the authoritarian state may be experienced as less overbearing and repressive by citizens than the literature tends to assume. Authoritarianism is then easier to endure even for citizens who are otherwise longing for a more politically liberal regime (see following section).

And Weller (2008) argues that even under authoritarian regimes, citizen resistance and state-citizen relations may not be antagonistic if incumbents are receptive to citizens’ grievances and policy demands. With reference to environmental policy in China and pre-democratic Taiwan, Weller thus shows how the state is able to utilise informal feedback mechanisms like “public meetings, legal cases, Internet bulletin boards, petitions, and even angry demonstrations” (Weller, 2008:118). Utilising these forms of feedback, the state is then able to address citizens’ demands through policy change. Calling this ‘responsive authoritarianism’, Weller argues that successful policy adjustment can dissipate pressures for democratisation by providing better governance and preventing existing policy issues from being politicised. And Ortmann and Thompson suggest that in the case of Singapore, elections force “the ruling party to defend its policies and respond to citizen demands” (Ortmann and Thompson, 2016:43).

It should be mentioned that Ortmann and Thompson (2016) regard this as a post GE 2011 phenomenon that reflects a move towards political liberalisation. But this is not convincing. For one, such apparent ‘responsiveness’ has little to do with allowing more political contest. For another, several examples of policy adjustment following public demands throughout Singapore’s history suggest that such ‘responsiveness’ is not a new phenomenon in Singapore (section 4.3).

Distinguishing Singapore from the case of China (and pre-democratic Taiwan) is thus that under Singapore’s ‘competitive’ form of authoritarianism ‘feedback mechanisms’ are formal rather than informal. Elections reveal information “about rulers, their critics, and the support competing factions command in the wider population” (Brownlee, 2007:9) not only to academics, but also to the state itself. Besides elections, feedback mechanisms in Singapore include regular ‘consultative exercises’ organised by the PAP-state (section 1.2). These consultative exercises can be seen as “a means of helping the PAP government to refine its agenda and make better policies rather than allowing citizens to challenge the PAP’s grip on power” (Yeo 2009:184).

Taking Scott (1985) and Weller (2008) as starting points and distinguishing between ‘state’ and ‘State’, the thesis aims to advance such more nuanced accounts of state-citizen relations under durable ‘competitive’ forms of authoritarianism. For instance, and as the following chapters suggest, more important for stabilising state-citizen relations than actual policy reforms are the ways that encounters with the ‘state’ lead to the emergence of subjectively held ‘State’ images. Without knowing the inner workings of the ‘state’, citizens can imagine the ‘State’ as addressing their concerns, creating an image of a ‘State’ on which citizens (can) rely to advance and protect their diverse interests despite authoritarianism.

At the same time, and as chapter 8 argues, the image of an overbearing State often breaks down in daily life as citizens are able to sidestep state institutions, express political opinions, and access unsavoury (political) views and information online. Singaporeans can thus perceive authoritarianism as more bearable than commonly presupposed. To make and develop these arguments, the following section further explains the distinction between 'state' and 'State' and places it in state theory.

2.2 The neglected theoretical distinction between 'state' and 'State'

Before reconceptualising state-citizen relations based on the distinction between 'state' and 'State', it should be clarified that the notion of 'citizen' or 'citizenship' is treated in its conventional legalistic sense in this thesis. That is, citizenship is understood in terms of the civil, social, and political, rights, entitlements, and obligations conferred on persons with 'citizenship' status by the state (Marshall, 1950). Plainly, such entitlements, obligations, and the power that a state can (legally) exert over its citizens are subject to change.

On the one hand, citizenship studies have thus been concerned with the evolution of, and distinction between, different rights and obligations conferred on citizens (Mahmood, 2002) especially under welfare state reform (see Somers, 2008; Brodie 1997). But not all obligations may be thought of in legal terms and the state can engage with citizens beyond the latter's legal entitlements. On the other hand, scholars have thus paid attention to social provision that go beyond legal entitlements (Sun, 2012; Lister, 2007; Joppke, 2008).

Given these debates, analysis of the East Asian welfare experience has been criticised due to tendencies to analyse the legal discourse “about rights and entitlements which sees them only existing in a statutory sense” while ignoring informal arrangements (Wood and Gough, 2006:1702). For example, in the case of Singapore, the PAP-state has been providing discretionary social support to Singaporeans through a variety of non-statutory schemes and state-backed community organisations (Ramesh, 2000).

Similarly, the PAP-state has set up the HDB as a statutory board to prevent public housing from becoming a legal entitlement. But Singaporeans have come to expect affordable public housing to be provided by the state despite the latter’s insistence that housing is a ‘privilege’ and not a ‘right’ (Chua, 2000:51-52). Deteriorating housing affordability is thus politically problematic for the PAP (Lim, 1989:184; Low and Vadaketh, 2014) not least because “public housing has become such a fundamental measure of Singaporean citizenship” (Hill and Lian, 1995:129-130). Indeed, in the Singapore context, life in the ‘HDB-heartlands’ has become a defining aspect of what might be called ‘lived citizenship’ (Joppke, 2008:43) even in the absence of legal entitlement.

While my findings and arguments confirm the lacunas between legal entitlements, obligations, and the state’s actual (and changing) roles in welfare provision, the thesis does not widen the definition of ‘citizenship’ beyond its conventional meaning. Instead, it investigates Singaporeans’ demands levelled against the state regardless of whether these demands and expectations are based on legal entitlements. And on the flipside, I analyse ongoing re-adjustments of the state’s roles in economy and society. These adjustments include, but are not limited to, the introduction of welfare entitlements (chapter 6).

Now, and despite being ubiquitous in the academic literature, few concepts are so amorphous and ill-defined as *the state* [sic] itself. Part of the issue is that the term is often used as “convenient shorthand whenever the pressure of semantic precision is relaxed or ignored” (Jessop, 2007:55). The more fundamental issue is that even barring semantic imprecision and conceptual fuzziness, just what *the state* qua object of analysis is often differs between scholars’ accounts. This section places the distinction between existing ‘state’ and imagined ‘State’ in theory, establishing a working framework for engaging the state/State empirically and analytically.

Conceptualising the ‘state’ and ‘State’

Max Weber defined the modern state as an autonomous hierarchical bureaucracy formulating laws and regulations that has successfully claimed “the monopoly of legitimate force” within a given territory (Weber, 2008:156). Characterised by institutional rationality, bureaucratic capacity, and legitimacy (Weber, 1978:217), the Weberian state is often regarded as an ideal-type that modern states aim to achieve (Boyd and Ngo, 2009; Evans and Rauch, 1999). This conceptualisation of the state is often implicitly assumed when the state and its role in the economy or society are discussed (Gainsborough, 2009). As Evans (1995) suggests, however, a high degree of state autonomy is not necessarily equivalent with detachment from society. In fact, Evans argues that successful state-led development requires the state to be ‘embedded’ in, as well as possessing autonomy from, society. By possessing ‘embedded autonomy’, the state can escape regulatory capture while remaining in touch with businesses to identify and exploit strategic opportunities to promote national economic growth (Evans, 1995).

Singapore's PAP-state has almost exclusively been cast in Weberian terms while its resilience is attributed to the high degree to which it accords to Weberian norms despite, or because of its authoritarianism. What Leftwich calls 'performance legitimacy' (Leftwich, 1995:418) is an outgrowth of the state's capacity and institutional rationality. And the coherence and successfulness with which the PAP is seen to have infiltrated state institutions is reflected in scholars calling Singapore's state the 'PAP-state' (Tremewan, 1994:31; Rodan, 2006:3). With the 'performance legitimacy' argument, scholars have thus variously reproduced the PAP's own narrative where a coherent, strategic, and monolithic state (the PAP-state) directs society and economy towards material success at the price of individual liberties and democratic freedoms.

Such conceptions of the state and state-citizen relations have increasingly been criticised in state theory generally (see Sellers, 2011; Lemke, 2007; Foucault, 2000) and Singapore's case in particular (Teo, 2011; Gainsborough, 2009). Two issues stand out in particular. The first issue is that depicting the PAP-state – any state – as unitary actor that works with single intention is problematic. The lines between state and society are in fact always blurred, shifting, and permeable, making it impossible to determine where the one ends and the other begins (Mitchell, 1991:84). And the modern state itself encompasses "dozens of institutionally distinct policy sectors" (Sellers, 2011), thus being fraught with internal contradictions and dilemmas (Jessop, 2007:9). In the face of such contradictions and a multitude of contact points between state and citizens, extrapolating relations between citizens and a unitary state lacks nuance.

The second issue is that predominant accounts of state-citizen relations in Singapore ignore that states rule precisely by appearing to stand above and apart from society. Mitchell calls this the state's 'ideological effects' or the 'state effect' (Mitchell, 2006). But

the modern state conceived in Weberian terms is a “historically contingent form of rule” and thus highly ideological (Gainsborough, 2009). Reinforced through public displays of military parades, government buildings, or international frontiers (Mitchell, 2006:180), the State is thus also an idea “projected, purveyed and variously believed in in different societies at different times” (Abrams, 1988:58). Abrams thus proposes that we need to distinguish between the state as “palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government”, from the state [sic.] as ideological “device in terms of which subjection is legitimated” (Abrams, 1988:68).

Addressing the concerns about the literature’s theoretical engagement with the PAP-state, the thesis distinguishes between ‘state’ and ‘State’. Roughly following Abrams, the former refers to the ‘state’ qua (political) bureaucratic organisation⁷ that pursues a host of ‘state interventions’ while the latter is the ‘State’ qua idea. The ‘state’ is thus first and foremost “a political institution, and its actions have to be explained in regard to its specific political interests” (Castells et al., 1990:5) – in the case of Singapore also due to its amalgamation with the PAP. Like in any other organisation this does not imply that members are always in unison, share their motivations, or see their membership as life-defining. But it does imply the presence of a common underlying interest in the continued dominance of the PAP-state and co-option of elements in the state to participate in this project.

But the thesis flips Abram’s concept of the ‘State’ on its head. In my terms, ‘State’ refers not to “an ideological thing” [...] “[creating] for our sort of society an acceptable

⁷ I take for granted that the borders of that organisation are permeable and blurry (Mitchell, 1991:82; Gainsborough, 2009).

basis for acquiescence” (Abrams, 1988:68). Instead, ‘State’ refers to an idea held by citizens. The idea is influenced by state practices but not deterministically so and neither does the imagined State automatically legitimise state power in the eyes of the beholder. As Corbridge et al. (2005) argue, citizens’ encounters with the state will “vary to a significant degree from place to place, and over time”, depending “crucially on which agency, or ‘who’, in the state is being seen” (Corbridge et al., 2005:21). The same state may thus be imagined in a variety of different ways qua ‘State’ according to citizens’ beliefs and experiences of state intervention. Therefore, citizens’ reasons for acquiescence to the state – or lack thereof – can differ considerably.

Engaging in legitimisation practices, the ‘state’ is thus constrained in what it can and cannot ‘do’ if it is to be regarded as legitimate and coherent ‘State’. Indeed, for Jessop (1990) it is “only through the mobilisation and consolidation of state projects – which attempt to integrate state activities around a set of common, coherently articulated agendas – that the image of the [S]tate as a unified organisational entity (‘state effects’) can be projected into civil society” (Brenner, 2004:85).

Perhaps in some sense hinting at the duality between the really existing ‘state’ and imagined ‘State’, Jessop argues that the [S]tate is a “complex phenomenon and no single theory or theoretical perspective can fully capture and explain its complexities” (Jessop, 2007:1). In this respect, what I propose is simply that accepting this complex ideological nature of the ‘State’ qua image or ideal does not make *also* analysing actually existing ‘states’ and state intervention futile. The former becomes real as social imagination, which is influenced by citizens’ interactions with the state in a non-deterministic way and is a selective abstraction and simplification of the much messier reality of an existing ‘state’.

Exertion of power and state-citizen relations

If conceptualisation of the state/State can take on a variety of forms, so can state-citizen relations and the way states exert power over their citizens. First, and most obviously, states rule by making legislation and enforcing it through the executive. Extrapolating state-citizen relations merely from state discourse and formal legislation, however, suffers from a “statist bias” (Gainsborough, 2009). The problem with this ‘bias’ resides in the assumption that society is simply “acted upon” by a coherent Weberian state that moulds citizens to its liking. Society is in fact always involved in the negotiation and interpretation of the state and its activity (Sellers, 2011:126). Connected to this is the recognition that ‘functioning’ states preserve public order and are able to enforce legislation without (habitually) resorting to physical violence and coercion. Having to widely resort to such means is a sure sign of a state in (legitimation) crisis (Sim, 2006).

Acquiescence to the state is thus the result of citizens seeing the State as legitimate, or of fear of punishment in case of disobedience as is assumed to predominantly occur under state authoritarianism. In the former case, the ‘State’ qua idea can be “understood as the device in terms of which subjection is legitimated” (Abrams, 1988:68) in the eyes of citizens holding that (State) idea. In my terms, imagining the State as legitimate agent induces acquiescence to the state’s claim to authority. As outlined above, such imaginations of a coherent State that rules over citizens and stands outside society are fuelled by state practices. For instance, public spectacles like military parades, and wider forms of state discourse can contribute to the State being imagined in a particular way (Mitchell, 2006; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001:5).

However, being ultimately socially constructed and thus contending and interacting with diverse social practices and interests, the State idea is always in flux and may not be easily cultivated and directed to produce acquiescence. We can thus analyse the reproduction of a state effect “without referring to ‘society’ as a whole” (Jessop, 1990:6), allowing for variations in citizens’ imagining of the ‘State’. Furthermore, and beyond Abrams who looks at states in ‘our sort of society’ (Abrams, 1988:68), I suggest that citizens do not necessarily regard diversely imagined States as legitimate. That is, there is no guarantee that citizens see the State as legitimate “source of governance, the arbiter of conflicts, the site of authorisation” (Hansen, 2001:225). Instead, the “production of legitimacy, that is, the naturalisation of power, requires constant enactment” (ibid.). The State may thus also be imagined as dysfunctional, incoherent, or illegitimate – all of which is consistent with citizens’ acquiescent behaviour due to fear of punishment or rebuke in cases of disobedience.

By the same token, citizens who stage ‘every day forms of resistance’ (Scott, 1985) against specific state practices or regulations may not intend to challenge and bring to crumble the state in its entirety. Crossing a red light, jaywalking, tax evasion, or exceeding the speed limit are not automatically political acts. As the following chapters show, Singaporeans may (attempt to) sidestep and evade the state without seeing the State and exertion of authoritarianism as any less legitimate for it. Just as the state itself is manifold, citizens selectively interact with the state in varying contexts while acquiescing to its claims to authority in some areas while not in others.

Finally, how the exertion of state power is interpreted by citizens may not be straight-forward. Indeed, ‘state’ power may be exerted without citizens seeing the ‘State’ to act. And the ‘State’ may be seen to act even in the absence of clear evidence that the

actually existing 'state' is pursuing interventions. In the latter case, we are entering the "popular genres of conspiracy theories that often impute almost superhuman omniscience and omnipresence to political leaders and agencies of the [S]tate" (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001:18-19). In the former case, the state may be pursuing some form of intervention but without citizens acknowledging or realising this. For instance, the state may attempt to exert power and influence the population's conduct through "educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs" (Li, 2007:5).

These theoretical reflections on the 'state' and 'State', as well as the exercise of power lay the foundations for engaging Singapore's PAP-state and imagined State empirically and analytically. They also allow conceptualising state-citizen relations beyond the predominant notion of the PAP-state simply acting upon and moulding Singapore's population. Especially the State concept helps to analyse how the State is socially constructed and imagined.

Accounting for the continued stability of state-citizen relations thus also requires an accurate understanding of the functions pursued by the state in economy and society through which the State can be seen as 'legitimate'. Here the literature argues that the functions the state can pursue are increasingly constrained by economic globalisation. I use the umbrella term 'global economic integration' and 'economic globalisation' interchangeably. Both denote the uneven but continued movement of markets and national economies "towards an integrated global economy" where goods and services are traded with diminished transaction costs (Lloyd, 2010). This produces increased competition between national economies to attract mobile international capital and labour, imposing the need for the economy to be 'competitive' (Cerny, 1997; Parsa et al., 2003).

The following turns towards economic policy, social policy, and the state's nation-building functions. The three areas of state intervention dominate contemporary political discourse in Singapore and are reflected in the three images of the State that emerged as predominant from fieldwork. These were the images of the State as (i) hyper-rational economic actor, (ii) vanguard protecting economically and socially disadvantaged citizens, and (iii) as champion of a 'Singapore way of life'.

2.3 Taming the 'Tigers'? The state under global economic integration

As suggested above, the 'state' is constrained in what it can and cannot 'do' if it is to be regarded as legitimate 'State' by citizens. Focussing on public housing and healthcare policy, this thesis argues that the stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore is a consequence of the state's evolving roles in economy and society and images of the State thus conjured and held by citizens. With the state addressing various contemporary popular policy demands, Singaporeans can see the State as acting on behalf of their needs and interests.

The available evidence from political discourse, election results, and fieldwork findings suggest that three of the PAP-state's functions are particularly relevant for regime legitimation at this juncture. These are, first, PAP-state's roles of promoting economic growth through 'industrial' policy. Second, the state's functions in influencing social and economic outcomes through social policy that is moving from 'productivist' to more 'protective' forms of welfare provision as I argue. And third, the preservation of a 'Singapore way of life' through nation-building initiatives.

In this section I briefly focus on theories concerned with the state's roles in the economy, social policy, and its nation-building in turn. In all three areas, policy options in the 'Tigers' have been said to be shrinking due to their increased integration into the global economy and their evolving domestic political economies. Later chapters then build on the theoretical discussion pursued here and problematize some theoretical positions found in the literature.

Developmental state intervention under economic globalisation

The term 'developmental state' was coined by Johnson's (1982; 1999) analysis of rapid economic development and industrialisation in post WWII Japan, followed by ostensibly similar experiences in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore (Yeung, 2000:137-138). The defining features of developmental policy are successful strategic sectoral economic planning (Amsden, 1989) by a technocratic bureaucracy (Boyd and Ngo, 2009:1) that prioritises growth "over all else" (Pereira, 2008:1190) for "explicit economic objectives" (Leftwich, 1995:401).

As such, the success of state developmentalism hinges on the state adjusting domestic market incentives to move investment and productive activities towards strategic higher value-added industries that would not result otherwise. By directing the allocation of resources, developmental regimes "'intervene' in the market in order to 'beat' the market" (Yeung, 2000:138). Typically, such interventions include granting monopoly rights, providing targeted tax-breaks, and imposing selective tariffs as well as export subsidies for selected companies and industries (Chang, 2002:48-50). If "all states intervene

in their economies for various reasons” (Johnson, 1999:37), developmentalism is characterised by a plan-rational relation between state and economy (Hill et al., 2012:7). Not to be confused with a planned economy, this implies ‘rigging’ and ‘governing’ domestic markets to achieve substantive desired outcomes through what is known as ‘industrial policy’ (Wade, 2004:28).

What form industrial policy takes, however, may vary. In South Korea, state developmentalism implied close relations between ‘chaebol’ business conglomerates and a succession of governments. Governments leveraged state power to protect, discipline, direct, and reward successful chaebols in selected industries (Amsden, 1989; Lie, 1998:165; Chang, 2002:48-50). In contrast to Korea’s emphasis on big industrial conglomerates, Taiwanese industrial policy has produced internationally successful small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Initially directed at promoting production and export of textiles and chemicals, industrial policy soon turned towards the electronics industry (Doner et al., 2005). With industrial upgrading in full swing, the state later also established and financed technological consortia to help SMEs to cooperate and offset research and development (R&D) costs (Wong, 1999; Wade, 2004). As outlined above and discussed in chapter 4, unlike Korea and Taiwan, Singapore focussed on attracting FDI in strategic industries to drive the country’s industrialisation and economic ascend.

The ability of states to pursue such developmental functions, however, has increasingly been cast in doubt by proponents of economic liberalism and changes in international trade regimes. The state’s ability to pursue industrial policy is questioned given the high degree of domestic industrial transformation already achieved and conditions of increasing global economic integration. In particular, three national and international factors conspire against traditional forms of industrial policy.

First, the increased mobility of human and financial capital in an economically more integrated world is said to decrease the state's ability to strategically direct the domestic economy. Difficulties are multiplied by the imposition of trade regulations and trade agreements that outlaw many of the 'traditional' industrial policy tools used by the newly industrialised economies (Stubbs, 2009). For instance, the imposition of export requirements, trade balancing, or input requirements that were part of (North)-East Asian developmental regimes have been made illegal under World Trade Organisation regulations (Wade, 2003:627).

Second, developmental success transforms domestic industry and can lead to the rise of strong domestic business interests that are not necessarily aligned with those of the ruling elite or their industrial vision. Developmental regimes thus call upon their own gravediggers (Evans, 1995:229) in the form of domestic economic players that are not dependent on the state for financial support and follow their own agendas. As was the case in Korea (and to a lesser extent in Taiwan), the plan-rational relationship between state and economy that undergirds developmentalism breaks down (Pereira, 2008:1190; Stubbs, 2009).

Third, the Tigers' industrial structures have changed as their economies have transitioned into service and knowledge-based economies (KBEs). With domestic companies operating closer to the technological frontier, the state bureaucracy is thought to be less able to strategically direct a fast-moving KBE successfully (Low, 2001; Huff, 1999).

While I problematize these assumptions (chapter 4), the state's capacity to successfully plan and direct the domestic economy are cast in doubt (White, 2006). Stepping back from their developmental roles and faced with a globalised economy, the Tigers were thus expected to increase their economic competitiveness and attractiveness to

mobile capital not least through economic and trade liberalisation. The undergirding belief that industrial policy has to make room for economic liberalisation is therefore concurrent with a wider shift in expectations of what states can 'do'.

According to advocates of liberalisation and what has come to be known as the 'Washington Consensus', the state is no longer capable of pursuing substantial industrial goals successfully (Gore, 2000:799). It is instead to secure domestic conditions conducive for businesses and individuals to pursue their (financial and productive) interests. In reverence to efforts to increase the international competitiveness of their economies through a variety of strategies, such states are denoted as 'competition states', 'workfare states', or 'internationalised states' (Brenner, 2004:1). The plan-rational relationship gives way to "a market-rational, regulatory relation between state and economy" (Hill et al., 2012:7), or so the argument goes. Under the auspices of internationally mobile capital and resulting global market pressures, flexibility, shareholder value, value for money, lax tax regimes, and the population's productive potential are metrics by which local and regional competitiveness is assessed (Peck and Tickell, 2002:287; Schmidt, 2010:282).

Like in other (South)-East Asian countries, Singapore scholars have identified and predicted such reconfiguration of the relation between state and economy, especially from the 1990s when formerly government-linked companies (GLCs) underwent privatisation (Liow, 2011; Ong, 2006). Pace these assessments, I argue that the PAP-state's industrial policy strategy has remained largely unchanged and that privatisation of GLCs has been superficial (chapter 4). With regard to what the state is 'doing', I suggest that the 'State' can thus continue to appear as hyper-rational economic actor in the eyes of Singaporeans (chapter 5).

Social policy: Between 'productivist' and 'protective' welfare

Industrial policy in the 'Tigers' has been complemented by 'productivist' social policy. This implies "minimal direct state involvement in financing of social insurance [and] strong resistance to unemployment insurance of any sort" (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:243). At the same time the state provides "strong support for educational and vocational training" (ibid.). Social policy has thus been "subordinated to the dominant economic policy goal of maintaining high rates of economic growth" (Wood and Gough, 2006:1706). The combination of low social security provision and comparatively high investment in education is to strengthen the domestic economy in three ways.

First, low social expenditure minimises the state's financial burden. This pre-empts the need for high taxes that could harm nascent national industries and dampen incentives for investment and production (Rudra, 2007:380). Second, the absence of comprehensive social insurance is to foster a strong work ethic among the population that can expect scant state-provided social support in case of unemployment (Sherraden et al., 1995). And third, as the main area of social spending, educational provision is to increase the competitiveness and productive abilities of the domestic workforce (Wood and Gough, 2006:1706).

Vogel (1991) or Kwon (1998) thus suggest that (South)-East-Asian models of welfare capitalism are distinct from their 'Western' counterparts where social policy had traditionally been more independent of economic considerations (Holliday, 2000:708-709). That is, what is distinguishing the "productive welfare state is the emphasis upon strengthening the commodity status of labor in a globalizing economy [while] the state-market relationship is complementary rather than adversarial" (Rudra, 2007:381).

Similarly, Ong (2006) argues that the Tigers are increasingly bolstering their economic competitiveness by 'optimising' their populations vis-à-vis the demands of international capital through social policy. Specifically, she calls attention to 'market-driven calculations' and 'optimisation' tactics. Social policy is to induce citizens to "optimise choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions" (Ong, 2006:6). Given educational provisions and the dearth of state-provided social security, Ong argues that citizens are to engage in 'lifelong learning' and other "techniques of self-engineering and capital accumulation" (ibid.). Because such calculations are imbued with market logics, Ong argues that the Tigers have turned 'post-developmental' (ibid.:74-75).

Indeed, social policy that is to shape individuals' preferences and behaviour instead of applying coercive power directly can create the *image* of a less interventionist 'State'. But Ong's assessment is question-begging for two reasons. First, the absence of comprehensive social insurance in combination with state-provided education opportunities is nothing new in the Tigers. 'Productivist' social policy has been integral to the developmental state.

Second, applying such 'market driven calculations' to 'optimise' the population through welfare retrenchment are highly unpopular. For instance, although Western welfare states have struggled to "insulate national economies from the global economy" without causing stagflation (Cerny, 1997:259), such welfare reform has made limited inroads. Pierson (1994) explains this with reference to distributional coalitions with political power and vested interests in the continued state provision of social services. But in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan, too, democratisation has produced political pressures for the extension of welfare protection (Wagstaff, 2006; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008).

A move away from productivist welfare regimes was the result. As Rudra argues, “the expansion of the right to vote puts all those negatively affected by globalization in a better position to insist that international market expansion be moderated with the pursuit of other objectives” (Rudra, 2007:381). Therefore, “democratisation is associated with an extension of social entitlements” (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16). And even without democratisation “politicians use social policy to gain power or to stay in power; in some cases, social policy has been used as a political measure of nation building” (Kwon, 1998:30). I suggest that in the case of Singapore, ongoing extensions of protective *welfare entitlements* to the citizen population have been largely overlooked (chapter 4).

In particular, the overlapping constituencies of HDB-flat resident-owners and public healthcare consumers have developed common political and economic interests. These interests are increasingly addressed by the extension of social welfare protection and extension of social services by the PAP-state (chapter 6). Departing from ‘productivist’ social policy, the PAP-state is thereby addressing popular demands for increased social protection as revealed in post GE 2011 political discourse and consultative exercises (section 1.2). If citizens imagine the State as ‘responding’ to their varying demands and needs, I argue that this can pre-empt Singaporeans from seeing the need for more democratic process to exert pressure on the state.

Nation-building between local and global

Finally, the literature on state-citizen relations and resilient authoritarianism in Singapore has predominantly focussed on the state’s roles in producing economic and social outcomes. This may have created a blind spot for the state’s other roles like nation-building,

based on which the State can be seen as 'legitimate' by citizens. This neglect appears increasingly problematic. The contemporary political landscape and discourse is dominated not only by issues of social inequality, but also grievances about immigration and a "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2).

Contradictions inherent in the pursuit of Singapore's integration in the global economy and simultaneous nation-building agenda are exposed: "in the present phase of globalisation [...] the task of producing locality is increasingly a struggle" (Chang, 2012:692). Tensions between "citizen demands for closure symptomatic of nation-state formation on the one hand, and the rationale underpinning the functioning of a global city to fashion itself as a hub open to and animated by transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas on the other" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:16-17) are at the heart of this contradiction. Cerny also points towards such simmering tensions between the roles of the state. Given the 'realities' of internationally mobile capital, economic globalisation "hinders the capacity of state institutions to embody the kind of communal solidarity or 'Gemeinschaft' which gave the modern nation-state its deeper legitimacy" (Cerny, 1997).

The thesis' central case studies of public housing and healthcare encapsulate this conflict and contradiction. On the one hand, subsidised housing and a healthy population has improved Singapore's attractiveness to international capital, thereby furthering the country's global economic integration (chapter 4). On the other, 'flagship' social policy programmes "can enhance a sense of belonging to a specific (national) community and become a defining feature of national identity" (Sánchez-Ancochea and Martínez Franconi, 2014:13). And pointing towards the crucial role that infrastructure development like public housing can play in nation-building, Barr and Skrbiš argue

[n]ation building contains two closely intertwined and co-dependent dimensions that are difficult to separate in practice. The first dimension refers to the building of physical infrastructure while the second refers to the construction of the national community of belonging (Barr and Skrbiš: 2008:39).

As I argue in chapter 7, especially the public housing programme has immensely contributed to nation-building in Singapore by creating both horizontal (communal) and vertical (institutional) bonds of belonging – albeit perhaps not always in ways intended by policy. But perceptions that Singapore’s integration into the global economy is eroding the national community of belonging are also playing out in the ‘HDB-heartlands’. This leads to increased calls for the PAP-state to preserve what is sometimes referred to as a ‘Singapore way of life’ from further erosion (Low and Vadaketh, 2014; Yeoh and Lam, 2016; Lim et al., 2014).

Thus, while Cerny doubted the state’s ability, if not purpose, of protecting national identities and communities under conditions of global economic integration, this need not be so. Instead, and if “the general effect of globalisation has been to weaken national forms of cultural identity” (Chang, 2012:692), the state’s possible function of protecting local identities is gaining new-found importance.

I suggest that protecting or promoting local identities in a globalised world can make the State appear as having a new *raison d’être* and deep legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Beyond economic policy and social protection, states thus have to actively balance the sometimes “contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity” (Chang, 2012:619). The state’s role in community and nation-building is thus emerging as increasingly paramount in the Singapore context. Chapter 7

argues that the PAP-state is fulfilling substantive nation-building interventions in line with citizens' demands. Doing so, the PAP-state is addressing the current "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2) otherwise threatening to strain the relations between citizens and a state that has been firmly pro-economic globalisation.

A note on 'neoliberalism' and the state

The supposed reconfiguration of the Tiger states along the lines of what Cerny calls 'competition states' or the alleged 'post-developmental' turn (Ong, 2006) does not take place in a vacuum. In Europe and the US, mistrust of Keynesian welfare states built up throughout the 1970s and 1980s due to sluggish economic and productivity growth, and rising budget deficits. Apparently inefficient in the management of public companies and having let social spending run rampant, the state was accused of overextending itself beyond its competencies (Chang, 2003; Toys, 1993). As a political project started under the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, privatisation, tax cuts, and reduced welfare spending were to 'shrink' the state to diminish the damage it could do in society and economy. This has come to be known as 'neoliberalism' (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:183-184; Harvey, 2005).

Understood as economic ideology, 'neoliberalism' holds that economic growth is best promoted by establishing and protecting private property rights, as well as competitive market and market-like mechanisms (Hill et al., 2012:5). In contrast to laissez-faire liberalism, neoliberalism recognises that property rights and competitive markets will not spontaneously and naturally emerge or endure (ibid.; Brown, 2005). As a set of ideas,

practices of government, and project of reconfiguring states' functions, 'neoliberalism' is said to have swept the globe since the 1970s and 1980s, thus often being attributed a 'hegemonic status' (Wang, 2012; Peck et al., 2013).

Ong (2006), for instance calls the adoption of optimisation strategies discussed above 'neoliberal' by virtue of the market logics extended to the management of the population. Chiu et al. (2012) make a similar assessment in respect to Singapore's healthcare policy that requires citizens to take 'ownership' of their health(care). And Liow (2011) emphasises that privatisation of Singapore's GLCs signifies a neoliberal turn. At least in terms of scholarly assessments, neoliberalism has not made halt at Singapore's shores. The term's prevalence in the literature thus necessitates theoretical engagement here.

However, despite or because of its ubiquitous use and appearances, the term itself is often ill-defined and has become emotionally and politically connoted (Ong, 2006:1). Castree (2006) laments confusion about "the precise object of analytical attention" and that "what counts as neoliberalism does not appear to be a matter of consensus". As Castree argues further, "'Neoliberalism' seems to alter its shape from paper to paper" (Castree, 2006:1). Some scholars have thus come to refer to 'actually existing neoliberalism' that varies with pre-existing local political, economic, cultural, or societal circumstances (Hill et al., 2011:8). The deeper issue for Castree, however, is not that local 'variants' of neoliberalism differ, but that the usefulness, if not the existence of an abstract notion of 'neoliberalism' as such must be questioned.

To this I add that there are fundamental contradictions in the way the 'neoliberal' 'State' is imagined. The image of the State whose interventions in society and economy

must be reined in due to its incompetence stands in sharp relief to the image of a neoliberal State as active optimisation agent. Somehow the State is imagined as incapable of pursuing substantive economic and industrial goals while being perfectly able to establish and police efficient markets. And while the State is accused of distorting incentives through the provision of social protection, it is simultaneously imagined as capable of educating citizens' preferences and 'optimising' their behaviours so that they act in desired ways.

In my own analysis of the PAP-state, evolving state-citizen relations, and State images held by Singapore citizens, I thus avoid using the term 'neoliberal'. I also problematize the narrative of policy reconfiguration from developmental to a form of (neoliberal) competition state.

2.4 Conclusion: A theoretical framework

This chapter couched the thesis' central research concerns in wider theoretical debates. These debates are concerned with authoritarian resilience and the (expected) reconfiguration of states' social and economic interventions under conditions of increased global economic integration.

I argued that theories accounting for resilient (competitive) authoritarianism fall short in Singapore's case. I suggested that a better theory and account of regime durability may reside in a reconceptualization of state-citizen relations and what we mean by the word *state*. I advocated a distinction between 'state' and 'State'. The former refers to the 'state' as bureaucracy and political institution. The latter refers to the 'State' qua idea(s) that are held by those coming in contact with 'state' practices. The PAP-state thus

emerges first and foremost as political organisation pursuing a variety of functions in economy and society. Interventions and discourses pursued by the state influence the State images held by citizens, but not deterministically so.

Acquiescence to authoritarian state practices and stable state-citizen relations are thus either the result of the State being imagined as legitimate, or because state oppression is effective enough to suppress dissent. Building on Weller's (2008) concept of 'responsive authoritarianism' I suggest that even under authoritarianism, state-citizen relations may not turn antagonistic if citizens imagine the State as legitimate and responsive to policy demands. And paradoxically, citizens' ability to sidestep authoritarian state practices and stage 'everyday forms of resistance' (Scott, 1985) may make the State appear less totalitarian. In both cases, citizens may thus have less of an impetus to challenge the state politically.

Social policy and other forms of state interventions are driven on the one hand by politics and 'legitimisation pressures'. And on the other by the "purportedly borderless, politically uncontrollable forces of global economic integration" (Brenner, 2004:1). In the case of Singapore where contemporary political circumstances are imbued with state authoritarianism this is crucial. Misappraisal about the state's contemporary functions has led to misconceptions about state-citizen relations and reasons behind the PAP-state's continued authoritarian resilience, as this thesis argues.

A symptom of this misunderstanding and the obliviousness thereto is the unquestioning regurgitation of economic 'performance legitimacy' arguments in the literature. Failing to take account of social transformations that 50 years of socio-economic development must have produced (Chua, 2015) – or explaining the absence thereof – these

arguments have become unconvincing. To account for the stability of state-citizen relations that underpins continued regime durability and inquire into how people “interpret their social world” (Saunders et al., 2009:126), I widen the gaze beyond the PAP-state’s economic functions and authoritarian practices.

Pressing empirical questions for this thesis are thus how the public housing and healthcare programmes together with wider social and economic state interventions impact Singaporeans’ State image and state-citizen relations under authoritarianism. Theories about the state’s role in economy and society presented in this chapter map onto State images and state functions emerging as predominant from fieldwork in Singapore. These include the PAP-state’s economic functions, but also the extension of welfare support to reduce social inequality, and the state’s nation-building functions. Engaging with these state functions on a theoretical level is crucial because the ‘state’ is constrained in what it can and cannot ‘do’ to be imagined as legitimate ‘State’ by Singaporeans.

My theory is thus eclectic: it takes seriously the diverse ways in which power is exerted by the PAP-state, varying ways of seeing the ‘State’, and the uneven nature of policy change. But ‘eclectic’ does not mean ‘arbitrary’ or willy-nilly. The theoretical framework results from moving back and forth between theories of the state and its roles in economy and society on the one hand, and fieldwork findings on the other.

This process of testing, breaking down, and (re)constructing theory thus continued until research findings and theory were in tune with one another (Burawoy, 1988:17-18). The methodological and theoretical approach does not dissolve theoretical tensions. But different research methods and theories are valuable for understanding different yet related aspects of what we may mean by Singapore’s state/State and how it interacts with its citizens as I show in the following chapter.

3. Research Methods: Public housing, healthcare, and state-citizen relations

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods utilised. As Burawoy argued, methods and theory constitute one another where “fieldwork is a sequence of experiments that continues until one’s theory is in sync with the world one studies” (Burawoy, 1988:17-18). My theoretical point of departure is to separate the ‘state’ from the ‘State’ as it may be variously imagined by citizens. I thus discuss methods applied to investigate state interventions, state-citizen relations, and the predominant State image(s) thus conjured and held by Singaporeans. The guiding research concern is to explain the apparent continued popular support for the PAP-state and how the State can be seen as legitimate at this juncture.

Overall, my research methods are within the qualitative research tradition. As Beeson (1997) points out, “the common thread that connects various approaches to qualitative research is the commitment to study the world from the perspective of the acting individual” (Beeson, 1997:25). By employing qualitative research methods to investigate how Singaporeans see the State, I thus aim to do justice to “the socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Here, the usefulness of qualitative research is that it helps tracing “complex causal relations” (George and Bennett, 2005). In my case the relations of interest are those between state practices, State images evoked, and citizen acquiescence.

Qualitative methods incorporate “a flexible set of [research] guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical

material” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Thus, neither what methods are applied to investigate state-citizen relations, nor theories of what constitutes these relations and State images are set in stone at the outset of the research. This flexibility allows going back and forth between fieldwork findings, hypothesising and theorising until data and theory are congruent (Janesick, 2000; Burawoy, 1998:5). The focus on qualitative methods does not mean that quantitative data is of no use for this study, however. As I show below, contextualising fieldwork findings in quantitative data allows extending my arguments about state-citizen relations to the population at large.

The methodological discussion proceeds as follows. Section 3.1 motivates and justifies the use of case study research. I argue that the state is too vast to study in its entirety. Citizens are exposed to, and engage with, manifold state practices. Given this vastness, it is instructive to rely on case-study research to investigate state interventions and State images thus conjured. I then argue that the public housing and healthcare programmes are ideal case studies for my research objectives in the Singapore context.

Section 3.2 outlines methods applied to collect information about evolving state interventions and the diverse ways in which Singaporeans imagine the State. Typical for qualitative fieldwork, data was collected through qualitative interviews, participant observation of life in the ‘HDB-heartlands’, and document analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4). Documents consulted during and outside of fieldwork include policy papers, newspaper articles, and pieces of art that emerged as important from fieldwork. The duration of fieldwork during which ‘participant observation’ and interviews took place was a total of nine months. During that time, I interviewed 154 HDB-flat residents and citizens utilising the public healthcare system, as well as political and policy ‘experts’. In the section I justify these choices.

Section 3.3 concludes this chapter by discussing limitations of my research approach and how I addressed these limitations. I suggest that the main methodological challenges to be addressed are questions about (i) representativeness, (ii) data reliability, and (iii) subjectivity resulting from my own position as researcher. I suggest that these challenges can be addressed through ‘triangulation’ of methods and data, as well as through being ‘reflective’ about my position as researcher and its impact on research outcomes. I also discuss considerations about research ethics.

3.1 Case study research and case selection

This section justifies this thesis’ use of case studies to investigate the evolution of state practices and how Singaporeans see the State. This thesis is not the first to utilise case study research to investigate state-citizen relations in Singapore. However, I suggest that previous studies suffer from empirical and theoretical limitations. I argue that by selecting the public housing and healthcare programmes as case studies and by distinguishing between ‘state’ and ‘State’, I am able to improve on the existing research approaches.

The suitability of case study analysis

Case study analysis has been chosen as research strategy for two reasons. First, a major challenge of investigating the state and its evolving functions in economy and society is that modern states encompass “dozens of institutionally distinct policy sectors” (Sellers, 2011). The state is thus vast, its boundaries with society blurred, and internal contradictions are simmering below the surface (chapter 2). Therefore, and according to Evans,

“[a]nalyzing states entails almost as much hubris as pretending to run them” (Evans, 1995:4). Aware of the ‘hubris’, I abstain from analyzing ‘the state’ in its entirety. Instead, I focus on the public housing and healthcare programmes as two central areas of state intervention and nexus between state and citizens.

Second, the strength of case study analysis is that it provides “the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” to investigate the matter under consideration (Evers and Staa, 2010). In terms of my research objective, case study research thus warrants utilising data sources as diverse as interviews, participant observations, and analysis of popular art intimating how Singaporeans see and engage with the State. To dismiss any such source of data would be to not take seriously that states exert power in diverse ways and that citizens may see and engage with the State in a similarly varied fashion (section 2.2). Case study analysis can thus lead to analytical depth required to account for complex casual relations (George and Bennett, 2005:19-22; Bleijenbergh, 2010) – in my case, the relation between state practices, Stage image(s) conjured, and citizen acquiescence.

By utilising case study analysis to investigate state-citizen relations in Singapore, the thesis follows scholars like Teo (2011), Sun (2012), or Tremewan (1994). Teo (2011), for instance, analysed how Singaporeans negotiate the PAP-state and make sense of the state [sic.] through family policy. Similarly, Sun (2012) focused on the PAP’s pro-natalist family policy and her interviewees’ conceptualisation of social citizenship. And Tremewan (1994) analysed how in the “post-independence period, welfare became the basis of social control” through which the PAP-state could impose its authoritarian will on the people.

I suggest that the methodological weakness of the former two studies is, first, their focus on family policy. While connected to other areas of state intervention, including housing and healthcare, the OSC-survey (section 3.3) shows that Singaporeans themselves attach low significance to family policy (REACH, 2013b:2). Only featuring marginally in most Singaporeans' concerns, family policy is unsuitable as case study when trying to understand how Singaporeans see the State and regard it as legitimate.

My second contention is precisely with *how* state-citizen relations are conceptualised. Tremewan (1994) extrapolates state-citizen relations from state practices and discourses themselves while taking for granted what effect such practices have on the population. And while Teo (2011) and Sun (2012) do employ interview data to understand how citizens engage with the state, they conflate the 'state' and the 'State', treating the two as the same object of analysis.

I suggest that the theoretical distinction between 'state' and 'State' and my selection of case studies thus improves upon these approaches when attempting to explain the stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore. I justify my choice of case studies in more detail now.

The public housing and healthcare programmes as case studies

Plainly, a researcher does well to "select cases that give a maximum amount of information about the research objective at stake" (Bleijenbergh, 2010). Given my research concern with the stability of state-citizen relations and durable authoritarianism, selected cases should thus fulfil two criteria. First, the selected cases should say a lot about the roles that the PAP-state plays in economy and society. That is, they should represent

central aspects of state interventions connected to other policy areas and speak towards the state's wider roles in Singapore. And second, they should be areas of state intervention where the relation between state and citizens are negotiated and predominant images of the State can emerge. The latter point implies that the selected areas of state intervention should directly affect and *matter to Singaporeans* so that, inter alia, the State can appear as legitimate (or illegitimate). In the following I propose that the public housing and healthcare programmes fulfil both criteria.

First, as Singapore's two flagship social policy programmes, public housing and healthcare policy speaks to the PAP-state's wider roles in economy and society. To anticipate the discussion in later chapters, these include the state's roles of promoting economic growth, its influence on social outcomes, and the state's nation-building functions. For instance, the housing programme has helped the state to pursue FDI-dependent industrial policy by effectively subsidising the cost of living (and labour) (Lim, 1989:185). As part of the wider 'productivist' welfare legacy, the healthcare system with its strong cost containment objective has also contributed to Singapore's economic competitiveness (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:243). Housing and healthcare policy is also connected to nation-building objectives in Singapore's multi-ethnic population (Sim et al., 2003; Hill and Fee, 1995). And social policy has served not only as tool for regime legitimation but also as authoritarian control mechanism (Tremewan, 1994; Minchin, 1991). The two programmes are thus compelling cases for studying the state's wider roles in society and economy without analysing the state in its entirety.

The second criterion was that the selected cases must matter to Singaporeans and be a central aspect of life in Singapore, thus representing policy areas where images of the State can emerge and relations between state and citizens are negotiated. That

the public housing and healthcare programmes are central nexuses between state and citizens in Singapore is beyond doubt. Roughly 85% of Singaporean families live in housing provided by the HDB while over 90% of these families 'own' their flat under 99-year leaseholds (Mah, 2011). Given the quasi-monopolistic provision of inpatient care by the state in public hospitals and with 'MediShield Life' now providing health insurance to all Singaporeans, the reach of the public healthcare system is even further. That this translates into citizens regarding the public healthcare and housing programmes as decisive areas of state intervention is suggested by the 2012 'Our Singapore Conversation' (OSC) survey and contemporary political discourse.

In the representative survey conducted by the government's feedback unit 'REACH', Singaporeans identified 'public housing' and 'public healthcare' along with 'job security' as policy areas most important today and for the future (REACH, 2013b:2). It is perhaps thus not surprising that the two policy programmes are also at the core of contemporary 'hot button' policy issues in Singapore. These include increased social inequality in line with deteriorating social service affordability, and felt erosion of life in the 'HDB-heartlands' which has emerged as central marker of Singaporean identities (section 1.2).

Singaporeans had expressed and communicated their grievances about these social changes to the PAP-state in GE 2011, resulting in the PAP's worst electoral performance in history (Rahim, 2015; Low, 2014a). And, in turn, the PAP has adjusted (social) policies, thereby addressing such popular grievances post GE 2011 as I show in the following chapters. The selected case studies can thus trace how state-citizen relations are negotiated and images on the State as legitimate can emerge 'on the ground'.

It is also worth mentioning that as case studies of state-citizen relations the two selected cases reinforce one another and help bridge clefts otherwise criss-crossing the

multi-ethnic citizen population. Public consumption of housing and healthcare represents common ways for Singaporeans to engage with the state regardless of an individuals' ethnicity, age, or social background (Teo, 2011; Hill and Lian, 1995). Navigating the public housing and healthcare systems and living in the 'HDB-heartlands' has led to significant "homogenisation of life-style and experience in the same neighbourhoods, schools, stores, playgrounds, and so forth" (Lim, 1989:183). This even applies to those Singaporeans who live in 'private' housing because 'showcase' public housing projects compete with upmarket 'private' housing options. Even if not living in HDB-housing today, all Singaporeans have thus "gone through the [public] system" as one interviewee put it (chapter 7). The same is true for the healthcare system as further suggested by the OSC-survey⁸ (REACH, 2013b:3).

Overall, the housing and healthcare programmes thus link Singaporeans to one another and the PAP-state. The two social policy programmes are ideal case studies because they are central to Singaporeans' life and indicative of wider state-citizen relations. They are sites where varying images of the State emerge, regardless of citizens' ethnic, religious, or social backgrounds. As I also argue in this thesis, such varied images of the State as hyper-rational economic actor, vanguard protecting the socially disadvantaged, and as protector of a 'Singapore way of life' can stabilise state-citizen relations.

⁸ Public housing and / or healthcare were ranked as most important areas of state intervention *across* income groups in the OSC-survey. This includes Singaporeans with monthly incomes of over S\$10.000 who were recorded as the highest income bracket and who selected healthcare as the most important policy area (REACH, 2013b:3).

3.2 Research strategy: Methods of data collection

As suggested above, a serious weakness of the existing literature's accounts of Singapore's resilient state authoritarianism is the methodological and empirical confinement to analysing the PAP-state itself. For instance, Tremewan (1994), Chua (2000; 1997), Liow (2011), Quah (2011), or Pereira (2008) extrapolate state-citizen relations from state practices and public narratives alone. Contrasting these earlier studies, I draw on fieldwork data to investigate what images of the 'State' are conjured by state interventions. With references to how citizens *see the State*, I thus try to explain why popular challenges against state authoritarianism have remained largely absent.

Typical for qualitative case study research, fieldwork data was collected through interviews, participant observation of life in the 'HDB-heartlands', and document analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4). In the following, I discuss the use of these data sources in turn and justify methodological choices like the number of interviewees or fieldwork duration.

3.2.1 Document analysis and state practices

A central component of case study research, "document analysis can provide a window into a variety of historical, political, social, economic, and personal dimensions of the case beyond the immediacy of interviews and observations" (Olson, 2010). Documents comprise "a variety of written, visual, and physical material, including any artefacts that can shed light on the case" (ibid.). I used document analysis to trace (changing) state practices and State images that are thus evoked. Documents analysed towards these aims included

public documents released by the state, news articles, and pieces of art emerging as relevant from fieldwork. Documents are always socially situated and were thus read with their social and historical contexts in mind (Coffey, 2014).

I analysed public documents to research changing state practices because the academic literature unavoidably lags behind the evolution of state intervention. Throughout the thesis, I thus corroborate and update the information provided by the literature through analysis of contemporary policy statements, government websites, reports, or statistics. I nonetheless utilise the academic literature to trace the evolution of the PAP-state and draw comparisons to other countries where useful.

News sources like major national newspaper 'The Straits Times' were also consulted to learn about upcoming and ongoing policy changes. This included changes made to public housing and healthcare policy as hardly a day went by without one of Singapore's newspapers covering some housing or healthcare related news. Singapore's mainstream media and government publications are parts of state practices and directed at the population to announce, justify, or explain, policies (George, 2000).

On the one hand, it is important to note that being in the employ of the PAP-state such sources must be expected to have political biases. This required me to 'triangulate' information where possible (section 3.3). But on the other hand, these publications are also an opportunity for studying how the state justifies and communicates interventions and policies to Singaporeans. What images of the 'State' are thereby produced, however, cannot be taken for granted and must itself be investigated, for instance through qualitative interviews (section 3.2.2).

Some newspaper articles and government publications like policy papers were accessed through the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Archives and the National

Library's newspaper archives. The National Archives' growing collection of historical policy and planning papers also promised the opportunity to gain insight into policy-making and implementation (National Archives of Singapore, 2015). This latter hope, however, proved to be mostly in vain. Even with many planning and communication documents formally declassified, most remained practically inaccessible to me.

My requests to access microfilm tapes holding healthcare and housing policy proposals, for instance, were first delayed for several months and could then not be located in the system anymore. As Abrams argues, claiming control over the world of "official secrets" and the "ability to prevent the adequate study of the state" is precisely one way in which 'states' operate (Abrams, 1988:62). In my terms, the experience in Singapore's archives thus speaks to how the 'State' can appear as coherent hyper-rational actor denying the researcher access to information.

Finally, "research participants can point to valuable documents the researcher might not have thought of" (Olson, 2010). Previous to conducting fieldwork I had not considered analysing pieces of art to develop my understanding about how Singaporeans may see the State. However, interviewees encouraged me to look at pieces of (popular) art including film and paintings originating from Singapore's arts scene. Perhaps these interviewees thought that particular pieces of art could intimate something about how they saw the State that they could not articulate themselves. The value of analysing art as one tool for investigating how interviewees may see the State is that such artistic expressions "function to communicate about the social worlds that gave rise to them" (Mills et al., 2010).

But one can interpret visual representations and other pieces of art in numerous ways (Banks, 2001). It is thus important that I did not selectively pick and choose pieces

of art that fitted my argument but that interviewees recommended these works to me. Interviewees' recommendations and explanations ensured that I would understand *their* interpretation of the recommended pieces of art, thereby providing political and social context (Mills, et al, 2010).

This section has briefly outlined the use of document analysis for inquiring into state practices and State images. I have also pointed towards the use of interview data to inform and contextualise the analysis of such documents. The following thus outlines my use of interviews and selection of interviewees.

3.2.2 Qualitative interviews

Interviews are a “method of data collection for conducting systematic inquiry” consisting of “a process of seeking knowledge and understanding through conversation” (Barlow, 2010). During fieldwork, I interviewed 154 Singaporeans utilising the public housing and healthcare systems to understand how they saw the State and its roles in economy and society. Interviewees were selected through ‘theoretical sampling’ where participants are chosen in a systematic but non-probabilistic manner. The aim of this non-random sampling method is to “generate robust, rich, and deep levels of understanding” (Thompson, 1999:816).

I also conducted separate interviews with political and social policy ‘experts’ familiar with various aspects of the PAP-state’s interventions in economy and society. Such ‘expert’ interviews served to gain further insight into state practices and to triangulate and corroborate data. The format of all interviews was semi-structured and open-ended.

The following explains and justifies the sampling method, recruitment of interviewees, and the choice of interview format.

Theoretical sampling: Selection of interviewees

In the theoretical sampling method, interviewee selection is “driven by the need to select subjects and data likely to generate robust, rich, and deep levels of understanding [in a] systematic but nonprobabilistic” manner (Thompson, 1999:816). Research participants are selected based on the ‘theoretical’ consideration that the selected sample does not exclude any relevant ‘group’ in the population (Maines, 2004:122). That is, the sample is not to exclude a ‘group’ of people within the population with characteristics that would impact research outcomes. Selection of interviewees is thus guided by the aim of reaching a high degree of “variation within the field through constant comparison [and] searching for extreme cases” (Burawoy, 1998:25).

