

IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND RESISTANCE
IN POPULAR MUSIC:
A CASE STUDY OF SINGAPORE

by

PHUA SIEW CHYE¹

and

LILY KONG²

¹ Graduate, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 0511.

² Lecturer, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, Singapore 0511.

IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND RESISTANCE

IN POPULAR MUSIC:

A CASE STUDY OF SINGAPORE

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how popular music as a cultural form is used for different purposes by different groups in Singapore. On the one hand, the ruling elites use music to communicate their political values to the general population and to legitimise their rule. In this sense, music is used to encourage politically acceptable behaviour. At the same time, music is also a medium for encouraging certain modes of "socially acceptable" behaviour. On the other hand, music is used by people in structurally subordinate positions to comment on social problems; to express their dissatisfaction with the state of society and resistance to hegemony and the ruling order. Music as a cultural form is thus appropriated for different ends by two different groups in society.

IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND RESISTANCE
IN POPULAR MUSIC:
A CASE STUDY OF SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

Culture, as Johnson¹ suggests, is best seen as a "kind of reminder" of the struggles over meaning". These struggles can be understood in terms of the separation between producers and consumers of meanings. Producers encode their preferred meanings in cultural forms such as music, landscape, art or literature. The resulting text -- linguistic or visual -- is then read by an audience, in a manner sometimes concordant, at others discordant, with the encoded meanings. These meanings are then incorporated into lived cultures and social relations; feedback loops may then provide material for the production of new texts or lead to the modification of existing ones. In other words, the production and consumption of meaning in cultural forms may be theorised as a "circuit"².

Within this context, popular music as a cultural form can be examined in terms of the meanings encoded and decoded by different producers and audiences. Specifically, producers of music operate within the context of certain political, social and economic conditions, and with particular intentions. These could be to perpetuate an ideology through the exercise of ideological

hegemony, or to express resistance. At the same time, they may be an expression of personal experiences and predilections. In this and political mirrored. We aim to investigate how two different groups in society, namely the ruling elites and the "everyday people" in one section of the music industry, make use of the same cultural form (popular music) for different purposes. Specifically, we will show how the ruling elite uses popular music which they commission to achieve hegemonic ends and to encourage socially acceptable forms of behaviour, while at the same time, other groups also produce their own music to express their thoughts and feelings about society and social ills, and as a call to resist hegemonic rule by the elite class.

A PROLOGUE TO ANALYSIS: RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTS

Research on popular music has adopted a variety of approaches and multi-disciplinary perspectives. One body of work, with significant contributions from geographers, have strong spatial overtones. This genre of research has concentrated on the diffusion of particular musical styles³ as well as the diffusion of more tangible manifestations of music such as radio stations⁴. Related work has also been done on the musical styles of various culture areas⁵ and the analysis of lyrics to uncover the unique qualities of places, ideas of place and space, and environmental themes.

The brand of analysis that we will attempt here is however, much more akin to the interpretive strand of work produced under the rubric of cultural studies and sociology.⁷ Our interests parallel those who have studied the use of popular music as a means of voicing dissatisfaction with society. The American "protest songs" exemplify such music, and have attracted significant research attention. Denisoff⁸, for example, has shown how protest songs from different traditions have been infused into rock and roll music, and the way in which the messages of protest have been conveyed by the lyrics, the unconventional sounds and the irreverent lifestyles of rock performers. The importance of the non-lyrical elements of the music and the lifestyle of its "devotees" has also been emphasised by Miller and Skipper.⁹ We also draw inspiration from those who have analysed the ways in which minority groups and subcultures use their perceived meanings of various musical forms to reinforce their group identity and express their resistance to dominant value systems.¹⁰ While other sociological perspectives have been forwarded, such as the relationships between music and capitalist production, these perspectives will not be considered here.¹¹

Drawing on these orientations, the conceptual basis of our analysis is built primarily on the notions of "ideology", "hegemony" and "socialisation". In the neutral sense of the word, "ideology" is defined as a 'lattice of ideas which permeate the social order constituting the collective consciousness of an epoch'. In the critical sense of the word, ideology operates by

systematically promoting certain meanings in preference to others. The people who promote these preferred meanings are the thinkers of a dominant class¹³ who wish to sustain their own status quo by creating a "false consciousness" among those they have power over¹⁴. As Cosgrove¹⁵ postulates:

Their power is sustained and reproduced to a considerable extent by their ability to project and communicate, by whatever media are available and across all other social levels and divisions, an image of the world consonant with their own experience, and to have that image accepted as a true reflection of everyone's reality. This is the meaning of ideology.