For my research, this implies interviewing citizens from all ‘groups’ within the population whose interaction with the state through the housing and healthcare programmes could be expected to systematically differ from other groups. This implies theorising if characteristics such as age, income, or ethnicity may systematically impact Singaporeans’ interactions with the state and State image(s) conjured. Theoretical sampling thus allows and requires widening the sample as new data becomes available about the case(s) or population.

Previous to fieldwork, I theorised that to prevent fundamental biases it would be necessary to interview Chinese-, Malay-, and Indian-Singaporeans as these are the country’s main ethnic groups (Lee, 2009:161). Ethnicity is often related to cultural traits and

family structure, thus likely influencing utilisation of public services like housing and healthcare. Similarly, age and income would likely tend to affect what type of (public) housing or healthcare options citizens would consume or what their financial interests were.

The potential relevance of other categories like sex and primary language only emerged during or between fieldwork stints based on findings and analysis. Women's engagement with the public healthcare system – and image of the State conjured through this engagement – may differ from that of men. And exposure to Singapore's state discourse and narratives that are in English (Ortmann, 2009:30) may be reduced for citizens for whom English is not the first language. In line with such considerations, the sample was thus extended and further interviews were conducted.

Instead of deciding on an arbitrary number of interviews in advance, the sample size was thus guided by the aim to “generate robust, rich, and deep levels of understanding” (Thompson, 1999:816). New interviewees were sought within and across ‘groups’ of interviewees with relevant distinguishing characteristics until the data produced reached a high level of repetitiveness or ‘saturation’ (Bagnasco et al., 2014:e6). The point of ‘saturation’ was well reached by the time I concluded my 154th interview.

In this respect, the intermittent fieldwork format of 3-months stints each helped me to analyse findings and identify further needs for research between fieldwork periods. Overall fieldwork duration and number of fieldwork stints was thus determined by the need for data collection. The resulting sample of 154 interviewees is perhaps (too) small for quantitative studies. But the number of observations is more than three times above the upper end of the 20-50 interviews that are usually recommended as minimum for qualitative studies (Bagnasco et al., 2014:e6).

With respect to the separate interviews with social policy and political 'experts', interviews were conducted as required by the availability of information on political and policy issues (or absence thereof). As experts in their fields, these interviewees were able to reveal 'insider' knowledge not accessible otherwise (Gillham, 2000:64). For instance, three interviews with real-estate agents yielded relevant information about the housing market and state interventions therein not covered in the literature or by news sources. In relation to healthcare I learned about on-going developments in healthcare delivery and financing from nurses (two) and medical doctors (seven) who worked at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), National University Hospital (NUH), or private clinics. And political opposition leaders interviewed (three) were quick to point at the PAP-state's authoritarian tactics employed against the opposition, as well as weaknesses in the welfare systems. Such issues are also scantily covered by the national media.

I also interviewed current and former professors at the National University of Singapore (NUS) who are or have been at the forefront of research on the PAP-State and social service provision. Through discussion about social policy and current political trends I hope to have enriched the accuracy of my arguments. Persons interviewed were Professor Chua Beng Huat; Professor Ho Kong Chong (both at the Department of Sociology); Dr Alexius Pereira (formerly at the Department of Sociology); Dr Eng Lai Ah (anthropologist at the Asia Research Institute); Professor Riaz Ul Hassan (Institute of South Asian Studies); Professor Yu Shi Ming (Department of Real Estate); and Professor Hussin Mutalib (Department of Political Sciences). I acknowledge their individual input where appropriate.

Recruitment of research participants

Most interviewees were recruited through referral by previous contacts in Singapore, some of whom I had acquired during my previous stays there for purposes of studying and working (see section 3.2.3). Compared to random selection, the advantage of the referral method of recruiting interviewees within ‘theoretical sampling’ is twofold.

First, it helps recruiting participants with desired traits. For instance, I originally had few interviews with working age women. During my second fieldwork stint I therefore asked to be referred to working age women who I could then interview. Similarly, I also asked existing contacts to introduce me to interviewees who spoke mainly or only Mandarin or Hokkien. I used an interpreter for 3 days and 7 interviews to conduct interviews with these informants.⁹ In the case of ‘expert’ interviews, participants were exclusively recruited through referral. This was because interviewees like medical doctors or leaders of the political opposition had remained inaccessible to me previously and otherwise.

Second, the referral method where interviewer and interviewee have a common affiliation with a third person can create rapport. All things being equal, this reduces self-selection biases where interviewees would otherwise not take part in the research due to mistrust of the interviewer and her intentions. Especially in the Singapore case where free speech is limited, approaching random interviewees is likely to lead to self-selection where some citizens systematically refuse to be interviewed (Chee, 1994:52). By the

⁹ Findings from these interviews were not significantly different from those of other Singaporeans within the same age group. This was probably the case because the majority of Singaporeans are multilingual and do not use English as the primary language at home (Singstat, 2010).

same token, being referred by a mutual acquaintance, interviewees are more likely to 'open up' and speak more freely with the interviewer (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). This is likely to increase the richness of the data thus created through interviews.

However, friends and associates tend to share relevant traits like interests, educational background, or political views that can influence research findings (Morgan, 2008:817). The non-random nature of referrals between contacts introduces a certain selection bias. To broaden the pool of interviewees, I thus also recruited participants from the 'HDB-heartlands' on a random basis. The random interviewees were mainly recruited from within HDB-housing estates in Pasir Ris, Clementi, and Woodlands residential areas. These areas were chosen based on their geographic distance to one another in an attempt to further increase the diversity of interviewees.¹⁰ However, the PAP-state has largely maintained an ethnically and socially mixed resident population in all public housing estates through a quota and flat allocation system (chapter 7). While defining sampling areas is practical for the selection of random participants within the area, *what specific* HDB 'new town' was chosen as sampling areas may have been largely irrelevant in the Singapore context.

A random number generator was used to select HDB-housing blocks and flats within the catchment areas, followed by an attempt to interview the housing unit's resident-owners. The success rate of this approach was very low with only about 1 out of 25 approached agreeing to take part in the research. I was often dismissed and misconstrued as real-estate agent, scammer, or HDB-employee checking on housing units under

¹⁰ The districts are located in Singapore's North-East, South-West, and North of Singapore respectively.

some false pretence. My own experience thus mirrors that of Lai (1995) who also attempted to interview random occupants of HDB-housing flats.

As I argue below (section 3.3) the mistrust and hesitation to participate should not simply be regarded as a limit on data collection but speaks towards (some) Singaporeans' image of the State. Having outlined my use of theoretical sampling and the recruitment of interviewees, I now turn towards how interviews themselves were conducted.

Interview format and structure

With a focus on the public housing and healthcare programmes, interviews were utilised to elicit data about policy evolutions and State images conjured among Singaporeans. All interviews were semi-structured and contained open-ended questions about issues concerning state involvement in housing and healthcare.

The semi-structured format meant that certain questions, say, about specific housing and healthcare regulations, were posed to all 154 interviewees utilising the public housing and/or healthcare system. Other questions and topics of conversation evolve as the interview progresses (Barlow, 2010).

The "flexible, and at the same time, standardized" interview format (Gillham, 2000:69) was chosen because it allowed interviewees to talk about aspects of state intervention and policy issues that mattered to *them*. This is crucial because the aim of these interviews was to inquire into the "perspective of the acting individual" (Beeson, 1997:25). The interview format thus enabled me to keep an "open but not empty" (Janesick, 2000:384) mind about interviewees' subjectively felt relations to the State as they

imaged it. Furthermore, the 'standardised' or 'structured' element of the interviews allowed making some comparisons between different interviewees' views. The comparisons revealed contradictions between interviewees' views on the PAP-state's roles in healthcare, housing, and wider social issues that contributed to the shaping of State images.

Starting from the literature's assessment of state-citizen relations and 'performance legitimacy' argument, I focussed the interviews with consumers of public housing and healthcare around 3 thematic areas. First, I tried to ascertain the extent to which interviewees bought into the national narrative and imagined the State along the lines depicted in that narrative. The narrative casts the PAP-state as vanguard perpetually pushing Singapore and its people forward and protecting it from economic and social collapse (section 1.1). I did so by asking interviewees what they thought about current national policy priorities while also inquiring about what policy changes should be made and why. This usually opened a discussion about elements of Singapore's economic, historical, social, and geographic realities – though often with diverging perspectives on the 'State' and its roles in economy and society.

As a second thematic focus, I inquired into issues directly relating to healthcare and housing provision and consumption as far as interviewees themselves did not raise them. Issues I brought up ran the gamut from healthcare and housing financing, supply (quantitative and qualitative) and regulatory changes, to more abstract questions concerning what the responsibilities of the state are and should be. Besides financial aspects relating to public housing and healthcare, a number of unexpected policy issues pertaining to living in the 'HDB-heartlands' as markers of Singaporean identities emerged.

As a third area of interest, I inquired into interviewees' daily-lived experience in the HDB-housing estates as well as when coming into direct contact with the healthcare system. These are obvious instances where and when images of a State can come to fruition. I thus focussed on interviewees' experiences of 'every day forms' of the state (Mitchell, 1991:81) that are incarnated in the built-environment, public service delivery, and various state-sponsored social support and community activities. With respect to the latter some scholars argued that infiltration of grassroots and resident associations in the HDB-housing estates has extended the PAP-state's authoritarian reach deep into Singaporeans' daily life (Tremewan, 1994; Lim, 1989). Inquiring into these issues thus allowed drawing inferences about the working of state authoritarianism 'on the ground' and questioning the smooth working of the state otherwise taken for granted in the literature concerned with the PAP-state. A sample list of interview questions is attached in appendix A.

In the case of 'expert' interviews, interview structure was kept deliberately light to allow interviewees to talk about issues they regarded as most pertinent (Gillham, 2000:64). In line with policy changes and my growing understanding, interview questions thus also changed and became more refined over the nine months of intermittent fieldwork. Having so far outlined my use of document analysis and interviews I now briefly turn towards the third and final research method applied.

3.2.3 Participant observation in the field

To understand the varying ways in which Singaporeans may see the 'State', I also engaged in extensive participant observation. Participant observation "seeks to describe human

interaction and behaviour through first-hand accounts and field work” (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2010) through “the study of others in their space and time” (Burawoy, 1998:25). Participant observation thus requires participating in the daily life of the population being studied as a way of ‘immersing’ oneself in the field.

Having stayed in HDB-housing for each of my three-months fieldwork trips (first in the Geylang, then in Bukit Timah, last in the Clementi district), I took part in, and witnessed daily HDB-flat living and how the PAP-state’s interventions and regulations panned out ‘on the ground’. I also had direct (involuntary) contact with the public healthcare system as a patient on several occasions. I thus visited Singapore’s National University Hospital (NUH) and Singapore General Hospital (SGH) as participant and observer.

In the field, I was also confronted with a diversity of media that are an “inherent feature” of the world we study (Dicks et al. 2012). Some of this media like newspaper articles or leaflets were part of state practices, directed at the population to announce, justify, or explain policy. Being exposed to such state practices and having encountered the state through healthcare and housing consumption myself helped me to contextualise and better understand how interviewees pictured the State. At the same time, participant observation also let me witness the limits – and failures – of some of the PAP-state’s regulations first hand. Contrary to the literature that takes the PAP-state’s effective hold over the population for granted, Singaporeans selectively sidestep state practices and are able to stage ‘everyday forms of resistance’.

Participant observation thus helped me to understand “collective and individual behaviours, norms, and customs” (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2010) that are relevant for the ways Singaporeans engage with the ‘state’ and see the ‘State’. At the same time,

gathering interview data was essential to build an understanding how Singaporeans saw the State, rather than how I thought they might, based on my own encounters with state practices. For, and as discussed further below, all observations are filtered through the observer's social, ethnic, linguistic, or gender backgrounds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4).

While the fieldwork duration was 'only' nine months, my ability to engage in participant observation was helped by having lived in Singapore previously. I studied at NUS for two semesters as undergraduate in the 2010-2011 academic year and interned at a Singapore-based executive search firm for six months. I was thus familiar with local customs, people, and life in Singapore previous to conducting fieldwork.

3.3 Limitations and research ethics

In this thesis, I make arguments about the stability of state-citizen relations and durable authoritarianism in Singapore. Besides the academic literature, these arguments are based on fieldwork data produced through qualitative analysis of documents, interviews, and participant observation. I suggest that the research approach's main methodological challenge to be addressed is how to draw sound conclusions about wider state-citizen relations from this data. Specifically, challenges are three-fold and include questions about (i) representativeness of the data collected, (ii) data reliability, and (iii) subjectivity resulting from my own position as researcher. The following engages with these three issues in turn and how I addressed these challenges. I also discuss considerations about research ethics.

Representativeness

As outlined above, interviewees were mostly recruited through referral by previously known contacts in Singapore. The weakness of this 'snowball' method of recruiting research participants is that friends and associates referring each other may share relevant traits like interests, educational background, or political views. Referral among acquaintances may therefore introduce an unobserved selection-bias into the pool of interviewees (Morgan, 2008:817). A possible weakness of my approach is thus that interviewing 154 (mostly non-random) Singaporeans does not allow drawing conclusions about wider state-citizen relations and how the State may be imagined. While taking the possibility of biases in the pool of interviewees seriously, three aspects of my research approach may alleviate these concerns.

First, the 'theoretical sampling' approach ensured that I interviewed Singaporeans with diverse backgrounds (section 3.2). As explained above, the aim was to not systematically exclude any group within the population that could be expected to significantly differ in its engagement with the state and State image(s) thus held. Although the sample is not statistically representative of the whole population, I thus captured a wide spectrum of views. Rather than frequency of observations, what matters is how certain State images are conjured by state practices and can make the State appear legitimate in the eye of the beholder. Each subjectively felt relation to the State as it was variously imagined by interviewees is equally valid.

Second, the choice of case studies itself helps. Both cases are indicative of wider state-citizen relations, and speak towards the (changing) economic and social roles fulfilled by the state (section 3.1). The public housing and healthcare programmes are thus

where state interventions are negotiated and ideas of the State arise regardless of Singaporeans' ethnic, religious, or social backgrounds. Put another way, the two social policy programmes produce common yet variegated ways of seeing the State.

Third, I place fieldwork findings in the context of quantitative survey data, election results, and contemporary political discourse. While qualitative research is concerned with *meaning* more than with *frequency* of observations, I suggest that this contextualisation allows drawing inferences about the prevalence of a State images within the population as a whole. For instance, the representative 2012 OSC-survey (discussed below) asked about what policy issues matter most to Singaporeans. As explained in section 3.1, such data helped guiding the choice of case studies. But the survey also reveals public sentiments about *specific* policy issues like the state's role in the economy, securing social outcomes, or control of migration. For instance, the survey suggests that about 50% of Singaporeans prefer "reducing the inflow of foreigners even if it translated to slower growth and jobs" (REACH, 2013b:7).

Survey results like this are corroborated by scholars' analysis of the contemporary political discourse and politics on which I also draw (section 1.2). Without claiming what exact percentage of citizens imagine the State in what way, I can thus draw informed inferences about the relative predominance of certain State images *beyond* my pool of interviewees. For instance, the data suggests that the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor on which Singaporeans (can) rely to advance the economy cannot (alone) account for popular support for the PAP-state. At this juncture, too few Singaporeans regard the economy or jobs as policy issue with overriding priority. The other State images emerging as predominant from fieldwork can be similarly contextualised in the overall policy discourse and quantitative data (see chapters 6 and 7).

I therefore suggest that such contextualisation of fieldwork findings helps to anchor conclusions drawn about state-citizen relations. Careful contextualisation allows extending findings and arguments beyond my pool of interviewees. To avoid misunderstanding it should be made clear here that the data *does not* allow drawing well-founded conclusions about variations in state-citizen relations among different demographics. Such statistics are unavailable and were impossible to generate for a single researcher. I do not argue, for instance, that the better-off see the State in one way and the worse-off see the State in another way. My fieldwork data does not allow making these claims, and as I will argue in the later chapters, neither can one easily make logical inferences.

I thus show *how* a particular 'State' image can be conjured based on 'state' interventions but not *what* makes one citizen predisposed to see the State in one way, and another to picture it differently. Instead, I confine myself to arguing how each of the predominant State images can be evoked and why the State can appear as legitimate with regard to each.

Data reliability

Using survey data and other sources to contextualise interview data brings me to the second challenge of my research approach, namely that of data reliability. Any document has been created for a purpose and represents a specific viewpoint (Olson, 2010) while research participants bring their own biases and agendas that may taint information produced (Briggs, 2001). This is especially pertinent in politically illiberal Singapore where the flow of publically available information is more state directed than elsewhere and free speech is limited.

Take the OSC-survey referred to above, for instance. The survey draws on a representative sample of 4,000 participants to reveal public sentiments about contemporary key policy issues (REACH, 2013a). While thus useful to contextualise my interview data, the OSC-survey was part of a 'consultative exercise' led by the government's 'Feedback Unit' where the 'consultation process' is carefully curated and monitored by the PAP (chapter 8). The OSC-survey itself was conducted with support by Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies which is affiliated with the state's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (Institute of Policy Studies, 2013).

The PAP-state thus had full control over the survey and its outcomes, including what questions were asked to survey participants and in what way. Not to mention that survey results could have been misrepresented. The data thus has to be taken with a grain of salt. Similarly, the results of elections in an authoritarian context are best not read as an indicator of absolute support for the incumbent. They do, however, "reveal political trends", providing "information about rulers, their critics, and the support competing factions command in the wider population" (Brownlee, 2007:9).

Besides such official quantitative data published by the PAP-state, qualitative information gathered through my interviews and sources like newspapers or policy papers can be biased or incomplete. Interviewees and Singapore-based scholars commenting on political trends may have their own agendas or may fear reprimand if divulging opinions critical of the PAP-state.

Despite these limitations, I make use of the OSC survey, election results, and the media in this thesis. For one, because the 'competitive' authoritarian context does allow (some) accurate reflections of public sentiments in public discourse (section 2.1). For another, because the thesis' utilisation of several methods and sources constitutes a form

of 'triangulation'. Triangulation of data provided by official sources, the media, and the academic literature helped to distinguish more credible from less credible claims made by sources (Cox and Hassard, 2010). I thus confirmed information through other sources like international news outlets or 'expert' interviews where possible.

The use of multiple research methods like interviews, document analysis, and participant observation helped to add further "rigor, breadths, and depths" to the investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:2). And to avoid systematic political biases I consulted sources from both sides of the political aisle, as well as gathering information from non-political actors. This included interviewing real-estate agents and physicians that were not in the employ of public hospitals or clinics (section 3.2). Overall, this combination of different data sources and methods of data collection thus served as "a means of enhancing the completeness of the findings, rendering a more in depth understanding" (Evers and Staa, 2010). Throughout the thesis, I have denoted where such triangulation was not possible.

Subjectivity and power effects

The final challenge for my research approach is that of subjectivity and power effects that are inherent parts of qualitative research. 'Power effects' refer to the researcher as "intrusive outsider" having power over research outcomes both in terms of data generation and data analysis (Burawoy, 1998). And 'subjectivity' arises because the researcher's "gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:12).

The issue here is that researchers unavoidably become “part of the world they study and thus are closely involved in the process and product of the research” (Begoray and Banister, 2010). That is, there is an “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4). Interviews or participant observations thus do not produce “objective observations, only observations socially situated in the world of the observer and the observed” (ibid.:12). Even the researcher’s presence in the field represents an ‘intervention’ that necessarily influences the data generated (Burawoy, 1998:19). The effect of such ‘intervention’ on research outcomes may be especially strong in the case of Singapore where it can be “undesirable or unsafe [...] for our participants as political subjects to engage in certain conversations” (Koch, 2013:391).

Researchers can address these inherent challenges of qualitative research. Doing so involves being reflective about how one’s own position as researcher influences research outcomes (Burawoy, 1998). The aim of being ‘reflective’ is to *use* the ripples and distortions created by the researcher’s presence ‘in the field’ to learn about the research subject. For instance, my interviewees’ warnings not to discuss a certain topic, or requests not to be quoted, reveal information about how interviewees imagined the ‘State’ – in this case as omniscient and omnipresent in its surveillance capabilities, leading to participants’ propensity to practice self-censorship.

Plainly, such considerations and ‘reading between the lines’ of interviewees’ statements are themselves subject to power effects. Researchers claim interpretative authority over what is said (and meant) by interviewees, or what can be learned from observations made in the field. When doing so, researchers bring their own frame of references and theories to the field. In my case and for this thesis, it is impossible to equally

represent all opinions and views expressed by the 154 interviewees. As part of data analysis, views expressed by interviewees are necessarily aggregated, condensed, and reconstructed (Evers and Staa, 2010). Analysis and abstraction always means “reducing the world to categories that can be investigated, sites that can be evaluated” (Burawoy, 1998:24).

The act of condensing, abstracting, and generalising from qualitative data while giving some views more weight than others is inexorable in qualitative studies. However, as suggested above this does not make fieldwork or the analysis thereof arbitrary: methods, analysis, and theory have to be coherent and produce a consistent argument. I am thus not denying that I inevitably went into the field with a theoretical framework and (unconscious) biases (Begoray and Banister, 2010). Rather, I am reflecting on, and thematising, the effects of my own position as researcher vis-à-vis the research subject(s) and analysis developed. Accordingly, and in line with my research objectives, I went back and forth between fieldwork findings, analysis, and new rounds of fieldwork in Singapore. Research methods and theory thus constitute one another where “fieldwork is a sequence of experiments that continues until one’s theory is in sync with the world one studies” (Burawoy, 1988:17-18).

Research ethics

Finally, conducting research in Singapore’s authoritarian setting and probing into personal issues like healthcare brings up the question of research ethics. As the central imperative of ethical research conduct, participants’ wellbeing must not be negatively impacted by the research undertaken (De Roche and De Roche, 2010). Among the research

methods applied by me, interviews and participant observation in Singapore stand out as the two research practices that could potentially affect research participants negatively. I consider each in turn.

With regard to ethical implications of conducting interviews in authoritarian contexts, “at the bare minimum, [...] we must ensure that the integrity and security of our research contacts not be compromised by our activities” (Gentile, 2013:426). In Singapore, the issue is less that all interviewees must fear legal prosecution when uttering politically critical opinions. Such authoritarian state practices are reserved for leaders of the political opposition (Rajah, 2012:17-20) and those challenging the PAP-state publicly (Rodan, 2006:4). But talking about politically contentious topics may nonetheless produce feelings of stress and unease for interviewees (Goodman, 2001:316). The same can be the case for interviews dealing with healthcare related issues (Goodrum and Keys, 2007).

To reduce possible psychological stress, I thus reminded interviewees that participation and consent to data publication is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time and without justification. I provided interviewees with phone numbers and email addresses through which they can contact me in Singapore and the UK in case they wanted to retract their participation at a later time. And to further protect participants from social and political abuse – as unlikely as this may be – all (interview) data utilised in the thesis is anonymised through the use of false names. In cases where interviewees could be identified through (other) unique characteristics like their position in an organisation, that information is anonymised, too.

Participant observation can also raise ethical questions and concerns because those observed are often not made aware of the researchers’ presence. Such ‘covert’

forms of participant observations, it is argued, thus involve deception of the research subjects (Di Domenico and Philips, 2010). I suggest that such concerns are unfounded in the case of this study.

My participant observation was a result of simply 'being' in the field, rather than being 'undercover' or hiding my identity as a researcher. I was not being intrusive, and did not engage in dubious practices like posing as a patient in waiting rooms of public hospitals. I simply went about life in the 'HDB-heartlands' and utilised public services like everybody else and in genuine ways. Of course, the presence of a researcher presents some form of intervention but the presence of 'ang mohs' (a Hokkien expression for 'white people') is not unusual in Singapore. Such forms of (participant) "observations in anonymous public places" are generally regarded as ethically unproblematic (De Roche and De Roche, 2010).

4. The PAP-state's roles in economy and society

To analyse state-citizen relations in Singapore we need to take stock of the roles that Singapore's PAP-state plays in economy and society. Some scholars propose that the PAP-state's function of "guiding Singapore's socioeconomic development is well recognized in the literature" (Han, 2005:169). But diverging assessments about policy reforms, especially since the Asian Financial Crisis, suggest that it is not so. While some scholars argue that state interventions remain 'developmental' (Pereira, 2008), others see Singapore's state turning 'post-developmental' (Ong, 2006) or 'neoliberal-developmental' (Liow, 2011).

For this thesis, the 'kinds' of state interventions pursued matter because they impact and speak towards state-citizen relations and Singapore's political economy. That is to say, the state's roles shape citizens' image of the State, albeit not deterministically. And Singapore's political economy sets the constraints under which Singaporeans can engage with the PAP-state politically. In this chapter I therefore aim to provide a coherent account of the PAP-state's economic and social policy interventions and political economy implications thereof.

I argue that Singapore's economic and social policy is not liberalising. The state continues to pursue industrial policy and continues to provide social services in a quasi-monopolistic fashion. On the one hand, this is a boon for the PAP-state, which has managed to strengthen its position vis-à-vis domestic capital and labour, as I argue in this chapter. On the other hand, the state's roles can become politically problematic for the PAP-state in the case of policy failures or (perceived) social issues marring the citizenry.

In my terms, the *visible* roles of the 'state' shape certain 'State' images and produce expectations for the 'State' so imagined to promote desired economic and social outcomes (chapter 5-7).

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 4.1 focuses on the PAP-state's brand of industrial policy that has proven to be both politically and economically successful. I argue that Singapore's industrial policy differs from comparison countries with regard to Singapore's extensive reliance on inward foreign direct investment (FDI) in strategic industries. The only large 'native' firms are the government-linked companies (GLCs) that remain under (indirect) state control despite superficial liberalisation in the 1990s. I argue that the state's alliance with international capital and continued control of the only large domestic firms strengthen the PAP-state vis-à-vis potential political adversaries.

I then turn towards Singapore's productivist social policy regime. I focus on *the financing of social services* in section 4.2, and then turn towards the quasi-monopolistic *provision of social services* by the PAP-state in section 4.3. I argue that in the relative absence of social security entitlements, the requirements for citizens to finance their own consumption of social services has overburdened Singaporeans financially. This is producing political pressures for the PAP-state to extend its social support functions as I show here and discuss in chapter 6 in detail.

Despite the fact that social service financing is largely private, quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the state has nonetheless tied state and citizens together. Inter alia, state provision has thus produced political pressures for the PAP-state to meet citizen expectations in social service delivery. I show that several occasions in Singapore's history suggest that the PAP-state has not been immune to these pressures. The state's

apparent 'responsiveness' to citizen demands that, I argue, helps to stabilise state-citizen relations at this juncture is thus not necessarily a new phenomenon.

Section 4.4 concludes the chapter. I argue that the PAP-state's economic and social policy interventions have three important implications for the political economy and state-citizen relations. First, continued control over domestic capital and the PAP-state's alliance with foreign MNCs has hamstrung the PAP's political opposition from gaining the finances or political clout necessary to challenge the PAP effectively. Second, quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the state has tied citizens to the PAP-state. Besides being a boon for the PAP, this has also forced the PAP to be 'responsive' to citizens' demands as the latter can exert political pressure on the regime. Third, Singapore's state-backed integration into the global economy is becoming politically contentious, forcing the state to renegotiate Singapore's relation to international capital. This is especially the case in respect to the ongoing extension of welfare entitlements and the state exerting tighter restrictions on the inflow of foreign capital and labour as later chapters show (chapters 6 and 7).

4.1 The PAP-state's economic roles and control over domestic capital

In this section I analyse Singapore's economic policy and the political economy effects thereof. Singapore's economic policy has recently been subject to some debate. Once routinely described as a 'developmental state' by most scholars (Stubbs, 2009:7; Low, 2001:411; Huff, 1995:1421), Singapore's contemporary economic policy is being re-assessed. Especially since the restructuring of Singapore's formerly government-linked companies (GLCs) in the late 1990s, some scholars have regarded Singapore as moving

towards economic liberalisation (Liow, 2012). And Ong argues that the introduction of selective “market-driven calculations” has turned the state “post-developmental” (Ong, 2007:3-4).

I will argue that this is not the case. Selective liberalisation of the economy has been largely superficial. The directive and participatory roles played by the state in Singapore’s economy have been rekindled rather than abandoned. This is despite shifting expectations of what states can ‘do’ to intervene and participate in the economy under conditions of global economic integration (section 2.3).

In terms of Singapore’s political economy, I will argue that the continuation of Singapore’s brand of FDI-dependent industrial policy is strengthening the PAP-state vis-à-vis labour and domestic capital. The PAP-state’s economic functions thus play towards its overall political interests. I will make that argument by analysing the roles played by Singapore’s Economic Development Board since national independence and continued state control over the GLCs.

Singapore’s FDI-dependent industrial policy

Established in 1961, Singapore’s Economic Development Board (EDB) has been the PAP-state’s primary means for establishing the plan-rational relation between state and economy that marks developmental economic policy (Hill et al., 2012:7). However, at national independence domestic capital was judged too weak to help bring about fast industrial transformation. What is more, Singapore’s Chinese entrepreneurial class was suspected of leaning towards the PAP’s communist political detractors (Low, 2001:416).

Given doubts about the capabilities of then existing Singaporean firms and to not strengthen the PAP-state's potential adversaries, the state thus focussed on attracting foreign companies to set up operations in Singapore and bring about industrial upgrading. Fundamental to that strategy was that foreign "capital came largely not as portfolio investment but as direct foreign investment which gave rise to almost complete foreign MNE [multinational enterprise] dominance of the manufacturing export sector" (Huff, 1995:1425). Taking a pro-active approach to attract FDI, the EDB advertised Singapore as business location to MNCs operating in industries identified as strategically important for Singapore's economic development and industrial upgrading (Cheng, 1991:191).

The EDB thus started building the 'Singapore brand' from the early 1960s when the EDB began opening foreign offices in more industrialised countries. The offices were to (and continue to) promote Singapore's attractiveness as business location for foreign MNCs (Ridzuan et al., 2017). Besides their promotional function, the offices also started analysing global business trends and industries that could become strategically important for developing Singapore's economy. The decision to strengthen Singapore's electronics industry, for instance, was reportedly the outcome of industry analysis in the wake of a 1966 ministerial visit to the Taiwan EDB office (Huff, 1995:1432). Foreign MNCs in targeted industries were then incentivised to set up operations in Singapore.

This was done through targeted tax holidays, the provision of ready-to-move-in factory sites for MNCs, clearly articulated and enforced commercial and intellectual property law, and Singapore's high level of political, fiscal, and macroeconomic stability (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:280-281; Huff, 1995:1427-1428; Tan, 2012:70). Labour was relatively cheap but educated due to state provision of public housing, training, and education (section 4.3). Wages were also kept low through state control of the trade unions

(see below). And the PAP-state used forced savings from the Central Provident Fund to finance infrastructure investments (section 4.2). While continuing with all the above, the EDB has increasingly also been informing MNCs about upcoming regulatory changes to reduce regulatory uncertainty that could dampen investment (Sim et al., 2003a:121).

In the 1960s, and apart from electronics, the EDB initially mainly focussed on the oil refining industry, thereby attracting British, American, and Japanese MNCs. By the 1970s, the PAP-state had begun to successfully promote the finance industry, helping to establish Singapore as a regional and global financial centre (Huff, 1995:1429-1430). The 1980s and 90s brought a turn towards focussing on inward FDI in the information technology industry. From the 2000s onwards, this included a concerted push into the production of semiconductors, including inward FDI by AMD, DuPont, and TSMC (Lim, 2002:S12). Continuing to promote the industry, the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) statutory board is currently building a semiconductor facility that is to be used by incoming MNCs. JTC's Chief Executive Png thus emphasises the EDB's unchanged commitment to "capture new opportunities in the global market by providing numerous incentives and developing appropriate industrial infrastructure" (The Straits Times, 2015 January 15).

With a reduced albeit stable role of manufacturing industries in Singapore¹¹ and an increasingly knowledge based economy (KBE), the EDB is now also focussing on the biotechnology and health sectors. To attract suitable companies and promote higher value-added research activities, several industrial parks have been created. For instance, the 'Tuas Medical Park' and 'Biopolis' industrial parks were built in several phases from 2003 and are maintained by JTC (Pereira, 2008:1196). Due to sustained state efforts to

¹¹ Manufacturing currently accounts for around 25% of GDP (Singstat, 2017a) while it accounted for roughly 23% and 28% of GDP in 1969 and 1992 respectively (Huff, 1995:1423).

promote the sector through provision of infrastructure, training of the workforce, and protection of intellectual property rights, “Singapore has become a hub for pharmaceutical FDI” (Mercurio and Kim, 2016:236).

The PAP-state thus positions “Singapore as a place where high impact research can be done” and where MNCs can produce pharmaceutical products including best-selling patented drugs (Ng, 2011:265). Biomedical manufacturing in Singapore has increased from S\$6 billion to S\$23.3 billion from 2000-2010 and “Singapore has also become a regional R&D hub, hosting high level facilities of several MNCs and employing over 7,000 workers” (Mercurio and Kim, 2016:239). Mercurio and Kim (2016) further show that Hong Kong has failed to make similar inroads in the industry, not because the regulatory environment there is less conducive for inward investment but because of lacking industrial policy.

Singapore has thus continued to attract FDI in strategic industries through a number of means. By all accounts, this strategy of FDI-reliant industrial policy has proven successful (Ridzuan et al., 2017). In 2015, the stock of foreign direct investment in Singapore totalled S\$1,255.5 billion at the end of the year, compared to S\$702.6 billion in 2011 and S\$216.5 billion in 2001 (Cheng and Tan, 2013; Singstat, 2017b). Relying on this growth strategy, the small island nation achieved one of the world’s highest levels of economic prosperity over the last 40 years (Huff, 1999:223-224; Rajan and Thangavelu, 2009).

Backing all the horses in a race

The PAP-state’s continued successful pursuit of industrial policy defies some scholars’ expectations. Here the prediction had been that once industry is operating at the leading

technological edge, state bureaucrats would struggle to devise successful industrial policy due to the lack of knowledge about future business and technological developments (section 2.3). That is, in a fast-moving KBE, the state is unable to “pick the right winners” and help them grow into internationally successful companies (Low, 2001). Furthermore, state authoritarianism and paternalism is thought to suffocate the creative industries on which the working of a modern KBE relies (Huff, 1999; Low and Vadaketh, 2014:11). I suggest that industrial policy continues to be successful in Singapore because the alliance with foreign capital has two advantages compared to more ‘traditional’ forms of industrial policy familiar from other ‘developmental’ states.

The first advantage has to do with state capacity and the bureaucracy. In contrast to Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan promoted the growth of domestic ‘national champion’ companies in strategic higher value-added industries (Pirie, 2008:47). This implied the protection of selected industries and firms by the state so that – and until – domestic companies became internationally competitive (Wade, 2004:7). During the incubation period, protection of domestic firms is provided through tariffs, subsidies, tax breaks, monopoly rights, and access to credit (Stubbs, 2009; Woo, 1991). While export targets *did* eventually force domestic companies to be competitive on the international market, these companies had thus been subjected less to market discipline and more to direct state control in the form of export targets or price-setting (Amsden, 1989; Chibber, 2003:58).

Especially in Korea this apparently led to arbitrary performance standards and non-transparent relations between the chaebol business conglomerates and state elites (ibid; Amsden, 1989:16). Industrial policy thus becomes increasingly difficult to pursue for the bureaucracy. The Singapore model eschews this problem by ‘backing all the

horses in a race' within a selected industrial sector. The PAP-state thus lets (foreign) companies compete with one another while the need for state bureaucrats to pick performance standards is eschewed (Huff, 1995:1433).

Taiwan shares with the Singapore system that industrial policy had tended to support sectors instead of single corporations. But the Taiwanese model has been geared to strengthen *Taiwanese* firms, therefore relying on trade protection and local content requirements to deepen 'internal integration' (Wade, 2003:635). All things equal, Singapore's system that depends much less on strengthening knowledge transfer and production networks for the benefit of *domestic* firms is thus easier to administer in technocratic terms. This is especially crucial once domestic productive activities are moving close to the leading technological edge so that future technological and business developments become increasingly difficult to foresee (section 2.3).

Second, strengthening foreign instead of domestic capital eschews political problems that could hamper the pursuit of industrial policy in future. Most importantly, Singapore's alliance with foreign capital has pre-empted the emergence of strong domestic players with their own industrial and economic interests. Such a situation could arise in the case of powerful firms in 'sunset' industries, pushing for continued state support and subsidies. Or, as in the case of Korea, domestic 'chaebol' companies "had become large (independent) global entities" (Pereira, 2008:1190). No longer dependent on state financing and with direct access to international capital markets, chaebols thus became powerful enough to undermine the state's ability to pursue industrial aims successfully (Chang, 1998:1559).

To some extent, Taiwan's industrial policy model avoids this problem, too. While Taiwan's SMEs have also become more financially independent from the state, they are

more disorganised (Stubbs, 2009:16) and have continued to benefit from state-managed research consortia (Balaguer et al., 2008). Carrying less financial heft than Korea's chaebols, Taiwan's SMEs are thus not emancipated from the state to the same extent. And the "government continues to be intensely involved in technology acquisition and in driving small- and medium-sized enterprises to upgrade their products and processes" (Wade, 2003:xxxviii). Nonetheless, Pereira argues that with the end of the Kuomintang government the "Taiwanese developmental state has also devolved" (Pereira, 2012:1190). The extent of this proposed 'devolution' is debateable. But it seems clear that the pursuit of industrial aims has become more difficult given the political change and gradual liberalisation of Taiwan's financial market (Wade, 2003; Stubbs, 2009:10).

Singapore's underlying economic policy and the EDB's modus operandi can thus be summarised as promoting domestic productive activities in strategic industries, mostly through inward FDI. This has been achieved by creating a conducive business environment through the provision of infrastructure, industrial parks, transparent and enforceable commercial law, political stability, and a workforce tailored to meet the skills and cost requirement of businesses (see below).

However, and while industrial policy is reliant on FDI, the state has also set up several government-linked companies (GLCs). In the "two-legged development model", GLCs do not serve as the engine of growth themselves, but provide infrastructure and services that are of strategic economic importance (Low, 2001:416). I turn towards the GLCs now.

The PAP-state's control over domestic capital

Created in the 1960s to help jump-start the economy (Ramírez and Ling, 2004:511-512), Singapore's GLCs were set up in industries like infrastructure, communication, and energy. These industries were regarded as too unprofitable, posing too high entry costs, or were considered too important for the overall economy to be left to the mercy of foreign capital (Huff, 1995:1428-1429; Fang et al., 2004:2462). In the wake of World Bank recommendations after the Asian Financial Crisis, GLC ownership was restructured towards ostensible privatisation (Tan, 2012; Low, 2001). For some scholars, this represented a clear sign that the PAP-state was moving towards economic liberalisation (Liow, 2011). However, I suggest that privatisation has been superficial while the PAP-state remains in tight control of the (former) GLCs.

Instead of independent private investors having taken ownership, the GLCs are now partially or majority owned by state owned holding companies where "tiers of ownership can go down the chain to six layers" (Han, 2005:91). Singapore's Temasek Holdings Limited (THL) investment company is the biggest of these state-owned holding companies. As of 2016, THL owns 100% of the shares of Singapore media providers 'MediaCorp' and 'Singapore Technologies Telemedia'. THL also owns all shares of utilities provider 'Singapore Power'. Furthermore, THL holds the majority shares of Singapore telecommunications company 'Singtel'; shipping company 'Neptune Orient Lines' (NOL); 'Singapore Airlines'; and Singapore's major public transport corporation SMRT. THL also continues to hold a 29% share of the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS), one of the largest banks in South-East Asia (Temasek, 2017). Overall, THL's net portfolio in 2016 was S\$275 billion, revenue was S\$97.0 billion, and net profits were S\$17.7 billion (ibid.).

PAP-state ownership of former GLCs has thus been rekindled rather than forfeited. The practice of 'retiring' former civil servants and members of the PAP-elite into the position of board members, chairmen, or CEOs of former GLCs (Low, 2001:427-428; Ng, 2011:264) casts further doubt on their liberalisation or political independence. THL itself is directed by Ho Ching who took over as CEO in 2004 (Temasek, 2014) and who is also Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's spouse (Boyd, 2005:180).

Through continued state ownership and PAP trustees in directorial positions, the government continues to exert direct control over the activities of GLCs. GLCs can thus continue to serve their strategic economic functions in Singapore while the government has also directed GLCs to pursue a 'regionalisation' strategy. From the 1990s onwards, Singapore GLCs like DBS or Singtel were to enter markets in surrounding countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, or even China (Yeung, 2000). Overall, and although the scope of investment has remained limited, outward FDI has been targeted mostly on financial and insurance services as well as on manufacturing (Kueh et al., 2010).

Political economy implications of industrial policy

The continued developmental alliance with international capital and control over the GLCs has implications for Singapore's political economy and state-citizen relations. Perhaps most obviously from the discussion so far, Singapore's brand of industrial policy puts the state in a strong position vis-à-vis domestic players that could challenge the state under more 'traditional' forms of industrial policy. In South Korea, for instance, commercial success soon made the state-backed chaebol conglomerates both independent and

strong enough to challenge the state and undermine its political dominance (Pereira, 2008:1190).

The Singapore model of prioritising foreign MNCs over private domestic firms and placing PAP trustees on the managerial boards of GLC does not run the same political risk. Singapore thus lacks domestic players with the financial influence and political clout that could challenge the PAP-state. As suggested above, this absence is not entirely coincidental. The PAP-state's initial alliance with international capital was reportedly partially motivated by the PAP elite's mistrust of the domestic entrepreneurial class (Low, 2001:416).

In Taiwan, domestic capital is more dispersed and disorganised than in Korea (Stubbs, 2009:16). Like in Singapore, this is not entirely coincidental as the state elites mistrusted the native population and wanted to avoid creating large domestic conglomerates (Wu, 2004:106-107). However, here too, domestic firms became more independent from the state as they grew internationally competitive (Pereira, 2008:1190). As argued above, the extent of this (political) independence is a matter of some debate.

From a comparative perspective, however, it seems clear that the PAP-state's industrial policy has "undermined the basis for independent oppositional political coalitions" much more than states did in the other two Tigers (Rodan, 2006:3). Thus, "in Taiwan and South Korea, from the 1980s, private capitalists became assertive in trying to break the economic dominance of the state", which opened an arena "for conflict over state power that could be exploited by various democratic forces" (ibid.). The PAP-state's alliance with foreign capital and control over GLCs has pre-empted the emergence of similar coalitions that could challenge the regime effectively.

Besides partnering with international capital and controlling large domestic firms, the PAP-state has also ensured its political dominance through control over the unions. By 1963 the PAP-state had either banned or absorbed all trade unions into the newly founded and PAP-controlled National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) (Tremewan, 1994:32). Bringing the unions under state control was justified by the economic imperative of attracting FDI where the NTUC pursues “a cooperative, rather than a confrontational policy towards employers” (NTUC, 2010). But the establishment of the NTUC also secured the PAP-state’s political dominance over labour by dispersing the unions through which workers could otherwise organise politically (Tremewan, 1994:33).

As further discussed in chapter 8, fieldwork data suggests that the political economy implications of the state’s dominance over domestic capital and labour are well understood in Singapore. For instance, with reference to PAP control of domestic capital, one interviewee suggested:

The problem with this country is that every single business in Singapore that makes more than one billion dollars is government linked. No one is making money irregardless [sic.] of the government. If we had people like that, they could say ‘screw you’, I will fund a new government.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 44 years old, male, Chinese)¹²

¹² I provide these references throughout the thesis to indicate interviewee diversity in terms of the factors identified as potentially affecting citizens’ engagement with the ‘state’, and ‘State’ image thus conjured. These were income (here approximated by dwelling type), age, sex, and ethnicity (section 3.2.2). Approximating household income through dwelling type is common in Singapore (Ministry of Manpower, 2017).

With the unions also under state control, the picture painted is thus one of the State having established surveillance over the workforce and shutting down avenues for organised resistance against the PAP-state. In my interview with the Singapore political commentator Katherine Lim, Lim maintained that dissent is even shut down within GLCs as employees have to fear forgoing chances of promotion if they engage in political activism against the PAP.

I could not verify that GLCs were actually following such practices. However, Lim's comment highlights the role that *fear* of the 'State', imagined as omnipresent, can play in dissuading Singaporeans from challenging the PAP-state outright (chapter 8). It is also without doubt that the continued hold over the various former GLCs means that large parts of the population are in the employ of PAP cadres. This is a considerable boon for the PAP as it routinely discredits the competency of the political opposition in economic matters (Tan, 2012b:89; Barr, 2008:409).

In this respect, the PAP-state can also continue to credibly assert its own economic relevance in the process of industrial upgrading and growth promotion given the country's continued economic dependence on FDI. Plainly, the utilisation of inward FDI for growth promotion is not unique to Singapore. But in Taiwan or South Korea, inward FDI was harnessed for purposes of knowledge transfer that would help domestic firms become capable of producing higher value-added outputs (Wong, 1999). In Singapore, however, the function of FDI is not to strengthen domestic firms but simply to provide Singaporeans with jobs and add to the GDP. To anticipate, this can give the State, imagined as hyper rational economic actor a continued *raison d'être* in the eyes of some citizens (chapter 5).

The state's economic functions, however, are not limited to economic policy itself. Having argued that the alliance with international capital and continued control over the only large domestic firms strengthen the PAP-state vis-à-vis society and potential political adversaries, I now turn towards Singapore's 'productivist' social policy regime.

4.2 Social service financing: Institutionalization of citizen self-responsibility

"Social policy is a mode of state intervention through which social goals such as social justice, equality and equity, the protection of vulnerable people and prudent life planning are pursued" (Kwon, 1998:30). Playing "redistributive, protective and transformative or developmental roles" (Mkandwire, 2005:1), social policy is intricately connected to the (political) economy.

Singapore's social policy regime is commonly referred to as 'productivist' where social welfare is "subordinated to the dominant economic policy goal of maintaining high rates of economic growth" (Wood and Gough, 2006:1706). On the one hand, this implies "minimal direct state involvement in financing of social insurance [and] strong resistance to unemployment insurance of any sort" (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:243). On the other, the state provides "strong support for educational and vocational training" (ibid.).

This section focuses on welfare financing within the 'productivist' social policy regime and current political implications thereof. I show that the most distinctive aspect of Singapore's social policy regime resides in the systematic institutionalisation of citizens' (financial) self-responsibility under the Central Provident Fund (CPF) system. Paying special attention to the cases of public housing and healthcare, I argue that while the system has successfully kept the state's social expenditure levels low, it has also contributed to

rising social inequality. Increased social inequality and accompanying rises in the cost of social service consumption has been a key social and political issue that has hurt the PAP in recent elections (section 1.2). That the productivist social policy system has not weakened state-citizen relations appears paradoxical at first. The paradox can be explained, however, by quasi-monopolistic delivery of social services by the state (section 4.3).

Productivist social policy and the Central Provident Fund

Established in 1955 under British colonial rule, the CPF amounts to a forced savings scheme. Under the CPF, each working Singaporean and her employer contribute fixed proportions of the employee's monthly wage into the employee's personal CPF savings account (Akyüz and Gore, 1996:465). Current contributions stand at 17% and 20% for employer and employee respectively (Central Provident Fund, 2017a). Contribution shares are periodically adjusted as a macroeconomic policy tool for fine-tuning the private savings rate, cost of labour, or providing non-inflationary lending to the government (Vasoo and Lee, 2001; Huff, 1995:1428). Originally established as a fully-funded retirement scheme that reimburses Singaporeans' contributions plus interest throughout retirement, the CPF has taken on further functions over the years.

Through maybe the most significant expansion of the scheme, homeownership was made possible for the masses in 1968 when Singaporeans were allowed to use their mandatory CPF contributions to 'purchase' HDB-housing under 99-year leases (Lee, 2009:163). In regard to healthcare, the government introduced 'Medisave' as a personal medical savings account under the CPF in 1984. 'MediShield', a catastrophic healthcare

cost insurance scheme was added in 1990 and insurance premiums are usually directly paid through a person's Medisave account (Lim, 2004a:85).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given that citizens are made to pay for their own healthcare, housing, and retirement through the CPF system, government social expenditure is minimal in Singapore. Fitting the "global political economic zeitgeist" of welfare austerity (Teo, 2013:388), government social spending averaged 6.4% of GDP between 2007 and 2014 in Singapore (Ministry of Finance, 2013; 2017). This is dwarfed by the OECD's average that is stabilising at around 21% since 2009. Singapore thus even underbids Mexico, the OECD's lowest spender where social spending typically makes up around 7.5% of GDP (OECD, 2014; 2016).

Comparing the 6.4% of GDP that Singapore's government spent on social services, total CPF withdrawals in 2014 amounted to S\$14.86 billion or 4.0% of GDP that year (Central Provident Fund, 2015:25). This is a reversal of earlier figures from the 1990s when CPF withdrawals accounted for around 7% of GDP and outweighed government social spending (Sherraden et al., 1995:116). The reversal indicates that the role of the state in welfare financing is expanding as discussed later (chapter 6), but is hitherto still minimal compared to other countries. The CPF thus remains highly relevant for welfare financing.

This is especially the case for the financing of HDB-housing. In recent years, CPF-account withdrawals made to purchase housing averaged around 57% of the total value of withdrawals, followed by retirement income at 26%. In line with the reliance on out-of-pocket expenditure for healthcare financing and strict withdrawal limits, healthcare related withdrawals only accounted for around 10% of total CPF-account withdrawals. The remaining balance of withdrawals went towards CPF-approved investments (Central Provident Fund, 2015; 2017b). Compared to historical data this represents an increase in

expenditure towards public housing, largely at the expense of investment in other CPF-approved assets (Sherraden et al., 1995:114).

Given its many functions, the CPF is often seen as keystone that connects all aspects of Singapore's productivist social policy approach: "subordination of welfare to economic efficiency and growth, diverting financial resources to productive purposes, minimising the dependence on the state" (Mathi, 2009:75). Through the CPF, "social security in Singapore is thus entirely financed by the private sector [...] whilst public expenditures on social welfare are limited to education with some subsidies to public hospitals" (Karim et al., 2010:47). Social protection is employment-based rather than state provided and welfare is dependent on the individual's ability to pay for her own (public) healthcare, HDB-housing, and retirement. In view of the CPF's expansion, Haggard and Kaufman thus argue that the CPF has shifted the responsibility for welfare financing from the state to Singaporeans (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16).

This assessment, I suggest below, is a misreading of the (welfare financing) relation between state and citizens because it creates the impression that the state is withdrawing from financial responsibilities it had previously held. Such a 'retreat' would be politically problematic for the PAP-state especially in the current political climate where Singaporeans are lamenting increased social inequality.

Institutionalisation of self-responsibility and ownership requirements

Pace Haggard and Kaufman (2008), a closer examination of the CPF withdrawal and social expenditure data above suggests that there is no de facto *shift* of financing responsibilities from the state to citizens. The CPF has not replaced social benefits or state provided

welfare, but restricts Singaporeans' spending options in an attempt to prevent myopic behaviour. I suggest that the deeper significance of the CPF and Singapore's brand of social policy is thus rather the *institutionalisation* of citizens' (financial) self-responsibility. Citizens are required, by law, to take ownership of their own welfare through forced *individual* savings that are to pay for housing, healthcare, and retirement income.

Besides keeping a lid on government spending, the economic rationale for promoting ownership is that social entitlements like welfare protection are feared to create moral hazard problems that could sap Singaporeans' work ethic.¹³ At the 45th St. Gallen Symposium and in view of European welfare states, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance thus warned of the degrading effect that welfare protection can have on the population's work ethic:

One of the very important lessons of the last 50 years is that traditional concepts of welfare and social expenditure and government intervention have led to a weakening of private initiative and personal responsibility. Not because that was the intent, it never was the intent [...] to weaken private initiative and family responsibility (Shanmugaratnam, 2015).

The CPF is therefore also as a 'pro-work' policy because "benefits come only with employment" (Sherraden et al., 1995:120). Singaporeans can only withdraw up to what they themselves have contributed to the scheme as Prime Minister Lee emphasised at his 2014 National Day Rally:

¹³ Moral hazard problems arise if agents are not exposed to negative (financial) consequences of their actions. For instance, extensive unemployment insurance creates a moral hazard problem if citizens are protected from negative financial consequences of unemployment (see Barr, 2008:397; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:183-184).

Firstly, it has personal responsibility because with the CPF scheme, the more you work, the longer you work, the more you save and the more you will have in retirement. Secondly, the CPF scheme is fair. Your savings are for your own retirement, not for someone else's (Lee, 2014).

The same ownership requirements apply to the consumption of public housing, where the 1964 Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) marked the beginning of the PAP's effort to create a "nation of homeowners" (Mah, 2011:81). By now over 90% of HDB-housing is owned by their residents (ibid.:75).

In healthcare, imposing 'ownership' of one's health(care) to reduce overconsumption is encapsulated in Medisave, various co-payment requirements, and deductibles under the MediShield insurance scheme (Lim, 2013:15-18). As stated above, Medisave forces Singaporeans to save for their own healthcare needs. However, access to Medisave and MediShield pay-outs are strictly limited by the state. For one, restrictions on the amount and conditions under which Singaporeans are allowed to access their Medisave savings are stringent to prevent early over-utilisation of savings (Luke, 2004). For another, it is not uncommon for hospitals to tap into the next-of-kin's private Medisave account if a patient is unable to cover the medical costs herself. The legal basis of this is that in Singapore children are required by law to support their parents financially (Ramesh, 2000:254). In his public 2015 Ministerial Meeting speech Prime Minister Lee thus emphasised that

as a people we need to be willing to take personal responsibility for our own healthcare and for that of our families, we need to be willing to save for our own healthcare needs and pay directly for our share of the costs (Lee, 2015).

Self-financing requirements together with campaigns by the Health Promotion Board (chapter 6) are thus meant to make people “take personal responsibility for their health, through their habits, through their lifestyles, through their exercise patterns” (ibid.).

From a financial standpoint, this strategy of creating ‘ownership’ has been successful. The PAP has reduced the state’s role in healthcare financing to roughly 30% of the domestic total (Lim, 2013:4). The state’s cost burden is thus low even compared to the supposedly more liberal Hong Kong where this figure was rising to over 50% by the 1990s and 2000s (Chiu et al., 2012).

The state’s promotion of ownership of one’s own welfare through housing and healthcare policy is thus imbued with economic calculations. Public expenditure is kept low in the name of Singapore’s competitiveness. Ownership and citizen self-financing requirements are to ensure citizens’ willingness to work while keeping demand for social services low. And the ideal Singapore family is to perform many of the care and financial support functions assumed by the state in other countries (Teo, 2013).¹⁴

Overburdening Singaporeans

On the one hand, Singapore’s productivist social policy regime appears to have been immensely successful. Social expenditure and unemployment levels are minimal, health outcomes are good, and the home-ownership rate of public housing flats stands at 95%.

¹⁴ South Korea and Taiwan swayed from this ideology in the wake of democratization as “politicians saw significant opportunities to attract support through the extension of new social protection. By contrast [...] Singapore and Malaysia - show much greater continuity in social policy” (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16).

But on the other hand, the “minimal direct state involvement in financing of social insurance [and] strong resistance to unemployment insurance of any sort” (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:243) appears to be overburdening Singaporeans financially. Adverse social and political effects of Singapore’s economic and social policy systems are increasingly coming to the fore.

Singapore’s GINI coefficient rose from around 0.41 in the early 1990s to 0.44 in 2000 (Lim, 2004:88). By 2010, the coefficient reached a value of 0.47 (Chew, 2012:218) and has since remained one of the highest among developed countries (The Economist, 2015). Illustrating the increased income disparity, Nasir and Turner show that the proportion of Singaporeans and Permanent Residents (PRs) earning less than S\$1,000 a month *increased* by 8% from 2001 to 2011. During the same time period, “the number of those who are earning in excess of S\$10,000 monthly had jumped threefold to 140,000 individuals” (Nasir and Turner, 2012:113). The PAP-state’s “growth fetishism” was thus “not sufficiently accompanied by policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth” (Low, 2014a:169).

For instance, Chew argues that “due to globalization and the occurrence of business cycles, some households cannot afford the monthly housing mortgage payments” (Chew, 2012:218). Compounding the risk of mortgage default, Singapore’s public housing prices have been rising over the last decades as a result of undersupply by the HDB and increased demand due to immigration (chapter 6). If in 1982 “the price of a three-room flat was about twice the annual earnings of a low-income family”, the ratio had increased to 5 times by 2010 (Chew, 2012:225). Prices have continued to rise “at a much faster rate than median or average incomes” since then (Low, 2014b:106).

Healthcare affordability has deteriorated to a similar extent (Lim, 2013). Also fuelled by rising healthcare needs of Singapore's ageing population, the proportion of household income spent on healthcare has more than doubled from 1988 to 2008 (Sun, 2012:227). And in the absence of state provision, retirees have accumulated insufficient savings in their CPF-accounts to maintain a decent standard of living or pay for healthcare in old age (Chew, 2012:219).

It is important to note that savings shortfalls are not so much the result of Singaporeans having failed to secure gainful employment but of inadequacies of the CPF system itself. Having been encouraged to invest their savings into HDB-flat ownership by the state, an increasing number of Singaporeans are 'asset-rich but cash poor' (Teo et al., 2006:28). Those having left their cash savings untouched are hurt by general price inflation. As a result,

among active CPF members who reached 55 years old in 2009 [...] only 20 per cent could meet the [CPF] Minimum Sum whole in cash. This means that four out of every five active CPF members who turned 55 in 2009 did not have sufficient cash to meet their basic needs in old age if they did not have sources of financial support other than CPF savings (Low, 2014d:122).

The current minimum sum that needs to be accumulated in the CPF retirement account at age 55 is S\$166,000 (Central Provident Fund, 2017c). Those retiring with only the minimum sum in their CPF-accounts will receive monthly CPF-account pay-outs of S\$650-700. This falls far short of the minimum monthly amount of S\$976 that retirees are predicted to need by 2026 to maintain a decent standard of living (The Straits Times, 2015 February 13a).

The shortfalls have not gone by unnoticed and are leading to discussions about revamping the CPF-scheme. For instance, and in light of current shortfalls, suggestions for lump sum CPF-account pay-outs have been mooted. However, as economist at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Walter Theseira warns, early withdrawals by account holders will “not address their basic problem of inadequate lifetime savings” (The Straits Times, 2015 February 5). On the contrary, early access to savings could hurt “many lower-income CPF members [who] will face great difficulty maintaining an adequate standard of living in retirement” (ibid.).

Sliding electoral support for the PAP between 2001 and 2011 shows that the combination of minimal state-provided welfare and rising social inequality has become politically problematic for the PAP. “A social contract that emphasised individual responsibility, low social protection, and minimal redistribution [had become] hardly desirable or sustainable” (Low, 2014c:216). Social security shortfalls and rising costs of social services have thus produced political pressures for the PAP-state to extend welfare support substantially.

As chapter 6 shows in detail, the PAP-state is increasingly addressing these calls by diverging from productivist social policy and rolling out social support. In a move unprecedented in Singapore, this includes statutory support schemes that grant welfare entitlements to citizens. In terms of state-citizen relations and the stability thereof, I argue that this extension of welfare provision helps conjure the image of a State more concerned with social inclusion and protecting citizens from financial and social vulnerability. Rather than continued welfare austerity, the PAP-state is thus extending its welfare support functions to address shortfalls and citizen unhappiness.

4.3 Social service provision: Tying Singaporeans to the PAP-state

Given the institutionalisation of social service self-financing requirements, one could perhaps expect a weakening of state-citizen relations in Singapore. But in contrast to liberal welfare regimes, productivism puts an “increased emphasis on the role of the state” (Karim et al., 2010:46).

In the following I argue that quasi-monopolistic provision of social services like housing and healthcare by the PAP-state ties citizens to the state despite self-financing requirements. Inter alia, this has produced political pressures for the PAP-state to meet citizens’ expectations in social service delivery. That the PAP-state has not been immune to these pressures is exemplified by adjustments made to state provisions in the past. The state’s apparent ‘responsiveness’ to popular citizen demands that, I argue, helps to stabilise state-citizen relations at this juncture is thus not necessarily a new phenomenon. What *is* new, however, are some of the ways in which the PAP-state addresses contemporary policy issues like social inequality (chapter 6) and nation-building (chapter 7).

Economic benefits of quasi-monopolistic social service provision

Through the quasi-monopolistic provision of education, housing, and healthcare, the PAP-state is able to influence what services are being consumed, by whom, and at what price. Within the productivist social policy regime, this has a number of economic benefits. I highlight two such benefits here, before turning to the political economy implications that such quasi-monopolistic provision produces in Singapore.

The first benefit is that through its involvement in education and skills upgrading, the PAP-state is able to exert substantive steering force on national skills development and human capital accumulation. This allows directing education and skills training towards areas that complement the country's overall industrial policy aims. For instance, and starting from 1960, industrial training centres were set up "to upgrade labour skills". In line with the then contemporary developmental aims, state-sponsored skills upgrading focussed on providing the population with technical and English language skills so that Singaporeans could be employed by incoming foreign MNCs (Kuruville and Chua, 2000:20).

Today, the PAP-state continues to offer a host of 'skills upgrading programmes', helping individual Singaporeans to remain "competitive and employable in today's fast-changing workplace" (Work Development Authority, 2012). For instance, tying-in with the promotion of the biotechnology industry (section 4.1), the A*Star scholarship programme aims to incentivise Singaporeans to pursue corresponding research degrees at Singapore's universities (Daquila 2013). This bolsters the skills profile and employability of individual graduates in the selected subject areas. Providing a skilled workforce with relevant educational background also furthers the country's attractiveness for MNCs in the biotechnology industry (Ng, 2011:265).

This approach of supporting industrial policy through targeted skills upgrading is not paralleled in the other Tigers. For instance, in South Korea, chaebols like iron and steel manufacturer POSCO offered their workers "paternalistic perks" including educational and medical provisions – often increasing with workers' length of employment at POSCO (Amsden, 1989:210-213). This meant, that POSCO-sponsored training would be designed to upgrade skills relevant to POSCO's business. By contrast, and in pursuit of

industrial targeting, Singapore's state-sponsored education and skills upgrading programmes are strategically directed to support selected dynamic industries. This hastens industrial transformation and pre-empts retrenchment that can result from labour specialisation in sunset low productivity industries.

The second economic benefit of quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the state has to do with containing the cost of living (and labour) in Singapore. Especially the public housing and healthcare systems have been leveraged to keep these costs low in an effort to make Singapore a more attractive location for incoming FDI. This is also contrasted by the experiences in the other Tigers where housing provision "has been less directed by the state and been more the outcome of the decisions of individual market actors" (Doling, 1999:247).

In Taiwan, public housing provision has been largely left to the private sector especially since the mid 1980s. While the state does issue four- and six-year housing plans, "the proportion of housing built or owned by the public sector [...] remains fairly small" (ibid.:245-246). Similarly, in South Korea housing has primarily been provided by the chaebol conglomerates running the business for profit rather than macro-economic outcomes.

The effects of this are brought out by diverging housing price developments in South Korea and Singapore. Comparing consumer prices in the two countries between 1980 and 1990, Park finds housing prices in South Korea to have increased more than two-fold while prices in Singapore only increased by 11% (Park, 1998:275). Even as the recently more quickly increasing housing prices have produced public unhappiness, a 2013 study still found Singapore to offer better value for money for MNCs housing their

staff than other global cities (The Straits Times, 2013 September 18). Interventions in the housing market thus continue to curb the cost of labour in Singapore.

In regard to healthcare provision, public hospitals collectively account for around 80% of inpatient care in Singapore. This is contrasted by Taiwan and South Korea where hospitals are largely privately owned (Wagstaff, 2007:449). In cost-containment efforts, Singapore's public hospitals underwent restructuring starting from 1987 when the state-owned Health Corporation of Singapore (HCS) was established and took over ownership of all public hospitals. Indirect state ownership under HCS established a more 'corporatized' healthcare delivery system where each hospital has more managerial autonomy and stands in competition with other public hospitals (Phua, 1991:3-5).

To increase cooperation between the restructured hospitals, the hospitals and state-owned polyclinics were then re-assigned to newly formed regional healthcare clusters in 2000 (Lim, 2013:108). Of these, the 'SingHealth' and the 'National Healthcare Group' are the two largest (Ramesh and Wu, 2014:316). Easy transferability of patients within as well as across clusters is aided by a universal health information system established in 2008 (IHIS, 2017). The PAP-state has thus overseen several rounds of healthcare delivery restructuring to contain costs and maintain quality but remains the quasi-monopolistic provider of inpatient care.

The politics of social service provision

In "The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore", Tremewan (1994) argued that the state's quasi-monopolistic provision of social services has become "the basis of social control" for the PAP-state (Tremewan, 1994:208-209). This is not entirely inaccurate as

especially the public housing programme continues to be leveraged by the state to secure authoritarian control over the population (chapter 8).

However, I suggest that the connection between state and citizens created through provision of social services is not always politically unproblematic for the PAP-state. Provision of social services by the state creates expectations and common (financial) interests among the consumers of these services. And the ability to cast their vote for the political opposition under Singapore's 'competitive' brand of authoritarianism gives citizens the opportunity to put political pressure on the PAP.

This has been made strikingly clear in GE 2011 where the PAP's bad electoral performance has not least been attributed to rising prices for social services (section 1.2). And as I will show, the PAP-state has been addressing major demands brought forward by citizens through policy adjustments, since. But examination of the literature reveals several much earlier occasions on which the PAP has adjusted policy following public pressures to do so.

With regard to housing policy, this is exemplified by instances like the victory of the WP's J.B. Jeyaretnam in the 1981 by-election in the Anson district that broke the PAP's parliamentary monopoly for the first time since 1966 (Tremewan, 1994:57). Jeyaretnam's victory has been widely attributed to the eviction of Singaporeans from adequate non-public housing flats and forced resettlement into HDB-housing units. The electoral backlash in Anson prompted the PAP to (somewhat) backtrack on its high-handed approach to resettlement (Pugh, 1989:855). Following Jeyaretnam's victory, the PAP also increased funding to the HDB so that Singaporeans who were to be resettled could get cheaper and quicker access to their HDB-flats (Thum, 2014:152-153). The de-

creased affordability of public housing identified as a major reason for the PAP's bad performance in GE 2011 was thus not the first time that public housing issues forced the PAP-state to be 'responsive'.

With respect to the public healthcare programme, too, "public opinion [has] been a significant contributor to shaping health policy" (Barr, 2008:407). For instance, in the late 1980s, the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) started removing highly subsidised 'C-class' hospital wards and replaced them with unsubsidised and more luxurious 'A-class' wards. The swap was made by SGH's management because 'A-class' wards have a higher profit margin for the hospital. The new wards were thus to increase SGH's profitability under the newly corporatized public healthcare system where public hospitals were to compete with one another. However, the removal of 'C-class' wards created an 'inverse care problem' where hospitals shift resources away from low-revenue basic healthcare so that "those in greatest need are least able to afford it" (Phua, 1991:16). The removal of the 'C-class' wards was thus met with political protest even among PAP members. The protests soon led to the reintroduction of 'C-class wards' and a public apology by then Prime Minister Goh that mistakes had been made (ibid.:28).

Beyond public housing and healthcare, other historic examples where the PAP-state has bowed to public will are not difficult to find. These include the expulsion of Japanese workers from Singapore after a 1963 discovery of bones from a World War II "mass slaughtering" by the Japanese occupational forces. The discovery led to public demands for the Japanese oil refining companies and their Japanese employees to be expelled from Singapore. The popular uproar following the discovery of the bones is reported as having been significant enough to require the presence of "immense security

forces” when Lee Kuan Yew finally addressed the crowd to announce that the visas of the Japanese workers would not be renewed (Wee, 2007:49).

Overall, this section has argued that social service self-financing requirements have not weakened state-citizen relations. Instead, and unlike in the other Tigers, the quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the state has tied state and citizens together. This has created expectations among Singapore’s constituencies of HDB-flat resident-owners and public healthcare consumers towards the state.

Fieldwork findings presented in the following chapters suggest that such expectations produce common but variegated relations to the State as it is variously imagined by citizens. As I argue, continued popular support for the PAP-state can be explained not least by the appearance that the State, variously imagined, is responsive to the demands of citizens. The apparent responsiveness and citizens’ ability to sidestep authoritarian state practices in everyday life (chapter 8) makes authoritarianism more bearable. Singaporeans thus have less of a reason to challenge the PAP-state and its penchant for authoritarian rule.

4.4 Conclusion: Policy foundations of state-citizen relations

The state’s myriad interventions and roles played in society and economy shape citizens’ images of the State. This chapter has thus taken stock of Singapore’s economic and social policy regimes. I contextualised the public housing and healthcare programmes within economic and social policy and analysed the political economy implications of the state’s economic and social functions. I argued that these economic functions have largely been

unchanged as the PAP-state has bucked expectations of economic liberalisation or a de-
volution of the developmental regime. The PAP-state continues to pursue an FDI-depend-
ent brand of industrial policy while remaining in control of domestic capital in the form
of GLCs.

The PAP-state also remains as the quasi-monopolistic provider of social services
like housing, healthcare, and education even as social service financing has historically
been in the private domain. Despite welfare austerity and citizens being required to self-
finance their utilisation of social services like housing and healthcare, Singapore's
'productivist' social policy has not weakened state-citizen relations. I suggest that this
chapter's analysis of the PAP-state's roles in economy and society has three important
implications for state-citizen relations and continued durability of authoritarianism under
the PAP-state.

First, continued control over GLCs and the PAP-state's alliance with foreign MNCs
has strengthened the PAP-state vis-à-vis potential political adversaries. Singapore lacks
large independent domestic corporations or capitalists that could challenge the state in
its developmental functions and hamstring industrial policy. At the same time, continued
reliance on footloose international capital sustains the state's relevance in actively man-
aging the economy to a larger extent than in countries with significant (native) domestic
industry. And the lack of large independent domestic firms and capitalists prevents op-
position political parties from gaining the financial backing necessary to effectively chal-
lenge the PAP-state.

Second, industrial policy, control over GLCs, and quasi-monopolistic provision of
social services have not only defined the roles played by the PAP-state, but have also
created citizen expectations to address perceived social issues. This produces political

difficulties for the PAP-state if these expatiations are not met. Under the ‘competitive’ authoritarian regime (section 2.1), citizens are able to exert political pressure on the PAP. I showed that citizens have successfully done so in the domain of public housing, healthcare and other policy issues on several occasions in Singapore’s history. While the thesis focuses on the contemporary resilience of state authoritarianism, the proposed ‘responsiveness’ of the PAP-state is thus *not* a new phenomenon of post GE 2011 politics as Ortmann and Thompson (2016) suggest. However, some of the recent policy changes like the introduction of welfare entitlements *are* a new phenomenon, as I will argue.

Third, by attracting FDI and promoting Singapore’s economic competitiveness through various social policy means, the PAP-state has integrated Singapore into the global economy to a much greater extent than the state did in Taiwan or South Korea. In the latter two cases, such integration was much more selective and cautious – especially with regard to inward FDI and financial markets. As will become increasingly clear in the following chapters, Singapore’s state-backed integration into the global economy is becoming politically contentious. Singaporeans are increasingly questioning that global economic integration and the need to remain ‘competitive’ justifies welfare austerity (chapter 6). And the contemporary “nativist ‘Singapore for Singaporeans’ groundswell” (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2) calls for de-linking the island nation from foreign capital and labour (chapter 7).

Widening the gaze beyond the case of Singapore, the chapter’s analysis speaks towards economic and social policy options for development policy in other countries. Cerny proposed that in an increasingly globally integrated world, ‘competition states’ intervene to make economic activities “more competitive in international and transnational terms, [while] international and transnational constraints limit the things that state

and market actors believe the state can do” (Cerny, 1997:259). For instance, ‘traditional’ forms of industrial policy like export and input requirements or trade balancing are increasingly unavailable to policy makers (section 2.3).

As this chapters shows, the PAP-state is pursuing its own brand of industrial policy that is reliant on attracting FDI in strategic industries and higher value-added productive activities to Singapore. The Singapore case thus confirms the continued possibility of more ‘limited’ forms of developmental interventions. Industrial parks can be set up, education and training can be targeted towards aims of industrial transformation, and the state can provide targeted support for research activities (Wade, 2012). The industrial policy efforts are further supported through the productivist social policy that increases Singapore’s attractiveness to international capital.

Here, and “in addition to economic conditions, the welfare legacy shapes the distributive demands placed on the state” (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:12). And “social services are part and parcel of the society in which they operate” (George and Wilding, 1985:1). The constant adjustments made to a multitude of social policy programmes thus not only speak towards economic aims, but evolving state-citizen relations and the variegated but common kinds of State images conjured through policy. The following chapters turn towards these variegated State images in respect to all of which state authoritarianism can be justified, or at least appear acceptable to Singaporeans who hold these State images.

As I argue, the appearance of ‘responsiveness’ to contemporary ‘hot button’ policy issues and citizens’ demands can account for the stability of state-citizen relations. These contemporary issues include social inequality (chapter 6) and nation-building (chapter 7) while the state has also continued to secure economic prosperity (chapter 5).

At the same time, state authoritarianism can also appear more bearable because Singaporeans are able to selectively sidestep and evade authoritarian state practices in daily life (chapter 8). I will make these arguments now.

5. The 'State' as hyper-rational economic actor

With a focus on the public housing and healthcare programmes, I argue that 'state' interventions have conjured divergent images of Singapore's 'State'. In the thesis, I highlight three such (contradictory) State images and trace each image to a set of 'state' practices. Based on evolving state interventions post GE 2011, I argue that citizens holding any of these 'State' images can regard the 'State' as legitimate at this juncture. Seeing the State as legitimate and as addressing citizens' concerns through policy, the latter have less of a reason to challenge the PAP-state politically. I suggest that popular support for the PAP-state is thus upheld and state-citizen relations remain stable despite authoritarianism.

The current chapter focuses on the first of the three predominant State images: the image of Singapore's *State as hyper-rational economic actor* on which Singaporeans (can) depend to promote economic growth and income opportunities. As *one of the ways* that the State can appear legitimate at this juncture, the chapter thus presents an updated version of the 'performance legitimacy' argument. That argument holds that Singaporeans "accede to the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered" (Henderson, 2013:217).

However, in contrast to the existing literature, I utilise fieldwork data to account for *why* the state's economic functions continue to shape some citizens' State image and why the State is thus seen as legitimate. This is crucial. In South Korea and Taiwan, socio-economic development eventually produced domestic pressures for political liberalisation that led to the demise of authoritarianism (Castells et al., 1990:6). Similar societal

forces have since been expected to come to the fore in Singapore (Nasir and Turner, 2012): having fulfilled its promise of delivering prosperity to the people, the PAP-state has, in some sense, weakened the basis for justifying its continued authoritarian power.

On the one hand, the previous chapter argued that because of Singapore's political economy, such societal forces are less politically threatening than in the comparison countries. Pro-democratic movements cannot join forces with private business interests because large domestic independent businesses are absent. But on the other hand, the PAP-state is vulnerable to demands for political liberalisation given the 'competitive' component of the authoritarian regime (section 2.1).

If socio-economic development could undermine the PAP-state's *raison d'être* in the eyes of Singapore citizens, the PAP-state has thus engaged in legitimisation discourses. The national narrative (section 1.1) justifies state authoritarianism and the PAP-state's position as "vanguard party" (Teo, 2011:3) that protects Singapore from the alleged perpetual danger of economic collapse. As quoted earlier, Lee Kuan Yew warned Singaporeans that political liberalisation would threaten Singapore and its prosperous but fragile economy:

They say, oh, let's have multiparty politics. Let's have different parties change and be in charge of the Government. Is it that simple? You vote in a Division Three government, not a Division One government, and the whole economy will just subside within three, four years. Finished (Today, 2008 August 15).

Similar warnings that Singaporeans must not become complacent about economic progress or question the PAP-state's hold on power abound. In another campaign speech,

Lee stated

because his experience is one of tranquillity, of perpetual progress [...] he believes that this is the natural cause of nature. It isn't so. You unscramble this - the confidence, the organisation on which Singapore thrives and you have had it. [...] This is not a game of cards; this is your life and mine. I have spent a whole lifetime building this and as long as I am in charge nobody is going to knock it down (Channel NewsAsia, 1980).

I have argued that we cannot take for granted that such narratives and justifications continue to legitimise the PAP-state's authoritarian hold on power in the eyes of Singaporeans. Indeed, the results of recent elections suggest that the state's economic successes have become less powerful in legitimising the regime (section 1.2). The state's alleged 'growth fetishism' had made the PAP's electoral support slip to 60.1% in GE 2011 (Low, 2014a:171; Rahim, 2015).

But this does not mean that economic growth and the state's economic functions have, all of a sudden, become completely irrelevant to citizens. The OSC-survey shows that the promotion of employment ranked as one of the three policy issues most important to Singaporeans – the other two policy issues were public housing and healthcare (REACH, 2013b). And my interviewees, too, regarded the promotion of growth and jobs as one of the state's most important functions. In this chapter I thus focus on those of my interviewees who imagined the State as hyper-rational economic actor. And I argue how this image can (continue to) produce legitimacy in the eye of the beholder(s).

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 5.1 focuses on social policy and in particular on the public housing and healthcare programmes. I argue that both social policy

programmes have institutionalised the need for Singaporeans to hold gainful employment and generate income throughout their adult lives. On the one hand, this is a purely financial issue. Singaporeans have to finance their own utilisation of housing and healthcare that is provided by the state in a quasi-monopolistic fashion. On the other, I show that social pressures for conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare can exacerbate citizens' perceived need for income creation. I argue that this perceived need translates into a felt dependence on the PAP-state to secure national prosperity and income opportunities for citizens.

Section 5.2 is a short interlude that proposes why interviewees who saw the State as hyper-rational economic actor did not demand for the state to increase welfare provisions. Put simply, I show that for Singaporeans discussed in this chapter, the survivalist national narrative where prosperity is never secure has become part of daily lived reality. They thus believed that the economic dependence on foreign capital and labour forbids the extension of welfare.

Section 5.3 then shows how the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor emerges. I argue that the image is conjured by the continued pursuit of industrial policy and the state's prominent role in social service provision under the productivist welfare regime (chapter 4). The point I make here is not that the PAP-state pursues a growth agenda while other states do not. It is rather that policies and their successes are *highly visible* to all citizens on the small island nation, thus easily conjuring the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor.

Section 5.4 concludes this chapter. I argue that for interviewees whose view of the State I discuss in this chapter, the (perceived) need for lifelong income creation translates into a felt dependence on the State imagined as hyper-rational economic actor.

Successfully promoting growth and income opportunities for Singapore and its residents, the State can thus be seen as legitimate despite its authoritarian tendencies.

While the chapter's findings and arguments are focussed on the case of Singapore, references to other states and their policy regimes are made. The chapter thus speaks to the wider literature concerned with how economic and social policy affects state-citizen relations and can produce diverging images of the State among citizens.

5.1 Public housing and healthcare: Fuelling the need for income

As I recapitulated above and argued in the thesis' introductory chapter (section 1.2), it is not obvious that and why the state's economic functions can continue to legitimise the PAP-state's hold on (authoritarian) power. As a first step of presenting the argument advanced in this chapter, I thus draw on fieldwork data to answer the question of why citizens would feel dependent on the state to promote economic growth and employment opportunities.

5.1.1 Social service self-financing requirements and the need for income creation

I argue that in the absence of comprehensive social insurance, the requirement to finance one's own consumption of social services practically institutionalises citizens' need to hold gainful employment. The promotion of jobs and growth by the state thus remains relevant to Singaporeans despite the high standard of living already achieved. This section focuses on the cases of public housing and healthcare while utilising fieldwork data to make that argument.

A nation of indebted public housing owners

Close to having fulfilled the official aspiration of becoming a “100 per cent property-owning democracy [sic.]” (Castells et al.1990:274), Singapore’s public housing system has created a nation of (indebted) HDB-flat owners. According to former Minister of National Development Mah this is no coincidence. Mah posits that “the government decided early on that prudent mortgages can be a ‘good debt’ that allows every citizen, every family, to have a concrete stake in this country” (Mah, 2011:12).

Taking up this ‘good debt’ that gives Singaporeans a stake in the country – and especially the economy – is made attractive through a number of financial arrangements. Low-interest housing loans are made widely available by the HDB and the state-owned DBS while a host of housing grants are extended to HDB-flat buyers by the state. Attempting to dispel current concerns about decreased HDB-housing affordability (chapter 6), Prime Minister Lee himself pitched the attractiveness of housing ownership to Singaporeans. During his 2013 National Day Rally speech, Lee addressed the audience and proclaimed ‘let me be your housing agent’. He then proceeded to demonstrate that the purchasing price of a typical newly-built 3-room HDB-flat with an already subsidised list price of S\$170,000 can be reduced to S\$111,000 after all government grants have been applied. As Lee showed, this allows households with a monthly income of little more than S\$2,000 to take up a 25-year mortgage to buy such a flat. In the example discussed by Lee, the family in question would not even have to endure a significant dip in their disposable income as the mortgage payments are almost completely covered through mandatory CPF-account contributions (Lee, 2013).

These financial arrangements advertised by Lee make HDB-flat ownership attractive. However, taking up the 'good debt' has two significant downsides for purchasers of HDB-flats. First, housing mortgages impose the necessity of decades of continuous employment because failure to pay instalments on time leads to eviction and loss of the flat (Ng, 2013:41). Second, having been encouraged to leverage the majority of their CPF-account savings to purchase a public housing flat, eviction can have dire financial consequences for Singaporeans (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:280).

Housing mortgages, the economy, and employment

The connection between home-ownership and the need to generate a continuous stream of income through employment came up repeatedly during interviews with HDB-flat owners in Singapore. Especially those among my interviewees who had not yet paid off their housing mortgage emphasised the importance for Singaporeans to be gainfully employed and for state interventions to keep the economy on an even keel. For instance, one interviewee who had only collected the keys for his HDB-flat two years prior to our interview commented on his concerns about the economy:

You do think about the economy and your job. You have to because nothing is free here, nobody owes me a living. I have artist friends in London and they are living, what do you say, 'on the dole'? Nobody can do that here unless you have really rich parents kind enough to give you money. [...] Once you commit your money and your future to buying HDB [housing] and all of a sudden you raise the stakes. Because now what if the economy flat lines, you become unemployed, lose your job, your house, and so on.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 29 years old, male, Malay)

Similarly, another interviewee who, together with her husband, had just been relocated into a new HDB-flat as part of the HDB's effort to re-develop older HDB-housing blocks emphasised the need to create steady income. Having just taken up an additional housing loan for their new flat, she explained:

Our new place is a little more expensive so we had to top-up our [housing] loan. [...] Before I was thinking to maybe start my own thing in F&B [foods & beverages] or join a friend of mine who just started her own business. But with the higher loan, now that is too uncertain. Too risky. So, I'll stay corporate and keep raking in the cheques. [...] I'm not ungrateful because I have a nice new flat and all that but a lot of families in Singapore are in that situation, a lot of my friends have debt for like 30 years.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 41 years old, female, Chinese)

Even interviewees who had already paid off their housing mortgage vividly recalled the road to home ownership as beset with financial worries and employment needs. For instance, Mr Lam, who worked at a major shipping firm recounted the 19 years it took to pay off the mortgage on his 4-room HDB-flat in the Woodlands district. In the absence of social insurance "every week I work[ed] just to stay afloat" to pay off the housing debt, as he put it. Mr Lam further recounted that especially during the Asian Financial Crisis the danger of job loss and "ceiling falling down" loomed. Besides the direct effect of cutting off his income stream, job-loss would have also meant no more money entering his CPF-account as he continued to explain. This would have made Mr Lam unable to pay the remaining instalments of his housing loan, putting his old age security and source of retirement income at risk.

The crucial point here is not simply that Singaporeans need to make a living and manage their mortgage – this is true under many social policy regimes. It is rather that this need is imposed on the entire population by the state via the HDB's quasi-monopolistic housing supply, home ownership requirements, and dearth of comprehensive social insurance.

For comparison, Hong Kong's public housing programme where almost 70% of the population lives in government-provided housing comes probably closest to the ambitiousness of Singapore's system. But unlike in Singapore, about 75% of these flats are rental housing (Yau, 2011:712). The rental model complements Hong Kong's economic model where the entrepreneurial sector and family-owned small and medium sized businesses traditionally play a major role (Castells et al., 1990:2; Scott, 2010:242). A model of subsidised rents rather than (subsidised) ownership that requires long-term financial commitment is thus more allowing for the pursuit of risky entrepreneurial activities. By contrast, the housing mortgages and CPF-system in Singapore impose long-term financial commitments for resident-owners (Phang, 2007). As the quotes above suggest, this encourages steady employment at one of the foreign MNCs or GLCs instead of independent entrepreneurial activities. The much smaller public housing systems in the other 'Tigers' also do not share Singapore's emphasis on home ownership (section 4.3).

Tremewan thus regarded this successful promotion of home-ownership as 'forced proletarianisation' where Singaporeans were made "dependent on the PAP-state for housing and dependent on wage-labour to pay for it" (Tremewan, 1994:49). While Tremewan makes this sound like a conspiracy by the state against its citizens, one can appreciate the financial implications that housing mortgages have on Singaporeans' need

to hold gainful employment. Compared to social policy elsewhere in East Asia, the Singapore housing model is thus unique. It makes Singaporeans dependent on wage labour and represents a central nexus between state and citizens where images of the State emerge. Interviewees thus attached a high degree of importance to the State, imagined as hyper-rational economic actor (section 5.3) to promote jobs and growth.

I now turn towards the healthcare system where institutionalised arrangements are similar with the state acting as quasi-monopolistic supplier while financing is largely citizens' private responsibility.

Paying for one's own healthcare consumption

In line with the productivist welfare ideology, Singapore's public healthcare strategy has been focussed on cost containment while delivering good health outcomes. To summarise from the discussion in chapter 4, cost containment is pursued, first, through quasi-monopolistic state provision of inpatient care and provision of affordable outpatient care in polyclinics. And second, the healthcare financing system places most of the cost burden on Singaporeans' shoulders. This is done through co-payments, deductibles, and insurance claim limits that ensure that healthcare seekers always have to pay for their healthcare consumption.

If the patient does not have sufficient cash savings or Medisave balances to settle a healthcare bill, healthcare providers are warranted to tap into the Medisave accounts of family members to cover costs. And while under the '3M' system some financial support is available through Medifund, this support is discretionary, granted on a case-by-case basis, and eligibility criteria are not published to prevent abuse of the system

(Ramesh, 2000:249-250; Lim, 2013:80-81). Besides directly reducing the state's share in financing healthcare, the financing model dampens citizens' demand for healthcare which further limits costs for the state. Efforts to promote healthier lifestyles by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) to delay or pre-empt the onset of chronic illnesses complement the demand-dampening measures (chapter 6).

As one medical doctor summarised the implications of Singapore's healthcare financing system in my interview with him, "[from a] financial standpoint our system does ensure that bills get paid. But it puts enormous [financial] pressure on individuals and the family because if costs are high, family members must step in".

That Singapore's healthcare financing system only provides reliable healthcare to those who can afford it did not go by unnoticed by interviewees. In healthcare, as in housing, "there is no such thing as free in Singapore" as Mr Chow, a 32-year-old interviewee living in a 4-room HDB-flat put it. I argue that the healthcare financing system reinforces Singaporeans' dependence on wage labour throughout their adult life – to pay for their own healthcare costs and potential healthcare needs of family members. For, and as another interviewee summarised the situation of having to work for healthcare,

in Singapore if you are ill, need to see the doctor, you have to pay up. If you cannot, ah, your safety net, your first line of defence is supposed to be your family. Its repeated the umpteenth time, it's repeated by the state, it's something that I write about. [...] So, you view the family as the first stop-gap. Second one is the community. And only last one is the state.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 31 years old, male, Malay)

Here it is worth re-emphasising the significant role of out-of-pocket cash contributions in healthcare financing. Due to access to Medisave pay-outs being capped, limits on

MediShield insurance claims, and co-payment and deductible requirements, *up to two-thirds* of healthcare spending is in the form of out-of-pocket payments (Wagstaff, 2007:445; Lim, 2013). This means that even if Singaporeans have accumulated sizeable funds in their CPF-Medisave accounts, they are *still* required to pay for their utilisation of healthcare services directly. The result is that the need to accumulate cash savings through employment is upheld throughout citizens' working life as exemplified by cases like Mrs Fu.

Active in the financial services sector, the 67-year-old had developed breast cancer and incurred much of the treatment costs from repeated surgery and chemotherapy herself:

So, every tumour I have to pay nearly S\$3,000. So, S\$1,000 to the maximum is from my Medisave. Medisave is my money, it's not the insurance. Then insurance will pay a few hundred dollars like that. So, when I got my operation at the hospital it is not covered, you claim very minimum. And for chemo [therapy it is] even worse.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 67 years old, female, Chinese)

With MediShield and Medisave pay-outs capped, Mrs Fu paid for her medical costs through significant out-of-pocket expenditure, also tapping into her husband's Medisave account. The 67-year-old, and many like her, would thus simply not have been able to pay for healthcare treatment had she and her husband not continued to work. The health expenditure data and interviewees' 'jokes' that in Singapore it was "better to die than fall [seriously] ill" due to potentially ruinous healthcare costs (chapter 6), show that Mrs

Fu's case is hardly unique. Singaporeans are thus exposed to institutionalised self-financing requirements that elevate the need for income and employment even if an individual is covered through Medisave and MediShield.

However, unlike the public housing system where Singaporeans are paying off long-term mortgages, healthcare costs are often unexpected, one-off, or concentrated relatively narrowly on a short time span like a hospital stay. On the one hand, interviewees thus emphasised that they would be unable to pay for healthcare needs without accumulating additional savings. But on the other, healthcare costs appeared to be less of a daily concern than housing mortgages due to the former's often one-off and unexpected nature. Compared to housing, healthcare financing is therefore perhaps less of a felt 'push' factor that drives Singaporeans into employment. However, poorer and lower educated citizens can be expected to be more strongly affected by the self-financing needs imposed by the healthcare financing system.

The two conspiring factors here are, first, that deductibles and co-payments are fixed and thus essentially regressive in nature (Lim, 2013). Second, based on my interviews with healthcare consumers and healthcare professionals, especially older and less educated Singaporeans struggle with accessing scant state provided healthcare support. Even beyond the intentional opaqueness of Medifund, schemes and eligibility criteria have become increasingly complex and difficult to understand. The net effect of this is that those with lower incomes are especially dependent on the availability of employment opportunities to be able to finance their own healthcare.

It might be objected that health systems elsewhere also (partially) rely on private contributions and out-of-pocket spending as means for cost recovery. This is not entirely

inaccurate especially given (limited) shifts towards welfare austerity in established welfare states (Choi, 2012; Schmidt, 2010). However, two aspects of Singapore's healthcare financing system stand out.

First, the Singapore system's emphasis on self-financing is unmatched in the developed world in terms of its extent and institutionalisation. Introduced in 1984, Medisave is "the world's first national medical savings scheme" (Luk, 2014:94). And with the '3M system' and co-payment requirements, "Singapore is the first and only nation that has, by design, shifted the responsibility of healthcare financing from the state (the dominant model in most countries) to the individual" (Lim, 2013:23). Singapore has thus emerged as somewhat of a role-model for healthcare financing reform. Especially established welfare states are attempting to "shift the balance between the public and the private sectors in both the financing and provision of insurance and services" to reduce government spending (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:184).

Second, and while since the 1980s efforts in 'Western' welfare states have thus generally been directed at making citizens more responsible for financing their own social service consumption, Singapore's traditional comparison countries have gone the other way. In step with increased democratisation and political parties competing for votes, the other 'Tigers' have seen an expansion of state-financed welfare provision from the 1980s onwards (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Rudra, 2007). Korea and Taiwan introduced universal health insurance in 1989 and 1995 respectively (Wagstaff, 2006:442-443). As a result, "public-health spending rose substantially as a percentage of total health spending" in South Korea (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:212). While comparable WHO data is not available for Taiwan, "the creation of a national health insurance system had similar effects there as well" (ibid.).

In Hong Kong, reform efforts to increase the private sector's role in healthcare financing were fuelled by the 1997 financial crisis and ensuing "concern over the fiscal viability of the welfare system" (Chiu et al., 2012:13). However, political pressures by pro-democratic parties and various professional groups with vested interests in the continuation of the public system prevented deep welfare reforms (ibid.:15). As a result, and while in Singapore about 70% of healthcare costs are paid for by the private sector (and mostly through out of pocket spending), the proportion has declined to 30% in the supposedly more 'liberal' Hong Kong. In the other Tigers of Taiwan and South Korea, expansion of state-provided welfare has also let the proportion of private healthcare expenditure decline to around 30% and 40%, respectively (Wagstaff, 2007:446; Chiu et al., 2012). In the comparison countries, the role of the state in financing healthcare is thus more pronounced than in Singapore and has been *increasing* since the 1980s and 1990s.

The extent to which the PAP-state has imposed healthcare financing on citizens' shoulders in the name of economic competitiveness is thus unique among industrialised countries. What is more, in comparison to the other 'Tiger' economies, Singapore has held on to the overall productivist welfare ideology – although Singapore might currently be going through fundamental welfare reform as well, as I argue in chapter 6.

But there also exist significant social pressures towards conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare as I show next. These pressures are the result of *fragmentation* within the provision of social services where the state is offering different services to Singaporeans according to their ability and willingness to pay. I argue that the felt need for income creation and dependence on the state's functions of promoting growth and income opportunities is exacerbated by these social pressures for conspicuous consumption.

5.1.2 Conspicuous consumption of housing and healthcare

Advantages and disadvantages of universal vs. targeted or means-tested welfare support are hotly debated. One contention is that targeted or means-tested social provisions create stigma while universalistic programmes can contribute to nation-building. But such positive effects of universalism can be threatened by fragmentation, “where the provision of social services varies in access and generosity across groups of people or where some groups have access to high quality private services” (Sánchez-Ancochea and Martínez Franzoni, 2014:16). Fragmentation of the quality and quantity of services provided can be the result of policy design (segmentation) or marketization. In the latter case, the existence of private providers “gives rise to more socially stratified service consumption” (Agartan, 2012:469). Even universal provision of social services may thus not be conducive to the formation of cross-class alliances and cooperation if fragmentation is pervasive.

Singapore’s public housing and healthcare programmes are fragmented by policy design and some degree of marketization. The lower income groups can choose to buy smaller and cheaper HDB-flats or elect to stay in less luxurious hospital wards. The level of services and subsidies thus differs according to Singaporeans’ consumption choices. As Teo (2011) suggests, navigating these fragmented systems with all their consumption options has become a universal way of negotiating state practices in Singapore (chapter 7). But as I show now, fragmentation has also created conspicuous consumption pressures. I argue that social pressures towards conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare can re-enforced a (felt) need for gainful employment, and therefore the felt dependence on the State imagined as hyper-rational economic actor.

'It is all laid out for you': Common experiences of fragmentation

With more than 80% of Singaporeans being HDB-flat resident-owners, the consumption of public housing is a central aspect of life in Singapore. Referring to the process of jointly applying for the purchase of an HDB-housing flat when entering wedlock, one interviewee thus explained that

the route is laid out for Singaporeans. You find your wife, you move out from [your parents'] home, you buy your HDB-flat together, you have your own children. That's what living in Singapore is about. It is all laid out for you.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 49 years old, male, Indian)

The joke that Singaporeans propose to their future spouse by asking if they want to apply for an HDB-flat together was made by several interviewees. That the joke is apparently well-known enough to have made it into the Singapore literature (Teo, 2011:1) further highlights the centrality that HDB-housing consumption has for Singaporeans.

However, and despite its near universality, the public housing system is fragmented. Behind the HDB-flat facades that appear 'cloned' or 'homogenous' to the uninitiated observer lie different flat categories, mostly reaching from 3- to 5-room units and a few smaller rental flats (Chew, 2012:323-324; Chua, 1997:138). According to a real-estate agent interviewed, the location and age of the HDB-housing estate, number of rooms in the flat, floor level, and even where the flat is located on the common corridor influence the desirability and sales price of each HDB-flat. Apart from this fragmentation through segmentation of the public housing market, approximately 15% of the housing

supply is provided by private developers (Wang, 2012:369). This introduces further fragmentation through marketisation of housing provision in the Singapore context. Private housing in the form of condominiums and single-detached properties generally represents the upper end of the housing market.

The situation in healthcare is similar in the sense that coverage is broad but segmented and marketised by virtue of the existence of private providers in addition to the (indirectly) state-owned hospitals. Through state-owned hospitals, the state is the major provider of inpatient care while also providing some outpatient care through polyclinics (Barr, 2008:399; Chiu et al., 2012). Segmentation of service provision within public hospitals is introduced through a tiered hospital ward system where patients self-select into four different ward categories; in increasing order of subsidization namely 'A', 'B1', 'B2', and 'C'. The government maintains that all patients, receive the same quality of clinical care regardless of ward categories (Lim, 2004a:87). But this seems at least questionable.

At one end of the spectrum, prices in 'C-class' wards are approximately 80% subsidized; patients share a room with seven others; there is no air-conditioning, and most importantly, there is no continuity (or choice) with regard to the doctor(s) treating a patient. At the other end of the spectrum, patients in 'A-class' wards receive no subsidies, have a single room, have air-conditioning and other amenities, and can choose the doctor they want to be treated by. The 'B-class' ward types are positioned between the other two alternatives with lower subsidization rates than the 'C-class' wards but more comfort (Singapore General Hospital, 2015; Lim, 2004b:87).

Interviewees thus often talked in terms of 'us' and 'them' when it comes to selecting appropriate options in healthcare and housing for the middle class and upper

class, respectively. As I argue now, such comparisons between consumption choices under fragmented social service provision has produced pressures for conspicuous consumption.

Social pressures towards conspicuous consumption

The fragmented public housing and healthcare systems thus create a clear basis for comparing peoples' consumption choices. Here even those Singaporeans going the 'private route' are able to make exact comparisons. For one, because the upper segment of the public housing market represented by flagship projects such as the 'Pinnacle@Duxton' is comparative to options that private housing providers have to offer (Wang, 2012). The upper class is thus turned into potential buyers of HDB-flats. For another, many private housing owners have previously lived in HDB-flats and have only 'upgraded' to a private flat later in life (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:279).

Similarly, in healthcare provision the state competes with the private sector at the upper end of healthcare delivery by offering 'A' class hospital wards. This means that at least some of Singapore's most wealthy are consuming public healthcare, even if they switch between private and (unsubsidised) public healthcare options depending on their preferences and healthcare needs.

Such consumption comparisons are not only made between 'private' and 'public', but also within the public system itself. Within the HDB-housing system individuals' income level and personal success is easily discernible from the flat size and its location in Singapore – for instance the upmarket districts numbered 9, 10, or 11. These districts are

centrally located and include the posh shopping area around Orchard Road, as well as the Holland Village, Bukit Timah, and River Valley areas featuring expensive housing.

Further pointing towards the deep social significance that choosing a certain housing option has, informants applied 'category' not just to the flat itself but by saying "your category" or "the category you are" extend it to the unit's resident-owners: *being* a 3, 4, or '5-room category' or living in districts 9, 10, or 11 has as much to do with one's income as with one's social standing. One's 'category' reveals one's economic and social success, as well as the aptness with which one manages one's assets, allowing 'upgrading' from a smaller to a larger HDB-flat or even into private housing.

Similar social pressure for consuming higher quality options were observable in respect to healthcare. Especially in group interview situations my informants asked each other about what hospital ward category to choose while discussing the ins-and-outs of the different options. Interviewee Mr Chin explained what it takes to withstand conspicuous consumption pressures and go to a public rather than private clinic:

You really need to have time for this and you sit together with folks like myself, wearing like this [interviewee points towards the absence of branding on his polo-shirt], nobody walking down the road with a Prada bag. Just plastic bag. Some people, especially wealthier ones are not comfortable [with that]. They are ashamed; they need the Ritz Carlton treatment.

(Private housing owner, 64 years old, male, Chinese)

Similar comparisons came up in numerous interviews where hospital stays in the different ward categories were likened to flying *Lufthansa* Business Class compared to *Ryan Air* economy class. Another interviewee explained that she likes to stay in an 'A-class' ward or go to the 'Gleneagles' private hospital: "it's like the difference between being

served by a gourmet cook and being served in a hawker centre.” As came out in the group interviews and as Mr Chin points out, especially better-off Singaporeans with similarly well-endowed friends and social connections find it difficult to opt for the subsidised route due to pressures to engage in conspicuous consumption practices.

Beyond healthcare and housing, additional success signifiers are weekends of conspicuous consumption in the country's myriad malls and car ownership. For instance, when showing me around the neighbourhood in HDB-new towns, informants sometimes pointed to the make and model of cars parked under and around the HDB-blocks. They thus distinguished between housing estates with more wealthy residents and bigger flats from ones with small flats elsewhere. Besides homeownership, being able to afford one's own car is an important part of attaining the 'Singapore Dream' (Chua, 2000:53).

These consumption preferences translate into considerable social pressure to direct one's private undertakings towards material and monetary success, and making this success visible. On the flipside, some of my interviewees experienced fear of 'losing face' in the case of job loss that would make them unable to pay housing-loan instalments. This would lead to an equally visible relegation to cheap 1 or 2-room rental HDB-housing. Hopeless over-leveraging and mass loan-default that could derail the economy has so far been successfully pre-empted by state-sponsored financial institutions like DBS and the HDB's loan regulations.

In light of demand-induced increases of housing prices and concurrently rising debt ratios, these regulations were tightened during fieldwork in 2013 as part of an overall 'market cooling' strategy (The Straits Times, 2013 August 28). Banks refuse to grant cheap housing-loans more than twice to any particular person (Vasoo and Lee,

2001:279). This means that repeated default on housing loans effectively bars Singaporeans from ever purchasing an HDB-flat again. Thus, what Mrs Lum perceived as “falling through the cracks” by not according to the PAP-State’s ideal of a gainfully employed, internationally competitive, and heterosexually married individual is economically and socially penalised. Fieldwork data suggests that the influence of these pressures and ensuing dependencies on the State to promote growth and employment options is difficult to escape even for those who want to.

Mrs and Mr Lim, for instance expressed annoyance about the HDB-flat “upgrading craze”, and especially those coveting a private-housing flat. Still feeling the need to justify ‘only’ living in a 5-room HDB-flat herself, Mrs Lim spoke at length about the financial disadvantages of buying private housing like the lack of support from the HDB. She and her husband thus saw private housing as wasteful while rather taking “all the help we can get” from the HDB and buying a flat with higher capital gains after the subsidised purchase.

For Mrs and Mr Lim, HDB-housing was thus cast mainly as financial asset where investment produces winners and losers in accordance with their owners’ prudence and capability. Denying participating in the housing market for its social significance made Mrs and Mr Lim no less driven to pursue productive activities and to justify their choice of housing consumption. In this way, and much like Mr Lam they are thus dependent on the PAP-state to advance the economy and on the HDB’s housing subsidies for economic self-realisation but without blaming the State for producing the conditions under which the need for income generation emerges. This ‘help’ by the PAP-state for Singaporeans to buy housing and healthcare is not a form of social welfareism: housing subsidies can

only be realised by Singaporeans who prevailed on the (international) labour market, are gainfully employed, and live a productive life.

Self-financing and conspicuous consumption

To sum up this section's argument, the public housing and healthcare programmes have created social and economic circumstances that fuel citizens' continued need for income and capital growth. With housing almost monopolistically supplied by the HDB and the rental market almost eliminated by the state, home-ownership has been thrust upon the population including the low-income groups. Housing mortgages that often run up to 30 years (Jones, 2012:324) uphold the need for HDB-flat resident-owners to generate income through steady employment. The healthcare financing model has a similar effect. It relies on employment-based benefits in the form of Medisave and MediShield and requires patients to make significant out-of-pocket payments, forcing them to hold employment into old age.

That the need for Singaporeans to generate income is institutionalised *through social policy* only appears ironic from a 'Western' welfare-state perspective. Welfare states "influence the access to and the incidence of adequate and secure livelihoods and income" (Mkandawire, 2005:1) mainly through redistributive and protective social policy (Wood and Gough, 2006:1696). In contrast, Singapore and other (South)-East Asian countries are said to have (had) 'productivist' welfare regimes where social policy is subordinated to economic or industrial objectives (Holliday, 2000). Welfare entitlements are thus employment-based, or are in other ways conducive to employment as is the case with educational provisions or vocational training. "Instead of increasing the degree of

decommodification” (Choi, 2012), social policy thus pursues “the strategy of ‘commodification plus state regulation’ in welfare provision” (Aspalter, 2011:741) to increase or uphold the competitiveness of the local workforce (section 2.3).

As I have argued, the felt *need* for the PAP-state to promote growth and jobs is thus not least the outcome of self-financing requirements of public housing and healthcare. Such requirements and welfare austerity are justified through the national narrative that preaches Singapore’s economic dependence on inward FDI and the fragility of the economy if international firms take their business elsewhere. To remain competitive, Singaporeans are told, the population has to remain resilient and social spending low. However, as argued earlier, it is not obvious why Singaporeans who have grown up and lived in relative prosperity should believe this narrative. Societies are expected to abandon such ‘survivalist’ values as they become wealthier (section 2.1). It is thus important to pause and suggest why this national narrative and justification of welfare austerity did not ring hollow for interviewees who imagined the State as hyper-rational economic actor. I do so below.

5.2 Interlude: Lived experiences of economic globalisation

According to the national narrative, tight integration into the global economy represents Singapore’s biggest strength and potentially ruinous vulnerability (section 1.1). Future prosperity and Singapore’s status as global and regional hub is said to be never secure. The state warns Singaporeans that “Asian cities are modernising rapidly, and catching up on us” (National Population and Talent Division, 2013:2) so that “competition among cities for talent and investment becomes more intense” (Ministry of Trade and Industry,

2012:2). Singaporeans are thus “not take our low unemployment rate for granted” (National Population and Talent Division, 2013:2). And the media construes higher unemployment rates in European countries as a “cautionary tale of what might happen” under generous welfare regimes that represent a fiscal burden on the state (The Straits Times, 2013 August 30).