Ideology, however, cannot exist on its own without the exercise of hegemony. According to Gramsci¹⁶, hegemony refers to the power of a dominant class to persuade subordinate classes to accept its moral, political and cultural values (in other words their ideology) as the natural order. Persuasion rather than coercion is used in securing the acquiescence of subordinate groups. We will show in the following sections that music which is commissioned by the ruling elite in Singapore is sometimes used as a hegemonic tool for political legitimacy and to perpetuate their ideology. At other times, the efforts by the ruling elite to encourage certain socially acceptable forms of behaviour can better be understood in terms of "socialisation", defined as the process through which an individual's attitudes, outlooks and actions are influenced (such as by the family, peer relationships, schools, the mass media and so forth).¹⁷

Whether the state attempts to produce politically or socially

acceptable behaviour, their persuasions are never always successful. Specifically, hegemony is never fully achieved because it is always contested by the subordinate classes. Their resistance can take the form of active struggle, such as through riots or demonstrations, or it can be latent and symbolic, such as using a pattern of behaviour or a particular style of dressing¹⁸. In the context of this study, music written, produced and performed by subordinate groups in society can be seen as a form of symbolic resistance: the producers and artistes express and articulate their resistance and rebellion to the prevalent social order by the messages they encode in their music.

THE ENGLISH MUSIC SCENE IN SINGAPORE

In order to appreciate the ideologically hegemonic and symbolically resistant role of music, the broader context of Singapore's music scene¹⁹ and its political culture must be understood. During the 1960s, Western countries experienced a boom in rock and roll music, with countless new bands joining the music circuit. Singapore, too, experienced a music boom of sorts then, with the popularity of bands such as The Quests, Naomi and the Boys, and The Thunderbirds. These bands not only played cover versions of songs popularised by foreign bands, they also recorded original material.

In the 1970s, however, the local English music scene took a

nose dive. During that decade, the Singapore government feared that a drug culture would emerge in Singapore, in the same way that it had emerged in association with some music in Western countries. To the local government, hippism and drug culture, together with the music which was associated with it, were undesirable imports from the "decadent West". As a senior government official said in 1972:

Trends like hippism and drug-addiction are symptomatic of social malaise. The pressures and thought-habits of foreign sub-cultures are creeping into our society, and these are fraught with serious consequences²⁰.

In order to discourage a similar drug culture from emerging in Singapore, the local government officially discouraged bands from playing. Local artistes received little airtime on state-controlled radio and television. Also, during the course of the 1970s, tea dances were stopped and many venues for bands to perform were closed by the authorities, while other night spots in town were monitored by the police²¹. This resulted in a much more subdued music scene. During this time, few original albums were recorded by Singapore artistes, and those recorded were mainly by mainstream pop singers such as Tracy Huang and Anita Sarawak. Bands playing alternative music found it difficult to survive in such an environment and few artistes went beyond mainstream offerings.

The situation began to change from the mid-1980s when a more liberal climate began to prevail in Singapore. This new liberal

environment was more tolerant towards foreign influence, and it was realised that things which were not part of conventionally accepted norms did not necessarily imply a sinister plot to rebel against authority. It was due to this new liberal environment that there was a proliferation of new bands such as Corporate Toil, The NoNames and The Oddfellows in the mid-1980s. The bands which formed during this period recorded tapes for sale to a small local audience. Many were self-recorded (some of them were recorded at home using tape recorders), and the covers were photocopied. The capital involved was minimal, and the end-results were essentially no-frills products meant for a small market of serious listeners. There was a "raw" feel to many of these recordings.

1985 was a landmark year of sorts, with the publication of the first issue of BigO (acronym for "Before I Get Old") magazine. Up till 1990, BigO was a collection of photocopied pieces of paper. The growing number of people interested in forming their own bands or listening to local music meant that BigO was able to become a "proper magazine in September 1990, with professional printing and glossy photographs. BigO was an invaluable information source for budding artistes as well as serious music listeners. BigO, in addition, organised concerts (known as "gigs") and forums and recorded compilation albums for local bands to showcase their talents. It was largely because of BigO's efforts that many local bands came forward to perform and record their songs.

The current English music scene in Singapore is one where new bands are constantly being formed, and where more new albums and demo tapes²² are being recorded than ever before. Several band competitions have also been organised in recent years, by individuals and organisations (apart from BigO). More fanzines²³ such as Naked Truth, Pale Shelter and MegaZ have also been published in recent years. In addition, several alternative music bands have achieved commercial success. For instance, The Oddfellows' Teenage Head²⁴, which was recorded in 1991, became a big success locally. The current boom in music, therefore, is only the beginning of what could become a vibrant and exciting music scene.