Deputy Prime Minister Shanmugaratnam thus argues that the function of social policy is to provide “support for personal responsibility”, rather than “take over personal responsibility or community responsibility” (Shanmugaratnam, 2015). While the literature takes for granted that Singapore citizens buy into this narrative and productivist ideology, I argued that there is little reason to do so (section 1.2). For if ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2008:36), ideology requires constant reinforcement, reiteration, and legitimation (section 2.1). Perceived reality must be roughly congruent with ideological state discourse if the latter is not to degenerate into farce in the eyes of citizens. Based on fieldwork data, this short ‘interlude’ proposes that the survivalist national narrative serving as justification for welfare austerity was part of lived reality for interviewees whose views are analysed in this chapter.

Views ‘of’ and ‘on’ economic globalisation

The role that international capital and labour plays in propping up Singapore’s economy is impossible to overlook for anyone spending some time in the small island-nation. Rising above the sea of public housing blocks (*image 5*), the CBD with its gleaming skyscrapers and the logos of international corporations adorning them is a constant feature of the

cityscape. So are the myriad of American, European, and Asian English accents that one picks up when traversing the streets of central Singapore.



Image 5: public housing blocks with CBD in the background

Other reminders of Singapore's integration into international streams of capital and labour are equally prevalent. Singapore's Changi Airport – supposedly the best airport in the world (Skytrax, 2016) – stands for the country's economic reliance on foreign 'talent' and capital (section 5.3). The container port is the world's second biggest (Forbes, 2017) and dominates large sections of the island's coast line. And the Causeway bridge that tethers Singapore to Malaysia and regional economies brings a daily ebb and flow of transitory labourers. By now, foreign workers make up almost a third of Singapore's population (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:6). Daily reminders of Singapore's economic reliance on transitory labour, international capital, and Singapore's constant struggle to preserve its competitive edge over its regional and global rivals are thus virtually inescapable.

As Lee Hsien Loong encouraged the nation in a recent speech, Singaporeans are thus to 'outsmart the competition' by becoming more competitive than their rivals:

the answer is educate yourself for the new world. Learn to control the computers and robots, do not get replaced by them. We have got to keep upgrading ourselves, out-think and outsmart the competition and be smart enough to take advantage of the technology (Lee, 2012).

In line with this narrative and daily lived reality, some interviewees thus explicitly tied the need for personal and national competitiveness together. For instance, as one interviewee said,

this is not Malaysia where people have oil and land; we are just people on a tiny speck [of land]. I don't do new things and next time you [sic.] come here and take my job. And if Singapore is not good, no one will even come and there will not be any work for most people at all. So how can we stand still, how can I stand still?

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 34 years old, female, Chinese)

This salience of Singapore's high degree of embeddedness in international streams of capital and labour thus shaped the lens through which the State and Singapore's economy was seen. The survivalist national narrative where prosperity is never secure is thus experienced and becomes daily lived reality. As one of my interviewees put it,

we are only a city; no hinterland. How can we ever forget [that]? Just go on the MRT and you see people from all over. I bet you can't say who is Singaporean and who is not. Now even Singaporeans can't say anymore. So, Singapore is global, people are global, jobs are global.

(Living in parents' 5-room flat, 26 years old, female, Chinese)

As I discuss in the following chapters, the influx of foreign workers is a contentiously discussed subject in Singapore. But interviewees whose image of the State is analysed here regarded foreign workers as economically necessary even if leading to intensifying competition for employment in Singapore. That is, Singapore must attract foreign workers, while for Singaporeans, “economic security is fragile; they must either work harder to get ahead of the pack or be left behind; they must keep on climbing the slope or slide down” (Brown, 1998:94).

Confluence of narrative and lived experience

The latter interviewee quoted above saying that ‘jobs are global’ links to the second claim I want to make in this ‘interlude’: the supposed national struggle for economic relevance in the face of relentless international competition is mirrored and *normalised on the individual level*. To the extent that this economic-survivalist condition is subjectively internalised, this belief is not merely ideological, that is, a *modus vivendi* to interpret the real conditions of existence. Instead, internalising the view of a world where every country, every city, and every person has to fend for herself, “there is no mask to lift; what the individual hold[s] on to is a ‘truth’ as he or she has come to know it” (Liow, 2011:242).

There is thus a confluence between the survivalist national narrative that preaches economic vulnerability and the need to contain welfare spending on the one hand, and (real) daily lived experience on the other hand. Interviewees quoted here thus refrained from questioning the productivist welfare policy, including the need for welfare austerity in the name of economic competitiveness. For instance, one interviewee argued that

if they put too much money in our healthcare [system] it would be abused like in Britain, like people who don't really need healthcare or they don't need [it] as badly, they clog up the waiting space because it is subsidised and [that] costs the state and everyone else. [...] More taxes [are] bad for businesses and we need business here.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 47 years old, male, Chinese)

And with regard to the provision of social security, another interviewee suggested that,

it's not like PAP doesn't want to [provide welfare]. But if we have more welfare and so on, why would we even work? [...] Why wouldn't I close the shop and go on holidays maybe 3 times a year, why would you try hard at work? Can you imagine what Singapore will look like if we all slack off? Either all closed down because all the firms leave [Singapore], or only the foreigners, the Indians and the [mainland] Chinese would be working because they don't have much. But the PAP knows this and so it doesn't just give money to us. Keeps us hungry.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 38 years old, male, Chinese)

Uniting these quotes is, on the one hand a rather dim view of human nature where citizens are selfish and prone to overburden the state by making excessive use of welfare provisions if given the opportunity. And on the other, that the state must prevent this behaviour through institutional arrangements for the good of Singapore and all its residents. Failing to do so would hurt Singapore's globally integrated economy and the economic wellbeing of all Singaporeans.

To sum up, this short interlude suggested that the nation's alleged economic vulnerability to the ebbs and flows of international (human and financial) capital was subjectively normalised. On the one hand, this prevented interviewees whose image of the State is discussed here from criticising the welfare austerity inscribed in the productivist social policy model. On the other, it makes the State appear as 'helping' when providing things like skills upgrading programmes or securing economic prosperity through industrial policy (discussed below).

To pre-empt misunderstanding, it is worth emphasising that one need not hold that the PAP-state, acting with single intention over the many years of its rule, planned and carefully orchestrated the emergence of these perceptions. Indeed, the bifurcated opinions about – and reactions to – the nation's global economic integration and ensuing effects on Singaporeans' lives (discussed in chapters 6 and 7) suggest the opposite. In any case, my main concern is not to prove intentionality but to provide an account for why Singaporeans by and large continue to acquiesce to the PAP-state.

5.3 Producing the image of the 'State' as hyper-rational economic actor

In this chapter I have so far suggested why the survivalist national narrative continued to hold some credence among interviewees and proposed that social policy has produced the felt need for the state to promote income growth. To complete the argument, this section shows how the image of Singapore's State as hyper-rational economic actor emerges. I argue that the image is conjured, on the one hand, by continued industrial policy, GLC ownership, and strategic infrastructure projects. And on the other hand, by

the PAP-state's direct involvement in promoting Singaporeans' employability and financial interests through social policy. The point is not that the PAP-state intervenes in the economy and society 'more' than other states do. But the PAP-state's developmental roles are highly salient for Singaporeans, thus contributing to the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor.

I have analysed Singapore's industrial policy regime in some detail earlier (section 4.1). To make the argument about the state's salience in section 5.3.1 below, I therefore focus less on discussing industrial policy itself, and more on the State image conjured by the PAP-state's economic interventions. I also discuss the PAP-state's infrastructure projects that are to help attract foreign capital and labour as part of Singapore's FDI-dependent industrial policy strategy. I then move on to how social policy reinforces the image of Singapore's State as hyper-rational economic actor that promotes opportunities for Singaporeans to generate income in section 5.3.2.

5.3.1 Industrial policy and infrastructure: Images of the hyper-rational 'State'

The PAP-state's contemporary forms of intervention in the economy are sometimes thought to be moving away from 'developmental' towards more '(neo)liberal' ones (chapter 4). The shift from a plan-rational relation between state and economy towards a more regulatory, market-rational one is sometimes regarded as a 'roll back' of the state per se (Hill et al., 2012:7-18). This is a misconception as the 'roll-back' of one kind of state is accompanied by the 'roll-out' of other types of state interventions (Brenner, 2004:200).

Nonetheless, by taking on regulatory rather than directive roles, states can thus *appear* to be 'retreating'. Or, in my terms, the *'State' is seen* as retreating although the

'state' is merely reconfiguring its roles in economy and society. In the following I propose that the opposite is the case in Singapore with regard to the state's economic functions. The image of Singapore's State as hyper-rational economic actor emerges from the *salience* of industrial policy and infrastructure projects pursued in the name of growth promotion. In the following, I focus on these two areas of state interventions in turn.

The salience of industrial policy and GLCs

The PAP-state is continuing to direct the national economy towards strategic industries and higher value-added activities. This includes the promotion of the bio- and medical technology industries, as well as microchip production in the electronics industry. Industrial parks and factories are constructed by statutory boards like JTC and state-linked corporations. Foreign MNCs active in the promoted industries are then to set up operations in Singapore, while the state-owned media communicates the latest initiatives to the public (section 4.1).

Fieldwork data suggests that the state's role in directing the national economy towards industrial goals is highly visible for Singaporeans. One prominent effect of this was that interviewees were extremely aware of the PAP-state's economic functions and linked Singapore's economic success to the PAP-state. Some even found it difficult to imagine continued national prosperity without the PAP-state strategically strengthening key industries and industrial activities. If "Singaporeans have long equated the ruling party with the country" (Vadaketh, 2014b:190), the belief was that if the former fails, the latter itself is in peril.

For instance, Mr Leow, a 38-year-old owner of a 4-room HDB-flat, proposed that the PAP-state remains crucial for Singapore's economic future, "because they help us get ahead; we do what our [geographic] neighbours cannot." Variations of Mr Leow's view on the PAP-state's role of promoting growth through industrial policy came up time and again in interviews conducted during fieldwork. As another interviewee put it,

If the state does not make the economy grow and [it] is stagnant, Singapore will not survive. If we are not relevant [...] Singapore will disappear from the face of the map. So, the PAP must make sure – get strong firms and strong people to Singapore.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 39 years old, female, Chinese)

With a more optimistic view of the economy and the PAP-state's functions within it, another research participant in her late sixties who lived in a 4-room HDB-flat suggested that the PAP-state "is smart. It knows Singapore's strengths and weaknesses and adjusts the economy [...] It bullet-proofs us [economically]." And explicitly making reference to the PAP-state's FDI-dependent industrial policy regime, another interviewee suggested

[the PAP is] bringing a lot of [foreign] companies here. Like just yesterday I read in the newspaper about this 'bio[polis]' complex. I actually go past it sometimes when I take the MRT.¹⁵ Now I know what it is. [...] Often, I complain about these stories in the newspaper, [because] we always had these companies coming. We need to thank the PAP [for that]. So why [it] is 'news' I don't know but at least this time I learned something about this 'bio[polis]'.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 59 years old, male, Chinese)

¹⁵ Mass Rapid Transit – Singapore's metro system

Variouly referred to as 'bullet-proofing' Singapore and being able to attract FDI to the country, these interviewees thus regarded the State as capable economic actor, while often suggesting that Singapore's prosperity depended on it. The image is conjured by the presence of foreign capital, developmental success, and the PAP-state regularly claiming credit for this success.

While the interviewees quoted mostly pointed towards the attraction of FDI, other informants highlighted the centrality of the GLCs for Singapore's continued prosperity. As argued in the previous chapter, the privatisation of the GLCs has been widely exaggerated. The significance of GLCs to Singapore's economic future and jobs is emphasised by Temasek's stated mission: "to grow GLCs into globally competitive enterprises that are anchored in Singapore [where] Temasek should compel GLCs to scale up their core competencies to build global businesses" (Boyd et al., 2005:180).

Interviewees tended to be aware of the prominent role that PAP-members and (former) civil-servants play in the running of the GLCs. In the eyes of interviewees, and as one informant put it, GLCs were thus part of the PAP-state:

They are mainly private but on the board of directors – all government people. On the front, you see nothing, lah, but they are always at the back. But never mind, as Singaporeans we don't care because it's not like [in] Indonesia where they run off with the money.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 56 years old, male, Malay)

Some interviewees, including leaders of the political opposition, did lament the connection between state and supposedly private businesses. However, the overall opinion

among all interviewees was to the contrary. This might have been the case because public allegations of corruption are harshly and swiftly punished (Rajah, 2012). More likely, however, the GLCs' commercial performance was seen as satisfactory by interviewees who saw the State as hyper-rational economic actor. Even if consisting of PAP-trustees, company management was regarded as competent and trustworthy enough: they do not 'run off with the money' as quoted above.

With few exceptions, interviewees thus found little at fault with the assimilation of GLCs into the PAP-state given the latter's track-record of securing Singapore's economic success. This track-record of the state's economic functions and successes is regularly communicated to Singaporeans while the PAP-state warns that prosperity is always fragile (section 5.2). Perhaps similarly important for establishing the state's economic relevance and successful track record in the eyes of the population, the PAP-state has been pursuing major infrastructure projects. As I show now, such 'flagship' projects are meant to elevate Singapore's attractiveness to international capital, but they also stand as monuments to the state's economic success that is on constant display.

The 'State', developmental success, and the cityscape

Singapore's economy and industrial policy heavily rely on the inflow of international capital and foreign workers (chapter 4). The PAP-state has thus pursued a number of infrastructure projects "aimed at transforming the local urban environment to attract regional head-quarters of companies" (Parsa et al, 2003:117).

The most recent of these projects is an extension of Singapore's Changi Airport. As PM Lee emphasised in his 2013 National Day Rally speech, Changi Airport is crucial for

Singapore's international image as 'global city' and business hub: Changi Airport "is how the world comes to Singapore and how Singaporeans connect with the world. It is why we thrive as an international hub for business, for trade, for tourism" (Lee, 2013). In view of (South)-East-Asian cities competing to attract international capital, Lee then continued to explicitly link Changi and Singapore's economic future:

We are the hub. Why? Because they are not Changi Airport! That makes a difference. Now the question is: Do we want to stay this vibrant hub of South-east Asia or do we want to let somebody take over our position, our business and our jobs? That is our choice. Do we want to let somebody else eat our cheese?" (ibid.)

The PAP-state is thus investing heavily to preserve Changi's internationally leading position. To increase capacity, additional runways are currently being built (The Straits Times, 2015 December 21) while the construction of Changi's S\$1.7 billion 'Jewel' building complex is to commence in 2018. 'Changi Jewel' will feature "a waterfall as high as five storeys within a lush indoor garden", is to "offer travellers a stunning welcome", and incorporate space for holding international conferences and conventions (The Straits Times, 2013 August 20).

Besides Changi, the PAP-state has a history of investing in 'show-case' projects to develop Singapore's global city brand (Olds and Yeung, 2004; Han, 2005) and raise the country's attractiveness to international capital and 'talent'. These projects include the iconic 'Marina Bay Sands' hotel and casino, the recently completed 'Gardens by the Bay', and the 'ThePinnacle@Duxton' flagship public housing project. Located at the edge of

the central business district (CBD), the 'Pinnacle' consists of seven 50-storey towers that are connected with 'sky garden' bridges (*image 6*).

Departing from the concrete slab design that dominates most HDB-housing built to date, the 'Pinnacle' provides public housing options for the young internationally mobile creative class (Wang, 2012:375). Such re-development of much of the downtown area into a modern central business district complete with adjacent shopping districts and residential areas was made possible by decades of compulsory land acquisition by the state (Han, 2005:74).



Image 6: The Pinnacle@Duxton public housing complex with colonial era shop houses in the foreground

More recently, the state's use of authoritarian power in the name of the economy and the creation of such 'show-case projects' is encapsulated in the 2010 opening of the Marina Bay Sands Casino. The casino was opened "in spite of a longstanding [gambling] ban and the loud protests of Singaporeans" fearing the social ills associated with gambling (Tan, 2012b:85). In an interview with 'National Geographic', Lee Kuan Yew stated:

I guess, supposing I had not intervened in the casino debate, the religious groups would [have] fought tooth and nail to stop it [...] so I stood up and said 'look, I understand the views, I was of the same view but I'll tell you the reason why I have changed my mind' and that had a calming effect because if you don't do this, you are not going to be part of the modern world. Either you accept that this is part of today's globalized world and you have F1¹⁶ and all this, glitzy events, closed roads, light up the city and so on, or you are out of business. And in Singapore, if you are out of business, you are out of food (Today, 2010 January 1).

Fitting the long-running survivalist national narrative, Lee's argument for opening the casino was thus one of economic necessity: in a globally integrated world where cities and countries compete to attract business and investment, Singapore cannot afford to fall behind. Being sensitive to moral considerations is a luxury Singapore cannot afford if it is to remain 'relevant'. And according to the PAP-state's national narrative, relevance is required for survival (section 1.1).

Singapore is of course not alone in its efforts of developing flagship projects to raise its international profile and underpin its status as a 'global city' and business hub (Sassen, 2005). Examples of similar projects abound in the global city literature and include diverse projects like the 'London Eye' and the 'World Trade Centre' in established global cities, as well as various sky scrapers like the 'Petronas Towers' in aspiring ones (Olds and Yeung, 2004). Other states thus pursue similar strategies.

¹⁶ Formula 1 – a reference to the yearly Formula 1 race held in downtown Singapore and in the wake of which large sections of the roads in the CBD are closed for racing.

But the congruence between nation and city-scape together with the incorporation of the public housing programme into the 'global city' agenda make the Singapore case unique. The whole country rather than only the capital or a specific region is witnessing the PAP-state sponsored landmark projects first hand and on a daily basis. These projects can thus directly affect *all* Singaporeans' imaginations of the State. Reflecting these experiences and image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor thus conjured, one interviewee stated

ok let me tell you how I feel about Singapore because I grew up here, 60 years ago in a slum, no running water, no electricity, you had to go outside to an outhouse if you wanted to use the toilet. And now look at the [HDB] housing and the skyscrapers in CBD. That's what they have done for us and so I never complain about their policies and all that. They are smart. You go to any aunty in my generation and she will tell you the same.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 68 years old, female, Chinese)

And comparing the role of the state in Singapore with that of Hong Kong, a retired sales director at an IT firm argued

People can see the PAP working and building for the whole nation here. But Hong Kong is different. Because Hong Kong always had a very strong interest or bias for the [local] business owners. If business owners need land or want to do something then public policy dictates that government follows. But here the PAP decides what is good for the people, where to have HDB, where to have CBD, where to have what building. [...] I mean they also use this as a strategy to generate votes saying 'look we have this new 'Gardens by the Bay' so everybody knows what they have done.

(Private housing owner, 74 years old, male, Chinese)

Emerging from the accounts given by interviewees, the state's projects of advancing Singapore's infrastructure and built environment have thus not gone by unnoticed. Even if not always conflict free, the whole nation is witnessing the PAP-state sponsored developments first hand and on a daily basis, shaping the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor. Mitchell (1991) argued that public and government buildings represent 'every day forms' of the state through which images of the 'State' as standing over and above citizens emerge (section 2.2).

In Singapore, the image is furthered by the *entire built environment* that appears to be carefully curated for efficiency and prosperity. Elevating the city's cosmopolitan character, show-piece projects help to secure Singapore's economic future. At the same time, the PAP-state's track record of delivering wealth to the nation through similarly visible industrial policy interventions is put on permanent display for all to see. Subjectively felt dependencies on the State imagined as hyper-rational economic actor are thus more easily evoked. Focussing on the individual level rather than the economy as a whole, the following section suggests that several aspects of the social policy regime also further that image of the State.

5.3.2 Social policy: Promoting Singaporeans' employability and financial interests

In the following, I focus on state provision of (i) education and vocational training, (ii) public housing as a productive input, and (iii) the state's management of the housing market to secure retirement incomes. I argue that with respect to all three, the state fulfils the function of 'helping Singaporeans to help themselves' through social policy but

without giving up the productivist welfare ideology. The state thus helps Singaporeans to be successful on Singapore's increasingly competitive job market and to take care of their own welfare in retirement. I show that social policy thus adds to, and reinforces, the image of the State as hyper-rational in its economic functions.

Skills upgrading and education

The PAP-state has been extensively involved in the provision of education and vocational training programmes starting from the 1960s (section 4.3). Such training was initially under the purview of the EDB and focussed on basic technical and English language skills so that Singaporeans could work for incoming MNCs (Kuruville and Chua, 2000:20). Today, 'skills-upgrading programmes' are provided by the Work Development Authority (WDA) and are to promote citizens' employability in the face of technological change and increased competition from foreign labour in Singapore.

According to the WDA's website, taking part in skills upgrading programmes helps Singaporeans to remain "competitive and employable in today's fast-changing workplace" (Work Development Authority, 2012). And as Lee (quoted earlier) put it in his 2012 National Day Rally speech, "educate yourself for the new world. Learn to control the computers and robots, do not get replaced by them" (Lee, 2012).

The provision of skills upgrading programmes is thus widely advertised by the state. For instance, *The Straits Times* prominently depicted a photo of the millionths participant of the skills upgrading programmes. The woman in question, Madam Bg, was "presented with a giant certificate" to celebrate and publicise the occasion (*The Straits Times*, 2013 August 16). By providing opportunities for life-long learning of relevant skills

the PAP-state thus takes up the role of 'helping Singaporeans help themselves' instead of providing services like unemployment insurance.

Even in absence of available data pertaining to how successful these programmes are in ensuring Singaporeans' competitiveness on the job market, several interviewees regarded the education and skills upgrading programmes as vitally important. This was especially the case for parents who lauded upcoming reforms in the education system that would focus more on transferrable skills. Almost like repeating a slogan, four of my interviewees suggested that the education system will finally resemble "a meritocracy of skill rather than a meritocracy of grades". More so than 'simple education', the transferable skills, it was hoped, would help their children to make a living.

Public housing as productive input

The role of public housing provision in helping Singaporeans in the quest for vocational success is perhaps less obvious. As shown earlier, subsidised HDB-housing provision allows Singapore's labour force to work for relatively lower wages compared to Hong Kong or other major cities (section 4.3). But interviewees emphasised that HDB-housing also serves as productive input for Singaporeans.

As Pugh (1984) argues, HDB-housing not only provides shelter but is "a place of economic work for housewives and househusbands [and] a place related to work in other places, by virtue of study, 'homework' and various supports for trade and industry" (Pugh, 1984:25). In another study, Pugh (1989) suggests that before public housing pro-

vision was in full swing, poverty and dilapidated housing conditions “led to severe constraints on the chances of [...] children, who prematurely left the education system to take low-paid jobs” (Pugh, 1989:851).

Especially older interviewees were keenly aware that having access to (relatively) affordable public housing had increased their own and their children’s chances in life. This may seem a trite point for observers from countries where space is less scarce than in Singapore or where living in overcrowded dilapidated housing is not within living memory. In Singapore, the city-centre, myriad coffee shops, and libraries are constantly crowded with young professionals and students using every bit of available space to study, work, or socialise. And older interviewees remembered the days of noisy living conditions without reliable water or power supply. They felt that these conditions where housework was laborious and time consuming would not allow effective participation in Singapore’s fast-moving labour market of today. As Mr Liao, a father of two put it,

in the end life [in Singapore] is a struggle to stay ahead. And how can you do that if there is no home for you and your family. How can your children do that? So, the PAP made sure that if you work you have a home. And if you have a home you have to work [for it], understand?

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 65 years old, male, Malay)

As I argued in section 5.1, ‘having to work [for it]’ – to pay off one’s housing mortgage – is an underlying reason for which the promotion of economic progress and jobs continues to matter so much to many Singaporeans. For the current section, Mr Liao’s quote exemplifies the significance attributed to having access to public housing as means of succeeding on Singapore’s increasingly globalised labour market.

Protecting home values and retirement self-funding

Besides providing skills upgrading programmes and public housing as 'productive input', the PAP-state also attempts to help Singaporeans take care of their own retirement through the public housing system. The state does so by protecting the (relative) values of HDB-flats and making selling one's HDB-flat easier. The PAP-state thus attempts to ensure the availability of retirement income for (working) citizens but without incurring costs itself.

Managing the *relative* price developments of HDB-flats matters because it influences Singaporeans' ability to 'downsize' from a larger flat to a smaller one when reaching retirement age. Such 'downsizing' 'unlocks' some of the original flat's asset value and thus contributes to the retiree's retirement income. Drawing attention to the importance of relative price developments of different flats, 52-year-old Ms Ng who lived in a 5-room HDB-flat pointed out, "If my flat goes up more and where you live [the price] goes down, it means what? Means I can sell and get money. And if my flat goes down? Means I'm stuck".

The PAP-state is able to exert significant control over the price development of HDB-flats through a host of policy measures. These include the re-development and retrofitting of older housing estates with new amenities, or providing additional public transport to specific residential areas (Eng et al., 1997). One way of interpreting this continued state influence over home values is to see it as an authoritarian control method. Indeed, the PAP does openly claim to provide more upgrading and infrastructure development for electoral constituencies supporting the PAP in elections (chapter 8). A more benign interpretation favoured by interviewees imagining the State as hyper-rational

economic actor was that the PAP-state is (also) keeping relative price developments in check, thereby protecting citizens' investments in their HDB-flats.

But not all retirees live in large enough HDB-flats to make such 'downsizing' possible. In the absence of an affordable rental market this can leave the elderly 'asset-rich but cash poor' (Teo et al., 2006). The HDB has thus introduced schemes that allow HDB-flat owners to 'unlock' the HDB-flat's asset value without having to sell their flat on the resale market. For instance, HDB-flat owners are able to return their flat to the HDB in exchange for a smaller flat to live in and a steady stream of retirement income. As a real-estate agent interviewed explained,

they start building purpose-built studio apartments for the elderly to move into; they are building two room flats, and they try to build them in what we call 'mature estates'. Basically, you sell the tail end of your current lease back to the state, the state gives you a steady state of income. And you move into the new small flat. [...] When you reach that age 65, 70, generally your children have moved out and you don't need such a big home. The idea is that you should 'right size' – they don't call it downsize anymore because it just sounds bad so they call it right sizing.

By introducing such schemes, the PAP-state thus enables Singaporeans to create an income stream for retirement. The State can be seen as 'helping Singaporeans help themselves' to secure their livelihood in retirement while avoiding to create welfare entitlements that could hurt the economy and sap Singaporeans' sense of self-responsibility.

The 'State' as hyper-rational economic actor

As I argued in this section, the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor is conjured through the PAP-state's industrial policy interventions, 'show-case' infrastructure projects, and through social policy. The state promotes citizens' employability, means of securing wealth, and enables them to protect that wealth into retirement through management of the public housing market. For conjuring this image, it is crucial that the *state* acts as quasi-monopolistic provider of social services.

To recall, in Taiwan and South Korea, housing "development has been less directed by the state and been more the outcome of the decisions of individual market actors" than in Singapore (Doling, 1999:247). In South Korea, for instance, this meant that 'chaebols' offered their workers "paternalistic perks" including educational provisions, skills upgrading courses, housing and health services (Amsden, 1989:210-213). By contrast, in Singapore quasi-monopolistic state provision of housing, healthcare, and training that is to "raise productivity and encourage individuals to pick up new skills" (Straits Times, 27 January 2015) ties citizens to the state.

Imagined as hyper-rational economic actor that helps Singaporeans to help themselves, the State's role is thus summarised by one of my interviewees' quotes:

The fundamental core value is still meritocracy and self-sufficiency meaning that the government will create an atmosphere where it is easy for you to take care of yourself. And you do not depend on the state for your whole well-being. Meaning what, your CPF system basically uses your own money right? But the system makes it easy for you to own a place to live [in] and have healthcare from your savings.

(Private housing owner, 47 years old, male, Malay)

The overall point made in this section with regard to both economic and social policy is thus not that the PAP-state pursues a growth agenda while other states do not. As Johnson points out, “all states intervene in their economies for various reasons” (Johnson, 1999:37). The point is rather that the PAP-state’s economic functions are *extremely salient* for the small island nation’s population.

Continued industrial policy is advertised in the state-directed media; state-constructed industrial parks are integrated into the urban environment and therefore plain to see. (Indirect) ownership of the most important domestic companies is known fact and part of daily life. And various initiatives to boost national and individual competitiveness like skills-upgrading are state-provided and salient for the all-urban population. The whole infrastructure, including ‘show-piece projects’, and the public housing estates dominating the city scape are on constant public display. They make economic progress salient and easily attributable to the PAP-state. All this contributes to constructing the image of a hyper-rational State on which Singaporeans (can) rely to continue to advance national economic interests.

5.4 Conclusion: Felt dependence on the ‘State’ as hyper-rational economic actor

Interviewees whose views were analysed in this chapter insisted on the sustained necessity for the PAP-state to direct and run the economy with a firm grip. According to them, Singapore’s FDI-dependent and prosperous but fragile economy would run serious risk of collapse without the PAP-state. Accordingly, their own financial future would be in serious peril. Representative for the views of interviewees quoted in this chapter, Mrs

Ong regarded the economy as perpetually vulnerable to mismanagement by the government:

Our only resource, Christmas Island, was sold away by Lim Yew Hock.¹⁷ It was when we were very young. [...] Sold away by the opposition party. It had salt. That was the only miserable one we had and yet he sold away! So, we have zero! So is quite scary if [the economy is] in the wrong hands. So, we know what Lee Kuan Yew has done for the country.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 68 years old, female, Chinese)

This chapter has provided an account for why such views that emphasize Singapore's economic vulnerability and need for the PAP-state to manage the economy can continue to have credence. Put simply, the chapter argued that the public housing and healthcare programmes exacerbate Singaporeans' continued need for a prosperous economy and income possibilities. This turned into felt dependence on the State imagined as hyper-rational economic actor to promote growth and income opportunities for Singaporeans. This works as follows.

First, inducing Singaporeans to take 'ownership' of their health(care) and public housing flats has put significant financial pressure on Singaporeans to draw a steady income through employment. Relative welfare austerity and the importance of housing ownership as old-age security makes job loss and mortgage default disastrous for Singaporeans. Similarly, the perception that healthcare support is a 'shadowy kind of net' that one better not relies on, reinforces the need for healthcare self-financing.

¹⁷ Chief Minister of Singapore 1956-59 and political opponent of the PAP (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:27).

Second, while the state has thus practically institutionalized citizens' need to hold gainful employment, the felt urgency to do so is further exacerbated through social pressures for conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare. Here, fragmentation of the public housing and healthcare systems creates an easy basis for comparing housing and healthcare consumption choices. Singaporeans' ability to succeed on the country's increasingly competitive job market becomes highly socially significant. With reference to my informants, I argue that taken together, financial and social pressures thus continue to elevate the need for employment and income creation despite the high level of wealth already achieved. Beyond my pool of interviewees, the OSC-survey showed that 'job security' (along with 'housing' and 'healthcare') ranked as the top policy issue to be addressed by the government (REACH, 2013b).

Crucially, interviewees' everyday experiences of global economic competition and the mobility of capital and workers turned the constant fragility of the economy and income opportunities into lived-reality. On the one hand, this added credibility to the PAP-state's survivalist national narrative where prosperity is never secure. On the other, it contributed to interviewees' perception that welfare austerity is a necessary condition of existence. That is, the State was not blamed for imposing employment and financial pressures on the population by withholding welfare support.

In contrast, and given continued industrial policy, infrastructure development, and social policy programmes increasing Singaporeans' employability, the State *was seen* as crucial in securing Singapore's economic future. It was here, based on the state's economic functions and track record of delivering growth and employment opportunities that the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor emerged.

The PAP-state thus created the financial and social conditions under which Singaporeans require continued wealth creation, while the State is also seen as the only actor able to guarantee the availability of good, attainable jobs and prosperity for citizens. In light of these real and imagined economic dependencies, interviewees whose views were discussed in this chapter had no intention of challenging the PAP-state. The chapter thus provides an updated version of the economic ‘performance legitimacy’ argument (section 1.1) *as one way* in which the State can be seen as legitimate. But contrary to the literature, I have argued *how* the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor can be conjured, and *why* the state’s economic functions can continue to make the State appear legitimate in the eyes of citizens.

This chapter has thus closed the explanatory gaps present in the literature’s versions of such economic ‘performance legitimacy’ arguments. However, in the thesis’ introductory chapter I have also argued that the state’s economic functions alone do not produce a broad popular support base for the PAP at this juncture. Political and electoral developments in Singapore suggest that the provision of social support is increasingly important for regime legitimation. As elsewhere in (South)-East Asia, socio-economic developments including the rise of social inequality have thus led to “two very contradictory demands” levelled at the state: “welfare demands for the disadvantaged and productivist demands for economic competitiveness” (Choi, 2012:286-287).

The next chapter turns towards the constituency of Singaporeans who are calling on the PAP-state to provide more social protection and promote a more socially inclusive society. To be seen as legitimate, the State must be regarded as increasingly fulfilling these functions. As I show, the PAP-state has started to address these demands through

a number of social policy adjustments since the 2011 electoral backlash. Increasingly addressing calls for more 'protective' rather than (only) 'productive' interventions, the PAP-state readjusts its functions in economy and society. As the next chapter argues, the State can thus appear as legitimate also to those who hold such 'protective' welfare demands.

6. The 'State' as protector of the socially disadvantaged

This chapter turns towards the second State image that emerged as predominant from fieldwork. This second image is that of Singapore's *State as vanguard protecting socially disadvantaged citizens* by providing 'protective' welfare and building a more 'inclusive' society. Plainly, this second image contradicts the state functions (and State image) analysed in the previous chapter. In the current chapter I thus suggest how this image of the State as protector of the socially disadvantaged is conjured. And I propose how this image can make the State appear legitimate at this juncture.

Specifically, I show that in the face of increased social inequality, a growing constituency of Singaporeans has called for the PAP-state to take on more protective and redistributive roles. As Low suggests, "a social contract that emphasised individual responsibility, low social protection, and minimal redistribution [has been] hardly desirable or sustainable" on either the social or political level (Low, 2014c:216). Similarly, Rahim argues that GE 2011 represented "a critical juncture in Singapore politics" because issues of social inequality and cost-of-living pressures translated into political pressure for the PAP to readjust its social responsibilities (Rahim, 2015:160).

I argue that the PAP-state is increasingly addressing such policy demands by extending state-financed and redistributive welfare programmes that contradict the productivist welfare legacy. Doing so, the PAP-state is following the popular calls to "expand social protection significantly and redistribute far more aggressively than it has done" (Low, 2014e:180). As Prime Minister Lee promised Singaporeans in his 2016 National Day Rally speech, the state is to do its part in building a more "compassionate and

inclusive society, leaving no one behind” (Lee, 2016). I argue that these have not been empty words as the PAP-state has for the first time in Singapore’s history introduced *statutory* social support that creates unconditional welfare entitlements.

In this chapter I contradict Haggard and Kaufman (2008) who argue that

the high-growth democracies of East Asia correspond most neatly to the expectation that democratisation is associated with an extension of social entitlements. [In South Korea and Taiwan] politicians saw significant opportunities to attract support through the extension of new social protection. By contrast, the semi [sic.] authoritarian systems in the region – Singapore and Malaysia – show much greater continuity in social policy and even a bias toward a liberalisation agenda (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16).

Pace Haggard and Kaufman (2008) and the literature’s consensus, I thus argue that social policy reform in Singapore is not heading towards continued liberalisation. Instead, the PAP-state has extended social provisions while remaining staunchly authoritarian.

On the one hand, it is difficult to conceive that this re-adjustment to citizens’ demands has not contributed to the 10% surge of ballots cast for the PAP in GE 2015 (Welsh, 2016; Ortmann and Thompson, 2016). And on the other, fieldwork data suggests that the commitment to extend welfare support and to improve the affordability of social services is conjuring images of a State that is protective of the socially disadvantaged. Seen in this way, the State can thus consolidate its legitimacy in the eyes of those who had thought that the State had become deaf to unhappiness about social inequality and rising costs of living (Rahim, 2015:172-173; Low, 2014a:169).

The chapter's argument unfolds as follows. Section 6.1 analyses how socio-economic trends have produced popular discontent with the productivist social policy legacy. I show how increased social inequality has affected Singaporeans' ability to afford public housing and healthcare services. Self-financing and ownership requirements are overburdening Singaporean families while middle class materialist dreams are slipping out of reach. Interviewees whose views I analyse in this chapter thus demanded for welfare provision to be expanded and the affordability of social services to be improved. The chapter's following two sections show that the PAP-state is addressing these demands through two types of policy initiatives.

Section 6.2 focuses on policy initiatives that are to improve the welfare of socially disadvantaged citizens *within* the 'productivist' social policy ideology. Couched in a discourse of creating a 'more inclusive Singapore', these policy programmes are aimed at strengthening individuals' and communities' ability to absorb social inequality and its harmful effects. Fieldwork findings suggest that regardless of their *actual* effects on welfare, these forms of state interventions may not be seen as addressing citizens' welfare demands. That is, in my terms, the *State is not seen* as acting when channelling social support through community organisations, for instance. This is politically problematic for the PAP-state that has been said to be 'out of touch' with citizens' welfare needs (Low, 2014a:169).

However, as section 6.3 shows, the PAP-state is simultaneously *also* significantly extending direct welfare support to the population through programmes like the 'Silver Support Scheme' or 'MediShield Life'. Crucially, the programmes are statutory, thus creating welfare *entitlements*. By restricting access of foreign capital and workers to public

housing, the state has also undertaken steps to promote housing affordability. If the literature has been slow to recognize this shift in policy, interviewees who came into touch with newly introduced support schemes were not. By providing social insurance against poverty and catastrophic healthcare costs, the State thus appears to take on the role of protecting and helping those who are unable to afford public housing and healthcare.

Section 6.4 concludes. The extension of statutory welfare provisions and stricter limits on the inflow of foreign capital and labour help to mitigate social inequality but at the (assumed) expense of economic growth. The State can thus be seen as being more protective of the socially disadvantaged than it had been. In the eyes of those who demanded for the state to promote a more socially inclusive society, this policy readjustment added to the State's perceived legitimacy – some of which it had apparently lost in the face of rising social inequality.

The adjustments made to the state's social and economic functions thus also gave the impression that the State had 'listened' to citizens' concerns and was addressing them. On a more general level, the thesis argues that such apparent 'responsiveness' to policy demands can stabilise state-citizen relations and contribute to regime durability (chapter 8). Beyond the evolving social contract in Singapore, the chapter thus also speaks towards the uneven process with which states address domestic socio-political and international economic pressures that arise under global economic integration.

6.1 Productivist social policy and its discontents

This section analyses how socio-economic trends have created popular discontent with the productivist social policy legacy and produced calls for the PAP-state to take on more

redistributive and protective roles. Put simply, Singapore's economic and social policy regimes have been successful in promoting economic growth but were "not sufficiently accompanied by policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth" (Low, 2014a:169). As touched on earlier (section 4.3), the result has been a significant increase in social inequality over the last few decades.

Singapore's GINI coefficient rose from around 0.41 in the early 1990s to 0.44 in 2000 and 0.47 in 2010 (Lim, 2004:88; Chew, 2012:218). Income inequality in Singapore is now one of the highest in developed countries (The Economist, 2015). At the same time, prices of social services have risen "at a much faster rate than median or average incomes", further exacerbating social inequality (Low, 2014b:106). If in 1982 "the price of a three-room [HDB] flat was about twice the annual earnings of a low-income family", the ratio had increased to 5 times by 2010 (Chew, 2012:225). Public healthcare affordability has deteriorated to a similar extent (Lim, 2013).

Continuing to focus on the case studies of public housing and healthcare, the following shows how deteriorating affordability has affected policy demands of interviewees who saw the State as responsible for protecting the socially disadvantaged. I suggest that on a societal level, the emerging calls for increased welfare support and a more socially inclusive Singapore constitute a re-imagination of what the State can 'do'. The PAP-state had preached for decades that welfare austerity is necessary for Singapore to remain competitive under conditions of global economic integration (section 5.2). For interviewees, whose views I analyse in this chapter this narrative appears to fall on increasingly deaf ears. Imagined as social vanguard, the State is to protect the economically disadvantaged and promote a more socially inclusive society instead of overall economic growth.

As I argue in the following sections, the PAP-state is increasingly fulfilling redistributive functions and is working to improve the affordability of social services. The state is thereby addressing the demands for the state to “expand social protection significantly and redistribute far more aggressively than it has done” (Low, 2014e:180). Analysing the demands for a more socially inclusive Singapore, I now turn towards my central case studies of the public housing and healthcare programmes.

‘Aesthetic of the pathetic?’: Deteriorating public housing affordability

In the post-independence era, the PAP garnered much of its popular support and established regime legitimacy through the provision of affordable social services (Rahim, 2015:174). It is thus perhaps of little surprise that deteriorating HDB-flat affordability became politically problematic for the PAP in GE 2011. Rising HDB-flat prices have been attributed to undersupply of housing units by the HDB in combination with excess demand for flats due to immigration-fuelled population growth (Phang, 2012; Teng et al., 2015).

To clarify: a public housing shortage at first only affects the HDB-flat resale and open property market where prices are freely negotiated between seller and buyer. However, the base price of new housing units sold by the HDB is established through an auditing process that estimates the *market price* that the flat would catch if it were traded on the resale market (Haila, 2015:103). Due to this valuation system, rising property prices on the open market feedback into prices of new flats released by the HDB – thereby reducing housing affordability for buyers of such new HDB-flats.

Higher HDB-flat prices are especially detrimental for first-time HDB-flat buyers in the lower income groups who have suffered wage stagnation since the 1990s (Rahim, 2015:164). The demographic is thus experiencing increased

difficulty paying their housing mortgage. [...] Some people have been forced to sell their HDB flats during a downturn, which means capital losses. Some affected families become so heavily in debt that they cannot afford to buy smaller flats, which have been in short supply in the last ten years. However, most fortunately qualify to rent a one-room HDB flat (Chew, 2012:224-225).

Qualifying for rental housing may be described as ‘fortunate’ in the sense that it protects from homelessness. However, Singaporeans are only eligible to purchase a new HDB-flat twice in their lifetime (Vasoo and Lee, 2001:279) and renting a 1 or 2-room HDB-flat is stigmatised (section 5.1). Losing one’s HDB-flat due to (temporary) loss of income is thus economically and socially penalised.

More worrying still, decreased housing affordability seems to have led to more cases of families being evicted from their HDB-flat for being unable to service their mortgage. This has sparked a rise in homelessness even if overall levels are still low compared to other industrialised countries (Ng, 2013).¹⁸ On the one hand, these developments have led to calls for the PAP-state to do more to improve housing affordability and bring home-ownership back into the reach of the lower income groups (Phang, 2012; Low and Va-

¹⁸ Statistics are unavailable but Ng takes the opening of three homeless shelters in Singapore as evidence that the eviction rate and homelessness have been on the rise, creating a small but growing ‘underclass’ (Ng, 2013:36).

daketh, 2014). But on the other, fieldwork findings indicate rising criticisms of home ownership requirements that are exposing Singaporeans to the relentless demands of the modern, fast-changing employment market.

I suggest that such criticisms speak towards the wider demands for the PAP-state to recalibrate social policy, offer social provisions, and promote more social inclusiveness instead of GDP growth. This is perhaps best expressed not only by interview data but the re-emergence of popular art recommended to me by informants. For instance, and introduced to me by local artist and oral historian Koh Nguan How, paintings by Koeh Sia Yong from the 1960s are receiving renewed attention and are exhibited in the newly opened Singapore National Gallery (The Straits Times, 25 November 2015).

Koeh's paintings often depict the plight of Singapore's newly urbanised poor who are struggling to adjust to a rapidly modernising economy. With traditional ways of subsistence living eroded by the nation's accelerated and state-backed global economic integration, the paintings' subjects' livelihoods are threatened. For example, the painting *'Cannot Grow Vegetables Anymore!'* (title translated by Singaporean artist Koh Nguan How) depicts two villagers on a field in front of their traditional 'kampung'-style housing. As the title suggests, the scene is one of impending doom for the livelihood of the rural population that was dispossessed of their land and resettled into HDB-housing blocks depicted in the painting's background. Other interviewees recommended analysing further artistic expressions that criticise the social and economic demands that (forced) HDB-flat home ownership impose on Singaporeans. Works recommended to me several times included films by Singaporean director Eric Khoo like the 1996 *'Mee Pok Man'* (*'The Noodle Seller'*). The film's socially marginalised protagonists are trapped in a world of

“cloned public housing and [...] top-down demand for success” that they fail to achieve (Wee, 2007:94).

Khoo's 1998 *Twelve Stories* sticks to the theme of public housing and deteriorating social life within it. The film's title refers to the number of floors found in an older generation HDB-housing block and from which a young man leaps to his death in the opening scene. His ghost remains in the HDB-housing estate and through it, the film audience observes three socially defunct and isolated households. In both movies, Singapore's built environment is depicted as “a disjunctive and claustrophobic space to which individuals have to adjust to emotionally – unsuccessfully” and where the social and financial pressures of modern Singapore are too much to bear (ibid.).

Another informant gifted me a copy of *Penghulu*, a novel by award-winning Malay author Suratman Markasan. Set in the mid 1990s, the novel tells the story of Pak Suleh and his family who have undergone compulsory relocation into an HDB-flat. Having previously lived as fishermen on an island off the coast of Singapore, Pak Suleh suffers in this ‘birdcage’ of a flat while he and the rest of his family fail to adapt to modern life in the city. Forced into a modern labour economy and no longer able to live off the sea and the land, one-by-one his family members succumb to greed, ambition, lust, drugs, and money problems (Markasan, 2012).

According to Tan (2012), contemporary artistic criticism of the PAP-state, its housing policy, and claims of bringing progress to all Singaporeans, bypass censorship due to economic considerations. A competitive global city and modern KBE requires a local art scene to be attractive to cosmopolitan tourists and creative ‘talent’ (Tan, 2012b:76).

Emerging as common theme of these works is thus the portrayal of individual and communal failure to adjust to the social and economic demands imposed on the population through public housing policy and Singapore's rapidly transformed economy. Recognising the increased prevalence of such works, Chua and Wong (2012) dismiss artistic displays of Singapore's 'abject' as "aesthetic of the pathetic." Calling to attention that capitalism always produces winners and losers, they argue that "the pathetic ones are the figures on the dark side of capitalism, recognisable everywhere in this capitalist world" (Chua and Wong, 2012:73). They further dismiss the implicit criticism directed at the PAP-state:

by simply pointing to the inevitable presence of the underclass—the pathetic—the lie that all Singaporeans are beneficiaries of the nation's achievements under global capitalism is immediately and effectively exposed. The aesthetic of the pathetic is thus a critique of the Singapore government, easily achieved (ibid.).

I propose that Chua and Wong are being too dismissive here. Previous criticisms of the public housing programme had reportedly waned by the 1970s when the programme's social benefits became apparent (Aldrich, 1985:5; Gamer, 1972:83-88). The re-emerging popularity of the 'aesthetic of the pathetic' should thus be seen in the context of increased social inequality, deteriorating social service affordability, and the popular demands for social policy to fulfil more protective functions (Cheung, 2012; Low and Vadaketh, 2014).

In that respect, and also pace Chua and Wong (2012), the home ownership requirements that are depicted as contributing to the plight of the 'abject' have not been

imposed by capitalism per se, *but by Singapore's state*. That same state had previously publically voiced ambitions of achieving 100% home ownership of HDB-flats by 1997 (Park, 1998:283). This has undoubtedly created the expectation that working Singaporeans will be able to afford such ownership. Thus, and despite the PAP's insistence that public housing is a 'privilege' and not a 'right' (Chua, 2000:51-52), "public housing has become such a fundamental measure of Singaporean citizenship" (Hill and Lian, 1995:129-130).

On the one hand, interviewees whose views of the State I analyse in this chapter thus understood excessive economic demands placed on Singaporeans' abject as an outcome of policy, rather than of capitalism per se. And on the other, having imposed home ownership requirements as quasi-monopolistic supplier of housing, the State is seen as being responsible for improving the affordability of public housing.

This is reflected in the discussions surrounding the outcome of GE 2011 and demands for the PAP-state to address deteriorating housing affordability (Low, 2014b). For, as one interviewee pointed out, the PAP-state determines housing supply *and* influences demand through adjusting immigration policy, financial regulations, and 'market cooling' measures (section 6.3):

Sometimes the government screws up a little bit, but by and large they are able to finely balance it because housing prices are rigged! There is only so much land, and most of the land is on lease [to Singaporeans]. [...] And when the prices are too high they will cool it, and if the prices escalate too low, they will restrict the supply, and they will just finely calibrate it.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 38 years old, male, Chinese)

Quasi-monopolistic provision of housing has thus created its own set of responsibilities for the PAP-state in the eyes of citizens. Even the 'pathetic' are to be housed. However, the problem of reduced housing affordability and demands levelled towards the State imagined as social vanguard is related to a host of other social policy issues. These issues include public healthcare to which I turn now.

To anticipate, many of the financial concerns raised by interviewees and discussed in this section are familiar from the previous chapter (section 5.1). However, self-financing requirements and welfare austerity take on a different meaning here. Productivist social policy and the island nation's integration in the global economy are seen as the root cause of social inequality and cost of living pressures. Interviewees whose views are covered in this chapter thus heavily criticised the productivist welfare legacy, demanded for the PAP-state to expand social provisions, and to improve social service affordability. This implies a re-imagination of what the State can 'do' to protect its citizens from the purportedly borderless forces of global capitalism, as I suggest below.

Asset rich but cash poor: The limits of financial self-responsibility in healthcare

In contrast to housing expenditure, healthcare costs often arise in the short term and tend to be unexpected in cases of acute episodes caused by injury or illness. Singaporeans enjoy healthcare insurance through the '3M' healthcare financing system consisting of Medisave, MediShield, and Medifund. However, under the state-managed insurance system, cost protection is light to discourage overutilization of health-care services and to encourage people to make responsible health choices. Here, as in public housing financing, the system has thus been one of state support in the form of subsidies and public

provision but not without imposing financial obligations on citizens. Welfare is employment based, rather than entitlement (section 4.2).

Given inadequate individual savings to cover healthcare costs, increasing income inequality, and price inflation, this system has been reaching the limits of social and political sustainability. The proportion of household income spent on healthcare has more than doubled from 1988 to 2008 (Sun, 2012:227). Combined with insufficient savings, “many lower-income CPF members will face great difficulty maintaining an adequate standard of living in retirement” (The Straits Times, 2015 February 5). And “high living costs and a higher life expectancy in Singapore” mean that “low-income citizens cannot afford to pay the premiums for Medi-Shield” (Chew, 2012:219). In terms of paying for healthcare services, too “lower- and middle-income families find it difficult to cope with high prescription costs, which can run into hundreds of dollars” (Sun, 2012:235).

Out-of-pocket healthcare spending has thus pushed some families to the edge of financial viability. Even as statistics are unavailable, Singaporeans having to sell their flat to pay for healthcare in case of serious illness are frequent enough to have caused public concern and policy discussions (Lim, 2013). As Mr Long, a retired business man interviewed in his family home suggests, this problem is not exclusive to the low-income groups but cuts across the social spectrum:

I don't think [healthcare costs] will bankrupt us and I don't think I will have to sell this house. Because we have made quite good property investments. So unlike many who will claim to be 'asset rich, cash poor', particularly the HDB folks. Their HDB flats are worth anything between S\$600 thousand to S\$1 million but cash wise, they will be in trouble. I have many friends like

that. I suppose all the children will come around, empty their bank [accounts] if something happens and they have expensive hospital bills. But I will be ok; no need to sell [the house].

(Private housing owner, 72 years old, male, Chinese)

Tightened healthcare affordability is thus also a knock-on effect of successful home ownership promotion where housing is financed through individuals' CPF-accounts and encouraged by the availability of cheap long-term housing loans. While having brought home-ownership into the reach of Singaporeans, the channelling of CPF and cash savings into HDB-flats has left many Singaporeans 'asset rich but cash poor' (Teo, 2006:28).

Struggles to pay for healthcare needs are also a result of strict limits imposed on financial support derived from personal Medisave accounts and MediShield (section 5.1). As is common in Singapore, participant Mr Han thus had to tap into his scant cash savings to cover the cost of treatment following his wife's cancer diagnosis:

Three months ago, after my wife [went] into hospital again, I cannot use my Medisave [to support her]. Cannot. Next year I can use [Medisave again]. S\$400, only one year, then I have to use my daughter's [money]. Let's say I don't have a daughter and son. What happens then? [...] They say 'No, you have to, only use a certain limit' [from Medisave], the rest you pay cash.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 61 years old, male, Chinese)

Such views that self-financing requirements and restricted access to personal Medisave-account savings were overburdening citizens abounded in interviews. Another interviewee complained

every treatment you go, costs like S\$200 but people like us, we feel the pinch. It's difficult, not all Singaporeans have enough. Nowadays even though you go NUS clinic, pay S\$50. Let's say today is the 21st February. See the people who sit here? Do you think they have S\$50 in their pocket? Then what is my Medisave for? Please, do you understand my question? You know I only have 2 Dollars in my pocket. And you ask me for 3 Dollars? [...] They always tell you to save for a rainy day. When is the rainy day? When? Its poring now!

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 46 years old, male, Malay)

Clearly, at least the latter quote above is infused with some exaggeration and perhaps not all numbers quoted are accurate. But this should not distract from the fact that many families are struggling with the cost of healthcare and are thus criticising the productivist welfare legacy. In this vein, especially older interviewees liked to 'joke' that in Singapore it was "better to die than fall [seriously] ill" due to potentially ruinous healthcare costs.

Further illustrative of these sentiments, several interviewees retold different versions of a cautionary tale involving an elderly woman who was delivered to the hospital after an accident. According to the tale, the woman inadvertently chose to be treated in a ward of the 'A' category where patients receive no healthcare subsidies:

So, an old lady living alone fell and an ambulance came and she went to the doctor, the hospital, and she is like unconscious or semi-[conscious] and she goes to A-[class] ward, she is in trouble. Because her follow up [treatments] will always be A because she can't drop back. She should always ask for B2 or C ward but she was too confused or drowsy [I] don't know. You must know the system or you are ruined, la. So I always tell my children to make sure they put me in B2 or C.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 52 years old, female, Chinese)

Even as details of this story varied depending on the teller, the worries of incurring a ruining healthcare bill when undergoing treatment are unmistakable.

As PM Lee admitted in several recent National Day Rally speeches, healthcare costs together with housing affordability have thus developed into a main concern for Singaporeans (section 6.2). And if “the health system stands out as a critical indicator of the nature of the social contract” (Chiu et al., 2012:229), available data from the literature and fieldwork findings suggest that this contract has come under significant strain in Singapore. This is also borne out by the OSC-survey results where ‘public healthcare’ was the first or second most prioritised policy area by all income groups (REACH, 2013b:3). It would thus be a mistake to dismiss interviewees’ ‘jokes’, stories, and individuals’ accounts about failing to pay for healthcare as purely anecdotal.

Instead, interviewees’ opinions should be seen in the context of rising costs and expenditure on healthcare which is producing political pressure for the PAP-state to expand financial support (Rahim, 2015). The accounts thus also speak to systematic discontent with welfare austerity in the name of promoting economic growth and a re-imagination of what Singapore’s state can ‘do’. I turn towards the re-imagination of the PAP-state’s social responsibilities now.

What the ‘state’ can ‘do’: External economic and internal political pressures

Tremewan had argued that social policy including the provision of public housing and healthcare are the PAP-state’s primary means of exerting social control (Tremewan, 1994:208-209). However, as fieldwork data and the contemporary political discourse in

Singapore suggest, quasi-monopolistic provision of social services has proven to be a double-edged sword for the PAP. The PAP-state had promised to provide the conditions for national and individual economic success for those who strive and work hard to get ahead (Chapter 4). But deteriorating social service affordability and rising social disparities mean that growth in Singapore is no longer inclusive (Rahim, 2015:163-165). One interviewee summarised the mood of disappointed Singaporeans:

You see the ones that have gone out of school and realise that S\$3,000 starting pay can't pay for their drinking habits, can't pay for their cigarettes, can't pay for their car, and then remember a time when their parents and their old sibling could buy a car and a condo and realise they can't do that.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 64 years old, male, Chinese)

Pointing to the same cost of living pressures and increased social inequality, another interviewee referred to the service staff in the restaurant where our interview took place when observing

I mean look at the guys who are working here. They have to work until the day they die. And there is enough statistics that you just have to look at the key factors of where their education is, the kind of industry they are in, and you know that they are going to have to work until the day they die. That's something we need to fix. And if PAP on a small island state can't fix that, who else can fix it?

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 31 years old, male, Chinese)

There is thus substantial discontent with the unfolding effects of Singapore's productivist social policy legacy. Through interventions in economy and society, the PAP-state promoted GDP growth but lacked "policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth [and that] sought to ameliorate citizen unhappiness" (Low, 2014a:169-170). But the second interviewee quoted above also pointed towards the perception that the PAP-state *can and will* 'fix that' through policy change.

GE 2011 suggests that ignoring these demands for the state to promote social inclusiveness is politically problematic for the PAP. The PAP has to address social problems and popular policy demands if state-citizen relations and regime legitimacy are not to deteriorate (Rahim, 2015; Ortmann and Thompson, 2016). This need for legitimation is pertinent given that the PAP-state has to compensate for "its otherwise questionable democratic legitimacy" (Brown, 1998:39). As Mkandawire argues,

all capitalist societies have to address issues of accumulation and legitimation of the accumulation process and outcomes and of the state itself. Redistributive social expenditures can contribute to political stability by enhancing the legitimacy of the state [...] Social policy can be used both for the management of social pressures that are engendered by rapid economic transformation and also as a corrective to the inherently volatile process of capitalist accumulation (Mkandawire, 2005:19-20).

Contrasting the argument and State image presented in the previous chapter, this section thus shows how the public housing and healthcare programmes have also created demands for the PAP-state to provide more social support and improve the affordability of

social services. Interviewees regarded state interventions as crucial for addressing shortfalls that arise under a social policy system based on austere economising of limited welfare provision.

Thus, and as Haggard and Kaufman (2008) suggest, “the welfare legacy shapes the distributive demands placed on the state” (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:12). Cerny, in turn, had argued that “international and transnational constraints limit the things that state and market actors believe the state can do.” And states have to “pursue increased marketization in order to make economic activities located within the national territory, or which otherwise contribute to national wealth, more competitive in international and transnational terms” (Cerny, 1997:259). A similar discourse of vulnerability to the whims of international capital served as justification for authoritarianism *and* productivist welfare policy under the PAP-state. As social inequality has been on the rise, this discourse seems to have lost appeal to an increased number of citizens who are now demanding for the state to “expand social protection significantly and redistribute far more aggressively than it has done” (Low, 2014e:180).

In the following two sections, and with reference to my major case studies in this thesis, I show that the PAP-state is pursuing two policy approaches that address these demands. It is important to distinguish the two, not simply for its own (analytical) sake, but because the two policy strategies had diverging impacts on how interviewees saw the State. The first approach, discussed in section 6.2, is to further ‘help citizens to help themselves’ and strengthen community support structures. The second approach, discussed in section 6.3, includes the extension of protective welfare entitlements with a redistributive component. I show that *only the latter* approach where the PAP-state is

extending statutory welfare support was seen as the State 'stepping in' to alleviate social inequality and to build a more socially inclusive Singapore.

Adjusting social policy, the PAP-state is thereby addressing a politically problematic social issue. Citizens who feel that their voices and concerns are being heard by the State have less reason to push for more democratic institutions. I suggest that in this specific case, and more generally, the appearance of responsiveness helps to stabilise state-citizen relations (chapter 8). However, the resulting policy mixture is not without contradictions and tensions. While addressing citizens' diverging demands at this juncture, policy contradictions are likely to catch up to the PAP-state in the future as I argue in the thesis' conclusion (section 9.2).

6.2 Strengthening individuals, communities, and mutual help

Discussions on how the PAP-state could and should best address Singapore's rising social inequality intensified after the PAP's historically poor performance in GE 2011 (Rahim, 2015:167). One school of thought held that existing productivist social policy needed to be fine-tuned and expanded. That is, the PAP-state was to strengthen communities and individuals to help themselves in dealing with increased social disparity but without inferring welfare entitlements or significantly increasing social spending. In a 2012 keynote address on 'Building a more Inclusive Singapore', Deputy Prime Minister Shanmugaratnam thus argued:

We have to try to contain inequality, and ameliorate its effects on our society [...] we must preserve a sense of compact among Singaporeans, a sense of obligation on the part of those who are doing well to help others

in their own society [...] The key question is how we do this. How do we maintain and strengthen our progressive slant, do more to support those at the lower end, while ensuring that we remain a society where at the core, people do have a deep sense of responsibility for their families, do want to work hard to improve themselves (Shanmugaratnam, 2012:2-3).

Crucially, for Shanmugaratnam, building a ‘more inclusive Singapore’ was thus not to undermine the principle of self-responsibility and ‘ownership’ of one’s own welfare. Instead, the state was to enable Singaporeans to better deal with negative consequences of social inequality. I suggest that due to the continued absence of welfare entitlements thus implied, this policy approach did little to make interviewees picture the State as ‘stepping in’ and helping the socially disadvantaged.

In the following, I outline the policy implications of this ‘deepening’ of productivist social support in section 6.2.1. I then analyse interviewees’ receptions thereof in section 6.2.2.

6.2.1 ‘Many helping hands’: Community and mutual help

Strengthening the role of the community in providing support for those in need is a continuation of what “has come to be dubbed the ‘many helping hands’ approach” in Singapore (Mathi, 2009:75). ‘Many helping hands’ “promotes the active involvement of non-state actors to meet the needs of the less fortunate in Singapore” so that the state does not have to do so directly (Rozario and Leigh Rosetti, 2012:645). While evoking a “romantic image of old Singapore, where villagers come together for mutual aid to the betterment of the community” (ibid.), the ‘many helping hands’ approach thus also serves to minimise social expenditure.

For instance, under the many helping hands approach the PAP set up institutions like the Community Development Councils (CDCs). CDCs are to “promote community bonding and social cohesion, primarily through community mobilisation, bearing the responsibility to administer self-help projects and specific government assistance programmes” (Thio, 2009:4). Organised under the 5 CDCs, local community-based social support programmes are thus to build “a tightly-knit, compassionate and self-reliant community in Singapore” (North West CDC, 2015).

Examples include the Central Singapore CDC’s ‘Silver Friends’ programme, which is “a regular befriending programme for low-income seniors who are living in one- to two-room rental flats”. The programme’s volunteers “visit these seniors, befriend them and assist them with basic needs – such as purchasing groceries, household items, or helping them with their medical appointments” (Central Singapore CDC, 2015). The South West CDC has set up the “Food Connect @ South West” scheme where community partners provide food rations and condiments to needy households (South West CDC, 2015). To “enhance the physical, social and emotional well-being of elderly residents” the South East CDC organises a host of activities for “the needy elderly” including “exercises, basic English and Chinese courses, karaoke, bingo, and art & crafts” (South East CDC, 2015).

Besides the CDCs, community-building exercises are organised by Community Centres (CCs) within the HDB-housing estates. For instance, the July 2013 issue of HDB’s bi-annual publication *‘Life Storeys’* celebrates “life in the HDB Heartlands” (see image 8) and highlights recent community-building exercises.



Image 8: cover of July 2013 issue of 'Life Storeys'

The magazine includes articles with titles like “Winners-Next-Door” and “Angels Next Door”, which honour residents who organise neighbourhood activities or were otherwise helpful to their neighbours (Housing and Development Board, 2013b:7). Other residents who participated in community-building activities were called ‘role models’ and received the ‘Good Neighbour Award’ (ibid.). One such community-building exercise was the ‘Amazing Heartland Race’. In this race, competitors had to follow a trail around their neighbourhood while participants were to “complete challenges like delivering groceries to elderly residents” (ibid.:5). By organising such events, the HDB “hopes to imbue these residents with a strong sense of identity and pride towards their towns, as well as encourage them to take ownership of their communities” (ibid.).

By encouraging Singaporeans to take ‘ownership’ of the community, the PAP-state is thus extending the responsibility to address social inequality *to the community*

itself. Similarly, and to strengthen charitable community organisations, the PAP-state engages in fund-matching where the state provides dollar-for-dollar support to the precise extent that an organisation is able to raise private funds (The Straits Times, 2017 February 21). The state is also funding up to 90% of charitable organisations' capital expenditure (Lim, 2004a:87). As Ramesh argues, the major rationale for providing social support through such non-state actors has been to ensure that "the recipients do not confuse them for citizenship rights" (Ramesh, 2000:244). The state is thus able to fulfil welfare functions without long-running financial commitments while continuing to encourage strong community support initiatives by non-state actors.

When Shanmugaratnam speaks of building a 'more inclusive Singapore' through strengthening communities, he signals to Singaporeans that the PAP has recognised problems of social inequality. But the policies advanced under this banner do not represent a fundamental departure in terms of the state's roles in addressing these inequalities as the state continues to eschew welfare entitlements.

Strengthening individual Singaporeans

The PAP-state also intensified attempts to directly help individual citizens to mitigate the negative welfare effects of deteriorating social service affordability and income inequality but without giving up on the principle of self-responsibility. For instance, the HPB engages in a myriad of programmes to educate Singaporeans about healthy food options and lifestyle choices while 'nudging' them to make such choices by setting financial incentives. The HPB thus aims to "[empower] individuals to take ownership of their health" (Health Promotion Board, 2015a:2) and prevent the onset of chronic non-communicable

illnesses. Such illnesses account for “approximately 70% of the burden of deaths and ill-health in Singapore” (Ministry of Health and Health Promotion Board, 2014).

Chronic illnesses therefore greatly contribute to healthcare expenditure – not only for the state but most of all to the cost burden carried by individual Singaporeans through out-of-pocket spending. Health education initiatives are carried out at schools, at workplaces, in HDB community centres (Health Promotion Board, 2012), or in the form of conventions as advertised throughout the city during my last fieldwork stint in November 2015 (*image 9*). The ‘Healthy Lifestyle Festival’, for instance, offered workshops for healthy and nutritious cooking, fitness programmes, as well as free BMI and eye screenings (Health Promotion Board, 2015b). Other initiatives aiming to ‘nudge’ Singaporeans to follow a healthier lifestyles and fight obesity include the ‘1,000,000kg challenge’ where participants aim to collectively lose one million Kilograms of bodyweight (AsiaOne, 2014).

In another health promotion initiative launched during fieldwork in late 2015, the HPB partnered with drink-stall owners in the nation’s myriad food courts and hawker centres to launch a ‘healthier drink’ campaign. The campaign awarded scratch cards (*image 10*) to customers who ordered what was considered a ‘healthier drink’ – for instance a ‘kopi-o kosong’ (black coffee, no sugar), rather than a ‘kopi-c’ (coffee with sweet condensed milk) or ‘kopi-o’ (black with sugar). With each scratch card, the purchaser of a qualifying drink stood the chance to win vouchers for further ‘healthier drinks’, and other prizes of up to S\$5,000 in cash.



Images 9 and 10: Advertisement for the 2015 Healthy Lifestyle Festival (left) and scratch-card handed out by a drink stall in Clementi as part of the healthier drink campaign (right)

In respect to public housing, the PAP has also launched several schemes to improve the affordability of new HDB-flats for young Singaporeans and first-time buyers by extending housing grants. For instance, a S\$4,000 'National Service Recognition Award' and a S\$10,000 'Special Housing Grant' were introduced in 2013. Together with previously existing grants, Singaporeans are thus typically eligible to a total of almost S\$60,000 in housing grants when buying a new 3-room flat. This can bring the price of a new flat down to S\$111,000 as Lee demonstrated at the 2013 National Day Rally (Lee, 2013).

With reference to such grants and in light of the overall increased HDB-flat prices, PM Lee thus attempted to reassure Singaporeans:

I know that Singaporeans still worry about property prices. We do surveys and it is one of the items on their minds, (along) with healthcare. [...] We will monitor closely how well people can afford housing in Singapore and over time as it becomes necessary, we will do more to help the lower and

the middle-income Singaporeans own their homes [...] Do not worry, go ahead, plan on it, get married, get your flat. If you make the effort, the opportunities are there in Singapore (ibid.).

As Lee emphasised, the PAP-state as quasi-monopolistic supplier of housing is thus responsive to popularly mooted worries about deteriorating housing affordability. And Lee reassured Singaporeans of the state's commitment to its promise that for those who 'make the effort' and hold a regular job, 'the opportunities are there in Singapore.'

6.2.2 Old wine in new bottles: Extending productivist welfare

As this section has argued so far, the PAP-state has thus attempted to ameliorate negative consequences of social inequality through community help. It has also tried to enable citizens to better help themselves. Singaporeans are subject to programmes that aim to incentivise healthier living and can claim additional grants when buying an HDB-flat. All this takes place within the familiar productivist discourse and welfare ideology.

I now show that neither strengthening community support, nor the attempts at 'helping Singaporeans to help themselves' through health education or housing grants were well received by interviewees discussed in this chapter. In the former case, the reason for this was that state involvement in community support is easy to overlook and thus does not make the State *appear* as addressing citizens' welfare demands. In the latter case, interviewees criticised the productivist slant of welfare support. In both cases, the State was thus not seen as "contain[ing] inequality, and ameliorate its effects on our society" as Shanmugaratnam had promised it would (Shanmugaratnam, 2012:2-3).

Criticisms of the productivist slant

With respect to provision of HDB-housing, a common criticism voiced by interviewees was that the HDB provides housing grants only to the 'deserving': those who 'make the effort' as Lee (quoted above) put it by holding gainful employment. Welfare thus continues to be employment-based. And fitting the productivist slant, many of the housing grants are only available to those who move into a flat close to one of the spouses' parents (Housing and Development Board, 2013a). Such arrangements are to reverse the shrinkage of families and facilitate inter-family support (Chang, 1985:253-256).

Interviewees were aware of this. One interviewee, for instance, criticised the link between housing grants and the pursuit of economic outcomes:

It's not that I'm against the institution of marriage or housing. But I feel the whole HDB system forces couples to stay together. Like once you are invested in a house together, you are financially bound together just for that house. From an economic point of view, it makes sense. [...] I get that we need more children in Singapore and that in families we need to support each other. But I'm not sure the state should make this about economics – marriage, family, and housing.

(Living in parents' 4-room HDB-flat, 26 years old, female, Malay)

Interviewees voiced similar reactions in response to various of the HPB's initiatives. In theory, the HPB can help Singaporeans to make better health choices, thereby reducing healthcare spending for Singaporeans who avoid or delay the onset of chronic illnesses.

With respect to the ‘Healthier Drinks Campaign’, for instance, interviewees criticised the campaign for utilising financial incentives to make Singaporeans live healthier.

Interviewees also immediately found ways to acquire scratch cards without substituting their sugary drink for a healthier option. One interviewee, Mrs Chow, said that she orders ‘kopi-o kosong’ to receive a scratch card and then adds her own sugar to the beverage. Two other interviewees reported having seen Singaporeans do the same thing – either adding sugar or sweet condensed milk to the ‘healthy option’ bought from a drinks stall. As Mrs Chow explained, ‘cheating’ was less about making monetary savings and more about defying the campaign’s intention of inducing her to choose a healthier drink:

You know everything they try to micro manage, even how you eat. Because they know we are kiasu¹⁹ they have these vouchers – so we choose the healthy option. But who wants [to be] sick? So why they even give [us] these vouchers? Health is not all about money [...] so of course I take the voucher because I am kiasu and I say ‘thank you’ but I really don’t like what they are doing.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 38 years old, female, Chinese)

Adding her own sugar to the ‘healthier’ black coffee was thus as much about satisfying her drink preferences as it was about defying the financial incentives imposed on her by the state in an area of life where she thought such incentives were inappropriate. ‘Inappropriate’ because Mrs Chow and other interviewees thought that health promotion

¹⁹ ‘Kiasu’ – a Hokkien expression often used to describe the national psyche, literally meaning ‘fear of losing’ in all areas of life including business, school, and consumerism (Chin, 2016:143; Brown, 1998).

should not be subordinated to economic aims or subject to monetary incentives. Such actions and selective forms of non-compliance are reminiscent of what Scott referred to as “every day forms of resistance” (Scott, 1985) that can undermine the smooth working of the state. However, as I will argue, being able to sidestep state practices not only hampers the state’s functions ‘on the ground’ but may also make authoritarianism appear easier to endure (chapter 8).

Fieldwork data thus suggests that the PAP-state’s strategy of increasing Singaporeans ability to ‘help themselves’ through health promotion and the housing grants may not be well received by Singaporeans who want a more inclusive society. If Singaporeans are concerned that the PAP-state has focussed on promoting economic growth at the expense of citizens’ welfare, these newest policy initiatives do not abate these concerns.

The unseen ‘State’ in the community

Turning towards the PAP-state’ support of community organizations under the ‘many helping hands’ approach, the state’s provision of (indirect) social support went by unnoticed by interviewees. That is, the ‘State’ is not *seen* as extending social support and thus appears as more austere than the ‘state’ actually is. This is no accident but follows the rationale of discretionary social support programmes like ‘Medifund’ and ‘ElderCare’ (section 5.1.1). In 2011 alone \$84.3 million were dispersed through Medifund (Lim, 2013:80-83).

Healthcare financing support thus was – and still is – often perceived as a “shadowy kind of net” as one interviewee put it while “health-care programmes in Singapore [have been] more extensive than popular perception and official rhetoric suggest”

(Ramesh, 2000:249). Ramesh explains this paradox by pointing to the political imperative for the PAP to provide help for those in need while balancing this against the ideological aversion to statutory welfare entitlements (ibdi.:254).

Similarly, the Singapore government has long shied away from overtly supporting the treatment of HIV patients due to the illnesses' association with irresponsible life choices including drug use (Lim, 2004b). Despite HIV prevalence having been on the rise since 1985 (Teoh et al., 2012), HIV drugs remain unsubsidised except through discretionary Medifund payments (Ministry of Health, 2010) and are excluded from Medisave eligibility (Barr, 2008:401). A consultant at NUH interviewed during fieldwork thus lamented that

the top 10% can afford HIV drugs and the bottom 10% can pay this [with Medifund support]. The middle 80% gets their drugs from Thailand. [...] And the government knows about this. They sometimes seize an order, the drugs are sent to the Ministry of Health, and a person there calls up the drug runner saying 'hey I have your drugs, come and pick them up'. [...] The Ministry of Health knows that without the drugs all these people will get all the complications of HIV. And so, they let them run these networks. A very pragmatic approach and they keep quiet about it.

(Consultant at NUH, other identifying details retracted to protect the identity of the source)

While allowing access to cheap HIV drugs from abroad ensures affordability for the lower and middle classes at no cost to the state, the political benefits of hiding the state's function of helping those in need is at least questionable.

Of course, the illusion that states are 'retreating' when acting as regulator and director rather than as immediate provider of social support is not one that even state

scholars have been immune to (chapter 2). Reducing the state's function as provider of social support is often regarded as a 'rolling-back' of the state while the 'roll-out' of other forms of regulatory state interventions are overlooked (Brenner, 2004:200; Hill et al., 2012:18). It is thus perhaps of little surprise that the PAP-state's commitment to building resilient and self-responsible supportive communities was largely overlooked by interviewees and did not feature in their image of the State.

Rahim (2015) attributes the continuation on productivist forms of welfare provisions despite popular demands for protective welfare to entrenched ideologies in the PAP's elite. She further laments that "since the 2011 elections, the PAP government has not been willing to undertake comprehensive structural reform" that would reduce cost of living pressures and ameliorate social inequality (ibid.:172). Similarly, Low argued,

[b]ecause Singapore has done well in the past by following the adage 'grow first, worry about distribution later', and because Singapore's economic growth in the past has benefitted most segments in society, it was quite natural for our policy makers to presume that pursuing economic growth was sufficient (Low, 2014a:171).

Pace the assessments of Ramesh (2015) and Low (2014a), I suggest that the continuation of productivist social policy after GE 2011 is only half the story. For besides holding on to the economic rationale underpinning productivist social policy, the PAP-state has also been extending statutory welfare entitlements in unprecedented policy reform steps during the past years. In the next section, I thus argue that the PAP-state is moving away

from (exclusively) productivist social policy. I further suggest that creating welfare entitlements and the public advertisement thereof contributes to the State being seen as vanguard promoting social inclusiveness.

6.3 Re-calibrating the PAP-state's social policy commitments

According to the literature, Singapore has so far bucked the trend of the other 'Tigers' of South Korea and Taiwan where democratisation and welfare reform went hand in hand. Remaining staunchly authoritarian, the PAP-state is described as being "anti-welfare" (Teo, 2013:387) where the dominating ideology is to avoid creating a "crutch mentality" as former PM Goh told Singaporeans (Goh, 2001).

This section argues that pace the literature, and besides the continuation of 'productivist' social support, the PAP-state is *also* extending protective welfare support to the population. I suggest that this is part of an overall recalibration of the state's roles in economy and society post GE 2011. Crucially, some of the new welfare programmes are statutory in nature, thereby creating welfare entitlements. The state also introduced new limits on the inflow of foreign capital and labour to cool the housing market and raise the wage floor.

Both policy adjustments help to directly address social inequality but are expected to hurt Singapore's economy. If the literature has been slow to recognize this fundamental shift in policy, interviewees who came into touch with newly introduced welfare schemes were not. The image of Singapore's State as vanguard protecting the socially disadvantaged thus arose. In the following I focus on the state's changing welfare functions and new restrictions on the inflow of foreign labour and capital in turn.

Extending statutory welfare support

Pace the literature's assessment, the following shows that the PAP is addressing popular calls for the promotion of more social inclusiveness in the face of increased income disparity. The PAP-state is thus significantly increasing the provision of social protection, and has introduced protective welfare entitlements for the first time in Singapore's history. The new commitment to state-provision of social support is eroding the PAP's traditional fiscal discipline and is strengthening the image of Singapore's State as social vanguard increasingly concerned with the welfare of its citizens.

For instance, the PAP introduced the 'Silver Support Scheme' in 2015 to extend financial support to Singapore's (growing) and cash-restrained population of senior citizens. The means-tested scheme provides cash transfers to Singapore's poorest 30% over the age of 65 (The Straits Times, 2016 March 24). The scheme thereby provides a substantial top-up to the income that this demographic receives from their CPF pay-outs and/or earn from low income jobs. The Silver Support Scheme represents a significant increase of state commitment to social security spending. In the first year alone the scheme has been estimated to cost roughly S\$320 million (Ministry of Finance, 2016).

Similarly, the 'Pioneer Generation Package' (PGP) provides additional financial support and subsidies to Singaporeans who were citizens on or before 31 December 1949 (The Straits Times, 27 January 2015). The PGP is to "honour and thank our Pioneers for their hard work and dedication [as] they have made Singapore what it is today" (Pioneer Generation Package, 2016). The PGP can thus be regarded as an attempt at providing a one-off solution for those citizens whose savings have been diminished by inflation and

who feel that they “have never tasted the fruits of their own labour” as Mrs Han, a 49-year-old living in a 4-room HDB-flat put it.

In healthcare, the compulsory ‘MediShield Life’ national health insurance scheme put in place in 2015 is designed to provide coverage against catastrophic healthcare costs in case of hospitalisation for all Singaporeans (Ministry of Health, 2014). Because Singaporeans with very low income are unable to pay insurance premiums themselves, they are *entitled* to have their contributions subsidised or waved entirely. MediShield Life is therefore the first state-managed healthcare risk-pooling scheme in Singapore where the height of an individual’s contributions is not related to benefits and entitlements incurred.

MediShield Life thus represents a shift towards the state producing the “more supportive socioeconomic environment” that citizens have been longing for (Sun, 2012:237). Overall, the PAP-state has promised to increase its share of national healthcare spending from 30% to 40% (Lim, 2013:92). Social policy programmes such as the Silver Support Scheme, PGP, and MediShield Life imply statutory financial commitments for the PAP-state. Not geared towards growth promotion, the programmes are diametrically opposed to Singapore’s productivist welfare legacy. That legacy emphasised the importance of avoiding welfare provisions that could produce a ‘crutch-mentality’ among the population where the state cares for its citizens instead of citizens caring for themselves.

These new programmes are thus highly significant from a political and institutional standpoint. The extension of state provided social support is also reflected in social expenditure data. In 2013, government social expenditure accounted for S\$24.77 billion, or the equivalent of 6.6% of Singapore’s GDP that year (Ministry of Finance, 2016). With

the new social support programmes, social spending has increased to S\$32.1 billion for the 2015 financial year (The Straits Times, 2015 December 20) and S\$34 billion for 2016 (Today, 2017 March 02). While still low compared to other industrialised countries (section 4.2), social expenditure now accounts for 8.3% of GDP (Singstat, 2017d) and has almost tripled over the last decade in absolute terms (Today, 2017 March 02).

In view of the new social support schemes and significantly increased social expenditure figures, an interviewee thus mused

Singapore is built on that principle: market. So, you read in the papers – the budget – yesterday that they see us moving left. Yup, we have to for political expediency. And with the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, the last bastion of total anti welfareism, we will have to move in that direction. [...] Lee Kuan Yew would have never allowed a single step in that direction because it's a slippery path. But I think he also has to give in because to live on capitalism alone has many, many drawbacks.

(Private housing owner, 71 years old, male, Chinese)

Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew had made his stance against the provision of welfare entitlements, and justified withholding such entitlements on many occasions. In his memoirs, for instance, Lee claimed:

The fundamental issue is, we must not demotivate people. Once we demotivate them and they feel it is an entitlement – 'Society should look after me. I am born, you are the government, you have to look after me' – then we are in trouble. You are born, the government has to provide conditions for good healthcare, good housing, good education. You must strive. What you make of yourself depends on you. We can't equalise everybody's results (cited in Lim, 2013:3).

The literature continues to be guided by this rhetoric, describing Singapore as ‘anti-welfare’ (Teo, 2013; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008). And the PAP had once gone to some length to camouflage available financial support to prevent abuse of the system, maintain incentives, and preserve the discretionary nature of the schemes (Ramesh, 2000).

But as this section argues, this strategy is being reversed. For instance, given the political imperative to step up healthcare support and let Singaporeans know about it, the secrecy associated with Medifund has been replaced by advertisements for MediShield Life, including a short promotional movie. While the success of such promotions in raising awareness is difficult to judge, most interviewees had heard of MediShield Life even before it was put in place in late 2015. At the time of writing, the promotional video for MediShield Life had accumulated close to 1.8 million views on YouTube,²⁰ suggesting that there is considerable interest and awareness in the population as a whole (The Straits Times, 2016 January 30).

The PGP has received a similar level of promotion via both analogue and digital media. Younger interviewees were thus often better informed about the PGP than their parents who were entitled to benefits under the scheme. One effect of this was that the young were able to help their parents to claim their PGP benefits. As one interviewee stated, “it makes me really happy that they are looking after the old like my parents more now. [...] On the whole, I think they care [about the old] and it also makes life easier for

²⁰ The version of the promotional video that had accumulated the many views has since been removed from YouTube. The same video can, however, be found on a different YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eH9-fudoHM>).

me”. Making it ‘easier for me’ was here uttered with reference to the legal and social pressure for children to care for their parents financially.

That Singaporean families are aware of healthcare subsidies that they are receiving is also ensured by the way hospital invoices are tallied up. One interviewee supplied me with tax invoices from his most recent visits to a polyclinic, one of which is reproduced as an example below (*image 11*). The invoice clearly states the ‘full amount’ or unsubsidised rate for each service consumed and then separately lists the subsidies applicable to the patient – in this case a ‘pioneer’. The invoice states that the unsubsidised price of S\$80.83 is brought down to S\$13.38 after all subsidies and tax refunds are applied.

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GST REG NO: [REDACTED] PQTCCY / FB / [REDACTED] Page 1 of 2

Tax Invoice Number: [REDACTED]
 Bill Ref Number: [REDACTED]
 Tax Invoice Date: [REDACTED]
 Patient NRIC/HRN: [REDACTED]
 Visit Date: [REDACTED]
 Visit / Bill Location: [REDACTED]
 Payment Class: ELDERLY

SERVICE CODE	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	AMOUNT(S\$)	
			Full Amount	Payable Amount
CONSULTATION				
POP5	# CONSULTATION	1	38.97	# 6.10
	Subtotal		38.97	6.10
LABORATORY INVESTIGATIONS				
LB1A	# HYPERTENSIVE FOLLOW-UP PANEL	1	17.22	# 14.50
	Subtotal		17.22	14.50
MEDICATION/DEVICES				
IPR4NA1	# SIMVASTATIN 20MG TAB - (S1)	112	13.44	# 3.36
IPR4NA1	# ATENOLOL 50MG TAB - (S1)	112	11.20	# 2.80
	Subtotal		24.64	6.16
	TOTAL CHARGES		80.83	
	LESS: GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY		-54.07	
	LESS: GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY FOR PIONEERS (additional 50% off for items marked with #)			-13.38
	AMOUNT PAYABLE BEFORE TAX			13.38
	ADD: 7% GST			0.94
	AMOUNT PAYABLE AFTER TAX			14.32
	LESS: GST ABSORBED BY THE GOVERNMENT			-0.94
	NET AMOUNT PAYABLE			13.38
	PAYMENT [REDACTED]			13.38
	PAYMENT [REDACTED] 07.02.2015 NETS	13.35		13.35
	ROUNDING ADJUSTMENT			0.03
	AMOUNT DUE [REDACTED]			0.00

Members of the SingHealth Group
 Singapore General Hospital - (K, Women's) and Children's Hospital
 National Cancer Centre Singapore - National Dental Centre Singapore
 National Heart Centre Singapore - National Neuroscience Institute

Image 11: Polyclinic invoice with subsidies; the interviewees’ name and identifying data is blacked out

Given the current political climate, the uncharacteristic amount of advertisement allotted to schemes like MediShield Life and the PGP leaves little room to doubt the political

nature of these schemes. And with regard to the newly introduced MediShield Life, a cardiologist at SGH argued

with MediShield Life they have really tackled the low-hanging fruit. Because there is still a really high deductible. The first S\$1,500 you still have to pay yourself in cash or from Medisave. [...] So, what [MediShield Life] does is to take care of the catastrophic hospitalisation. These are the ones that get into the newspapers. The other day, there was a story in the Chinese newspaper about a woman who couldn't afford to pay the hospital bill. So, MediShield Life will hopefully take care of that. [...] It will get rid of the headline stories where somebody has to sell their house just to get treatment.

(Cardiologist at SGH, other identifying details retracted to protect the identity of the source)

As indicated by the quote, MediShield Life thus provides financial support especially in (potentially) high publicity cases that could cause political damage for the PAP-state – the cases in respect to which interviewees ‘joked’ that it was “better to die than fall ill in Singapore” (section 6.1).

Politics notwithstanding, the scheme thus addresses real problems and existing fears in ways that previous discretionary “piece-meal” (Ramesh, 2000:252) welfare provisions had not. Like the Silver Support Scheme, the deeper significance of MediShield Life is that social insurance is becoming statutory in nature and therefore represents a long-term binding financial commitment for the state. As shown, the PAP-state had long hesitated to extend such welfare entitlements also due to the fear that statutory programmes are politically impossible to retract (Ramesh, 2000). The shift from welfare as

charity to entitlement thus represents a shift in state-citizen relations and the role that the PAP-state plays in economy and society.

If the productivist social policy legacy has produced popular demands for the PAP-state to secure citizens' welfare more actively, the extension of social protection by the state shows that it is doing so. For the first time in Singapore's history, welfare entitlements are introduced and advertised to let citizens know about it. Among interviewees whose image of the State is discussed here, the State thus emerged as vanguard willing and able to promote a more socially inclusive Singapore and support citizens' welfare. This image is further strengthened by recent efforts to secure better affordability of public housing by reducing the inflow of foreign capital and labour, even if this hurts Singapore's economy. I turn towards this now.

Ensuring public housing affordability by locking out international capital and labour

As discussed earlier (sections 4.2 and 6.1), the affordability of social services has deteriorated drastically over the last two decades. Decreased affordability of public housing is especially problematic for first-time HDB-flat buyers in the lower income groups. This demographic has seen wages stagnate (Chew, 2012:225) while not possessing a home that can be sold to offset the purchasing price of a new flat. Besides slow wage growth, decreased housing affordability is also a product of increased housing prices. Both factors can be linked to the inflow of international capital and foreign workers.

With regard to financial capital, "flows of 'hot money' into Singapore after the subprime and euro crisis" have increased demand and bid up Singapore's housing prices (Haila, 2015:112). And increased immigration means that Singaporeans are "competing

for a small and shrinking (or increasingly expensive) resource pie in the areas of housing, healthcare and education” (Teng et al., 2015:14). Besides demand-induced upwards pressure on housing prices, immigration also implies more competition on the employment market (Yeoh and Lam, 2016). This bids down wages and further depresses the affordability of social provisions, including public housing and healthcare.

That this is politically problematic for the PAP-state came out in GE 2011 and negative public reactions to the 2013 ‘Population White Paper’. The white paper proposed an immigration-fuelled increase of Singapore’s population from 5.5 million to 6.9 million by 2030 to support national economic growth (National Population and Talent Division, 2013). In a rare case of public protest, the white paper provoked 4,000 Singaporeans to gather at Hong Lim Park in February 2013. Protesters voiced fears that rises in immigration would overburden the country’s infrastructure while further reducing social service affordability (Rahim, 2015:167; The Guardian 2013 February 15).

I suggest that the PAP-state is addressing this politically problematic issue of reduced social service affordability through uncharacteristic measures that threaten to have negative effects on the economy. First, the PAP-state has attempted to raise wages for the lower income groups. Following the public protests against the ‘Population White Paper’, the PAP has for the first time in decades adjusted immigration targets downwards (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:8). The PAP-state has thus been “tightening the foreign-to-local labour dependency ratios for different sectors and raising the foreign worker levy that must be paid to the government for hiring” (Teng et al., 2015:17).

A tighter labour supply forces businesses to raise wages to attract employees while the levy raises the wage floor, thereby making taking on low-paying jobs more via-

ble for Singaporeans. To prevent companies from hiring overseas, rather than local 'talent', the PAP has also tightened regulations on hiring practices, including requirements to advertise job openings domestically first (Bloomberg, 2013). The policies seem to have been successful. Following the curbs on immigration of low-skill foreign workers, in 2015 Singapore's Department of Statistics reported a 4.9% increase in real term median wages. Overall income growth was only 2% that year. For the first time in decades, Singaporeans in the bottom 30% income group experienced the highest wage increases (Channel News Asia, 27 February 2016). Faster growth of lower and median incomes compared to average income growth implies reduced income inequality and relatively improved social service affordability for the lower income groups.

Second, the PAP-state has also introduced measures to reduce the price of HDB-flats. On the one hand, the HDB has increased the supply of public housing flats to reach a lower market equilibrium price (Low, 2014:106). On the other, the state has introduced a host of measures to cool the housing market. 'Market-cooling' measures dampen demand for flats by increasing the transaction costs for resale flats or excluding parts of the population from the HDB-resale market. For instance, the HDB introduced a 3-year waiting period for PRs who want to acquire HDB-housing (The Straits Times, 2013 August 28). This prevents foreigners from engaging in short term housing speculation that could contribute to rising property prices. As part of the same round of 'cooling measures', the HDB introduced a variety of 'stamp duties' for all buyers and sellers of HDB-flats (The Straits Times, 2016 October 10).

These measures, too, seem to have been successful in improving the affordability of public housing. HDB-flat resale prices have exhibited a slow constant decline since property prices peaked in 2013 (Singstat, 2017c). National Development Minister Wong

thus told Singaporeans that the PAP has steered the resale market towards a 'soft landing' that would increase affordability without hurting HDB-flat owners much (Channel NewsAsia, 2015 December 30).

Fieldwork data suggests that especially the curbs on foreigners' ability to buy HDB-flats struck a nerve with Singaporeans. The perception that PRs are using Singapore as little more than a professional stop over was common among interviewees and reflects the sentiments of most Singaporeans as a survey published in 2015 shows (Teng et al, 2015). Foreign 'talent' is accused of 'profiteering' at the expense of Singaporean families when selling their flat at a handsome gain upon leaving Singapore again. Reflecting these perceptions, one informant commented on the market cooling measures introduced by the PAP-state when remarking

I think the government has done a lot to minimise speculation, there [are] a lot of laws and regulations [...] there is no greed compared to countries like China, India, or Hong Kong. The kind of regulations they have is different from the ones we have here. Like we have cooling measures, we have, you know, stamping fees for foreigners and stuff like that. For other countries no, you just speculate all the way. [...]. So I think the PAP listens to the citizen.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 42 years old, male, Chinese)

And another interviewee suggested

recently they have really done more to bring housing [prices] back into reach. And they have to because in Singapore housing does more than provide shelter, it also becomes source of retirement funding and is connected

to almost everything else. That is the simple truth why housing is so important and I think the PAP has noticed that its maybe too important. That it has been a mistake to make everybody a home owner. Because that's crazy on an island like this [where land is scarce]. So now they are responding to a lot of the bad blood by those low income [groups] who can't afford [housing] or just barely by saying 'ok, less immigration and more homes for you'. [...] Some will say 'oh its political' but its good in the end.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 35 years old, female, Chinese)

In terms of the PAP-state's role of ensuring housing affordability and promoting social inclusiveness, two implications follow for state-citizen relations and how interviewees saw the State. First, the PAP-state was said to be 'listening' and 'responding' to its citizens when attempting to improve housing affordability. That is, the State, imagined as vanguard concerned with citizens' welfare was *seen* as acting on the behalf of Singaporeans and their discontent about reduced housing affordability.

Second, and like the ongoing extension of social protection discussed above, reducing access to public housing to foreign 'talent' and 'workers' represents a re-balancing of policy priorities away from growth promotion. Wang had regarded the provision of modern stylish public housing like the 'Pinnacle@Duxton' as aimed at attracting a cosmopolitan creative elite able to add value in Singapore's increasingly knowledge-based economy (Wang, 2012:374-375). Making access to public housing more difficult through the recent rounds of cooling measures is thus likely to reduce Singapore's attractiveness to mobile 'international talent'. Similarly, 'foreign workers' were welcomed because of their willingness to work for low wages, boosting Singapore's attractiveness for companies that are thus able to draw on cheap (low-skill) 'labour' (Liow, 2011).

As one might expect, the clamp down on foreign workers has thus been hurting businesses based in Singapore by producing a labour shortage and bidding up wages (The Business Times, 2016 September 06). The entire retail and food service sectors are struggling to adjust to the labour crunch on the one hand, and pressures for wage rises on the other (Toh and Thangavelu, 2016). The wider economic problem caused by the labour squeeze is that “wage growth has raced ahead of productivity”. This makes the labour shortage the biggest current challenge for Singapore’s economy, and may even increase the risk of an economic recession (Today, 2016 September 6).

Given these broader shifts in social policy priorities, the State can thus emerge as vanguard willing and able to promote a more socially inclusive Singapore and support citizens’ welfare. Recalibrating its relation to international capital and domestic society, the PAP-state is thus addressing the ‘bread and butter’ issue of social inequality that was threatening to strain state-citizen relations.

6.4 Conclusion: The ‘State’ and a more inclusive Singapore

Dogged pursuit of economic growth that was “not sufficiently accompanied by policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth” had led to sliding popular support for the PAP as reflected in GE 2011 (Low, 2014a:169-170). The ‘productivist’ social contract that “emphasised individual responsibility, low social protection, and minimal redistribution” (Low, 2014c:216) had become socially and politically unsustainable due to increased income disparity and rising prices of social services.

Like many other Singaporeans, interviewees discussed in this chapter thus demanded for the PAP-state to improve the affordability of social services and introduce

more redistributive measures. Pace the literature that depicts the state as ‘anti-welfare’ (Teo, 2013:187) and “increasingly out of touch” with the population (Rahim, 2015:172-73), I argued that the PAP-state has in fact been addressing popular calls for a more socially inclusive Singapore since GE 2011.

Social spending has been significantly increased and MediShield Life and the Silver Support Scheme introduced protective welfare *entitlements*. The PAP-state had previously eschewed introducing such entitlements because higher social spending commitments are feared to hurt the economy. Besides providing more welfare support, the PAP-state has also curtailed the inflow of foreign capital and labour to raise wages and exert downward pressure on the price of public housing flats. But the clamp down on foreign capital and labour is hurting Singapore’s economy. Increasing social provisions and de-linking Singapore from international capital and labour represent sharp departures from long-held policy priorities of promoting economic growth over all else (chapter 4).

If the literature has been slow to acknowledge the post GE 2011 move from ‘productivist’ towards more ‘protective’ social policy, this chapter suggests that Singaporeans were not. If not benefiting from new support schemes directly, interviewees were made aware of them through advertisements. Similarly, restrictions on the inflow of foreign capital and labour are regularly communicated by the national media. I thus argued that in line with policy reform, interviewees saw the State as addressing citizens’ concerns about social inequality. Backed by public vows to build “a more inclusive Singapore” (Shanmugaratnam, 2012:2-3), the State thus appears as *responsive* to citizens’ demands and as increasingly concerned with citizens’ welfare.

With respect to public sentiments beyond my pool of interviewees, it is difficult to imagine that these policy adjustments that address issues of social inequality did not

contribute to the PAP's re-strengthened electoral performance in GE 2015 (Ortmann and Thompson, 2016; Welsh 2016). And as I argue in this thesis, the appearance of responsiveness to demands levelled towards the state by citizens eliminates the political basis for serious challenges against the regime (chapter 8). The PAP-state's extension of welfare support and apparent responsiveness thus contribute to the stability of state-citizen relations and regime durability.

However, the chapter also argued that the move towards provision of statutory social protection is matched by a further extension of 'productivist' social policy through the 'many helping hands' approach. Here, communities and individuals are to address and absorb social inequality's harmful effects so that the state does not have to provide expensive welfare support. The PAP-state thus also continues in the fashion of what Cerny called a 'competition state'. Such a state avoids crowding out private investment through government spending (and taxation) and aims to make domestic economic activities more competitive (Cerny, 1997:259).

As this and the previous chapter suggest, the PAP-state is thus simultaneously evoking contradictory State images among different segments of my interviewees. On the one hand, interviewees discussed in the previous chapter see the State as hyper-rational economic actor on which citizens depend to promote economic growth and income opportunities. On the other, this chapter presented interviewees' image of the State as vanguard that is increasingly helping the lower and middle classes by improving the affordability of social services, and insuring Singaporeans against poverty and catastrophic healthcare costs. I argued that at this juncture *both* images of the State can let the State appear as legitimate in the eyes of citizens.

Beyond re-evaluating the social contract and state-citizen relations in Singapore, this should also give pause for those who have upheld Singapore as 'best practice' model for containing public spending. For by "emphasizing the need to exercise prudence in public spending, the Singapore state is behaving in ways that fit well with the global political economic zeitgeist" (Teo, 2013:388). But the discussion here demonstrates the social and political limits of welfare austerity. What states 'can do' under conditions of global economic integration is thus subject of constant negotiation. "International and transnational constraints" limit the state's policy options (Cerny 1997:259), but so do domestic socio-economic and political pressures – even under an authoritarian regime.

The next chapter will turn to the third predominant way of seeing the State that emerged from fieldwork and speaks towards another contemporary 'hot-button' policy issue. The issue is that of felt identity erosion due to social change and immigration which has produced a "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). Overlapping with the two State images discussed here and in chapter 5, interviewees thus also called on the PAP-state to protect what is sometimes referred to as the 'Singapore way of Life' in the 'HDB-heartlands'.

7. The 'State' as champion of the 'Singapore way of life'

This chapter discusses the third predominant State image emerging from fieldwork: that of *the State as champion of the 'Singapore way of life'*. In the chapter I thus focus on the PAP-state's nation-building functions. Nation-building has gained political relevance in Singapore given the recent emergence of a "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). As I will argue, the 'groundswell' itself represents a backlash against the perceived socio-cultural change that has accompanied Singapore's integration into the global economy.

As shown in chapter 4, the PAP-state has promoted Singapore's tight integration into the global economy through its FDI-dependent industrial policy and the reliance on foreign labour. Felt loss of a local identity and the threat to what is sometimes referred to as a 'Singapore way of life' (Ortmann, 2009:35) have thus become politically contentious topics threatening to strain state-citizen relations (Low and Vadaketh, 2014; Yeoh and Lam, 2016; Lim et al., 2014).

The underlying objective of Singapore's nation-building project has been the creation of a 'harmonious society' as citizens' linguistic, cultural, and religious divides are feared to constantly threaten domestic stability (Lim et al., 2014:18; Ortmann, 2009:28). Besides being manifest in public discourse, such nation-building objectives are inscribed in social policy including the public housing and healthcare programmes (Hill and Lian, 1995), on which I focus in this thesis.

The literature has thus primarily regarded nation-building as state-directed and ‘top-down’ (Chang, 2012:692) while “researchers have come to very contradictory conclusions as to the strength or weakness of Singapore’s national identity” (Ortmann, 2009:34). I do not aim to assess the relative strength of Singapore’s national identity. Instead, I argue that meaningful markers of a Singaporean identity have emerged from the ground and are inscribed in the ‘Singapore way of life’. I loosely define the ‘Singapore way of life’ as including harmonious community life in the ‘HDB-heartlands’, the ‘Singlish’ dialect, and a love and appreciation for local food. Such markers of ‘Singaporeanness’ like the *local* language and food directly contradict Singapore’s international economic orientation.

Elucidating the mentioned contemporary nationalist groundswell (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2), fieldwork data suggests that this ‘Singapore way of life’ is perceived to be threatened. I trace this felt threat to perceived social change in the ‘HDB-heartlands’, immigration, and the modernising built-environment. And I argue that the perceived threat to the ‘Singapore way of life’ produces demands for the PAP-state to ‘step in’ and protect markers of Singapore’s national identity that have emerged from the grassroots. I show that the PAP-state has, in turn, increasingly run nation-building programmes that address citizens’ concerns and is dishing out harsh punishments against individuals disturbing harmonious living in the ‘heartlands’. I argue that based on these interventions, the State can be pictured as champion of the ‘Singapore way of Life’ while its nation-building functions can make the State appear legitimate at this juncture.

The argument unfolds as follows. Section 7.1 traces the PAP-state’s attempts of fostering a national identity and ‘harmonious society’ since national independence. I focus in particular on the roles played by the public housing and healthcare programmes.

But notions of Singapore's national identity are ill-defined not least because local conceptions of 'Singaporeanness' are often "quite different from official nation-building efforts" (Ortmann, 2009:24). I show that rather than state-backed substantive nation-building, social practices in the 'HDB-heartlands' have emerged as markers of Singaporean identities. These practices include harmonious neighbourhood interactions, use of the 'Singlish' dialect, and common love for local foods.

Section 7.2 then draws on fieldwork findings speaking towards current sentiments that such Singaporean identities are threatened by socio-cultural change and Singapore's 'global city' status. One effect of Singapore's global economic integration "has been to weaken national forms of cultural identity" while "local cultures and locality has been grounded in various emerging reactions against globalisation" (Chang, 2012:692). Continuing with the central case studies of public housing and healthcare, I focus on life in the 'HDB-heartlands' and nostalgia for the 'kampung spirit'. The latter refers to a past often imagined as unburdened by the demands of modern life and atomisation of the community. As interview data suggests and current debates about national values and identities indicate (Chang, 2012; Low and Vadaketh, 2014), the PAP-state is called upon to protect these markers of national identity that have emerged from the ground rather than through top-down nation-building efforts.

Section 7.3 argues that while having perhaps been slow to pick up on these sentiments, the PAP-state is introducing various interventions addressing concerns about a degenerating 'Singapore way of life'. It is thereby placating the current "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). Contradictions between attempts "to develop and maintain national identification among its people with the Singaporean nation-state, while at the same time increasingly promoting that city state as a

global city” emerge (Velayutham, 2007:3). This also harks back to the previous chapter’s discussion about a re-balancing of the PAP-state’s economic and social commitments. Fostering economic growth is to be balanced with other policy areas that are crucial for retaining legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

Section 7.4 concludes that the literature’s predominant focus on economic aspects of state-citizen relations has blunted attention for the state’s other roles based on which the State can be imagined as legitimate by citizens. In the face of social change in the public housing estates, questions about the state’s community and nation-building functions are emerging as paramount. Due to horizontal (communal) and vertical (institutional) bonds of belonging created by social policy (section 2.3), Singaporeans are thus calling on the PAP-state to protect the ‘Singapore way of life’ in and around the ‘HDB-heartlands’.

Cerny had argued that given economic globalisation “hinders the capacity of state institutions to embody the kind of communal solidarity or ‘Gemeinschaft’ which gave the modern nation-state its deeper legitimacy” (Cerny, 1997:251). But the opposite seems to be the case here. Imagined as protecting and preserving communal solidarity as part of the ‘Singapore way of life’, the State emerges as relevant beyond the economic realm and gains another (potential) source of legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. The PAP-state is thus actively balancing the sometimes “contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity” (Chang, 2012:619).

The PAP-state is thus addressing the second issue that was identified as having hurt the PAP in GE 2011 apart from the rise in social inequality. I argue that such apparent responsiveness to citizens’ demands eliminates the political basis for serious challenges

against the PAP-state. Under the country's 'competitive' brand of authoritarianism this stabilises state-citizen relations (chapter 8).

7.1 Constructing a nation: 'state' discourse and policy

Anderson defined the nation as an "imagined political community" that is regarded as both limited and sovereign (Anderson, 2006:5-6). What the basis for such common imagination may be, however, might vary. While Anderson points towards the simultaneous consumption of "the newspaper-as-fiction" as basis for an imagined national community in modern society (ibid.:35), others appeal to the importance of common belief in a national foundational 'myth'. Brown (1998) summarises this view and the connection between nation and state: nations are built on an "invented myth of common kinship". And nation states depend "not only on the cultural resonance of the myths, but also on the extent to which state elites [are] seen as fulfilling their promises as guardian of the invented nation" (Brown, 1998:37). Nation-building is thus a matter of creating "both horizontal (communal) and vertical (institutional) bonds of belonging" (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:40).

Having had independence 'thrust upon' Singapore in 1965, "a state was born, and then a nation had to be artificially created" (Vadaketh, 2014a:60) from a "polyglot collection of migrants from China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and several other parts of Asia" (The Economist, 2015). Given the population's ethnic, religious, and linguistic divides, the belief was that a national "sense of belonging and feeling of togetherness ('oneness') will not develop naturally" (Wah, 1992). Especially in the immediate post-independence years, dealing with the threat of tensions along the population's ethnic fault lines was

regarded as crucial for maintaining domestic stability to attract inward FDI (Doner et al., 2005:328; Castells et al., 1990:4; Lim et al., 2014:16).