The current batch of English artistes in Singapore can be divided into two main categories - mainstream artistes and alternative or independent artistes. Mainstream artistes consist largely of people who have recording contracts with major recording labels, and their songs are tailored specifically to a target audience such as the Taiwanese market and the local teen market. Mainstream songs are usually not written by the artistes themselves, and the lyrics tend to focus largely on issues such as love and romance. Within this group of mainstream artistes exists a subset of "novelty" artistes who record albums spiced with a distinctly Singaporean brand of music and humour. Dick Lee's The Mad Chinaman²⁵ and Asiamajor²⁶, for example, make use of traditional ethnic Asian tunes, often with a touch of humour. The Kopi Kat Klan's Why U So Like Dat²⁷ also makes use of Singlish²⁸.

Apart from the mainstream artistes, there are the alternative or independent artistes. These bands are usually not bound by contract to major recording labels. As such, they are free to record their own type of music without the constraints of having to produce for a particular target audience. They therefore present audiences with an alternative to mainstream offerings. Alternative artistes in Singapore, as a collective group, play a rather eclectic mix of musical genres, from folk (for example Humpback Oak and The Ordinary People) to punk rock (Opposition Party), hardcore (Stomping Ground, Swirling Madness), thrash metal and death metal (Detragrammatos, Profancer). In June 1992, yet another musical genre joined this list, when Singapore's first cyberpunk album was recorded by Convent Garden.

Apart from this spontaneous growth of musical recordings, Singapore has also seen a proliferation of "national" songs in recent years. In the mid-1980s, the Singapore government began a "Sing Singapore" programme to encourage community singing of traditional as well as contemporary "national" songs. As part of this programme, the Psychological Defence Division of the Ministry of Communications and Information²⁹ has released one song every year to coincide with Singapore's National Day celebrations in August. These songs have catchy tunes and lyrics, and they are anthemic pieces meant for mass singing. Examples of such songs include Count on Me Singapore, We Are Singapore, Stand Up for Singapore and the most recent release, We Love Singapore. Such

songs are sung in schools and at community gatherings and are aired on national television. Closely allied to such songs are forms of popular music in other guises: catchy jingles and tunes used to bring national campaign messages to the people. These are aired very often over national television and radio when campaigns are running.

THE HEGEMONIC USE OF MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL LEGITIMATION

Having outlined the conceptual underpinnings and local context, we will explore in substantive terms how some music has been used for hegemonic purposes in Singapore. Specifically, we will explore how music is used to arouse loyalty and legitimise the power of the ruling elite. Analysis will be confined to the songs commissioned by the government described above.

Songs like We Are Singapore and Stand up for Singapore are part of the ideological tools used by the ruling elite to legitimise its rule and policies. One strategy adopted is to remind Singaporeans about their current affluence, which extends into reminding Singaporeans that they owe their living to the wisdom of the policies which were instituted by the incumbent ruling elite. Hence, they are reminded of the tumultuous past and the triumph over innumerable limitations:

There was a time when people said
that Singapore won't make it

but we did
There was a time when troubles seemed too much for us to take
but we did³⁰.

In order to continue along the path of success, Singaporeans are called upon to be loyal to the state and to publicly declare their loyalty to the ruling order. They are also exhorted to

Recognise you can play a part,
Let it come right from your heart;
Be prepared to give a little more.
Stand up, stand up for Singapore.

Apart from such explicit lyrics, many national songs have rousing anthem-like melodies and choruses designed to arouse feelings of patriotism. They are often released just before the annual National Day celebrations in August, a calculated move meant to ride the wave of patriotic fervour which is at its peak during this period. When sung during the National Day parade, these songs arouse a frenzy of patriotic emotions in the participant as well as the spectator. National Day songs are also released together with videos which are telecast over television. These videos invariably contain images of smiling people, the intermixing of ethnic groups, and happy family groups with young children, as well as national landmarks and national symbols such as the Merlion, City Hall, the container port, Benjamin Sheares Bridge, Changi Airport and Singapore Airlines. The images are carefully selected to evoke national pride in the audience, and to remind them that life in Singapore is comfortable, peaceful and harmonious. This illustrates McDonough's³¹ point that in perpetuating an ideology, ruling elites usually try to create a

false consciousness by emphasising certain ideas and images over others, and through this, to lull people into accepting that the current ruling order is the best one for them.