Thus, the creation of a national identity “has been a central feature of political and social life in Singapore” (Hill and Lian, 1995: 1) where the fundamental problem to be addressed is that Singapore is home to

a ‘plural society’ comprising several distinct racial, religious and linguistic communities, and lacking any overarching cultural values.²¹ As such, and as the ethnic disturbances of 1964 and 1969 made clear, it had no natural cohesion but had to be held together by state force (Brown, 1998:38-39).

Due to “potentially divisive consequences given the ethnic composition of Singapore” appeals to the ‘golden past’ of any particular ethnic group as cornerstone of the nation-building process had been precluded (Hill and Lian, 1995:20). Instead, Singapore’s economic vulnerability to the whims of international capital and to internal ethnic division emerged as the nation’s foundational myths (Lim et al., 2014:18). In this context, the state was to take on the role of containing threats to internal stability arising from multiracialism. And the national narrative propagates the need for a strong PAP-state to manage Singapore’s perpetual economic and social fragility (section 1.1).

However, in section 7.1.1 I will now argue that the promotion of a national identity fitting of Singapore’s ‘global city’ ambitions has been fraught with contradictions. The state’s efforts have also often been incongruous with citizens’ own conceptions of what

²¹ The term ‘race’ is unfortunate but somewhat unavoidable in the Singapore context: “As descriptors of culturally distinct groups of population, the terms ‘race’ and ‘racial group’ might be out of vogue in theories of ethnic and race relations, but in the Singapore government’s discourse they remain the master category for more broadly accepted terms, such as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic group’. Indeed, race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably” (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:50).

being 'Singaporean' means. In section 7.1.2 I then turn towards the public housing and healthcare programmes and their roles in the nation-building agenda. If top-down nation-building is not without conflict and contradictions, I argue that especially living in the 'HDB-heartlands' has nonetheless emerged as quintessential component of a 'Singapore way of life'.

7.1.1 National identity and the 'global city': Conflicts and contradictions

The PAP-state's top-down approach to nation-building has produced a number of conflicts and contradictions – in terms of policy-making and vis-à-vis local conceptions of 'Singaporean' identities. For instance, the Creole English 'Singlish' has been adopted by Singaporeans as "perhaps their most visible national characteristic" (Ortmann, 2009:36). Based on English as Singapore's *lingua franca*, 'Singlish' incorporates Hokkien Chinese, Malay, and Indian words and grammar. Although thus incorporating the various cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Singapore's population, the PAP-state has discouraged the use of 'Singlish' since the late 1990s: while Singlish is

the closest thing to a truly indigenous, national language it is considered too colloquial for use in business or education, and it is often virtually unintelligible to native speakers of English from other countries (Peterson, 2001:58-59).

Fearing to hinder communication with foreigners and contradicting the image of Singapore as a truly cosmopolitan 'global city', 'Singlish' runs counter to Singapore's FDI-dependent economic strategy. Lee Kuan Yew thus described Singlish as 'handicap' for Sin-

gapore while former PM Goh called it “English corrupted by Singaporeans” when launching the ‘Speak-Good-English’ campaign in 1999 (BBC, 1999 August 30). The campaign’s aim has been to “expand the use of standard English in order to be globally acceptable” while exemplifying “the desire to seek national unity that is beyond the boundary of nation-states” (Chang, 2012:698).

While encouraging the use of standard English thus helps to promote Singapore’s global economic integration, the “war on Singlish” (BBC, 1999 August 30) also represents a war against Singaporean grassroots identities in the name of economic competitiveness. Even Singapore academics have thus come out to describe the ‘Speak Good English Campaign’ as ‘misguided’ on account of the contradictions between economic strategy and local identities:

[A] segment of Singapore’s elite, led by Goh Chok Tong, the then Prime Minister, fought a misguided battle to dampen the use of Singlish in Singapore, claiming that foreigners may not be able to understand Singaporeans who speak Singlish. Confused Singaporeans lamented the possible loss of one of our few truly unique cultural markers (Vadaketh, 2014a:62).

Simmering tensions between various aspects of nation-building and economic policy have also been revealed by the promotion of shared ‘Asian values’ since the late 1980s (section 2.1). Although often regarded as code for ‘Confucian’ or ‘Chinese’ values (George, 2000:162), ‘Asian values’ are supposedly shared by all of Singapore’s major Asian ethnic groups. As Ortmann summarises, these values are: “nation before community and society above self”, “family as the basic unit of society”, “community support

and respect for the individual”, “consensus, not conflict”, and “racial and religious harmony” (Ortmann, 2009:31).

By stressing cohesion and consensus in an authoritarian setting “the state inculcates the idea that all the ethnic cultures are inherently compatible” (Brown, 1998:43), while also attempting to “counter the pressures in favor of democratizing the country” (Ortmann, 2009:31). The emphasis on ‘Asian values’ also represented an attempt to counteract “the allegedly decadent materialism and individualism of Western values which, it was claimed, were imported along with the English language and Western technology” (Hill and Lian, 1995:8).

If the promotion of ‘proper English’ over Singlish, and simultaneous efforts to promote local ‘Asian values’, may have led to confusion among citizens, the late 1990s brought yet another turn to the nation-building agenda. Strong in the 1980s and early 1990s, the ‘Asian values’ discourse ebbed after the Asian Financial Crisis. ‘Asian values’ were now too easily confused with the ‘Asian Way’ of economic management and associated cronyism that had allegedly caused the crisis (Rodan, 2006:15). Thus, after the Asian Financial Crisis, “the official concern” once again “shifted from Asian values to globalisation” (Velayutham, 2007:4).

Given the multiple twists and turns of the nation-building agenda, it is perhaps of little surprise that scholars conducting research at various times have come to contradicting conclusions with regard to the strength or content of a Singapore national identity. What is more, the markers of Singapore identities like ‘Singlish’ that *have* emerged ‘from the ground’ often stand in opposition to Singapore’s international economic outlook and the PAP-state’s substantive nation-building goals. As discussed below, these markers include ‘Singaporean’ food served in the island’s myriad ‘hawker centres’ within

the nation's 'heartlands' (discussed below), and the image of the 'kiasu', 'ugly Singaporean'. "Popularly celebrated with self-deprecating humour" the materialism and hyper-competitive attitudes inherent in 'kiasuism' is "not a result of nation-building by the state but rather a reaction against it" (Brown, 1998:42-48).

I will now argue that such 'grassroots' conceptions of 'Singaporeanness' and a loosely defined 'Singapore way of life' are deeply connected to living in the 'HDB-heartlands' – making public housing provision perhaps the most successful aspect of the PAP-state's nation-building initiatives. While continuing to be in flux, such markers of Singaporean identities unfold in the space between state interventions and citizens' negotiation and contestation of the former's sometimes contradictory discourses and policies. The following turns towards these Singaporean identities and the 'Singapore way of life' that are felt to be eroding as argued later (section 7.2).

7.1.2 Housing a nation: Social policy and nation-building

Universal 'flagship' social programmes "can enhance a sense of belonging to a specific (national) community and become a defining feature of national identity" (Sánchez-Ancochea and Martínez Franzoni, 2014:13). Furthermore, "the cohesive role of social policy could be particularly strong" when "national unity requires transcending separate collective identities" (ibid.:14). And pointing towards the crucial role that infrastructure development can play in nation-building, Barr and Skrbiš argue that

nation building contains two closely intertwined and co-dependent dimensions that are difficult to separate in practice. The first dimension refers to

the building of physical infrastructure while the second refers to the construction of the national community of belonging (Barr and Skrbiš: 2008:39).

I argue that although fragmented (section 5.1), especially the public housing programme has immensely contributed to nation-building in Singapore by creating both horizontal (communal) and vertical (institutional) bonds of belonging.

As suggested by titles of government publications like ‘Housing a Nation: 25 Years of Public Housing in Singapore’ (Wong and Yeh, 1985) and follow-ups like the 2011 ‘Reflections on Housing a Nation’ (Mah, 2011), the importance attached to the public housing programme as instrument for nation-building can hardly be overstated (Sim et al., 2003; Hill and Fee, 1995). Former Minister for National Development Mah referred to HDB-housing as the “common bond for all” (Wang, 2012:370). And the MND calls on the HDB for “developing world-class infrastructure, creating a vibrant and sustainable living environment and building rooted and cohesive communities” (Ministry of National Development, 2016).

Creating such ‘rooted and cohesive communities’ first emerged as crucial in the immediate post-colonial era when the promotion of public housing home-ownership was “seen as a way of reducing the sense of transiency which had persisted into the 1960s” (Hill and Lian, 1995:120). Wong and Yeoh further posit that a “fundamental aim” of the “public housing programme has been the creation of a nation whose people have homes they are proud to call their own. The underlying philosophy is that if one owns an asset in a country, one would stand to defend it” (Wong and Yeh, 1985:231). Nowadays the militaristic overtones are reduced but the nation-building objective of creating a harmonious community of belonging has remains. Minister Mah surmised that “HDB’s mission

is to house the masses so that we can build an inclusive nation [...] where people of different backgrounds, ethnicities and incomes live harmoniously together as a community” (Mah, 2011:84).

Social and ethnic integration of the population is promoted through the mixing of residents of differing ethnicities in the same neighbourhoods and HDB-housing new towns. At independence, the different ethnicities making up Singapore’s population were

spatially segregated and there was a lack of social cohesion on a nation-wide basis. This weak social fabric was particularly vulnerable to political crises, especially during the early days of self-government. The racial riots between Chinese and Malays that broke out in 1964, in particular, took place in areas where either ethnic group was strongly entrenched (Sim et al., 2003:295).

From the 1960s, the public housing system was thus leveraged to break up existing ‘racial enclaves’ through resettlement of the population into HDB new towns (Hill and Lian, 1995:125).

To counter re-emerging “ethnic grouping in some new towns and estates forming enclaves”, a quota system regulating the ethnic composition of HDB-housing blocks and neighbourhoods was then introduced in 1989 (Sim et al., 2003:297). Each HDB-block is thus not to house more than 87% Chinese, 25% Malay, or 13% Indian/other residents. Within the neighbourhood, the upper limit quotas are set at 84%, 22%, and 10% respectively (ibid.:298). The quotas are aimed at enforcing “nation-building through the integration of all the ethnic groups,” and “to avoid ‘racial enclave’ formation, which may jeopardise racial peace” (Chua, 2000:55).

The policy of enforcing ethnic diversity is complemented by mixing residents of differing socio-economic backgrounds. Large 5-room flats are thus interspersed with smaller 3- and 4-room flats in the same neighbourhoods and HDB-housing blocks (Wong and Yeh, 1985:71). Enforcing social diversity has required periodic readjustments to housing provisions. For instance, in the 1970s the state set up the Housing and Urban Development Company (HUDC) to offer upmarket public housing flats. But “the government [soon] felt that HUDC estates were growing into exclusive enclaves, quite distinct from HDB estates” (ibid.: 237). Harboursing the potential to “create social tension and retard the development of a harmonious community” (ibid.), the HDB thus soon incorporated these more exclusive public housing estates.

Finally, as part of the nation-building objective, the HDB has been aiming to promote a more harmonious society through the physical design of HDB-blocks and neighbourhoods. As Wong and Yeh explain the town planners’ intentions,

one way to view [the relationship between physical environment and human behaviour] is to consider that the physical environment may act as a behavioural filter. [...] Certain elements in the physical environment can perform the role of catalyst for social interaction, at least in the early stage of residence. [...] Interaction over time and the establishment of localised social networks can then be expected to lead to a sense of community amongst residents (Wong and Yeh, 1985:388).

Many of the HDB’s attempts to bring residents together and make them interact are thus quite literally set in concrete. The common corridors leading to individual HDB-flats on every level of an HDB-housing block, ‘void decks’ at the base of HDB-housing blocks, and

covered walkways between buildings are all designed to facilitate social interactions and neighbourliness.

For instance, HDB new towns are laid out to form precincts where neighbourhoods are formed around “a ‘community focal point’” (Turnbull, 1997:232). This is meant to encourage “an emotional attachment to the place and a shared sense of identity” within the neighbourhood (ibid.). The physical space around the HDB-housing blocks is thus designed so that “pedestrian activities are maximised because no block is more than 400 metres from the neighbourhood centre with its shops and other facilities” (Hill and Lian, 1995:137). With the evolution of town planning, more and more parts of the physical environment, including pavilions, playgrounds, and common walkways have been subordinated to the aim of community-building (Housing and Development Board, 2016).

The common corridors leading up to HDB-flats themselves have been deliberately shortened or segmented after the HDB assessed that shorter corridors serving only 6 or fewer families enhanced neighbourhood interactions. These corridors are open to one side based on the assumption that in Singapore’s tropical climate, a breezy and open surrounding would make corridors “more conducive places for residents to meet” (Wong and Yeh, 1985:389). Similarly, the open spaces that make up the ground floor of many HDB-housing blocks and which are referred to as ‘void decks’ (*images 12 and 13*) have been “carefully designed for residents to mix and mingle as part of their daily routine” (Mah, 2011:84).



Images 12 and 13: residents playing 'mahjong' (top) and hosting a small flea market (bottom) in 'void-decks' in the Clementi and Woodlands districts respectively

As the admission that the physical environment is little more than a 'filter' or 'catalyst' for human interaction indicates, whether the building designs are necessary or sufficient conditions for substantive community and nation-building is questionable. However, the quasi universal public housing programme, including the physical designs of HDB-housing blocks, has created common lived experiences in the population and created both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' bonds of belonging as I now argue.

Living in the HDB-heartlands

Through the HDB-housing programme the PAP-state has thus pursued a number of *substantive* nation-building objectives aimed at strengthening the national community in a

multi-ethnic society. Contradictory conclusions about the strength of Singapore's national identity suggest that these have perhaps not been entirely successful. Nonetheless I argue that public service consumption, and especially life in the 'HDB-heartlands' has had strong nation-building effects.

Given the fragmented nature of the public housing and healthcare systems, navigating the various social policy programmes creates common deliberation processes that Singaporean families go through (section 5.1). Discussions among friends about public healthcare and housing options, and the smartest way of taking advantage of regulations broke out immediately in several of my group interviews in Singapore. For instance, interviewees agreed that it was best to apply for a flat well in advance of marriage because it then takes 18-24 months for the flat to become available. Intricate knowledge of the system extends even to those not currently looking to buy a flat yet. Not being in the market for a flat herself, an interviewee explained this with reference to the conversations she has with friends:

Like we discuss and we know that there is this HDB 'build-to-order-scheme' [BTO] and we know the average price of a new HDB-flat runs 300K or so, then you have to pay 10% first payment, you can take loan from the government like CPF but you have to pay 2.6 per cent [interest] or so. So, I know the BTO and so on. All Singaporeans know this.

(Living in parents' 5-room HDB-flat, 32 years old, female, Chinese)

Similarly, Singaporeans are confronted with a wide choice of public healthcare options. Interviewees thus discussed which hospital or polyclinic to go to, what ward type to

choose, and what healthcare financing support is available (if any). The (financial) importance of those choices is expressed through cautionary tales like that of the elderly woman who inadvertently chose to be treated in an A-class hospital ward (section 6.1).

These discourses also extend to the small faction of Singaporeans who choose private housing or healthcare options. The main reason for this is that the unsubsidised A-class hospital wards and flagship public housing projects are comparable to upmarket options offered by the private sector (section 5.1). Teo (2010) suggests that through the “process of collective negotiation” of social policies, “there arises a self-conscious articulation of Singapore as exception, of Singaporeanness as unique” (Teo, 2010:351). A common notion of ‘Singaporeanness’ is thus produced not because social policies are universal per se, but because provision is *fragmented* and recognised as unique in the world. At the same time, the process of collective negotiation lets the State emerge as standing outside and above society, even as the ways in which that State is imagined differ between interviewees (section 2.2).

But beyond the practice of collective negotiation of regulations, housing almost the entire population in HDB-flats has also led to “the homogenisation of life-style and experiences in the same neighbourhoods, schools, stores, playgrounds, and so forth” (Lim, 1989:183). As a result of the public housing policy, residents “[mingle] with each other in the shops and markets, [while the] children of the multi-ethnic population study and play together in the schools, playgrounds and sports complexes” (Sim et al., 2003:305). Looking back at a decades long career at the MND, an interviewee recounted that housing “turned into a nation-building project that was about ethnic integration just as much as about putting a roof over peoples’ heads. Building a homogenous nation; common memories.”

These memories and common lived-experiences that I collectively refer to as the ‘Singapore way of life’ in the ‘HDB-heartlands’ are multi-faceted. They include eating in the nation’s myriad ‘Hawker centres’ (*image 14*), harmonious neighbourhood relations, and Singlish as residents’ common dialect (Yeoh and Lam, 2013; Nasir and Turner, 2014). Spoken in the heartlands, Singlish is distinct from – and opposed to – the ‘proper’ English of the globalised CBD and thereby becomes definitively *Singaporean* (section 7.1).



Image 14: hawker centre next to an HDB-block in Tanjong Pagar district

Fieldwork findings suggest that especially the consumption of food in hawker-centres that are integrated into many HDB-housing estates forms an integral part of community and family life. The relatively cheap food prices “make it possible for families to dine out and meet friends” on a daily basis while “diners from different ethnic groups and social classes eat together around the same table” (Haila, 2015:103). According to an interviewee working at the HPB, many local-born Singaporeans are so used to eating in hawker centres that they are unable to prepare meals themselves. The same source proposed that Singaporeans’ attachment to (unhealthy) foods and drinks served in the

hawker centres is the reason why the HPB struggles to ‘nudge’ Singaporeans to make better health choices – including consuming healthier drinks (section 6.2).

With roughly 85% of Singaporeans living in HDB-flats, being part of the various HDB-heartland communities and the ‘Singapore way of life’ is thus almost inescapable.²² “HDB flats provide not just shelter but a lifestyle” (Haila, 2015:102). An interviewee working as a visual artist underscored the centrality that HDB-flat living has in creating common memories and lived-experiences:

I mean, truly, from just growing up I cannot be separated from the neighbourhood because even if you don't go out to find stories, the stories come to you. Because that is pretty much what living in the HDB [flat] is like. You always know your neighbours' stuff and things like that. That's the same for almost all Singaporeans. No matter which HDB [neighbourhood] you live in. The experiences with your neighbours, the friends, the conflicts, the hawker food, it's all instantly recognisable.

(HDB-rental flat, 28 years old, female, Malay)

However, by pointing towards the ‘conflicts’ between neighbours, the above quote also highlights the fact that despite the PAP-state’s explicit nation-building objectives, a ‘common’ way of life does not necessarily imply a harmonious one. In fact, conflicts between long-term residents and new Singaporeans are simmering in the HDB-housing estates. As argued below, these conflicts and feelings of identity erosion among local-born citizens are generating calls for the State, imagined as champion of the ‘Singapore way of life’, to intervene.

²² The actual proportion of Singaporeans having lived in HDB-housing for a significant period must be much higher as many will have ‘upgraded’ from public to private housing only later in life.

While less part of daily life or explicit nation-building objectives, consumption of healthcare in Singapore's public hospitals also contributed to the creation of common memories and 'Singaporean' experiences. Given that 80% of inpatient care takes place in public hospitals (Chiu et al., 2012), the most surprising aspect of this phenomenon is maybe that it has not received more attention in the literature. Especially during group interviews, informants reminisced about stays in now refurbished or shut hospitals like 'Alexandra Hospital' in Queenstown or 'Toa Payoh Hospital'. And popular belief holds that the by now defunct 'Old Changi Hospital' complex is haunted by the ghosts of soldiers fallen during the Japanese occupation. Experiences and fears related to public healthcare are thus also the basis for shared common tales and stories that are distinctly Singaporean and create a national community of belonging.

This section has thus shown that the consumption of social services, especially in and around the 'HDB-heartlands', is part of the 'Singapore way of life' and has created communal bonds of belonging. In the next section I argue that these identities and community relations are feared to be threatened by social change brought on by Singapore's integration into the global economy. With 'heartland-living' suffering, interviewees called on the PAP-state to shore up and protect the 'Singapore way of life'. As I argue in this chapter, the perceived threat to the 'Singapore way of life' gives the State imagined as champion of Singaporean identities and lifestyles a *raison d'être*. And the State can be seen as legitimate to the extent that the State is pictured as fulfilling nation-building functions (section 7.3).

7.2 Strangers in the heartlands: The 'Singapore way of life' under threat

As Yeoh and Lam argue based on survey data and political discourse,

the recent challenges of an ageing citizen population coupled with ultra-low fertility rates have not only further fuelled the government's urgency to attract more foreigners. [...] They have also triggered major questions that have quickly spilled over from the straightforwardly economic sphere to other more complex arenas including Singapore's demographic future, its social landscape, and fundamental identity as a nation-state (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2).

Having identified life in the 'HDB-heartlands' as central component of what can be regarded as Singapore's national identity, this section shows how state-led economic development is seen as threatening the 'Singapore way of life'. Fieldwork findings suggest that perceived threats to life in the 'HDB-heartlands' are emanating on the one hand, from demographic change, deteriorating community relations, and immigration. And on the other, from the constant-remodelling of the physical built-environment that is destroying Singaporeans' sense of home and a shared past. Both immigration and (re)development of the city scape are part of state-led growth and modernisation objectives (section 5.3).

The following delineates three perceived threats to the 'Singapore way of life' in the HDB-heartlands. With issues of national identity playing an increased role in politics, section 7.3 then argues that the PAP-state is now more actively balancing the sometimes "contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity" (Chang, 2012:619).

Deteriorating relations within families and local communities

The first perceived threat to the 'Singapore way of life' is the degeneration of mutual social support within and between families. Interviewees blamed this perceived degeneration, on the one hand, on the financial pressures to which Singaporeans are exposed. These pressures result from social service self-financing requirements and scant provision of social insurance by the state. And on the other hand, the influx of foreign-born residents was said to undermine the trust and social cohesion that supposedly once characterised life in the 'HDB-heartlands'. I focus on these two issues in turn.

Institutionalised financial self-responsibility in the areas of housing, healthcare, and pensions has overburdened Singaporeans. Mortgage defaults have risen, Singaporeans joke that it is 'better to die than fall ill', and savings are insufficient for retirement (section 6.1). Under the 'many helping hands' approach, the family and community support is to absorb some of these financial shortfalls (Mathi, 2009; Tan, 2012). However, according to interviewees, the institutionalised self-financing requirements and associated financial pressures are prying families and the community apart.

Pursuing a career in Singapore's competitive labour market requires devotion and working long hours. Indeed, on average Singaporeans spend more hours working each week than even their Taiwanese and South Korean counterparts – the latter of which work the longest hours of all OECD countries (The Straits Times, 2017 January 17). This leaves Singaporeans little time for looking after ageing parents, relatives, or members of the local community in need. The problem of living and ageing alone with all its negative care consequences has been identified in the wider Singapore literature (Teo et al.,

2006). For instance, and in line with these social developments, an interviewee remarked that

many kids don't want to care for their father and parents anymore [and] I know of relatives who don't take care of their parents and they live alone, they are 70. [...] Half of my friends are filial I think. They say 'ok I will take care of my mom'. But half is like 'I don't want to take care of my parents, I'm just being self-sufficient. I want my own place and all.' But blood is thicker than water, no? But in Singapore that system is failing now because of the kind of economy and selfish society that the PAP has built.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 31 years old, male, Chinese)

Home-ownership and self-sufficiency requirements are thus sometimes pitched against the family and local community – a somewhat ironic twist given the PAP's efforts to strengthen family and community support not least through housing policy.

Increased migration of new citizens and foreigners into the HDB-heartlands was identified as the second element tearing away at the delicate fabric of local communities and neighbourhood relations. The perception that the proportion of non-Singapore born residents has risen immensely over the years is not incorrect. Due to Singapore's low birth rate and economic reliance on foreign labour, the proportion of Singapore-born citizens in the country's overall population has been in dramatic decline. If in 1970 93% of the population were Singaporeans, the proportion had declined to a mere 62% by 2012 (Rahim, 2015:166). But perceptions that this influx of new residents is corroding neighbourhood relations in the 'HDB-heartlands' are not necessarily xenophobic per se. Survey research conducted by the HDB in 1998

established that a direct relationship existed between residents' length of stay in their towns and the number of neighbours known. Residents who stayed in their towns for about 2 years would know about seven families. After living for 10 years, they would typically know an average of 14 families. By this time, they would also know their neighbours better. More than half would visit one another, exchange gift or food, and help keep watch of each other's flat. It implies that the living environment develops into a social setting for more frequent and routine encounters among fellow residents, which over time, promotes more intensive types of neighbourly activities such as mutual help and care (Sim et al., 2003:298).

Increased turnover of residents is thus associated with reduced social engagement, regardless of new residents' migration backgrounds. But putting the onus on new residents, interviewees thought that newcomers were not trying hard enough to 'fit in' and become part of the community. This led to the emergence of mutual mistrust between new and old residents. For instance, a long-term resident of a public housing estate in the Clementi district lamented,

it's quite a pity. I find that people don't even wish good morning! If we tried to be friendly and wish them, there is no answer so next time we don't dare wish them. [...] I once had neighbours and once a while they say 'hi', 'hello'. But once I was walking behind the wife and her flat is before mine [on the common corridor]. So, she will just open the door so small, and then she just squeezes in immediately and pulls close. It's so sad! Even, now, the old ones, because they are afraid to be cheated so they don't really chitchat. So, if you try to be friendly they think you are going to con them.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 65 years old, female, Chinese)

Accounts like these were often contrasted by interviewees' stories of neighbourliness in bygone days. During these earlier times neighbours supposedly left the doors of their HDB-flats open, trusted each other with their flat keys when going on holidays, and engaged with one another on a daily basis. As also cited in the HDB's survey mentioned above, interviewees recounted that neighbours used to look after each other's children playing in the common corridors and that they used to exchange food and other gifts at festive occasions. According to the same informants, these practices have declined or all but disappeared in line with the perceived deterioration of neighbourhood relations in the 'HDB-heartlands' brought about by social change and the influx of new residents.

Conflict and dilution of identity

That some Singaporeans are lamenting the corrosive effect of immigration on the 'Singapore way of life' seems hypocritical at first. After all, with over 70% of Singaporeans being ethnically Chinese and almost 10% Indian (Abshire, 2011:3), most of Singapore's society has an immigration background. But grassroots markers of 'Singaporeanness' like the Singlish dialect and love for local food cross ethnic or religious divides. It is thus also in these areas that the state-backed inflow of non-natives into the 'HDB-heartlands' is leading to conflicts as well as "an acute sense of displacement and identity erosion among local Singaporeans" (Lim et al., 2014:19). The dilution of 'Singaporean' markers of national identity is thus the second perceived threat to the 'Singapore way of life'.

For instance, non-Singaporeans running food stalls in hawker-centres were accused of several insufficiencies. Complaints were directed mostly against stall-owners from mainland China whose cooking practices were said to be unhygienic. Interviewees

also accused these new citizens or PRs of ‘butchering’ local favourites like Singapore-style ‘bee hoon’ noodles, ‘carrot cake’, or ‘chicken rice’. Part of living in the ‘heartlands’, such dishes have taken on special meanings to local-born Singaporeans (Vadaketh, 2014a).

One 56-year old interviewee who lived in a 3-room HDB-flat reported that she had become so unsatisfied with the dishes offered in the hawker-centre adjacent to her HDB-housing block that she went out of her way to eat elsewhere. Other interviewees also complained that you had to be increasingly careful where you ate and that many of the new food-stall operators “don’t even speak proper English and don’t understand Singlish.” Similarly, in a group interview the conversation turned towards food offered by hawkers in the Geylang district:

Mr Nadar: Its, like especially those around Geylang, they are all cooked by those Chinese from mainland and it tastes very different.

Ms Du: Yeah, yeah, and they cook it in a very ‘Sichuan’ style, super spicy.

Mr Nadar: You can’t eat anything. It makes you sick.

Ms Wan: I heard some kid died of food poisoning after eating there so there is all kinds of bad things happening.

(Two living with parents, one ranting private housing, 25-29 years old, Chinese and Indian)

Food is also at the centre of well-rehearsed stories about conflicts between Singapore-born residents and their foreign-born neighbours, one of which drew national attention in 2012. In the incident that was recounted to me several times by interviewees, a family from mainland China had complained about smells generated by their Indian-Singaporean neighbours’ cooking of curry. Upon the complaints, the Indian-Singaporean family agreed to refrain from preparing curry dishes whenever their Chinese-born neighbours

were home. Although the agreement had been reached through a community-mediation process, Singaporeans who had learned about the incident were

outraged that their long-held norms of tolerance, of putting up with pungent smells that come from their neighbour's cooking, especially of a dish very much associated with the multi-ethnic Singaporean lifestyle, was not better reflected in the outcome of the meditation process. [...] The issue had to do with the Chinese national's exclusivist outlook on culture (Koh et al. 2015:11).

Following the incident, Singaporeans of all ethnicities gathered in neighbours' kitchens to cook curry in what has come to be known as the 'Cook-a-Curry Day'. The episode underscores national pride about mutual respect of each other's cultural practices that "local-born Singaporeans consider as part of their national cultural landscape" (ibid.).

On the one hand, interviewees thus did not necessarily expect their foreign-born neighbours to perform "complete assimilation into some notion of 'Singaporean culture'" (Teng et al., 2015:10). But they did expect them to have a degree of tolerance and respect for those with other cultural practices and a respect for Singapore's distinct but multi-cultural cuisine. On the other hand, the widely-shared concern "that the influx of migrants has diluted Singaporean identity" is based on "a claim to national and cultural authenticity" (Nasir and Turner, 2014:108).

The deeper issue is thus how both local-born and new residents "negotiate identities in a context of growing cultural diversity" (Nasir and Turner, 2014:102). It is also in this respect that interviewees were falling back on the State imagined as champion of a 'Singapore way of life' as I argue in section 7.3. With regard to this, "Singaporeans of different ethnicities have become more united in this time of discord with immigrants"

(Yeoh and Lam, 2016:15) thereby strengthening common bonds of belonging between 'Singaporeans' regardless of ethnic background.

Such conflicts between local- and foreign-born residents spill over into other areas of community life in the HDB new towns. Ironically, common spaces and facilities meant to foster community integration and social interactions (section 7.1) are themselves becoming focal points around which conflicts emerge. Interviewees reported disagreements arising over the use of common corridors or the production of excessive noise by a neighbouring family. Within, as well as outside the living arrangements in the public housing estate, especially the "figure of the ubiquitous Mainland Chinese" is negatively "portrayed as uncouth and prone to objectionable behaviours" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:14).

Fieldwork data suggests that conflict even extends to the use of communal facilities like the badminton courts in CCs that are integrated into the HDB-estates. The CCs are designed as "common spaces for people of all races to come together, build friendships and promote social bonding" (People's Association, 2016). While thus accessible by all residents in principle, the influx of new residents apparently makes it difficult for local-born Singaporeans to use the facilities. Several interviewees complained that facilities were constantly blocked and booked out by newcomers. For instance, interviewee Mr Long thus complained,

in fact, if you go to the CCs now, the upper middle class Singaporeans don't go to the CCs anymore. It's actually the Filipinos, the Chinese, the Indians that use the facilities there. Because they never see such facilities where they come from. So, you see Filipinos play basketball all the time and the Chinese have booked all the badminton halls solid for the next 6 months, and then

the Singaporeans complain like 'what the hell? I can't get to use anything!'

Fully booked by all the Chinese people.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 41 years old, male, Chinese)

Fear of identity erosion and simmering conflicts with foreign-born neighbours thus represent the second perceived threat to 'heartland living', provoking calls for the PAP-state to protect the 'Singapore way of life' (section 7.3).

Home and the built environment

The final aspect of state-led development threatening a national feeling of belonging concerns the re-development of the built environment itself. Intertwined with "the construction of the national community of belonging," the development of physical infrastructure has been a major part of states' post-colonial nation-building efforts across South-East Asia (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:39). Nonetheless, state-led infrastructure development and nation-building can have contradictory effects in Singapore.

This plays out through the constant re-modelling of the built environment which is destroying citizens' sense of home. Stories of Singaporeans having lost their (physical) home or place of growing up due to the (re)development of old neighbourhoods abounded in my interviews and can be found in (re)emerging popular art and literature (Section 6.1). While (re)development in itself is nothing extraordinary in a quickly growing young city, "the pace and the scale of the transformation and re-transformation is extraordinary" (George, 2000:189). An account provided by former 'The Straits Times' journalist, Cherian George well illustrates the loss of home and nostalgia associated with the constant state-led re-modelling of the city scape:

When traffic on the Pan Island Expressway needed a slip road to enter the city-bound Central Express Way, my house and all its neighbours had to go. [...] As if the flattening of my home were not enough, the nearby hospital where my siblings and I were born, Youngberg Hospital on Upper Serangoon Road, was then demolished to make way for the North-East MRT Line. St Andrew's School, to which I walked every day for ten years, was vacated and condemned. If I suffered from paranoid delusion, I might suspect that I was the victim of a science fiction conspiracy to obliterate my past. In reality, of course, my story is nothing unusual by Singapore standards (George, 2000:190-191).

As “a nation in perpetual constructionist mode” (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:11), the constant re-modelling of the urban development encapsulates the PAP-state’s unceasing striving for progress. For some, this has conjured the image of the State on which Singaporeans (can) depend to advance the economy and secure income opportunities (section 5.3).

But in the eyes of others, it has meant the destruction of a cherished past and home. The wider sentiment that infrastructure development is too often trumping preserving national history and heritage has come increasingly to the fore. For example, and neglecting “questions of [the] unique and authentic identity” of the built environment in the name of efficiency, Singapore’s old national library has been “torn down in spite of a swell of public objections; in its place, a road tunnel was built that saved 5 minutes of travel time” (Tan, 2012b:79). In view of Singapore’s modernisation, Wee thus suggests,

for some observers the city-state’s modernity seems obvious: it represents a form of capitalism that, because it has landed on Asian soil, has run amok. Singapore is a whole society subjugated to the needs of capital. [...] The

aesthetic home of the PAP state's utopian impulses was not painting or literature — which cannot feed mouths — but building, the art we live in and do business in. Architecture in the form of extensive modernist public housing and a revamped downtown [...] was useful in the wish to rationally homogenise the nation (Wee, 2007:6-7).

But to 'homogenise the nation' is also to create common grievances and demands that can be levelled against the PAP-state. The public protest in cases of national significance like the old National Library and lamenting the never-ending remodelling of neighbourhoods suggest a decreased willingness to attend to the demands of globalisation at the expense of markers of national identity. This is not entirely unexpectedly from the perspective of modernisation theory. At least in parts, the increasingly well-educated and wealthy citizenry seems to be moving away from 'survivalist values' (section 2.1) inscribed in the national narrative. That narrative emphasised the constant need to promote Singapore's economic competitiveness and attractiveness to FDI as a matter of national survival (section 1.1).

Recognised as common by interviewees the island over and reflected in public discourse, this section has thus pointed towards three aspects of state-led development feared to threaten the 'Singapore way of life'. My findings in the HDB-heartlands speak towards "tensions between citizen demands for closure symptomatic of nation-state formation on the one hand, and the rationale underpinning the functioning of a global city to fashion itself as a hub open to and animated by transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas on the other" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:16-17).

I will now argue that the PAP-state is addressing such popular calls. The PAP-state thus increasingly balances "the contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to

maintain national identity and unity” (Chang, 2012:691). Taking on the role of protecting Singaporean identities that have emerged grassroots, the State is thus appearing as protector of what interviewees regarded as signifying their shared identities inscribed in the loosely defined ‘Singapore way of life’.

7.3 Protecting the ‘Singapore way of life’ and rekindling the ‘kampung spirit’

I suggest that the PAP-state is increasingly addressing demands to maintain what I have referred to as the ‘Singapore way of life’. The State can thus be seen as having responded to citizens’ concerns about deteriorating ‘heartland living’ and emerges as champion of this ‘Singapore way of life’. Accordingly, and given the contemporary nationalist groundswell, the state’s contemporary nation-building functions can add to the perceived legitimacy of the so-imagined State.

In the following I cover the state’s involvement in diffusing conflicts between neighbours, rekindling the ‘kampung spirit’, and improving community relations in the HDB-heartlands. I briefly focus on the use of state power to truncate any actions by individuals that could illicit social disharmony and harshly punish said individuals. I then discuss state efforts aimed at protecting what interviewees regarded as the ‘Singapore way of life’.

The ‘State’ and no tolerance of racial intolerance

As part of the foundational myth of multiracialism, intolerance against practices and beliefs of other ethnic groups has been a firm ‘out-of-bounds marker’ in Singapore. Actions

that “inter alia, promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population” are punishable under Singapore’s Sedition Act (Neo, 2011:352). The recent case of online blogger Amos Yee who had been accused of “wounding religious feelings” through internet posts (Channel NewsAsia, 2016 September 29) is a reminder that the PAP-state continues to enforce the act.

In the incident occurring shortly after Lee Kuan Yew’s death in March 2015, then 17-year-old Amos Yee uploaded a video to the internet platform ‘YouTube’. The video compared Lee to Jesus Christ and inferred that both deceived their followers by pretending to be compassionate and kind while actually being malicious and power hungry. Yee was sentenced to four weeks in jail, but was released after the trial as the sentence was backdated to include his remand period. In December of the same year, Yee published another post on his personal blog where he criticised Islam. Yee was thus arrested again and later sentenced to jail for an additional six weeks (Reuters, 2016 September 29).

The PAP-state’s responses are similarly vigilant in cases of conflict in the HDB-housing estates that do – or could have – an ethnic or racial dimension. For instance, according to an interviewee asked about the 2012 curry cooking incident (section 7.2), all such inter-ethnic conflicts between neighbours get referred to the police. The interviewee had worked as a policy man himself during national service and recounted many such cases, in one of which

[a] Malay family was cooking curry in the corridors and the smell of the curry annoyed the [Mainland] Chinese neighbour. The Chinese neighbour was sweeping the corridor and she took the dust and she poured it into his curry. [...] So, I mean you can bring the horse to the water but you can’t make him drink. [...] There was no real resolution [to the case] except [the Chinese

woman] got told that is wrong and then they had to go to counselling. Any dispute between races is considered racial and the police gets involved.

(3-room HDB-flat owner, 32 years old, male, Malay)

The facts of the case as they were presented, of course, do not allow drawing conclusions about the Chinese woman's motivations. We do not know whether she had indeed been acting on grounds of ethnic intolerance, or simply because she was annoyed that a neighbour used the common corridor for cooking activities. But that "any disputes between races" is suspected to be racist demonstrates the PAP-state's 'no-tolerance stance' against behaviour that could be motivated by ethnic intolerance.

The PAP-state has also reminded the population of its hard edge against groups and individuals causing social unrest within 'ethnic enclaves' in the aftermath of the 2013 'Little India Riot'. The riot broke out in December of that year following a fatal traffic accident involving a Chinese bus driver and a pedestrian from India. The pedestrian died at the scene of the accident. Apparently fuelled by outrage about the allegedly slow response of the ambulance service to one of Singapore's few remaining 'ethnic enclaves', a riot broke out. Oncoming police and ambulance forces were attacked by a forming mob; their vehicles overturned and set on fire (Forbes, 2013; South China Morning Post, 2013 December 20). The episode provoked a slew of racist and xenophobic remarks on online blogs and forums. Protected by the anonymity that the Internet can afford, Singaporeans depicted foreign-born South Asians as uneducated, uncivilised, and not fitting into Singapore's society generally.

On the one hand, Prime Minister Lee and other Singapore politicians responded to the racist slurs by warning the public that "hateful or xenophobic comments, especially online" would not be condoned (BBC, 2013 December 9). But on the other, the PAP-state

responded through harsh – maybe populist – action against the rioters. Many of the 57 alleged perpetrators seemed to have been denied family or legal counsel before deportation from Singapore (Yahoo! News Singapore, 2013). Others were deported even after charges were dropped and formal acquittals granted (Today, 2013 December 25).

The PAP-state thus cracks down on any conflict threatening peace between Singapore's ethnic groups and national stability more generally. In this respect, interviewees imagined the State as acting mercilessly in its function as champion and protector of the 'Singapore way of life'. On the one hand this was apparent by interviewees prefacing the utterance of an ethnic stereotype with requests not to be quoted or warnings that the statement 'was not really political correct'. On the other hand, interviewees expressed deep aversion not to ethnic stereotyping per se, but to harmful racial slurs. For instance, a 28-year-old sales clerk argued with respect to the quota system governing the ethnic composition of residents living in HDB-housing blocks:

I mean because of our education we have a common medium, we speak English and go through our common experiences. All the guys go to NS [national service], in uni we mingle. We are all the same except [for] some small cultural differences so I don't mind the quota system but I don't think it's necessary for the young anymore. Maybe the older, you know, they have their own dialects, prejudice, and habits they need [the quotas]. But in Singapore there is no place for racism. If you are serious racist and cause offence instead of just joking here or there you are in trouble.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 28 years old, female, Chinese)

This image of the State being almost omniscient when it comes to racist offenses is not least fuelled by the wide publication of cases like that of blogger Amos Yee. The PAP-

state is thus presented as vigilantly surveying the online blogosphere and bringing those who may cause unrest and pry apart the population's fault lines to justice (chapter 8). According to this image, the State can be counted on to weed out elements in the population that threaten a harmonious 'Singapore way of life'.

Events like the 'Little India Riots' thus give credence to the myth of multiracialism. Purportedly threatening the stability of Singapore's society, the need for the PAP-state to manage the citizenry with a firm grip is upheld. Perceptions that such state power is put to good use may further be strengthened by the recent restrictions on immigration (section 6.3). Curbs on foreign labour can thus also be read as addressing public worries about immigration posing a threat to national cohesion (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). Besides the crack-downs, however, the PAP-state is also pursuing efforts to pre-empt conflicts and promote better relations between neighbours as I show now.

Conflict prevention and rekindling the 'Kampung spirit' in the heartlands

In 1994, the fast food chain McDonald's Singapore launched the 'Kampung Burger', thereby acknowledging rising nostalgia for life in the kampungs "along with the relationship with nature and each other that the kampungs evoked" (Turnbull, 1997:233). The "collective nostalgia for the kampung" represents a longing for an imagined and embellished past with tight neighbourhood communities (Chua, 1997:166). Maybe more attuned to (changing) public sentiments than academics or the PAP-state, McDonald's re-introduced the 'Kampung Burger' to the menu in 2013 but with a changed recipe.

If the 1994 'Kampung Burger' featured fruit relish as homage to the kampung's Malay origin, the 2013 incarnation of the dish eschews such exclusive references to the

Malay community. Instead, and in line with the re-imagining of the kampung as inclusive and *Singaporean* place, the burger now also features chicken and a salsa sauce. The new recipe thus alludes to Singapore's ethnically mixed cuisine and staple foods. According to the promotional video accompanying the dish's 2013 re-launch, Singaporeans "may not live in kampungs anymore, but there is plenty of the spirit to go around." While depicting comic renderings of HDB-housing and life in the HDB-heartlands (*image 15*), the video claims that the kampung spirit "makes friendships grow" and is the reason "why we can't help but want to help our neighbours". The spirit thus brings Singaporeans "together in special ways to create the new good-old-days" (McDonald's Singapore, 2013).



Image 15: still from McDonald's 2013 Kampung Burger campaign advertisement video (McDonald's Singapore, 2013)

Faced with discontent about apparent degeneration of communal life in the 'HDB-heartlands, the HDB is implementing measures towards conflict prevention and community-building to rejuvenate this 'kampung spirit'.

The most rudimentary of these efforts are pamphlets and posters that are distributed throughout the HDB-housing estates and advise residents on how to behave and interact with their neighbours. One of such pamphlets is replicated below (*image 16* and

image 17). The emphasis on ethnic harmony between newcomers and previous residents is evident in the ethnic composition of residents depicted in the comic panels. The political context suggests that the campaign is mostly directed at recent immigrants. Playing towards the ubiquitous stereotype of residents from mainland China “as uncouth and prone to objectionable behaviours” (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:14), the use of Chinese as only secondary language leaves little doubt about the pamphlet’s intended primary audience.



Images 16 and 17: ‘Be a Good Neighbour’ pamphlet front and reverse sides; handed to me by a resident in Yishun district in 2013

Community-building exercises like the ones orchestrated around the CCs in the HDB-housing estates are more elaborate but also more ambivalent in terms of the intricate playing out of state-citizen relations and State images conjured. Community-building is part of the ‘many-helping-hands’ approach outlined in chapter 6. The ‘Amazing Heartland

Race' (section 6.2), for instance, is to make residents discover "often-overlooked gems" in the HDB-housing estates and "imbue these residents with a strong sense of identity and pride towards their towns" (Housing and Development Board, 2013b:7).

To further aid the multi-pronged approach to "promote interaction and national solidarity between locals and newcomers (with the key focus on newly naturalized citizens)", the National Integration Council (NIC) was established in 2009 (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:9). The NIC oversees and helps finance various projects "to promote and foster social integration among Singaporeans, new immigrants and foreigners" (National Integration Council, 2010a). Projects include community theatre performances held in public places like community libraries that are integrated into HDB new towns. In the 'Get To Know Singapore Competition', "new immigrants and Singaporeans teamed up to participate in a series of competitions around Singapore which helped build their knowledge and understanding of local culture, food, arts and history" (National Integration Council, 2010b).

Finally, and playing on the nostalgia for the 'kampung spirit' that includes tightly knit communities, the HDB has also announced the construction of 'vertical kampung' style public housing. To be built in the Woodlands district by 2017, vertical kampungs are to "create a modern urban kampung within a busy city – one that can pull people together and create a sense of community" (The Straits Times, 2013 August 04). To this end, the new building type will combine public housing, healthcare services, and hawker centres under one roof while encouraging residents to look after one another (The Straits Times, 2013 August 05). In 2016, further plans to build another 'vertical kampung' in the Admiralty district surfaced. Featuring a community park, people's plaza, medical centre,

and housing flats, the design is to “support inter-generational bonding and promotes active ageing in place” through the “close proximity to healthcare, social, commercial and other amenities” (World Architecture News, 2016).

Neither of the two building projects were completed by the end of fieldwork. It was thus impossible to determine whether the projects and their references to kampung living have had positive outcomes on community life within the building complexes. However, informed by the public media, many interviewees had heard about the projects during my latter fieldwork stints and spoke highly of them. As they pointed out, the new housing projects promise to bring improved inter-generational and ethnic integration – two main factors felt to be hurting community life in the ‘heartlands’ (section 7.2).

The future benefits of the ‘vertical kampungs’, or the various nation-building efforts discussed above, are likely impenetrable given the many simultaneous programmes pursued nation-wide. But I propose that such initiatives, nonetheless affected how interviewees saw the State. For the campaigns signal to Singaporeans that the PAP and HDB are aware of community and neighbourhood issues and are leveraging state power to solve them. For instance, with a view of nation-building, an interviewee observed:

The PAP has come to realise that maybe we had too many foreigners coming in too quickly and that this has not been good for our identity and communities. It’s also their fault for not communicating it better, like the ‘[population] white paper’ which should have been presented more like a think-piece rather than saying ‘we will have x million more foreigners by 2030’. So that was incompetent. [...] Now we have reduction of immigration targets, the usual NDP [national day parade], and some new schemes, ‘kampung spirit’ and so on. But whether it works, who knows.

(5-room HDB-flat owner, 48 years old, male, Chinese)

And in a much similar vein, another interviewee pointed towards past failings of the PAP-state's nation building agenda but a recent turn in the state's approach to nation building:

Building the nation [...] has never really stopped with all the new people coming in. Its continuous. Sometimes I really feel it has not been that successful because tolerance is there but tolerance is a minimum level of cohesion. [...] But there are also signs that things have been changing. There has been unhappiness about the liberal immigration policy and you also see that in the [response to the population] white paper. But then the PAP has changed that and we also have more nation-building now where it's about keeping Singapore like Singapore.

(Living in parents' HDB-flat, 26 years old, female, Chinese)

Together with the ongoing public discourse and political discussions surrounding Singaporean identities, such views suggest that the image of the State as champion of a 'Singapore way of life' led constituents in the citizenry to ask for *more* state action. In that regard, it also bears emphasising that the State is here not imagined as perfect or infallible as the quotes above show. Perhaps even more revealing, a study by Hassan (1977) found that social ties and community interactions between neighbours were already weak in the late 1970s.

In the study, Hassan describes interactions between HDB-flat neighbours as "superficial and transitory" where such interaction "hardly transcends to any effective social relationships in which any meaningful social exchange could take place" (Hassan, 1977:200). The study thus contradicts the HDB's own survey and interviewees' reminiscing that depicted bygone days of HDB-living when neighbours exchanged food and looked

after each other's children and flats (section 7.2). Exploring the historical accuracy of either account is beyond the scope of my argument. However, the shared (imagined) memory of communal heartland living gives the State, imagined as champion of the 'Singapore way of life', a role to play in bringing about the 'new good old days' as the McDonald's commercial touts. And as Chua argued in a slightly different context (Chua, 1997:128-129) it appears that the PAP-state's past successes in dealing with national problems gives Singaporeans faith that the State, so imagined, can and will succeed.

This is reflected in the image of the State as champion of a 'Singapore way of life' on which Singaporeans (can) rely to protect Singapore's identity and national cohesiveness. Recalibrating its functions, the State is seen as addressing the 'hot button' issue of immigration and a deteriorating 'Singapore way of life' that had threatened to strain state-citizen relations (section 7.1). Even if the outcomes of recent nation-building initiatives are unclear, I suggest that the appearance of state action itself can help stabilise state-citizen relations, thereby prolonging regime durability (see chapter 8).

7.4 Conclusion: The 'State' and the 'Singapore way of life'

The literature regards economic performance and material advancements as the basis of state-citizen relations and continued popular support for the PAP-state despite its authoritarianism. The image of a State intervening to secure economic competitiveness and Singapore's integration into the global economy is reinforced by the survivalist national narrative (section 1.1).

In this chapter I emphasised the PAP-state's nation-building functions that sometimes conflict with the global city agenda and pursuit of national economic advancement.

Based on fieldwork findings, I argued that the (almost) universally experienced 'Singapore way of life' in the 'HDB-heartlands' has emerged as a defining aspect of Singapore's national identity. Such 'grassroots' conceptions of 'Singaporeanness' include the 'Singlish' dialect, community life in the HDB-housing estates, and love and appreciation for local food. Singaporean identities and images of the State thus unfold in the space between state interventions and citizens' contestations of the former's sometimes contradictory discourses and policies.

As Chang argued, "in the present phase of globalisation [...] the task of producing locality is increasingly a struggle" (Chang, 2012:692). At the heart of this struggle and ensuing tensions lie "citizen demands for closure symptomatic of nation-state formation on the one hand, and the rationale underpinning the functioning of a global city to fashion itself as a hub open to and animated by transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas on the other" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:16-17). The chapter argued that in Singapore, this conflict plays out in the constant remodelling of the built environment, and felt degeneration of life in the 'HDB-heartlands' due to an influx of immigration and social change.

Among interviewees and the wider population, this has "triggered major questions that have quickly spilled over from the straightforwardly economic sphere to other more complex arenas including Singapore's demographic future, its social landscape, and fundamental identity as a nation-state" (ibid.:2). I suggested that these issues resonate with Singaporeans the island over because especially the public housing programme has created a "community of belonging" that involves "both horizontal (communal) and vertical (institutional) bonds of belonging" (Barr and Skrbiš, 2008:40). HDB-heartland living

thus ties Singaporeans to each other and the State as it is variously imagined, regardless of citizens' individual social or ethnic backgrounds.

With heartland-living allegedly threatened, "an acute sense of displacement and identity erosion" has emerged in Singapore (Lim et al., 2014:19). Immigration, financial demands on citizens, and infrastructure developments that are resulting from state-led development are felt to threaten the 'Singapore way of life'. This has brought to a head the "contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity" (Chang, 2012:619). Lee Kuan Yew emphasised the need to subordinate common local cultural and religious beliefs to the aim of economic growth. However, as I showed, the PAP-state has become more active in balancing these sometimes-contradictory demands in the light of citizens' sentiments.

On the one hand, the PAP-state continues to crack-down on individuals disturbing harmonious, multiracial living in the 'heartlands', reinforcing the image of a State that can be counted on to weed out those who threaten the 'Singapore way of life'. On the other hand, projects like the 'vertical kampungs' signal an embrace of notions of 'Singaporeanness' that emerged as *reaction and in opposition* to the island's integration into the global economy. Crucially, the PAP-state's contemporary nation-building projects build on these grassroots understandings of Singapore's national identity. As the chapter showed, previous nation-building objectives had been top-down, contradicted these local conceptions, and were cause for discord as in the case of the 'speak good English campaign'. Regardless of the actual effects of building such 'vertical kampungs' or nation-building exercises in the HDB new towns, interviewees thus saw the State as reacting to their concerns about the degeneration of the 'Singapore way of life'.

Singapore's state is thus neither simply "one of the culprits in the demise of community" as is sometimes said to be the case elsewhere (Evans, 1996:1036), nor have top-down nation- and community-building programmes entirely succeeded. Chang argued that "the general effect of globalisation has been to weaken national forms of cultural identity" (Chang, 2012:692). What I argue, then, is that the presumed ability of the PAP-state to preserve a 'Singapore way of life' gives the State qua champion of this 'Singapore way of life' its deeper legitimacy and *raison d'être*.

Beyond my pool of interviewees, the PAP-state's emphasis on nation-building and new restrictions on immigration are "thought to have contributed to the better than expected showing in the September 2015 general elections" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). The state thus garners popular support by placating the current "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (ibid.). This is a far cry from the economic 'performance legitimacy' arguments that dominate the literature.

This and the two previous chapters have thus outlined three predominant State images that emerged from fieldwork in Singapore and contextualised them within sentiments of the wider population. These sentiments are revealed by surveys data, suggested by analysis of election results, and discussed in scholars' assessments of contemporary politics in Singapore (chapter 3). The chapters have also proposed that continued and re-surgant popular support for the PAP-state can be accounted for by the latter's recent attempts to rebalance the state's role in promoting economic growth with other aims including social inclusion and protecting Singapore's national identity.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the PAP-state thus appears responsive to citizens' demands despite its authoritarian tendencies. With a focus on the public housing programme, the next chapter thus delves deeper into the nature and effectiveness of

the PAP-state's authoritarian social control mechanisms. I argue that authoritarian state practices hamper the political opposition but are less all-encompassing and oppressive than the literature takes for granted. I propose that, paradoxically, this (relative) ineffectiveness of state authoritarianism together with apparent responsiveness to citizens' policy demands stabilises state-citizen relations and thus promotes regime durability.

8. Imperfect but responsive: Authoritarianism and Singapore's 'State'

The literature has attempted to explain the continued durability of state authoritarianism in Singapore by pointing towards the state's ostensible 'performance legitimacy' (section 1.1). The consensus had thus been that the PAP-state is seldom challenged due to an "unspoken social contract whereby Singaporeans have been prepared to accede to the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered" (Henderson, 2013:217). The previous chapters have problematized taking this performance legitimacy argument for granted and presented additional ways in which the State can appear legitimate in the eyes of Singaporeans.

Few, however, have paused to question how Singapore's brand of 'competitive' state authoritarianism plays out 'on the ground'. Assessments of the PAP-state that is in full control of its citizens, and able "to augment state power and silence its critics", predominate (Rajah, 2012:295). And with respect to my central case studies, Tremewan argued that since national independence, social policy has become "the basis of social control" under the PAP-state (Tremewan, 1994:208-209). Especially the public housing programme is taken to further the PAP-state's "hegemonic control" through various authoritarian state practices that cement the population's "enslavement" to the PAP-state (Chua, 2000:56). Scholars have taken for granted that such authoritarian tactics are successful in establishing PAP dominance and cowing the population into submission.

Focussing mainly on the case study of public housing provision as authoritarian control mechanism, I argue that this is not so. On the one hand, Singaporeans find ways

to selectively evade authoritarian state practices in daily life. For one, this belies the depictions of Singapore's PAP-state as in complete control of the population. For another, and in combination with the relative lack of violence inherent in the PAP-state's brand of authoritarianism, the ability to allude the state in daily life can make authoritarian rule more bearable for citizens.

On the other hand, citizens have been able to illicit policy adjustments from the PAP-state on various occasions in Singapore's history (section 4.3). In respect to the latter, I argue that citizens' (limited) ability to express political sentiments in general elections and 'consultative exercises' can make the State appear as responding to citizens' demands when making policy changes. This is akin to what Weller (2008) called 'responsive authoritarianism' where the state pre-empts popular calls for regime change by addressing common grievances among citizens through policy. However, I suggest that what is more important for the stability of state-citizen relations than actual policy adjustments, is how the State is *seen* to respond to citizens' grievances.

To clarify: I do not present a fourth State image that competes with the three ways of seeing the State and its functions that emerged as predominant from fieldwork (chapters 5-7). Instead, I analyse how authoritarian state practices play out 'on the ground'. Contrary to the previous chapters, I thus focus on how interviewees' saw the State in terms of politics and its ostensible responsiveness to citizens' demands, rather than any specific function of the state.

I develop the argument as follows. Section 8.1 outlines state practices through which the PAP has imposed authoritarian forms of social control over Singapore's public housing residents. The PAP-state has infiltrated neighbourhood associations, is rewarding and punishing public housing residents in line with their political allegiances at the

ballot box, and has shaped the physical political landscape to its advantage. Through such measures, the PAP-state has managed to establish a significant level of control over the population while using relatively little violence.

Section 8.2 draws on fieldwork data to suggest that such authoritarian control mechanisms are less effective in directing citizens' everyday life than usually taken for granted. I show that Singaporeans are able to selectively sidestep and circumvent many of the state's surveillance mechanisms in the case of minor transgressions. I suggest that being able to evade state surveillance in something akin to 'everyday forms of resistance' described by Scott (1985) can make authoritarianism appear less burdensome in daily life. However, I also argue that, paradoxically, having some limited room for dissent does not embolden more outright forms of resistance because the State continues to appear as omniscient and powerful in its ability to punish serious political detractors.

Section 8.3 then turns towards feedback mechanisms like elections and 'consultative exercises' that give Singaporeans the opportunity to express political sentiments and provide input for policy-making. Given the authoritarian conditions, scholars have rightly questioned the sincerity with which the PAP-state incorporates citizens' feedback expressed in elections or elsewhere. However, I argue that the PAP-state has successfully created the *appearance* of responsiveness through elections, consultative exercises, and by re-balancing social and economic interventions (chapters 6 and 7). This suggests to Singaporeans that the State has been listening to citizens' demands, which, I propose, disperses political pressures for regime change.

Section 8.4 concludes the chapter by making the case that the way Singapore's brand of authoritarianism pans out 'on the ground' contributes to the stability of state-

citizen relations that underpins continued regime durability. On the one hand, Singaporeans are able to sidestep some authoritarian state practices in daily life while the PAP-state uses relatively little violence in its attempts to control the population. On the other hand, the State appears responsive to popular policy demands expressed by the population. Both helps to contain popular discontent with the regime and its authoritarian form of rule, thereby abating pressures for political liberalisation.

The point made here is not that authoritarianism is *politically* ineffective. On the contrary: leaders of the political opposition and other public figures speaking out against the PAP are persecuted through legal means (Low, 2014c:2012; Rajah, 2012). As I show, such persecution of the PAP's serious political opponents is part of what can make Singapore's State appear omniscient and powerful. At the same time, state control over domestic capital and labour prevents the political opposition from gaining the financial clout necessary to effectively contend with the PAP (section 4.1). When it comes to addressing the increasingly complex issues and concerns brought forward by Singapore citizens (chapters 5-7), the PAP-state thus emerges as only viable agent on which Singaporeans (can) depend.

The findings directly contribute to a better understanding of the unexpected resilience of 'competitive authoritarian' states elsewhere (chapter 2). Competitive authoritarianism had widely been expected to be unstable because the presence of some democratic institutions "will eventually bite authoritarian regimes where it hurts" (Krastev, 2011:10). The 'half-way house' of what Huntington called 'liberalised authoritarianism' would not be "a stable equilibrium" (Huntington, 1991:137). But state-citizen relations and authoritarianism under such hybrid regimes have proven to possess a high degree of stability (Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011) as the 'halfway house' has often proven to be

a fortress (Brownlee, 2007:16). What the case of Singapore and this chapter suggest, then, is that competitive authoritarianism can be stable if the extent to which authoritarianism is negatively experienced is limited and the State is seen to be 'responsive' to citizens' policy demands.

8.1 Establishing authoritarian social control

This section argues that the PAP has leveraged the public housing system to – quite literally – shape the political landscape to its political advantage while establishing authoritarian control over the population. Following Singapore's independence, organised forms of political opposition were broken up through forced resettlement of the population into then newly-built HDB-new towns. Since then, the PAP is using gerrymandering practices, a town council system, and a selective HDB-flat upgrading scheme to its political advantage. At the same time, the PAP-state has monopolised the organisation of community life in the HDB-heartlands by co-opting and establishing resident associations for its own political purposes.

The PAP's extensive grassroots presence in the housing estates continues to impede political opposition parties from establishing a secure foothold. This restricts the opposition's opportunities to position itself as a political alternative to the PAP. I show that, with the exception of forced land acquisition, social authoritarian control has been established without habitual use of violence. This is important, because it can make state authoritarianism easier to bear for citizens, as I argue in section 8.2. In this section I focus on the PAP-state's spatial control strategies, the town council system and selective upgrading schemes, and the infiltration of the resident associations in turn.

Spatial control of the public housing estates

In the public housing programme's early years, the HDB pursued a campaign of forced land acquisition and land clearance. Hastened by 'fires of convenience' and the 1966 Land Acquisition Act (Pugh, 1984:16-17), newly acquired and cleared land could then be re-developed into HDB-housing 'new towns' (Field, 1987:148-149). The destruction of various Chinese villages and Malay Kampunges "provided the PAP with the opportunity of breaking up established and potential opposition electoral communities by dividing up old ethnic, working-class communities for resettlement in dispersed locations" (Lim, 1989:183). As Tremewan put it, the PAP-state thereby "aimed to drain the pond in which the opposition fish swam" while "disrupting as far as possible the social base of opposition political organisation" (Tremewan 1994:46). Resettlement was thus "an effective instrument in altering the political demography in Singapore" to the PAP-state's advantage (Minchin, 1991:249).

Resettlement into various discrete HDB-housing 'new towns' placed Singaporeans in a living environment that would be "easy to monitor and easy to isolate should the need arise" (ibid.:250). The arrangement of these new towns in a ring formation has been argued to further help to surveil and isolate each new town (*image 18*). Ethnic quotas and the interspersed flat types (section 7.1) in all HDB-housing blocks ensure a solid working-class Chinese majority in every of these new towns and electoral districts. This prevents ethnic, linguistic, or social minorities from forming a block-vote against the PAP in general elections (Sim et al., 2003b:299-300).

Image 18: Plan of HDB new towns arranged according to the 'ring concept' (Castells et al., 1990:218)

There is little doubt that equal distribution of the population in terms of ethnicity and social background in public housing estates has furthered the PAP's political interests. Positive effects of the relative absence of opposition strong-holds on the PAP's electoral performance in the light of Singapore's first-past-the-post election system and gerrymandering practices are widely recognised (Wang, 2012:371; Tremewan, 1994:65; Yeo, 2002; Fetzer, 2008).

Incentivising electoral support: Town councils and selective upgrading

With the introduction of the town council (TC) system in 1988, gerrymandering and the spatial arrangements of HDB-housing estates gained further importance. Under the system, each electoral constituency is overseen by one TC that is responsible for organising the upkeep of common areas in HDB-housing estates within its jurisdiction. This includes

the maintenance of hawker centres, parks, walkways, void-decks, lifts, and common corridors, as well as organising general services like waste disposal (Tremewan, 1994:64; Eng and Kong, 1997:449). TCs are run and managed by MP(s) of the political party that was victorious in the corresponding electoral district.

The TC system is understood to serve the PAP's hegemonic interests as the PAP warns Singaporeans that the opposition parties have little resources or experience in local administration. A badly run TC can hurt HDB-flat resident-owners financially as the South China Morning Post commented:

A well-run estate can flourish, while negligence and poor service will result in run-down flats, poor facilities, not to mention the dangers of corruption. Property values of such estates will rise or fall depending on how well or how badly they are run (South China Morning Post, 1988 September 5).

As Tremewan argues, PAP-held TCs "have the back-up of the state administrative apparatus" while "the extent to which any opposition-controlled council has this support may depend on whether the government wants it to succeed or fail in the eyes of its constituents" (Tremewan, 1994:64).

The continued use of the TC system to control Singaporeans' political allegiances is demonstrated in the 2015 case of the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) that unfolded during one of my fieldwork stints. Wrestled from the PAP by the Workers' Party in GE 2011, AHPETC became the centre of public attention in 2015 after evidence emerged that AHPETC had misused public funds. Most importantly, persons in charge of running the TC approved payment of over S\$23 million to an estate management agent company, which was co-owned by members of the TC itself. As independent

auditing firm KPMG confirmed, payments made to the management agent company represented a serious conflict of interest (The Straits Times, 2015 November 1a).

The PAP attempted to capitalise on the scandal. PAP MPs called the Workers' Party's lapses 'astounding' and argued that the Workers' Party (WP) "had betrayed the trust of its residents" by hiring the estate management agent company in question (The Straits Times, 2015 February 14a). MP Khaw thus urged Singaporeans to consider how AHPETC's performance reflected on the WP more generally when asking "if they cannot even run a town council well, how can they be entrusted with the even more critical responsibility of running the country?" (The Straits Times, 2015 February 14b).

In its response to the PAP's accusations, the WP argued that AHPETC had no choice but to hire the estate management agent company owned by its own party members. According to the WP, no other such company responded to the town council's tender. Lamenting AHPETC's inability to draw on the same resources as PAP-run town councils, the Chief of the Workers' Party argued in parliament that

none of the managing agents serving PAP town councils has bid for tenders issued by AHPETC for political reasons. [...] If an opposition party aspires to be the next government, it may need to build an army of civil servants first. This is a strange situation for any functioning democracy [sic.] to be in (The Straits Times, 2015 February 13b).

Supporting the WP's claims, the company providing computer accounting software to all other TCs in Singapore had terminated the software lease agreement with AHPETC when the WP took over in 2011 (Lim, 2016:47). The company in question, 'Action Information Management Pte Ltd', is co-owned by 3 former PAP MPs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the

WP's complaints fell on deaf ears as the PAP attempted to use "the issue to discredit the WP and remind voters of one of the key positive legacies of Lee Kuan Yew: a clean and efficient government" (ibid.).

Finally, and complementing the 'stick' of underperforming TCs in opposition-held constituencies, various state sponsored HDB-flat upgrading programmes serve as a 'carrot' rewarding electoral constituencies exhibiting strong support for the PAP. Upgrading programmes include the adding of amenities to HDB-blocks including the retrofitting of lifts in old estates and improving the interior of flats (Eng and Kong, 1997:443). Such upgrading thus presents the (relative) value of ageing HDB-flats (section 5.3). Community Development Minister Tarmugi made no bones about the political background behind the upgrading programme when telling Singaporeans "if you want your blocks and precincts to be upgraded earlier, you know what to do at the next election. The answer is in your hands" (The Straits Times, 1996 January 29).

Authoritarian control over social life

The PAP-state's use of spatial control mechanisms to strengthen its political power over the population has been paralleled by a "process of imposing state social organisation" within the HDB-housing estates (Tremewan, 1994:47). That the PAP attempts to monopolise the administration and organisation of social life in the HDB-housing estates is widely recognised (Tan, 2003; Castells et al., 1990:193). According to Tremewan, "the PAP's strategy of monopolising all social spaces outside the workplace in its quest of a mass base, destroyed alternative organisation and precluded the possibility of new autonomous non-state social organisation" (Tremewan, 1994:49). The main tool for doing

so has been the infiltration and the setting up of various resident associations in the HDB-housing estates. The three most important of these associations are the Residents' Committees (RCs), Citizen Consultative Committees (CCCs), and People's Association (PA).

The first RC was set up as an informal association by HDB-housing residents in the Marine Parade area to organise social events and resolve issues within the neighbourhood (Lai, 1995:98). By 1988 the PAP had formally institutionalised the Marina Parade RC and introduced RCs all over Singapore. RCs are to facilitate the organisation of social life in each neighbourhood, specifically the promotion of "neighbourliness, ethnic harmony, and community cohesiveness" (Castells et al., 1990:146). "To weed out subversive elements", volunteers looking to become RC members are required to undergo security screening and must be appointed by the Prime Minister's Office (ibid.:320). This has firmly placed the RCs under the PAP's control and incorporated them into the PAP-state itself (Tremewan, 1994:66-67). RCs have thus "become increasingly powerful and involved in political, as well as merely administrative, affairs" (Lim, 1989:184).

To coordinate activities and programmes offered by the RCs and grassroots organisations, the PAP set up the CCCs. Each CCC oversees the activities of RCs in one particular electoral district. Similar to the RCs, the CCCs' members are appointed by a CCC Advisor who is an elected PAP MP. This directly connects the CCCs to the PAP-state (Gamer, 1972:198-199). The CCCs thus "incorporated influential local figures into the PAP government machinery, gathered political intelligence and defused local problems before they became points of political mobilisation" (Tremewan, 1994:48).

Finally, the network of RCs, CCCs, and grassroots organisations has been brought under the umbrella formed by the People's Association (PA). Established in 1960, the PA

is directly overseen by the Prime Minister's Office. On the one hand, the PA broadly directs and streamlines activities aimed to cater to the "recreational, educational, cultural and welfare needs of the residents." On the other, it turns residents' associations into two-way communication channels "to disseminate information and obtain feedback on national issues and policies" (Sim et al., 2003:299).

In light of this intricate network of associations, and as discussed in the following section, the State can easily appear as omnipresent and omniscient. Lee Kuan Yew himself proudly pointed towards the importance of HDB-housing and various resident associations for the surveillance and political indoctrination of the population:

Look at our new towns with community centres, parks and stadiums. [...] They have their MPs, RCs, MCs [Management Committees], CCCs, who act like the network of nerves and sensors which monitor signals and feedback and sends out messages in return (The Straits Times, 1984 August 20).

Some years later, Lee commented on a delegation from China visiting Singapore to learn about town management and its political system: "they discover that the People's Action Party has only a small office in Bedok.²³ But everywhere they go, they see the PAP – in the RCs, CCCs, and the CCs" (The Straits Times, 2009 December 30).

As Lee alluded to, many of the social events and community-building exercises in the HDB-heartlands are carried out with an explicit slant towards the PAP or with participation of PAP functionaries. The 'Amazing Heartland Race' where participants followed a trail around the HDB new town and delivered groceries to elderly residents (section 6.2), for instance, was overseen by the Minister of National Development (Housing and

²³ A district in the South-East of Singapore

Development Board, 2013b:5). Interviewees reported that similar events are usually attended by figures from the PAP's national elite or local TC. Such incorporation of the various resident and grassroots associations into the PAP-state is of elevated significance given their crucial role in community-building and social support provision within the 'many helping hands' approach (chapter 6).

The resident associations are thus the "neighbourhood 'eyes and ears' of the ruling party" while the public housing programme has become the base "of social organization and political mobilisation" for the PAP (Lim, 1989:184). Having permeated the administration of social life in the HDB-housing estates, the PAP next turned to infiltrating life in the HDB-heartlands itself.

For instance, CCs that serve as venue for sports clubs and youth activities are "often the site of the PAP branch headquarters" (Tremewan, 1994:48). This makes them part of the PAP-state's "extensive network of communication and control which was more and more used for direct political indoctrination [...] further blurring the distinction between party and state" (ibid.). Similarly, the PAP's lightning logo adorns the fronts of the many PAP-sponsored kindergartens and education centres located in HDB-housing blocks (see *image 19*).

The PAP has also set up designated facilities to host regular 'Meet-the-People Sessions' where Singaporeans can meet their PAP MP to voice complaints, give feedback, or ask for financial assistance (see *image 20*). In the latter case, the PAP MP can provide direct discretionary social support to residents who are overburdened by the cost of social services like housing and healthcare (Lim, 1989:184; Barr 2008:407).



Images 19 and 20: Education Centre in Ayer Rajah district with PAP-Logo in top left of door sign (left) and facility for PAP's 'Meet-the-People Session' in an HDB-estate in Yishun district (right)

This discretionary welfare provision directly ties citizens utilising such support to the PAP-state and is a boon for the ruling party. According to a leader of the Workers' Party interviewed during fieldwork, the political opposition parties lack the financial resources to establish kindergartens or permanent facilities for 'Meet-the-People Sessions' of their own.

8.2 The authoritarian 'state' in daily life and imagined 'State' omniscience

As I have shown in the previous section, arguments like those advanced by Tremewan (1994) that depict the PAP-state as having established firm authoritarian control over the population are not without merit. The PAP has set up a comprehensive system of state surveillance, co-option, and repression of political alternatives. Beyond the public housing system, the PAP-state established political control over the population through the courts system, the state-owned media, and the education system (Section 1.1).

Drawing on fieldwork data and continuing to focus on the case study of public housing in particular, the following asks how the discussed authoritarian state practices pan out 'on the ground' and affect Singaporeans' view of the 'State'. In section 8.2.1, I show that although the PAP has successfully established political dominance in the 'HDB-heartlands', Singaporeans are able to sidestep and evade authoritarian state practices in daily life. This belies depictions of the PAP-state as completely controlling the population.

In section 8.2.2, I suggest that being able to stage limited transgressions can make authoritarianism more bearable in citizens' everyday life. The same is true in respect to the PAP-state largely avoiding the use of violence in its attempt to politically control the general population. I propose that as a result, Singapore's brand of authoritarianism creates less popular discontent than more totalitarian or violent kinds, thereby contributing to the stability of state-citizen relations.

Finally, section 8.2.3 shows that having limited room for disobedience does not necessarily take away from the image of an all-knowing State. Interviewees often did not believe that transgressions are going by unnoticed. Instead, the State is imagined to forgive smaller forms of disobedience while swiftly punishing those who are challenging the PAP-state politically. I suggest that this further helps stabilise state-citizen relations because Singaporeans are thus not emboldened to challenge the PAP-state more outright.

8.2.1 Limits of spatial control and grassroots engagement

This section returns to the social control mechanisms discussed above. Based on fieldwork findings, I argue that public housing residents are able to sidestep and elude the PAP-state's authoritarian state practices and engage in minor transgressions in everyday

life. Following the structure of section 8.1, I discuss evidence that casts into doubt (i) contemporary political benefits accrued from resettlement of the population, (ii) the town council system, and (iii) the selective HDB-flat upgrading programme. I then turn to the PAP-state's attempts of bringing social life in the HDB-heartlands under its control where I focus on the various residents' associations.

Spatial control re-evaluated

During the public housing programme's early years, forced resettlement of the population into HDB new towns disrupted the formation and hardening of opposition strongholds based on existing 'natural' communities (Minchin, 1991:250). However, I suggest that the contemporary effect of population resettlement on the formation of (political) associations that could challenge the PAP must be questioned.

Housing arrangements do not prevent Singaporeans from congregating and discussing political issues. For instance, and especially on weekends and public holidays, Malay Singaporeans are meeting in the Geylang area while the food courts and 'People's Park' in Chinatown are filled with Chinese Singaporeans. Filipinos are congregating around Orchard Road and Indians come together in Singapore's 'Little India'. While these regular gatherings are not formally organised or politically motivated, interviewees ensured me that political issues are discussed among friends and relatives. And while no interviewee reported that such meetings served a political agenda, the 2013 'Little India Riots' (section 7.3) demonstrates their political potential. There are thus ample opportunities for 'natural' communities with potential common (political) interests to come together.

Similarly, the PAP-state's quota system seems to fail in upholding strict ethnic mixing of housing residents. Vadaketh argues that "ethnic enclaves have now formed, including a rather posh Indian one in the East Coast and a more humble Vietnamese one in Joo Chiat" (Vadaketh, 2014a:66). In that respect, the formation of "some 'ghettos' – including South Asians in Serangoon Road or Filipinos in Orchard Road – is some proof that it is pointless to try and socially engineer neighbourhoods, whether in terms of its inhabitants or daily visitors" (ibid.:73).

The extent to which spatial separation prevents the formation of organised (political) interest groups is also cast in doubt given nearly universal Internet access and difficult to monitor online communication channels. Asked about where I could find news sources critical of the PAP, few interviewees failed to direct me to websites like 'The Online Citizen' (<http://www.theonlinecitizen.com>), 'All Singapore Stuff' (<https://www.allsingaporestuff.com>), or 'The Real Singapore' (<http://therealsingapore.com>). More clandestine but similarly well known to interviewees were websites like '*Singapore Hardware Zone*' (<http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg>) where online forums double as platforms to discuss politics rather than computer hardware. While only three interviewees said that they would themselves post comments in such online forums, interviewees overall did not hesitate to visit or recommend these websites to me. Housing regulations and spatial control thus seem to have little impact on the ability of PAP critics to express their opinions within loosely organised online communities.

Such online 'enclave deliberation' occurs "within more or less insulated groups, in which like-minded people speak mostly to one another" (Sunstein, 2009:77). These online communities thus precisely represent the sort of 'enclaves' that the PAP-state had

attempted to eliminate. Indeed, in our 2013 interview, political commentator and academic Chua Beng Huat supposed that due to the Internet's opaque and murky nature, the PAP has largely given up ambitions to patrol and police the online sphere. Chua thus argued that the PAP-state's bans on selected websites that offer unsavoury content are merely 'symbolic' and meant to placate religious groups. According to Chua (and my own findings) the majority of Singaporeans have been able to make use of the Internet with few restrictions.

If forced resettlement of the population once drained "the pond in which the opposition fish swam" (Tremewan, 1994:46), spatial separation of communities or individuals does not have the same effect at this juncture.

Town councils and selective upgrading

The town council (TC) system was another social control mechanism that is taken to tighten the PAP's hold onto authoritarian power. To recapitulate, TCs have been understood to serve the PAP's hegemonic interests because the largely unproven opposition parties have little resources or experience in local administration. Voting opposition candidates into parliament is thus said to bring considerable downside to local resident-owners of HDB-flats.

But despite thinly-veiled threats that an opposition-held TC will spell (financial) doom for local residents, evidence of declining flat values in opposition-held TCs is conspicuous by its absence. This did not mean, however, that interviewees were entirely disinterested in the possible ramifications of an opposition-held TC on their flat values.

For instance, one informant explained that the TC system can create trepidations for supporting the political opposition:

So, what they did was that they made every member of parliament a little major. A little town chief or town council to run his little kingdom so to speak. To prove his worth; to give him work. The Prime Minister and his cabinet runs defence and foreign affairs while he looks after my grass out there, right? [...] So, the members of the opposition try to get our votes based on saying 'we will question the PAP for you; we will be your voice; we will ask all those questions about defence and money and finance and everything else'. But then they are left also with grass cutting. And with very few exceptions they have no experience with that. Of course, immediately I worry about my garden.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 63 years old, male, Chinese)

Despite worries like these, no interviewee complained that her local TC was performing badly or that her own HDB-flat value had ever been negatively affected by an underperforming TC – including those living within the jurisdiction of the AHPETC.

For instance, a Chinese entrepreneur couple living in a 4-room HDB-flat agreed that “if the opposition gets [voted] in we expect them to be as competent as the PAP” in the running of the TC and servicing of HDB-estates. Other interviewees pointed out that while the WP had made mistakes at AHPETC, the PAP is also prone to contracting out services utilised by TCs to companies owned by other PAP members. Owned by three (now retired) PAP MPs, ‘Action Information Management’, the company providing management software for all PAP-run TCs is one such example (Lim, 2016:47). With reference to the AHPETC case, a 28-year-old Chinese interviewee who lived in his parents’ HDB-flat summed up the sentiments of most of my interviewees. He argued that the PAP was

“beating a dead horse” where continuing to blame the WP that was “still learning”. Another interviewee said:

I think the PAP went too far and Singaporeans know it's all political. Now there is a whole move of people feeling sorry for the underdog. But this does not change that the WP has done something that they should not have done. But the PAP has been going on about the [AHPETC] for too long and that gets people on the side of the WP.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 44 years old, female, Malay)

Interviewees thus tended to regard the PAP's treatment of the WP as unwarranted and were generally unimpressed by warnings about the possible perils incurred by an opposition-held TC.

Finally, the PAP has also attempted to incentivise residents to vote for the ruling party by promising to upgrade HDB-flats within electoral constituencies showing strong support for the PAP. Singaporeans have thus often been told that they would be rewarded for their electoral support: as Lee Kuan Yew put it during his 1990 national day rally, Singaporeans who “stayed the course” could expect the government to “double the value of their assets in 20 years” (quoted in Tremewan, 1994:65). But despite these public statements and the importance of HDB-flat values for retirement, *none* of my interviewees admitted that the programmes influenced their voting behaviour. For instance, one interviewee explained possible positive effects of upgrading on his own neighbourhood in the Geylang district:

Elections coming next year, and some MPs will say ‘vote for me, you are going to have MRT station in front of your house’. MRT station naturally

increases your [flat] value by S\$30,000. They say, 'oh, I will give you lift upgrading'. That increases [your flat's value] by S\$10,000. And with the right TC it means that your parks will be green, your river will be fixed. [...] The PAP takes advantage of working with the national parks department and your local MP will take the credit. [...] I vote for PAP but will I vote for my PAP MP because of that? No.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 35 years old, male, Chinese)

I cannot claim that these findings are representative of the entire population. And perhaps interviewees were too proud to say that authoritarian practices influenced their voting behaviour. This is unlikely, however. For instance, interviewees happily admitted that they support the PAP-state due to its economic functions (chapter 6). Or when expressing support for the PAP-state given the (increased) social provisions (chapter 7).

Either way it is difficult to 'prove a negative'. But I suggest that the fact that no interviewee admitted to be swayed by the PAP's promises in the form of HDB-flat upgrading or TCs casts serious doubt on the assumption that these authoritarian control mechanisms are entirely effective. This assessment is given further credence by the fact that despite the PAP's efforts to use the 2015 AHPETC saga to its political advantage, the WP managed to hold onto the electoral constituency in GE 2015 later that year – albeit barely (Singh, 2016:136). Clearly, the PAP did not manage to bully the resident population into voting for the ruling party.

The limits of grassroots engagement

Fieldwork data further suggests that the citizen engagement achieved through the resident associations in the HDB-housing estates is also limited. In terms of membership in

resident associations, only one of my 154 interviewees reported having been, or being willing to become a member of an RC or CCC. When asked about their disinterest, most interviewees responded that a lack of spare time stopped them from getting involved in these associations. Others said that they are, or would rather, be engaged doing community service in their respective churches or religious associations.

Interviewees also often exhibited antipathy towards members of the RCs and CCCs. First, because those joining were thought to 'do so for a reason': preference allocation for their children to desired local schools or preferential allocation of a flat in an HDB-block of their choosing. And second, most interviewees wanted little to do with members of the RCs who were sometimes dismissed as 'PAP lackeys' and generally mistrusted. One interviewee representing such predominant views explained that

only the ones really close to PAP will join [the RCs]. So immediately I wonder what they want, why they love PAP so much and what they do. When I see someone from the RC I just say 'hello', wave in a friendly manner, but I will never sit or talk with them.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 40 years old, male, Chinese)

Similarly, other interviewees stated that they kept their distance from RC members who they described as 'hypocrites' for organising community help while being accused of holding selfish motives for doing so.

The level of community engagement and political indoctrination achieved by social activities organised by resident associations is difficult to assess. However, the same pattern of attendance (or lack of attendance) emerged in respect to the various community-building and social support activities. Organised by the RCs and under guidance by

the CCCs and PA, such activities only attracted a select few of my interviewees. Again, without claiming that these findings are representative for the entire population, they at least cast into doubt that the PAP-state is entirely successful in controlling social life in the HDB-housing estates. If social events are attended and organised by the same group of residents who support the PAP politically anyway, the effectiveness of RCs and CCCs in indoctrinating the population and serving as the 'eyes and ears' of the PAP-state is questionable.

By the same token, complaints about a loss of community in the 'HDB-heartlands' suggest that few Singaporeans have been taking part in social and community-building events. This is further underscored by interviewees' observations that many of the Community Centre facilities were only used by a small minority of residents (section 7.2). With grassroots leaders and resident associations apparently more in touch with PAP-ideology than their fellow local residents, their effectiveness in indoctrinating residents and channelling feedback to the PAP cannot be taken for granted.

8.2.2. Authoritarianism's lack of discontent

In this section I suggest that citizens' ability to selectively elude the state (discussed above) and the relative lack of violence applied to control the population makes the PAP-state's brand of authoritarianism more bearable. The two factors are interconnected. The state employs legal means "to block political opponents and critics" and has expanded "the political space of the state" (Rodan, 2006:24) in society through forms of political co-option like the resident associations. But participation in such associations is voluntary

while other authoritarian state practices like the TC system or selective upgrading programmes also involve no physical force being exerted. I suggest that this helps to contain popular discontent with the authoritarian form of rule.

For instance, and to continue with the example of the resident associations, informants who wanted nothing to do with the RCs and CCCs thus simply avoided these organisations. Within my pool of interviewees, only elderly residents and young couples with children took part in social or community support events organised by the RCs or other PAP-related grassroots organisations. Five of the interviewed families sent their children to one of the PAP-sponsored kindergartens or education centres. Several elderly residents reported that they often played mah-jong, card games, or attended TV-nights based in or around the Community Centres. These interviewees who made regular use of such facilities and took part in events surrounding the CCs were aware of the PAP-state's involvement but were little troubled by it.

Mrs Sharatnam, a 28-year-old owner of a 4-room HDB-flat and mother of two, explained that she was not apprehensive about the PAP-state's quasi-monopolistic presence in community life. She argued that the various grassroots and resident functionaries "come here and organise everything in the neighbourhood. So, who needs opposition, lah? I don't even see Workers' Party or SDP [Singapore Democratic Party]. PAP makes sure of that." Participants who were satisfied with the PAP-state's role in organising social life in the 'HDB-heartlands' thus saw little problem with these authoritarian state practices. As long as the provision of services was regarded as adequate, the successful exclusion of the political opposition from the heartlands was seen as unproblematic. These residents simply saw little need for a stronger presence of the political opposition 'on the ground'.

Clearly, here as elsewhere, the PAP-state's authoritarianism is not that "of a violent police state that uses threats against life and limb" to bring the population under its control (George, 2000:84). The ISA that allows for arrest and indefinite incarceration without charge or trial (McCarthy, 2006:108), and which has been used to take out the PAP's left wing adversaries in the past (section 1.1), has not been invoked for political purposes since 1986 (Ortmann, 2011:155). The PAP does continue, however, to move swiftly to level legal charges like defamation lawsuits against prominent contemporary political detractors as I discuss below.

But the general population is not regularly confronted with the state's extensive authoritarian power in the same way. In its everyday guise, the State and its authoritarianism appear much more benign while citizens sidestep the PAP's social control mechanisms selectively. Such elusion of the state control is reminiscent of Scott's observation that peasants practice 'everyday forms of resistance' against their masters, thereby undermining the latter's authority in subtle but meaningful ways (section 2.3). These forms of "active noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception [...] make no headlines" but can hinder the state from pursuing policy effectively (Scott, 1985:31-36).

Similarly, interviewees did not openly protest against RCs or CCCs but refused to engage in events organised by these associations or to be friends with their functionaries. As shown above, interviewees thus spoke openly about their non-compliance in resident associations or consumption of PAP-critic online news sources but without criticizing authoritarian state practices *per se*. This is not to say that no criticism exists. Clearly, not all Singaporeans are as blasé about the state's authoritarian practices as the overwhelming

majority of my interviewees. One only has to speak to members of the political opposition or visit the PAP-critic websites mentioned above to see this. But a principled stance against authoritarianism is rare even there.

Of course, the absence of evidence is not definitive evidence of absence. However, the argument I advance here is not only that there is little evidence of such principled (popular) resistance against authoritarian state practices. The previous section also showed why citizens can experience authoritarianism as more bearable: because they can often sidestep the authoritarian state in everyday life and because of the lack of violence being used against them in the PAP-state's attempt to control the population.

That Singapore's brand of authoritarianism is less totalitarian than that of other authoritarian regimes is no illusion. Singapore's 'competitive authoritarianism' (section 2.1) does not rely on, or aspire to, the complete elimination of dissent. This is contrasted by other states' attempts to censor public and online discourse wholesale. The Chinese state perhaps pursues the most famous attempt of censoring almost the entire internet. It is thus blocking and censoring a host of websites "including some international news sources (i.e., BBC-Chinese), international blogger service providers (i.e., facebook, blogger), and some other websites" (Zheng, 2013:38).

Scott further argued that like "polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own" so that "the ship of state runs aground on such a reef" (Scott, 1985:36). My argument in this section suggests that no such collision is preordained. Quite the opposite: having some room for everyday forms of opposition can take the edge off authoritarianism. Together with the relative lack of violence present in the PAP-

state's contemporary brand of authoritarianism, such evasion and ability to perform everyday forms of resistance (either offline or online) seemed to make authoritarianism more bearable. Citizens not only wanted to sidestep some of the state's everyday forms of authoritarian control, but they were also *able to*.

8.2.3 Preserving the image of 'State' omniscience

I now want to argue that, paradoxically, citizens' ability to occasionally elude state control did little to take away from the image of the State as (almost) omniscient and able to punish serious political detractors. This is important because citizens engaging in 'everyday forms of resistance' are thus not emboldened to challenge the PAP more outright – even if they wanted to. I suggest that that this apparent paradox is the result of two related factors.

First, the PAP does not hesitate to bring down the state's authoritarian power on vocal and well-known political opponents and instigators of (political) unrest. This applies to numerous political opposition leaders like the SDP's former Secretary General, Chee Soon Juan (Rajah, 2012) and others, like the WP's J.B. Jeyaretnam before him (Nasir and Turner, 2012:8). But it also applies in the case of Internet bloggers like Amos Yee (chapter 7). All three have been persecuted and convicted several times under Singapore's Sedition Act for making unproven accusations against the PAP (Reuters, 2016 September 29).

Similarly, the recent trial against the co-founders of the now defunct 'The Real Singapore' website exemplifies that the PAP selectively takes legal action against those spreading politically controversial news stories online. With the website shut down by the Media Development Authority (The Straits Times, 2016 March 8), the website's co-

founders have been charged with 7 counts of sedition. The charges resulted in an 8-months jail sentence for the website's Singapore-based co-founder (BBC, 2016 June 28).

As discussed above (section 8.2.1), Chua called crack downs against online dissent 'symbolic'. But they also produce the image of the State as unforgiving towards those seriously challenging the PAP-state's authoritarian hold on power. By dishing out harsh punishments but remaining "deliberately vague about what people can and cannot say or express" the PAP-state is thus "feeding an environment of excessive self-censorship" (Vadaketh, 2014b:197). Singaporeans tread carefully to keep criticism and transgression within acceptable limits and do not necessarily equate lack of punishment with lack of surveillance. While the extent to which this is 'deliberate' is perhaps questionable, the effect was that interviewees engaging in minor forms of dissent against the PAP-state did not assume that such acts were going by unnoticed. That outspoken political opponents get persecuted while 'regular' citizens can perform minor transgressions, created the impression that the State had let them 'get away with it'.

Second, Singaporeans have learned not to equate the lack of punishment with a lack of surveillance because surveillance mechanisms are, in a sense, opaque and act in a way similar to Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*.²⁴ To illustrate this, re-consider the Chinese state's attempt to pre-emptively eliminate dissent and online access to potentially regime-critic international news sources wholesale (section 8.2.1). Unsurprisingly, the Chinese state has inevitably fallen short of the totalitarian project as citizens "use circumvention technology to access 'sensitive' information" (Zheng, 2013:38). Indeed, George

²⁴ A Panopticon is a (prison) building designed in such a way so that a single watchman can observe all inmates from his central position. Crucially, however, inmates are not able to tell if they are being watched at any given time. Although the watchman is unable to monitor all the prisoners all the time, the inmates thus act as if they are under constant surveillance (Semple, 1993).

argues that in Singapore and elsewhere, forms of ‘contentious journalism’ that operate at the edge of legality and challenge the authority of the elite have existed long before the Internet (George, 2006).

Perhaps more aware of limits to the state’s actual surveillance capabilities (and due to concerns about Singapore’s attractiveness to foreign ‘talent’), the PAP has abstained from launching a similarly ambitious campaign. The schism between authoritarian ambition and the reality of the state’s capability to implement total surveillance and control may thus chip away at the image of the Chinese State as effective well-oiled authoritarian machine. Singapore’s approach does not run the same risk because the PAP-state has not aimed for complete control of the online sphere or elimination of all dissent in the first place. The opaque nature of Singapore’s efforts to police the online sphere ensures that *actual failures* in state surveillance do not undermine the image of the State as omniscient powerful actor that is able to control the population.

Indeed, Singaporeans are confronted with many such instances where they cannot be sure what the actual extent of state surveillance is, and if they are being monitored as individuals. For instance, ballot papers in general elections are serially numbered so that each ballot can, in principle, be traced back to the person who cast it (Tremewan, 1994:157). The government’s justification for this is that the individual serial numbers allow identification of counterfoil ballot papers in case of suspicions that invalid votes had been cast (Government of Singapore, 2018). Despite such justifications and the fact that matching ballot papers to individual voters at a large scale would be laborious to the point of infeasibility, Singaporeans have lamented that the system instils fear among supporters of the political opposition (McCarthy, 2006:115).

Other examples of Singaporeans fearing surveillance without clear evidence that they are actually being monitored have come up at several points in this and previous chapters. For instance, Lee Kuan Yew – an embodiment of the image of Singapore’s State as omniscient and merciless against its opponents himself – emphasised that the neighbourhood associations in the HDB-housing estates act like the PAP-state’s “network of nerves and sensors” that monitor activities on the ground (The Straits Times, 1984 August 20). Even as interviewees avoided the RCs and CCCs, they did not take for granted that this was going by unnoticed. The tendency of interviewees to justify their absence from these associations while keeping up a façade of friendliness to RC and CCC functionaries (section 8.2.1) speaks volumes of this paranoia.

Similarly, during our interview, political commentator Katherine Lim maintained that the career of employees at Singapore’s GLCs can be truncated if it becomes known that they engage in political activism against the PAP (section 4.1). It was impossible for me to verify if this is actually happening. But clearly such rumours spread fear among the employees and feed into the image of the State as omnipresent in its surveillance – even if *actual surveillance* is much more limited.

Not revealing the actual extent, ambitions, and thus failures of surveillance, the State can therefore appear as more omniscient than it actually is. According to Abrams (1988), and in my terms, the withholding of knowledge and creation of secrets is a key mechanism of how ‘states’ rule and let ideas of the ‘State’ as standing above its citizens emerge (chapter 2):

If one approaches the more serious levels of the functioning of political, judicial and administrative institutions the control or denial of knowledge becomes at once simpler and absolute of course: one encounter the world

of official secrets. [...] an integral element of [institutional] power is the quite straightforward ability to withhold information, deny observation and dictate the terms of knowledge (Abrams, 1988:62).

The image of the State as omnipresent and powerful actor able to swiftly punish the PAP's serious political detractors if it chooses to do so is thus maintained. Accordingly, being able to sidestep or elude some of the state's authoritarian practices did little to make interviewees feel that they could challenge the PAP-state more outright.

8.3 Responsive authoritarianism under the PAP-state

Having argued that the PAP-state's brand of authoritarianism is more bearable than usually taken for granted while the image of the omniscient State is nonetheless maintained, I now turn to the issue of responsiveness. Weller suggests that "the structural problems that one-party rule creates is knowing how government is really working on the ground" (Weller, 2008:118). According to Weller, the state in China (like the pre-democratic Taiwanese state) thus utilises informal forms of citizen feedback to gauge public sentiments and address this problem.

These informal feedback channels include NGOs, petitions to officials, or media coverage on public policy issues. Implementing policy changes based on this feedback makes authoritarianism 'responsive'. Under 'responsive authoritarianism', critical voices being consulted "can exist symbiotically with the state for a long time" if "a careful combination of co-option, encapsulation, and repression" is maintained (ibid.:123). Put

simply, the state pre-empts the emergence of political pressures for regime change by addressing citizens' demands through policy.

This section shows that the PAP-state has become increasingly sophisticated in its approach to gathering feedback from citizens. In addition to the (limited) political discourse in elections and citizens' ability to provide 'feedback' through their vote, the PAP opened a feedback channel when introducing a 'Feedback Unit' (now known as REACH) in 1985 (Quah, 2010:228). REACH functions "as a state mechanism through which people [can] voice their concerns regarding government policies" (National Library Board, 2017).

To gain additional insight into issues of political contention, the PAP also appoints selected members of the political opposition to parliament, ostensibly to give the opposition a louder voice. Far from a move towards political liberalisation, 'consultative exercises' and the nomination of unelected Members of Parliament (NMPs) co-opt the PAP's critics and are to obviate the need for a (strong) political opposition in the eyes of citizens (Rodan, 2006:15). Based on fieldwork findings, I develop two related arguments here.

First, engaging the wider public (including PAP critics) in the policy-making process fuels the image of a State that is listening to citizens and responding to their diverse needs (chapter 5-7). Pace the assessment by Weller (2008), I suggest that institutionalised consultation itself – rather than information that consultation generates for better policy making – can be crucial for stabilising state-citizen relations. But second, I suggest that having furthered the image of the State as 'listening' to its citizens can create its own set of expectations that citizens have towards the PAP-state. (Almost) monopolising public service delivery and feedback channels can thus become politically problematic for the PAP-state if it is not able to somewhat address the concerns and wishes expressed by citizens.

Responsive authoritarianism through a consultative style of government?

I suggest that contrary to less 'competitive' forms of authoritarianism, the presence of democratic processes like regular elections has provided the PAP-state with some form of feedback 'from the ground'. "Elections under authoritarianism reveal political trends" not only to observers on the side-lines (Brownlee, 2007:9) but also to incumbents themselves, enabling them to respond to the population's sentiments and policy demands (section 2.1). In Singapore, elections thus matter also "because they force the ruling party to defend its policies and respond to citizen demands" (Ortmann and Thompson, 2016:43). Beyond elections, 'consultative exercises' under the 'Feedback Unit' institutionalise citizens' ability to provide substantive feedback.

Consultation also includes the NMP scheme through which the PAP can nominate opposition politicians and 'experts' to join parliament and provide policy input without granting them full parliamentary voting rights. While allowing for a wider range of non-partisan representation in Parliament, several academics have argued that the NMP scheme co-opts political opponents and interest groups. Individuals who "were fiercely independent and frequently a thorn in the flesh of government officials" and "want to act as a check on the PAP [can] do so as non-partisan members of the House, instead of having to join the opposition" (George, 2000:117-118). One political effect of the scheme is therefore "to undermine the democratic concept of opposition" as it precludes the need for any actual opposition in Parliament (Tremewan, 1994:171-172).

Similarly, periodic public consultation exercises like the 2012 OSC have often been decried as attempts at channelling public dissent and placating citizens. Such "consultation and initiatives at political co-option" are thus "meant to obviate the need for more

elected opposition MPs, or an independent civil society”, thereby furthering the retention of the PAP-state (Rodan, 2006:15). Consultation has little to do with “the acknowledgment of any rights to involvement in public decision-making by Singaporeans” (ibid.:17).

Careful analysis of each consultative exercise is beyond the scope of this thesis. Still, I put forth that at least the most recent OSC and recalibration of the PAP-state’s roles in economy and society in the form of welfare extension and nation-building (chapters 6 and 7) suggest that the PAP has been taking feedback seriously. Emphasising the purpose of the OSC consultation exercise, the need for wide citizen involvement in the consultation process, and that the PAP-state was going to take feedback seriously, the OSC’s Chairman stated

I see the world growing more complex, with challenges coming fast and furious, and our needs growing ever more diverse. How, in such a world, can any one group of people have the answers to everything? (REACH, 2013c:2).

As discussed in section 3.3, the OSC drew on a representative sample of over 4,000 Singaporeans. Participants took part in facilitated dialogues and the OSC-survey that the previous chapters drew on. Consultative exercises are “carefully managed” (Yeo 2009:184) with respect to discussed topics and dialogue formats. However, my own interviewees saw their opinions reflected in many of the OSC’s findings that were published in 2013. Without insight into the inner workings of the PAP-state and its precise managing of consultative exercises, this at least suggests that consultation outcomes were not overly predetermined but did reflect a range of citizens’ actual opinions.

This gives credence to Yeo's assessment that 'consultation' is "a means of helping the PAP government to refine its agenda and make better policies rather than allowing citizens to challenge the PAP's grip on power" (Yeo 2009:184). In other words, instead of being a mere charade, consultation exercises help the PAP-state to detect policy issues and popular demands without taking steps towards meaningful political liberalisation or giving the consulted parties any real power.

However, what matters is not only the extent to which the PAP-state is actually able to assess public sentiments and be 'responsive', but in how far citizens are provided with "a sense of involvement in the policy process" (Rodan, 2006:17). Beyond national consultation, for instance, Singaporeans' opinions and input has increasingly been "invited in formal consultation exercises" (Henderson, 2013:217). Citizens are thus to provide input for the planning of parks and remodelling of the local built environment even as planning has remained top-down.

In my terms, local and national consultation can thus make the State appear as 'listening' to citizens even as the actual extent to which policy makers or bureaucrats pay heed to the result of any consultation remains ultimately impenetrable. That is, the State appears approachable instead of ruling with an iron fist from afar. At the same time, the institutionally regimented feedback process does not compromise the illusion of State cohesiveness. As the previous three chapters argued, the *image* of a State on which Singaporeans (can) depend, and which is responding to citizens' economic and social needs can continue to produce broad public support for the PAP-state despite authoritarianism.

In this respect, I argue that *what* policies the state introduces to address public grievances matters. For instance, section 6.2 and 6.3 showed that the two policy strategies that were to build a more 'socially inclusive Singapore' had diverging effects on how

the State was seen. The 'State' was not seen as helping citizens when strengthening community support networks or promoting better health *regardless* of the actual welfare outcomes produced. By contrast, the State was seen as 'helping Singaporeans' when increasing welfare payments and providing statutory welfare support.

Pace Weller (2008), regime stability under 'responsive authoritarianism' may thus not only depend on the extent to which the incumbent is able to gauge the 'mood on the ground' and adjust policy accordingly. What matters are (also) the State images that such consultations and policy responses evoke among citizens.

Raising expectations through consultation

However, I suggest that quasi-monopolistic social service delivery, combined with the feedback channels through which Singaporeans can voice opinions, produce expectations among the consulted and political risks for the PAP-state. If citizens think that the State is 'listening' to their concerns, they also expect the State to 'do' something to address policy issues revealed by consultation exercises. These include issues identified as having threatened the stability of state-citizen relations like the price of public services, felt degeneration of a 'Singapore way of life', and related topics like immigration.

The PAP's lacklustre performance in GE 2011 is not the first instance revealing that not responding to such popular sentiments is politically problematic for the PAP (section 4.3). The PAP's loss in the 1981 Anson by-election, for instance, is widely attributed to the state's heavy-handed forced resettlement initiatives and simultaneously rising HDB-flat prices (Pugh, 1989:855). And in healthcare delivery, too, the PAP-state has

occasionally been readjusting policy in response to public sentiments and political pressure from citizens. For instance, public protests led to the re-introduction of the highly-subsidised C-class wards at SGH in 1987 (Phua, 1991:28).

Public healthcare delivery at SGH was also at the centre of public attention in late 2015 as it became known that an outbreak of the hepatitis C virus in two of the hospital's renal wards had gone unnoticed for months. The outbreak itself took place from April to June of the same year and has been linked to 25 cases of patients being infected with the virus (Channel NewsAsia, 2015 December 8).

As an independent review committee later established, infection with the virus at SGH led to the death of eight patients due to arising medical complications (The Straits Times, 2016 March 17). All informants interviewed in late 2015 were closely following news stories covering the outbreak at Singapore's biggest hospital, and were speculating about its causes. What was never in question for my interviewees, however was that no matter the direct cause of the outbreak, the PAP-state was ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of healthcare delivery in (restructured) public hospitals. A loss of trust in healthcare delivery therefore also threatens to undermine trust in the PAP-state more generally. This was made explicit by several interviewees. For instance, one interviewee speculated on the immediate cause of the outbreak and asserted that the PAP-state would be held responsible by Singaporeans either way:

Renal ward they use dialysis and so on, right? Many ways of contamination, lah. But by accident or maybe someone tampering. [...] I once read a case where a nurse infected patients intentionally, I think in the US. If we had that here, by God, the PAP is in trouble. Even if not exactly their fault,

people will ask 'how come we have such people working in our hospital?'

And that question will be asked to the PAP, you see.

(Renting private housing, 28 years old, male, Malay)

And another informant interviewed in September 2015 before all facts of the case had been established remarked,

especially in health it's a matter of trust, isn't it? Now I am worried that if I go to hospital, will I get sick there? Will I get infected with something? They don't even know what happened there so how can I have peace of mind. [...] I don't know, I just hope it will be plain to see what happened and not some cover up or [something] fishy.

(4-room HDB-flat owner, 38 years old, male, Indian)

The independent review committee put an end to speculations and worries about a cover-up when it submitted its report to the MoH on 5 December 2015. The report identified several lapses in SGH's procedures and judged that the outbreak was "due to multiple overlapping factors, including gaps in infection control procedures and protocols" (The Straits Times, 2016 March 17). Lapses leading to poor infection control included "deviations from standard procedures in administering intravenous procedures, such as blood-taking and the giving of medication [...] and evidence of contaminated medical equipment such as computerised medical carts and trolleys" (Channel NewsAsia, 2015 December 8). In the incident's aftermath and following further investigations, four senior MoH officials and twelve persons in leadership roles at SGH were disciplined for failures in relation to the hepatitis C outbreak (The Straits Times, 2016 March 17).

As Straits Times' Senior Healthcare Correspondent Khalik argued, the episode affected "the image of the whole healthcare system," necessitating steps to be taken to regain the public's trust and confidence: "Looking for newer and better ways of doing things would do more to restore confidence than hospitals saying they will intensify checks and monitoring systems" (The Straits Times, 2015 December 10). If that comment was directed at the PAP-state to not let the public hospitals get away with empty promises of betterment, Health Minister Gan addressed the public to announce that he had "set up a task force to strengthen infection control in all hospitals following the release of the report on the hepatitis C outbreak" (The Straits Times, 2015 December 9).

I suggest that the SGH case, complete with the independent review committee, demonstrates that the PAP leadership is prepared to go to some length to protect the image of an incorrupt State that is willing to identify its own mistakes and improve upon them. I further suggest that doing so is politically critical for the PAP-state if state-citizen relations are to remain stable.

The PAP-state's dealing with the outbreak at SGH and similar issues is thus somewhat reminiscent of the 'responsive authoritarianism' described by Weller where the state is responding to public policy issues before they are politicised. According to Weller (2008), the Chinese and pre-democratic Taiwanese states have been responsive to popular demands, thereby managing to keep state-citizen relations from turning antagonistic on several occasions. The durability of 'responsive authoritarianism', then depends on the state's ability to maintain an equilibrium between 'responding' and 'repressing'. Weller names the failure to maintain this balance as "one of the several factors tipping

Taiwan from an authoritarian equilibrium” to democratisation (Weller, 2008:130). Another factor was the strengthening of domestic capital that had the means of challenging the state (section 4.1). Singapore has so far eschewed both threats to regime durability.

In contrast to Weller’s analysis, this section thus also shows that on the one hand, institutionalised feedback mechanisms and consultation can create the *image* of a State as listening and responding to the demands of citizens. This is distinct from China (and pre-democratic Taiwan), where feedback mechanisms are informal and not transparent, making it less likely that citizens see the State as directly responding to their requests. But on the other hand, I showed that more institutionalised forms of ‘responsive authoritarianism’ thus create their own set of citizen expectations for policy change.

The ability to vote for the political opposition makes the PAP-state politically vulnerable to disgruntled citizens. Publically expressed grievances in healthcare, housing, and other policy areas must be addressed if citizens are not to feel ignored or doubt the legitimacy of the State as they see it. The PAP’s sliding electoral support prior to the ongoing recalibration of the state’s roles in economy and society is evidence of this.

8.4 Conclusion: Authoritarianism re-assessed

The HDB-housing programme is often regarded as “fundamental to the exercise of social control” by the PAP-state (Nasir and Turner, 2012:4). In this regard, the physical design of HDB new towns and social life within the built environment is depicted as carefully and comprehensively engineered to further the PAP-state’s surveillance capabilities and political control over the population. Statements by some PAP politicians fuel this image of the State as omniscient and as having successfully cowed Singaporeans under its yoke.

This assessment is not entirely without merit as this chapter showed. The PAP-state has succeeded in pushing visible organised forms of political opposition from the HDB-heartlands. The ability of opposition parties to construct a strong grassroots support base has been hamstrung. By organising social life and community-based programmes, the PAP-state has managed to convince residents that a strong presence of the political opposition is largely unnecessary. And exerting control over who lives where has been a boon for the PAP in national elections.

However, the 'touristic intelligentsia' commenting on the Singapore case from afar (L'Heureux, 2010:142) and the PAP's political opponents exaggerate the effectiveness of the housing programme as authoritarian control mechanism. The state has not, as it were, succeeded in politically indoctrinating the heartland population. Citizens are able to selectively sidestep authoritarian control mechanisms and practice non-compliance, for instance, in the case of the various resident associations.

Such 'everyday forms of resistance' are not formally organised. Neither are they, perhaps, consciously meant to hinder the political workings of the PAP-state. However, if Singaporeans want to, and are able to, sidestep authoritarian state practices, fieldwork data also suggests that principled objections to authoritarianism were largely absent. I explained this by arguing that being able to selectively elude state surveillance and subvert authoritarian control mechanisms can make authoritarianism less burdensome in everyday life. The lack of popular discontent with the authoritarian form of rule can further be explained by the fact that the PAP-state's brand of authoritarianism does not habitually employ violence against the public. Singaporeans are then less likely to demand regime change and resist authoritarianism. Being able to stage 'everyday forms of resistance', however, did little to gnaw away at the image of an (almost) omniscient State

or to embolden open forms of resistance. I propose that this is the result of two interrelated aspects of the PAP-state's rule.

First, and while employing manifold authoritarian control mechanisms, the PAP-state is largely abstaining from pursuing an absolute or totalitarian surveillance agenda. This means that the inevitable existence of loopholes and citizens' evasion does not automatically undermine the image of the State as omniscient because the State is not thought to have aimed for complete control in the first place. Second, the 'out-of-bounds markers' distinguishing tolerated forms of (political) criticism from the "forbidden territory" (Ortmann, 2009:29) formed by unacceptable ones are for the most part poorly defined. Racism, ethnic, and religious discrimination are clearly 'out of bounds' under the sedition act (section 7.3). But what forms of political criticism, and by whom, are judged acceptable is less obvious.

Being "vague about what people can and cannot say or express" has thus created an atmosphere of self-censorship (Vadaketh, 2014b:197). As a result, Singaporeans do not necessarily interpret lack of punishment for minor transgressions as evidence of authoritarianism having failed, but of the State having let them 'get away with it'. The impression is reinforced by harsh punishments and merciless use of defamation and sedition lawsuits against prominent leaders of the political opposition or citizens otherwise (politically) active deep within the scarcely market 'forbidden' discursive territory. The image of an (almost) omniscient State selectively intervening to smite down its political opponents thus remains intact while political alternatives to the PAP are shut down.

At the same time, the State emerges as approachable and as 'listening' to its citizens in light of the consultative exercises and nomination of NMPs to parliament. Such feedback mechanisms are necessary so that the authoritarian state can compensate for

the lack of information about sentiments ‘on the ground’ otherwise marring autocratic rule (Weller, 2008:118). The state is then able to respond to citizens’ grievances through policy, which helps to prevent state-citizen relations from turning antagonistic.

Singapore’s ‘competitive authoritarianism’ (Levitsky and Way, 2002:53) is different from the case studies of China and pre-democratic Taiwan that Weller (2008) analysed because more than a semblance of political contest is taking place in Singapore. I thus suggested that feedback mechanisms not only allow gathering information about sentiments ‘on the ground’ to make better policies. If institutionalised, they also help to make the State *appear* as responding to citizens’ demands when adjusting policy. But their institutionalised nature – most importantly the presence of elections – also makes the PAP-state more vulnerable to political backlash for policy failures or when appearing ‘unresponsive’.

The chapter thus also directly spoke towards the unexpected contemporary resilience of ‘competitive authoritarianism’ elsewhere. It had long been assumed that together with increased levels of socio-economic development, the presence of some democratic institutions would undermine authoritarianism. The expectation is that an increasingly educated and wealthy population “will want, as active and informed citizens, to participate effectively in politics” and thus push for further democratisation (Nasir and Turner, 2012:4). And feedback mechanisms “imply an inevitable relaxation of control, [increasing] the potential that growing social forces may press against the structure of the state itself” (Weller, 2008:123).

More generally, modernisation theory (section 2.1) predicts socio-economic development to cause a shift in citizens’ preferences from ‘survivalist’ to ‘self-expression’ values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2009). But closer scrutiny also suggests that Singapore is

not necessarily a contradiction to that theory. On the one hand, citizens can practice forms of self-expression under Singapore's brand of competitive authoritarianism. And on the other, this has not led to "a growing emancipation from authority" (ibid.:37) because participation has been strictly managed while citizens see the State as responding to their demands.

Whether intentional or not, the PAP-state has thus been able to both weaken the political opposition by authoritarian means while making authoritarianism appear more bearable to citizens. I suggest that such perceived 'responsiveness' and the lack of alternatives to the PAP-state are stabilising state-citizen relations in Singapore, and can account for continued regime durability. The following chapter concludes by recapitulating this argument, including the three images that I found to dominate interviewees' engagement with the State as they saw it. I will also discuss the wider significance of my argument.

9. Conclusion: The three guises of the 'State' and authoritarian resilience

William Gibson damningly called Singapore a 'Disneyland with Death Penalty' (Gibson, 1993): a place too clean, too organised, too materialistic, too paternalistic, and too authoritarian. A country where even trees, flowers, and the whole foliage "had been gardened into brilliant green, and all-too-perfect examples of itself" (ibid.). Nasir and Turner extend the image of Singapore as 'Garden City' and depict Singapore's state as governing by "weeding out those who do not fit and cultivating those who can be trusted to keep the government in power" (Nasir and Turner, 2012:2). Writing in the early 1990s when communication infrastructure projects were to turn Singapore into an 'Internet Island', Gibson (1993) wondered about the island nation's political future. Empowered by the ability to exchange and consume unsavoury information or media 'online', would Singaporeans finally dare to 'rock the boat' and challenge the PAP-state? Almost 25 years onwards we know that, by and large, Singaporeans have not.

In this thesis, I have set out to provide an explanation for why this is the case: how can we explain the resilience of, and popular support for, an authoritarian PAP-state despite theoretical expectations and historical experiences predicting its demise? For like Taiwan and South Korea in the 1980s, Singapore, too, had been expected to move towards democratisation. Such a shift is hardly discernible. What is more, pressure for political liberalisation is conspicuous by its absence. Predominant explanations for this apparent historic and theoretical anomaly point towards the PAP-state's ostensibly high degree of 'performance legitimacy'. The 'performance legitimacy' arguments postulate an "unspoken social contract whereby Singaporeans have been prepared to accede to

the government in return for the security and prosperity it has delivered” (Henderson, 2013:217). The trouble with such arguments as they are perpetuated by the literature is three-fold.

First, the Singapore literature fails to engage with what the state/State is or can be. That is, the literature does not take into account that on the one hand the ‘state’ is a more or less coherent bureaucratic entity, the borders of which are blurry and permeable to actors regularly straddling both ‘state’ and ‘society’. But on the other hand, the ‘State’ is an idea where the ways in which the ‘State’ is imagined by those who come into contact with ‘state’ practices are not congruent with the realities of the ‘state’. To understand state-citizen relations and how the latter see the state qua State(s), it is therefore not enough to simply analyse policy. One also has to analytically engage with the ‘State’ as an idea held in various forms by citizens.

The second problem is that existing accounts of ‘performance legitimacy’ ignore the social and political changes that have transpired in Singapore. It is not obvious that and why a large constituency among the citizenry would continue to regard the state’s economic function as legitimising state authoritarianism. Wealth and education (usually) produce a shift in predominant social values from ‘survival’ to ‘self-expression’. The former implies preferences for policy to promote economic and physical security while the latter emphasises freedom of expression and meaningful political participation (Inglehart and Welzel, 2009). And what is sometimes dubbed the PAP-state’s “growth fetishism” has been highlighted as a main reason for the PAP’s bad results in the 2006 and 2011 general elections (Low, 2014a:171). If the PAP-state’s economic functions play a role in regime legitimisation we thus need a more nuanced argument.

The literature's version of the 'performance legitimacy' argument that points towards the PAP-state 'delivering the goods' in the form of social services like housing and healthcare is equally question-begging. For instance, Chua (2000) argued that HDB-housing provision has made Singaporeans 'clients to the state'. The trouble with these arguments is that the literature describes the PAP-state as 'anti-welfare' (Teo, 2013:187) and heading towards continuous social policy liberalisation (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:16; Sun, 2012:226). Social inequality and cost of living pressures have indeed been rising and were identified as a product of the PAP-state's 'growth fetishism' that has produced the electoral backlash against the PAP in GE 2011 (Rahim, 2015). As Low suggests, economic development had not been "sufficiently accompanied by policies that sought to ensure an even distribution of the fruits of growth" (Low, 2014a:169).

The third problem with the literature's explanations of the stability of state-citizen relations underpinning regime durability is the focus on economic outcomes and material provisions by the state. But the state pursues a myriad of (other) functions and encompasses "dozens of institutionally distinct policy sectors" (Sellers, 2011). The focus on economic policy and material provisions thus seems to have blunted attention to alternative state functions in respect to which the State can be seen as legitimate. Citizens negotiate state interventions in various ways and may thus picture the State in systematically related yet diverse ways. And reasons to imagine the State as legitimate may thus be equally diverse.

This is particularly important in the case of Singapore where the citizen population is heterogeneous. Beyond social strata and age groups, fault lines in Singapore's social fabric run along the various ethnic groups, differing religious communities, and between Singaporeans with varying migration backgrounds. If citizens interact with the

PAP-state at varying instances, the literature's generalisation and extrapolation of state-citizen relations based on analysis of state practices alone loses further credibility.

Tackling the three main weaknesses

I have attempted to tackle these three identified weaknesses in the relevant literature by taking a different theoretical and methodological approach. With regard to the first weakness, I distinguished between 'state' and 'State' and utilised fieldwork data to show how 'state' interventions conjure varying images of the 'State'. For instance, I showed that the image of the State as hyper-rational economic actor that stands over and above citizens can be traced to the PAP-state's economic functions. Continued industrial policy, infrastructure development projects, and things like skills upgrading programmes are salient for the entire population and serve as daily reminders of the state's developmental success.

The second problem was that the literature's versions of the 'performance legitimacy' argument ignore (ongoing) social and political developments in Singapore. This has led to incongruity between the 'performance legitimacy' arguments and contemporary policy issues like social inequality that have marred Singaporeans. I tackled this problem, on the one hand, by showing *why* the state's economic functions continue to play a defining role for some citizens. Fieldwork findings thus allowed marshalling an updated 'performance legitimacy' argument as *one way* in which citizens can continue to see the State as legitimate.

On the other hand, and pace the literature, I argued that the PAP-state has been revamping its social policy regime by providing more social support since GE 2011. I suggest that the State can thereby regain legitimacy in the eyes of those who thought that the PAP-state was blind to problems of social inequality and deaf to citizens' welfare demands. I have thus argued that the PAP-state is currently addressing both sides of citizens' bifurcated demands for productivist policy interventions on the one side, and protective policy on the other.

The third problem with existing explanations of Singapore's regime durability was the narrow focus on economic outcomes and material provisions by the state. By drawing on fieldwork data and analysing contemporary political discourse I paid attention to other functions of the state in respect to which legitimacy can emerge in the eyes of Singaporeans. I showed that beyond economic policy and social provisions, the State appears relevant in citizens' lives due to its function of protecting a loosely defined 'Singapore way of life'. The state has thus another *raison d'être* in respect to which the State can be seen as legitimate despite authoritarianism.

Having recapitulated my main departures from the literature, I will now proceed to summarise the argument developed in this thesis, as well as the contributions made to that argument in each chapter. Section 9.2 then provides an outlook regarding possible future political developments and challenges to the contemporary stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore. In particular, I focus on the contradictions inherent in the current re-calibration of the PAP-state's social and economic roles. Finally, section 9.3 points towards the thesis' wider significance in relation to major themes touched upon in the prior discussion. On the one hand, these themes include the contemporary resilience – if not re-emergence – of authoritarian regimes in countries around the world. On

the other, I discuss states' struggles of addressing domestic (political) and international (economic) demands under conditions of economic globalisation.

9.1 Connecting the dots: 'State' images, state intervention, and authoritarian resilience

In this thesis, I have argued that the contemporary stability of state-citizen relations in Singapore can be accounted for by two factors. First, citizens can see the State as being responsive to their demands and as addressing contemporary 'hot button' issues through policy change. Most prominently in Singapore's current political climate, this includes the extension of social support and nation-building policies. Both policy areas have emerged as politically paramount over the last decade (Low and Vadaketh, 2014; Rahim, 2015; Ortmann and Thompson, 2016). I argued that such apparent responsiveness eliminates the popular support base for political challenges against the PAP-state under the competitive-authoritarian regime.

And second, I also argued that authoritarian state practices are less totalitarian and effective than the literature takes for granted. Citizens are often able to elude authoritarian state practices in daily life. Both factors contribute to the unexpected durability of the PAP-state because authoritarianism can thus be experienced as more bearable while the PAP maintains a broad popular support. The political opposition itself is weakened by state control over domestic capital and (successful) legal persecution of prominent figures threatening to challenge the PAP-state.

Making this argument has required some work because the PAP-state's roles in Singapore have themselves often been misrepresented in the literature. Most importantly, scholars have suggested that Singapore's economic and social policy regimes are increasingly liberalising (Ong, 2006; Huff, 1999; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Liow, 2011). Chapter 4 thus argued that contrary to such assessments, the PAP-state has not given up industrial policy interventions or its control over the country's (few) large domestic corporations. The state also remains the quasi-monopolistic provider of social services despite the welfare financing model being heavily reliant on private expenditure. I argued that the PAP-state's brand of economic and social policy has three main implications for Singapore's political economy and state-citizen relations.

First, continued control over domestic capital and the PAP-state's alliance with foreign MNCs has prevented the PAP's political opposition from gaining the finances or political clout necessary to effectively challenge the PAP. FDI-fuelled industrial policy together with retaining control over Singapore's major domestic companies has thus allowed the PAP-state to retain its dominant position vis-à-vis potential political adversaries in Singapore.

Second, quasi-monopolistic provision of social services by the PAP-state ties citizens and state together. Besides being a boon for the PAP, this has also forced the PAP to be 'responsive' to citizens' demands as the latter can exert electoral pressure on the PAP. I showed that citizens have successfully done so in the domain of public housing, healthcare and other policy areas on several occasions in Singapore's history. While the thesis focuses on the contemporary resilience of state authoritarianism, pace Ortmann and Thompson (2016), the 'responsiveness' of the PAP-state is not a new phenomenon and neither does it signal political liberalisation.

Third, Singapore's unique brand of FDI-reliant industrial policy has necessitated and promoted Singapore's integration into the global economy. This has had ramifications for policy, as well as state discourse where welfare austerity and an inflow of foreign workers are justified by the supposed imperative of maintaining Singapore's economic competitiveness. But calls for the state to provide more social protection and to build a more cohesive nation that is less exposed to foreign influences are mounting. The country's integration into the global economy has thus become politically contentious and has provoked recalibration of social and economic policies.

Three State images and the stability of state-citizen relations

I argue that the PAP-state's interventions in economy and society have produced diverging demands and expectations towards the state to fulfil varying economic and social functions. As current political discourse, the OSC consultative exercise, as well as my own fieldwork data suggest, the most prominent of these demands encompass three policy issues and are internally contradictory. These are, first, productivist demands for economic competitiveness. Second, demands for the state to promote a more socially inclusive society and to extend welfare support to the socially disadvantaged. And third, demands for the PAP-state to protect a 'Singapore way of life' through nation-building and the locking out foreign workers.

As shown in chapters 5-7, all of these demands play out in the public housing and healthcare programmes and are associated with particular ways of seeing the State and its functions. I argued that continued support for the PAP-state can be accounted for not least because changes in state interventions do address demands brought forward by

citizens. The State can thus be seen as legitimate by Singaporeans with diverse interests and policy demands. The three State images, expectations, and state interventions are briefly outlined in the following.

Discussed in chapter 5, the first State image is that of Singapore's State as hyper-rational economic actor on which Singaporeans (can) depend for the promotion of economic growth and income opportunities. I argued that this State image emerges from the state's long-running developmental interventions. Industrial policy, (indirect) ownership of major domestic companies, and national showcase infrastructure projects are highly visible to the population. They are daily reminders of the PAP-state's economic functions and successes. And the PAP-state's leveraging of 'productivist' social policy to increase citizens' income opportunities are similarly salient.

I argued that Singaporeans' need for the state to strengthen the economy and create employment opportunities is upheld by social policy, in particular public housing and healthcare policy. Both programmes require Singaporeans to finance public housing (ownership) and their own consumption of healthcare services. In the relative absence of social security provision, both programmes institutionalise the need for Singaporeans to be gainfully employed and draw a steady income throughout their adult lives. I proposed that this need to generate income is exacerbated by social pressures towards conspicuous consumption of (public) housing and healthcare. I showed that the pressure to be gainfully employed can translate into a felt dependence on the State, imagined hyper-rational economic actor, to promote the economy and income opportunities. Despite theoretical expectations to the contrary, Singaporeans who hold this State image can thus continue to see the State as legitimate on account of its economic functions and successes.

However, as discussed above, the way in which state practices influence how citizens see the State is not deterministic. Diametrically opposed to interviewees who pictured the State as hyper-rational economic actor, chapter 6 thus presented the second predominant State image that emerged from fieldwork. According to that second image, the State is a vanguard responsible for protecting socially disadvantaged citizens. The State, so imagined, is to promote social equality and a more socially inclusive society rather than growth per se. According to these views, the PAP-state is to provide protective social entitlements and abandon its traditionally austere position on welfare financing.

I traced these demands for state provided welfare to social inequality that had been on the rise over the last decades and in particular the deteriorating affordability of social services. Lower income groups have been left unable to afford (public) housing and healthcare among other things. Thus, “a social contract that emphasised individual responsibility, low social protection, and minimal redistribution [has become] hardly desirable or sustainable” (Low, 2014c:216).

Pace the literature that has continued to characterise social welfare in Singapore as minimal and *receding*, the PAP-state is currently increasing the provision of welfare support to Singapore’s financially overstretched lower and middle classes. This takes place in the arenas of public housing and healthcare but is also observable in regard to wider social policy. At the same time, the PAP has throttled the inflow of foreign (financial and human) capital that had created upward pressure on prices of social services and downward pressure on wages. Increasingly fulfilling such ‘protective’ welfare functions, the State can thus be seen as legitimate by those having demanded such policy reforms and who are seeing the State as vanguard protecting the socially disadvantaged.

Chapter 7 then discussed the third predominant State image. This was the State

as champion of a 'Singapore way of life' that is feared to be eroding. This loosely defined 'Singapore way of life' includes the 'Singlish' dialect, community life in the 'HDB-heartlands', and a love and appreciation for local food. Living in the HDB-heartlands thus plays a crucial role as site of identity-making and state intervention. But markers of 'Singaporeanness' like the *local* language and food directly contradict the PAP-state's 'global city' agenda. Aspects of Singapore's integration into the global economy like the modernising built environment, social change, and influx of foreign workers were thus seen as threatening national cohesion and a common way of life.

These sentiments that emerged from fieldwork reflect the wider "acute sense of displacement and identity erosion" (Lim et al., 2014:19) among local-born Singaporeans. I showed that the PAP-state is playing towards the contemporary "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2) through two policy strategies. First, the PAP-state continues to crack down on individuals threatening to upset harmonious, multiracial life in the 'heartlands'. And second, the PAP-state is pursuing a number of community and nation-building initiatives like the 'vertical Kampung'. In contrast to earlier nation-building projects that aimed to create a national identity top-down, the current programmes draw on grassroots conceptions of 'Singaporeanness'.

The PAP-state has thus become more active in balancing the "contradictory demands of globalisation and the need to maintain national identity and unity" (Chang, 2012:619) in the light of citizens' sentiments. Interviewees who pictured the State as champion of the 'Singapore way of life' thus saw the State as reacting to the perceived threats to dearly-held notions of Singapore's identity. I suggest that by positioning itself as protecting Singapore's "fundamental identity as a nation-state" (Yeoh and Lam,

2016:2), the State thus gains another *raison d'être* in respect to which it can be seen as legitimate.

Lack of authoritarian discontent

I thus argued that the stability of state-citizen relations and (restored) popular support for the PAP-state can be attributed to the extent to which the State is seen as addressing contemporary policy issues: jobs and the economy, social (in)equality, and nation-building. Addressing citizens' demands and needs makes the PAP-state appear 'responsive' to the will of the people, thereby dissipating political pressures and precluding calls for regime change.

But chapter 8 showed that the relative lack of resentment against authoritarianism is also attributable to said authoritarianism playing out differently 'on the ground' than the 'touristic intelligentsia' (L'Heureux, 2010:142) takes for granted. Interviewees were able to sidestep authoritarian state practices while staging 'everyday forms of resistance' (Scott, 1985) against the PAP-state. For instance, all interviewees except the staunchest PAP supporters avoided the myriad PAP-controlled resident and grassroots associations in the 'HDB-heartlands'. I suggest that such 'everyday forms of resistance' are not necessarily politically motivated or meant to derail the state itself. But being able to sidestep authoritarian state practices in daily life, and given the relative lack of violence by the state against its citizens, authoritarianism can be experienced as more bearable.

At the same time, institutionalised feedback mechanisms like consultative exercises or regular elections under Singapore's 'competitive' form of authoritarianism allow

citizens to communicate grievances and demands to the state. On the one hand, this allows the PAP-state to detect popular citizen demands and adjust policy accordingly. On the other, it creates the appearance of the State as listening and responding to such demands when making policy adjustments. With these feedback channels being monitored and carefully moderated, the PAP-state manages to co-opt Singaporeans without introducing political liberalisation.

The point is not that authoritarianism is politically ineffective. On the contrary: leaders of the political opposition and other public figures speaking out against the PAP are persecuted through legal means. Such persecution of the PAP's serious political opponents is part of what can make Singapore's State appear omniscient and powerful so that Singaporeans engaging in minor forms of transgression are not emboldened to challenge the PAP-state more outright. And the PAP-state's control over domestic capital and labour has so far ensured that the political opposition lacks the financial resources to challenge the PAP effectively. The PAP-state thus remains as only credible actor able to address the complex contemporary policy issues marring Singaporeans.

The limits of the argument

Taken together, this thesis has thus provided an account for the contemporary resilience of state authoritarianism in Singapore and the stability of state-citizen relations that underpin that resilience. I have argued how broad popular support for the PAP regime can be maintained and why discontent with authoritarian state practices remains minimal.

To emphasise again what I have *not done* in this thesis: I have not presented a fully formed theory that explains regime resilience or change. For instance, I have not

analysed the behaviour of elites and elite cohesion *within* the ruling party (see Brownlee, 2007). Indeed, I made the argument that extrapolating the inner workings of the PAP-state from observed state practices alone is problematic. I have instead attempted to provide a coherent account of state-citizen relations that takes seriously that citizens picture the State in a variety of ways and depend on the state for varying reasons and to varying extents.

In this respect, I have also refrained from suggesting what State image predominates in what demographic or citizen constituency. My fieldwork data does not allow making these claims because it is not statistically representative. And I suggest that trying to make logical inferences borders on speculation. For instance, Low and Vadaketh (2014) propose that in the “post-2011 new normal”, it would be the “most educated, the most globalised, and the most mobile of its citizens” who would question the PAP-state’s survivalist national narrative and authoritarian hold to power (Low and Vadaketh, 2014:5).

But plainly, this is not obvious. The Singapore-born international ‘talent’ described by Low and Vadaketh are the citizens who are continuing to benefit most from the island-nation’s integration into the global economy. They have been on the right side of Singapore’s growing income disparity. And with their cosmopolitan outlook they can be expected to be the *least worried* about the perceived threat to the ‘Singapore way of life’. Pace Low and Vadaketh (2014), one could thus also argue that this demographic is likely *not* demanding the extension of welfare provisions and intensified nation-building.

Or we could look at it the other way around. We could ask, for instance: which demographic is most likely to demand the extension of welfare? At first blush, one would

expect that through the extension of welfare the State can accumulate legitimacy especially in the eyes of the less well off. But, again, this is in fact less cut and dried. For the provision of social services is exceptionally broad in Singapore to the point that even the upper income groups consume public housing and healthcare. At the same time, the requirements to support and pay for family members' healthcare consumption (if the need arises) means that even well-off individuals have a strong motive to push for more statutory welfare support and affordable social services. Indeed, 'public healthcare' was nominated as the most important policy issue in the representative OSC-survey *even by the highest income group* (REACH, 2013b:3).

Similarly, one might be tempted to argue that especially elderly citizens are calling for more social provisions given insufficient CPF-account savings and increased healthcare needs. However, the older demographic has benefitted from increased asset values of their HDB-flats over the last decades as housing prices have risen dramatically. The younger demographic that is now confronted with these higher public-housing prices (and rising cost of living generally) might thus be equally likely to demand more social support from the state.

The bottom line is that it is not obvious which constituency in the citizenry tends to see the State in what way and why. As a single researcher, I was unable to generate statistically representative data of this sort. I thus showed how a particular 'State' image can be conjured by 'state' practices but not what makes one citizen predisposed to see the State in one way, and another to picture it differently.

I also do not claim that all Singaporeans picture the State in one of the three ways highlighted in the thesis. As Vadaketh (2014b) points out, some Singaporeans will never regard the State as legitimate given authoritarian state practices. And some undoubtedly

continue to see the State as not responsive (enough) to their policy demands whatever these may be. As argued in chapter 3, an unavoidable consequence of fieldwork data is that views expressed by interviewees are aggregated, condensed, and reconstructed (Evers and Staa, 2010). Analysis and abstraction always imply “reducing the world to categories that can be investigated, sites that can be evaluated” (Burawoy, 1998:24).

The argument developed in this thesis thus does not answer all questions and suffers from the same limitations as other qualitative studies. I suggest that the thesis nonetheless presented an explanation of resilient state authoritarianism in Singapore that can account for the contemporary stability of state-citizen relations. It did so by asking how Singaporeans see the State based on state practices and contextualising fieldwork data in policy analysis, contemporary political discourse, and available quantitative data about citizens’ sentiments.

9.2 The road ahead: Challenges for the PAP-state

Pundits and academics predicted a fierce contest between the political opposition and the PAP in GE 2015. The PAP’s electoral performance had been in decline for a decade and hit a historic low in GE 2011 when the PAP garnered ‘only’ 60.1% of the popular vote (Rahim, 2015:160). Having overseen decades of economic prosperity, but also increasing social inequality and an unpopular rise in immigration, it seemed that Singaporeans were losing trust in the PAP-state.

Political opposition parties, by contrast, were promising to put a check on the PAP in parliament and renegotiate Singapore’s social contract. And the PAP’s declined share

of the popular vote suggested that citizens had lost their fear of having a non-PAP dominated political leadership (Mahbubani, 2015:21). Instead of the expected fierce contest and further losses, however, the PAP's electoral support in GE 2015 re-surged to almost 70%. This makes GE 2015 the PAP's third strongest electoral performance in the last four decades (Chin, 2015; Mahbubani, 2015:20).

I have argued that since the electoral backlash in 2011, the PAP-state has been reconfiguring its roles in society and economy. It has thereby begun to address major popular concerns about social inequality, the cost of social services, and immigration that were threatening to strain state-citizen relations. This included the unprecedented roll-out of statutory social support programmes, as well as restrictions on the inflow of foreign capital and labour.

However, structural economic and demographic developments are likely to pose significant political challenges for the PAP-state in future. Continued economic reliance on foreign capital and labour, combined with demographic ageing and rising social expenditure, will make it increasingly difficult to pursue economic aims while *also* promoting social inclusiveness, *and* pursuing the nation-building agenda. Trade-offs between different policy aims will have to be made. This can lead to further fragmentation in citizens' images of the State and will make it more difficult for the PAP-state to garner the wide popular support base so far underpinning the durability of state authoritarianism.

Continued dependence on international capital and foreign workers

Advancement of the economy and employment opportunities remain key issues for Singaporeans who see the island nation's prosperity in constant peril. However, I suggest

that the PAP-state's prospects of securing further economic and political success with Singapore's economic model is increasingly questionable.

The political problem with Singapore's economic model is that much of Singapore's attractiveness to inward FDI has been based on productivist social policy and the comparatively low cost of labour. But if the dip in popular support for the PAP in GE 2006 and GE 2011 has been attributed to rising social inequality, 'productivist' social policy has become politically unsustainable. To attract electoral support, the PAP is forced to "expand social protection significantly and redistribute far more aggressively than it has done" (Low, 2014e:180).

However, and as many have warned, such welfare entitlements could hamper growth and unravel Singapore's economy. Mahbubani even warns that once the state starts to spend beyond its means, "the international business community [...] will gradually disentangle themselves from Singapore" (Mahbubani, 2015:23-24). If this happens, he argues, "Singapore will not survive" (ibid.). One does not have to share Mahbubani's fatalist outlook to appreciate that if Singapore is to continue to attract FDI, business conditions have to stay attractive.

Similarly, given popular discontent with immigration, drawing on foreign workers to supplement Singapore's labour pool has also become politically problematic. Immigration-fuelled population growth has made Singaporeans compete "for a small and shrinking (or increasingly expensive) resource pie in the areas of housing, healthcare and education" (Teng, 2015:14). While the PAP has "continued to insist that the influx of new immigrants into the city-state must continue, albeit in a more controlled manner" (ibid.), curbs on immigration have been introduced for the first time in decades.

While having contributed to faster wage growth in the lower income groups, the evidence also suggests that the resulting labour crunch is hurting Singapore's businesses and economy. Especially the fact that wage rises are outpacing productivity growth represents a significant risk for the economy as a whole – at least in the short to medium term (Today, 2016 September 6). Due to their implications on social inequality and reliance on foreign workers, the policies that have secured Singapore's economic growth appear to become increasingly politically unviable.

Finally, and in macroeconomic terms, the problem is that Singapore's economy appears to be maturing. While Singapore's GDP has been growing at an astonishing 8% per year since 1961, recent figures have been much lower. During the last five years, growth has slowed to a total yearly average below 4% while the growth trend looks to be stabilising at around 2% since 2014 (World Bank, 2016b). Some of this slowdown can perhaps be attributed to a sluggish world economy in that period. Nonetheless, the recent growth figures are clearly below those from earlier decades and much more in line with steady-state growth in other developed countries with mature economies.

Demographic challenges: An ageing population

Looking forward, the existing social policy system is set to further widen the contradictions between various popular policy demands levelled against the state. At the same time, the PAP's policy options to address these demands are becoming more limited. For Singapore's population is ageing rapidly (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:16). This has three major knock on effects on the PAP's ability to address diverging popular policy demands.

The first issue is that the PAP-state has made almost the entire population into home owners, and HDB-flats into their main source of retirement-funding. The financial interests of the quickly growing constituency of home owners who have to monetise their HDB-flats for retirement are diametrically opposed to those of young Singaporeans who need to buy a flat of their own. This is constraining the PAP's policy options of addressing escalated HDB-housing prices. Lowering housing prices for first-time buyers is problematic because lower prices of new HDB-flats would feedback into HDB-flat prices on the resale market. This would politically alienate the established constituency of HDB-flat owners who rely on the asset values of their flats to pay for retirement. Calls for a general overhaul of the public housing system to improve affordability like a transition from the ownership to a rental model are sometimes mooted (Low, 2014b:110-111). But such reforms would be similarly difficult to pursue due to the high investment that HDB-flat resident-owners have made into their flats.

The second structural challenge that demographic ageing imposes is that of rising healthcare costs. The (cost) burden from non-communicable diseases is expected to rise substantially (Chongsuvivatwong et al., 2011:429). At the same time, shrinking family sizes imply that family members are less able to support each other when healthcare needs occur (Teo, 2013). Already at the edge of financial sustainability due to the large role of out-of-pocket spending in healthcare financing, further increases in healthcare costs for Singaporeans may not be socially or politically viable.

Simply put, if citizens cannot shoulder healthcare costs anymore, the PAP has little choice but to continue stepping up state contributions to healthcare financing. Otherwise the PAP-state is at risk of losing legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. As Lim put it in

his study of Singapore's healthcare system, more equity in the population's ability to enjoy healthcare, "may increasingly be critical for social harmony and nation building, especially in this age of raging inequality" (Lim, 2013:273). This thus harks back to the need for more social spending which supposedly, and *ceteris paribus*, endangers Singapore's economic competitiveness. The contradictions between demands for economic competitiveness and increased social support are thus set to intensify.

Third, demographic ageing implies that the size of the Singapore-born workforce is shrinking. The PAP-state's pro-natalist population policies have not succeeded in reversing declining birth rates (Saw, 2005). And the local 'talent pool' is allegedly too shallow to satisfy the staffing demands of multinational companies that have operations located in Singapore (Ng, 2011:266). Singapore's economy will thus likely continue to rely on foreign workers at a time when public sentiments are perhaps most charged against such inflow of human capital. Here, too, the imperative to protect Singapore's competitiveness and attractiveness to inward FDI is thus incongruent with citizens' heart-felt concerns about the social and cultural implications of high immigration rates.

As the outlook presented in this section suggests, reconfiguring the PAP-state's roles in economy and society to address citizens' diverging demands is set to become increasingly challenging. Contradictions between policy objectives are destined to come to a head. The state cannot continue attract foreign capital and labour while simultaneously shielding Singaporeans from the perceived accompanying cultural degeneration. And the state cannot continue to satisfy productivist social policy demands while at the same time also extending protective welfare entitlements. Given that fundamental policy changes are recent and ongoing, this is perhaps not yet fully reflected in social and economic outcomes.

It may thus not be an inherent drive for political liberalisation that poses the gravest threat to the continued stability of state-citizen relations and regime durability in Singapore. Instead, the declining ability to be 'responsive' to multiple and contradictory policy demands may prove to be the PAP-state's greatest challenge. But neither the hitherto resilience of state authoritarianism, nor the uneven reconfiguration of the state's functions in response to economic globalisation are unique to the case of Singapore. The following thus draws out some of the thesis' wider implications in relation to major themes touched upon in the prior discussion.

9.3 Singapore as exception? Wider significance and further research directions

Pointing towards Singapore's economic success, Mahbubani calls Singapore "the best surfer on the tidal wave of globalisation" (Mahbubani, 2015:127). The World Bank names Singapore the easiest country in the world to do business in (World Bank, 2016b). PricewaterhouseCoopers ranks the island nation 2nd in its most recent 'Cities of Opportunity' ranking (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016). And in 2013 the Economist regarded Singapore the world's 6th best country to be born in (The Economist, 2013).

Given extraordinary economic achievements, the resilience of state authoritarianism, and the apparent efficiency of the state, Singapore is thus often seen as an 'exceptional' (Low and Vadaketh, 2014; Gat et al., 2009:158). And in respect to its economic success, tight integration into the global economy, and low social spending, Singapore has emerged a role-model for policy reform in other middle- and high-income countries (Lim, 2013; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2014).

But in at least one way, Singapore and its state are anything but exceptional. For, like other states, Singapore's PAP-state has "multiple obligations, sources of legitimacy and power" (Sud, 2012:199) even within the authoritarian political setting. Effects of economic globalisation, including employment competition, offshoring and outsourcing, fiscal austerity, and immigration, have been felt by populations and shaped the domestic political playing field in countries around the world (Harvey, 2005; Cerny, 1997). At the same time, Singapore's resilient (competitive) authoritarianism must be contextualised in respect to the contemporary comeback of more authoritarian regimes in other countries around the world (Diamond, 2017). This final section thus draws out the thesis' contribution to debates about changing welfare regimes and the contemporary revival of (competitive) authoritarianism. It also raises questions about the 'telos' of development that emerge from the arguments pursued.

Welfare (state) regimes and their reform

As this thesis argued, the ongoing renegotiation of Singapore's unspoken social contract between state and citizens is reflected in social policy reform. Given increased social inequality, a maturing economy, and an ageing population, the productivist emphasis on economic growth with scant redistribution or social protection has become increasingly socially and politically undesirable.

However, such pressure for social policy reform is not unique to Singapore. Choi (2012), for instance, analysed the traditionally 'productivist' welfare regimes of South Korea, Japan, and China. Choi argues that transformations in socio-economic structures like "rapid ageing, increasing poverty and unstable labour markets, generated two very

contradictory demands: welfare demands for the disadvantaged and productivist demands for economic competitiveness” (Choi, 2012: 286-287).

Cerny (1997) suggests that the ‘competition state’ that promotes national economic competitiveness to attract investment in an increasingly globalised world has been replacing the welfare state. Nonetheless the ‘competition state’ has “to attempt to combine a significant measure of austerity with the retention of a minimal welfare net to sustain sufficient consensus” (Cerny, 1997:262). Similarly, some scholars argue that social policy in (South)-East Asian states is primarily geared towards growth promotion. Hill et al. (2012), for instance, suggest that social provisions “are always lesser priorities than economic development and these outlays are evaluated, not for their intrinsic merit, but by their impact on economic growth” (Hill et al., 2012:21).

In this thesis, I argued that this is no longer the case – the ongoing reconfiguration of (South)-East Asian welfare regimes deserves attention. Especially since democratisation, Korea has witnessed an aggressive expansion of welfare entitlements as politicians are seeking electoral support (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008:212). Developments have been similar in Taiwan where state provided healthcare insurance has been extended (ibid., Wagstaff, 2007). In Japan, too, welfare spending has increased over past decades, and China has leveraged social policy towards both economic and social aims, at least since the 1990s (Choi, 2012:287).

As these states are thus addressing demands for social protection, “cracks have begun to appear in the solid productivist welfare capitalism” (ibid.). Instead of advancing liberalisation the world over, we might thus see a convergence between ‘Western’ protective welfare states and (South)-East Asian productivist welfare regimes. In the former case, “the dead hand of austerity measures” has produced (some) welfare retrenchment

(Peck et al., 2013:1095). In the latter case, socio-economic and political change has produced pressures for the extension of protective welfare provisions.

What sets Singapore and China apart from these (other) East Asian countries are the authoritarian political systems under which welfare reform is taking place. Mkandwire pointed towards the marriage between productivist social policy and authoritarianism, predicting that productivism would not survive a “wave of democratisation that is likely to push for more progressive welfare policies” (Mkandawire, 2005:26). The argument made in this thesis suggests that, in some sense, the reverse is happening: strict productivist social policy has been defanged and welfare entitlements are extended in accordance with popular citizen demands.

The PAP-state’s historic fiscal discipline has begun to erode. The supposedly exceptional resilience of the PAP-state thus speaks towards the more universal phenomenon of states adjusting their interventions to address (political and economic) pressures associated with economic globalisation. This is related to the second wider debate that the thesis speaks towards: the renaissance of (competitive) forms of state authoritarianism elsewhere, to which I turn now.

The contemporary revival of (competitive) authoritarianism

Authoritarian regimes, especially those of a ‘competitive’ vintage, have made a global comeback. According to Freedom House, the number of countries becoming less politically free outweighed those where political freedoms were expanding in every year from 2006 to 2017. There has thus been no net increase in the number of democratic countries

since 2005, while the rate at which countries reverted into more authoritarian regimes has been on the rise over the last decade (Freedom House, 2017c).

This includes countries like Turkey, Pakistan, or Bangladesh that had been experiencing some political liberalisation but have relapsed and are now best characterised as ‘competitive authoritarian’. Other countries like Indonesia or the Philippines are experiencing increased “executive abuse of power”, as well as religious and ethnic intolerance so that the ‘quality’ of democracy is declining (Diamond, 2017). And at least according to some commentators, the USA under Donald Trump is turning into an illiberal form of democracy as Fareed Zakaria argues (The Washington Post, 2016). Even established democracies appear not to have been immune to the “new illiberal and quite possibly authoritarian zeitgeist” (Diamond, 2017). While occupying diverse positions on a continuum between authoritarian and illiberal democratic regimes, these countries are united by two commonalities.

First, “the rise of strongman governments from Poland and Hungary to Russia, Turkey, the Philippines and India” appear to be part of “a larger wave of authoritarian populism sweeping the world” (Bhagavan, 2017). Second, the current democratic roll-back has not been the result of blatant power grabs and executive seizures but of “gradual degradation of constitutional constraints, checks and balances, and civil liberties by ruling executives and parties” (Diamond, 2017).

Common to the populism underpinning this authoritarian shift are anti-globalist, anti-pluralist, and xenophobic sentiments, as well as anxieties about the proposed loss of national sovereignty and national authenticity in a globalised world – although the precise mixture of these populist elements differs somewhat between countries (Bhagavan, 2017).

Along came populist parties and leaders who skilfully exploited these anxieties, claiming that they were the one true defender of these people, the true heart of the country, who had been written off by the elites – that as a result of immigration, globalization, and the loss of sovereignty, the country was facing a deep crisis, and, in the words of Donald Trump, ‘I alone can fix it.’ (Diamond, 2017).

And in many democratic countries where they have not succeeded in taking over government, right-wing populist parties have enjoyed high levels of popularity in the midst of sluggish economic growth and especially during the recent refugee crisis. Austria’s ‘Freedom Party’ has seen electoral gains from 10% of the popular vote in 2010 to 35% in 2016. Poland’s ‘Law and Justice’ party made gains from 10% of the popular vote to 38% in 2015. France’s ‘National Front’ progressed from 4% in 2007 to 28% in 2015 and 33.9% in 2017 (The New York Times, 2017 March 20). Germany is currently seeing the rise of the ‘Alternative for Germany’ party that has managed to win the majority of votes in several electoral districts in the most recent 2017 general election (The Guardian, 25 September 2017).

The case of Singapore’s resilient competitive authoritarianism at once speaks towards, and sits uneasily among this revival of more authoritarian forms of rule. As the discussion throughout the thesis has demonstrated, the PAP-state does not share the divisive rhetoric, demagoguery, and anti-globalist outlook characterising many of the populist, authoritarian-leaning regimes mentioned above. On the contrary: the PAP-state itself has continued to push for economic globalisation while using the full force of the law against individuals threatening to upset domestic ethnic and religious pluralism. Not due to high-flying liberal ideals, but for reasons of economic, societal, and regime stability.

However, and on a less positive note, what Singapore *does* share with these other countries are citizens' popular sentiments that have forced the PAP to re-balance its integration into the global economy. The PAP-state has been forced to clamp down on immigration in the face of Singapore's "nativist 'Singapore for Singaporeans' groundswell" (Yeoh and Lam, 2016:2). It has also increased controls over the inflow of financial capital in line with popular perceptions that foreign money was contributing to rising cost of living-pressures in Singapore.

Uniting Singapore and contemporary populist authoritarianism is thus that the respective citizen populations appear willing to grant the state executive powers to shore up national sovereignty, address perceived threats like excessive immigration, and protect citizens from negative effects of economic globalisation. The difference being that in the latter countries, demagogues have fanned the flames of popular discontent while positioning themselves as the true champions of the people and saviours of the disadvantaged that had allegedly been written off by the (international) elites. In a recent essay, Manu Bhagavan (2017) thus suggests that the path to fighting contemporary forms of authoritarian populism "is to offer people a path to a more hopeful, positive future. To reassure them that we hear their concerns and that we can effectively address their needs."

Ironically, Singapore's political elite has done exactly this. It has fortified its authoritarian (but not populist) position by showing Singaporeans that it is listening and responding to concerns about social inequality, rising prices of social services, and immigration. What stands out about Singapore is thus its particular type of 'competitive' authoritarianism that appears to be 'responsive' in nature.

And the Singapore case shows that allowing genuine, if limited, forms of democratic processes to prevail may not simply threaten the authoritarian state. Such processes reveal social issues and popular demands that otherwise remain hidden. As a feedback mechanism, this can allow the incumbent to address popular demands before they become a serious strain on state-citizen relations and can be politicised by the regimes' detractors. Beyond what Weller (2008) had referred to as 'responsive authoritarianism' in China and pre-democratic Taiwan, the thesis has shown the utility of formally institutionalised feedback mechanisms for dissipating political pressure. It may thus be the 'competitive' component in state authoritarianism that allows hybrid regimes to walk a tightrope between addressing citizens' policy demands while repressing political challenges to the state.

The Singapore case also suggests that walking this 'tightrope' may be more feasible for authoritarian states if the emergence of strong domestic players in the form of business or citizen associations is hamstrung. For instance, if the equilibrium between repression and consultation had tipped in Taiwan, leading to democratisation (Weller, 2008:130), then this was also enabled by independent domestic capital that could challenge the state (Rodan, 2006:3). Singapore's developmental partnership with foreign capital and continued control of GLCs has so far prevented the political opposition from gaining similar strength.

I suggest that this is not unlike Evan's account of 'embedded autonomy' (Evans, 1995). Evans argued that 'embeddedness' allows the developmental state to elicit information about economic opportunities from businesses while preserving a degree of 'autonomy' prevents regulatory capture. Likewise, the presence of some democratic institutions could be said to allow the state to remain 'embedded' in debates about popular

policy demands. And political ‘autonomy’ from specific domestic interests under authoritarianism allows the state to be relatively flexible when adjusting policy interventions to retain legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. However, in this regard, I have also argued that the *appearance* of responsiveness may be more important to secure stable state-citizen relations than the actual effects of policy reconfiguration – at least in the short to medium term.

Diamond (2017) argues that current era of expanding authoritarianism will not last because “nativist populism is not a formula for national progress or the economic rejuvenation of vulnerable middle and working class groups.” If this is so, the comparative advantage of Singapore’s brand of authoritarianism over the newly-emerged populist kind is borne out by its longevity.

The PAP-state has held onto its authoritarian power for close to 60 years not by making empty promises, but by delivering social and economic outcomes in line with popular demands. And while exerting a significant amount of political control over the population, it is doing so with relatively little use of violence and within legal limits that make the use of authoritarian state power less arbitrary than in comparison cases (Rajah, 2012).

Questioning the telos of development

This leads me to the final point I want to make. The thesis has spoken towards the PAP-state’s developmental functions, pursued through its unique brand of FDI-driven industrial policy. This is significant because the extent to which contemporary states are able to pursue industrial policy is controversially debated. I have argued that Singapore’s FDI-

driven version of industrial policy eschews some of the political, bureaucratic, and regulatory difficulties that can be associated with more ‘traditional’ forms of industrial policy. Instead of recapitulating these arguments, I refer to the conclusion of chapter 4 and want to briefly focus on the question of development’s telos here.

For, if ‘development’ had once almost exclusively been understood in terms of economic development, more recent approaches have attempted to take a more holistic view. For instance, the ‘human development’ approach holds that ‘development’ is about increasing people’s freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum 2011). According to Sen’s version of the human development approach, increasing people’s capabilities (freedoms) is not only the appropriate end, but also the *best means* for achieving development.

Defining freedoms broadly and as including democratic freedoms and liberties, Sen criticises the PAP-state for deliberately imposing ‘unfreedoms’ on Singaporeans (Sen, 1999:149-151). These unfreedoms, Sen argues, prevent Singaporeans from choosing the life they have reason to value. Others, too have pointed towards the importance of democratic processes so that people can choose what kind of substantive freedoms should be promoted in society (Srinivasan, 2007).

I thus propose that Zizek called the decoupling of capitalism and democracy “a spreading virus” (Foreign Policy, 2012), also because the Singapore experience fundamentally questions what we tend to think development is – or should be – about. But instead of defaulting into condemnations of such (competitive) authoritarianism *a la* Zizek or Sen (1999), I suggest that the case of Singapore should give pause to reconsider the possible telos of development. For, as this thesis argues, the link between (capitalist) economic development and democratisation has been broken in Singapore not because

the state has become ever more effective at suppressing dissent. Instead, authoritarianism is proving resilient because citizens have come to endorse, or at least accept, state authoritarianism. As I argued, this can be accounted for by the PAP-state addressing popular policy demands despite the lack of – or perhaps to pre-empt – political liberalisation.

It is thus difficult to square the implicitly prescriptive component of the 'human development' paradigm presented by Sen (1999) or Nussbaum (2011) with some of this thesis' findings. The Singapore case therefore also points towards the limits, and need for further advancement of theories of development that avoid (moral) relativism *or* prescriptivism.

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Interview Questions for HDB Residents / Healthcare (Insurance) Consumers

A: PERSONAL / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age (range):
2. Sex:
3. Nationality (/since when if changed):
4. Ethnicity:
5. Occupation:
6. Housing:
 - a. Type of housing:
 - b. Number of rooms:
 - c. When bought/ moved in?
 - d. CPF used for financing?
7. Healthcare:
 - a. Received MediShield coverage before?
 - b. Received Medisave coverage before?
 - c. Received Medifund coverage before?
 - d. Any additional 'private' insurance scheme, if so which?

B: HDB HOUSING

1. Why did you buy an HDB-flat?
 - a. Why this one?
 - b. What role does the flat play for you as social security?
2. How do you feel about changing HDB flat prices?
3. What do you think about housing grant and HDB-flat allocation system?
4. What do you think about your Town Council and what do you think are its most important responsibilities?
5. What do you think are the state's responsibilities towards you as an HDB-flat owner?
 - a. What should the state's responsibilities be?
 - b. Does the state fulfil these responsibilities?
6. What are the state's responsibilities towards your welfare more generally?
 - a. What should the state's responsibilities be?
 - b. Does the state fulfil these responsibilities?
7. Are you a member of any of the resident associations and do you take part in any of the events organised by them?
8. How would you describe social life in the neighbourhood and your relations to your neighbours?
9. How do you consider your personal economic outlook?
 - a. Where do you see challenges and opportunities?
 - b. What is your plan for retirement?
10. What may be improved about the HDB-housing programme?

C: HEALTHCARE (INSURANCE) CONSUMPTION

1. What healthcare insurance do you have?
 - a. Have you made use of it, and what does it cover?
 - b. Have you attained additional (private) insurance and why?
2. What clinics and/or hospitals do you go to and what was your experience like?
 - a. Are you/ would you be returning there? Why?
3. With what are you satisfied and dissatisfied in respect to healthcare delivery and insurance?
 - a. Have you heard of MediShield Life and what do you think of it?
4. When and how often do you use the healthcare system, and when do you rely on your family to provide you with support when you are unwell?
5. What do you think that the government's responsibilities are in terms of healthcare delivery and insurance?
6. What may be improved about the public healthcare programme/ insurance?

D: SINGAPORE ECONOMY/CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ISSUES

1. What national issues concern you most (and why)?
2. How important is economic growth for you; should it be at the top of the national agenda?
 - a. What do you think Singapore's economic outlook is as a whole?
 - b. What opportunities and potential problems do you foresee?
3. How do you explain the results of GE 2011/ GE 2015?
4. What is / was your opinion on the 2013 population white paper?
5. What is / was your opinion on the 2015 AHPETC (town council) saga?
6. What is / was your opinion on the 2015 Hepatitis C outbreak at SGH?
7. What do you think about the upcoming 'vertical kampung' housing projects?

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