THE USE OF MUSIC TO ENCOURAGE "SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE" MODES OF BEHAVIOUR

Yet another way in which music has been put to persuasive use by the ruling elite is through the encouragement of certain socially acceptable modes of behaviour, a far less insidious process than the ideological roles described above. Singapore is a country of many campaigns, and through these campaigns, citizens are encouraged to save water, avoid taking drugs, avoid spitting in public places and to flush their toilets after use, among others. In many of these campaigns, catchy jingles, which are carried across the mass media, are put to good use to remind people to adopt desirable habits and jettison undesirable ones³². In the courtesy campaign, for example, the message that "courtesy is for free, courtesy is for you and me" is transmitted through a catchy jingle. Similarly, music has also been used by the government to warn young people against picking up smoking. A recent anti-smoking campaign involved the use of a rap-music-style jingle and it was accompanied by a video showing that smoking is not a "cool thing to do". This video was aimed specifically at young teens thought to be most receptive to rap music.

Similar means are adopted here to achieve socially acceptable behaviour as in the previous examples of the use of music for ideologically hegemonic ends. Clearly, the process of political socialisation using music as a tool can be interpreted in two lights. While the use of music for political legitimisation can be seen as a process of self-endorsement, the use of music to promote good hygiene and to condemn drug/tobacco use is much more acceptable and indeed desirable.

THE USE OF MUSIC BY NON-DOMINANT GROUPS IN SINGAPORE

Having examined the ways in which the ruling elites in Singapore make use of music, attention will now be directed at how people in "structurally subordinate" positions encode meaning into the music they produce. This section will first focus on the musical community as a subculture before going on to discuss the use of music as a medium to express feelings about perceived social injustices and as a call for resistance.

The music fraternity as a subculture

Apart from the "official" music-makers who produce "national" songs, the community of musicians and fans (particularly of the alternative genre) in Singapore collectively make up a distinct subculture. At local gigs for example, it is obvious that musicians and listeners alike dress and exhibit modes of behaviour

that are immediately recognisable as different from mainstream culture. While it is not the purpose of this paper to identify and discuss the characteristics of this musical subculture, it is important to note that mainstream culture, which includes the ruling elites, has identified them as a subculture, and their conceptions (or misconceptions) of this subculture have led to particular hegemonic actions on their part to discourage what they perceive as "unacceptable" behaviour or physical appearance. For example, the police have stopped slam dancing during gigs and have often hauled up innocent members of this subcultural group on the basis of their appearance (for example, males sporting long hair).

This identification of a distinct subculture apart from mainstream culture has spawned a process of cultural hegemony in which ruling elites (and mainstream society in general) try to impose their definition of what constitutes socially acceptable behaviour and appearance. This has, in turn, spurred musicians to encode in their songs messages which basically reinforce their commitment to non-conformity. Because the music fraternity is in many ways an "excluded group"³³, the songs also encode messages which berate society for perceived injustices, and music is also used as a call to resist cultural hegemony.

"Be loud, be proud, be heard": Music as social commentary and the call to resistance

As long as we are sane and still are around we won't be making happy music. Unless the impossible happens and the world turns nice.

Francis Leong, lead singer of Opposition Party³⁴.

Music is an important and effective medium for people to express their dissatisfaction with society. These social commentaries and calls to resistance emerge in the lyrics as well as through the sound and general "feel" of the music, and the names of groups and albums.

One prominent idea in local English music is the contention that although our society is progressing materially and making great strides on the economic and technological fronts, this has bred a society of problems. There is greed and ugliness, with many neglecting the non-material aspects of life in the race for material gain. Global Chaos' *Money Isn't Everything*³⁵, for example, hits out against the greed and materialism of modern humankind:

Uncontrolled greed
Impetuous desire to be rich
Immune to worldly issues
Addicted to worldly pleasures.

Such materialism and greed has blunted people's sensitivity to human suffering. As *Swirling Madness* explored in *Tormented Souls*³⁶, we live in luxury and are so caught up in our own obsession with accumulating wealth that we turn a deaf ear to those suffering around us:

They suffer in millions
While we live in luxury
We laugh into their faces
We're blind to their plea.

Materialism and greed also breed pretension and falsehood. *Cosmetic Zombie*³⁷ by Global Chaos is an expression against the masks that people put on, 'conceal(ing) the truth of what you are'. This is seen in part in society's emphasis on physical beauty and the use of cosmetics to enhance outward appearances, which is tantamount to wearing a mask. What Global Chaos seeks to highlight is that such actions are pretentious and fake while real beauty resides within a person. People should focus their attention on discovering and nurturing their own inner beauty rather than hiding behind this 'horrendous mask'³⁸.

Much of Singapore's alternative music also portray the pursuit of material progress as having created a group of unhappy, maladjusted people. The Watchmen's *Fast Forward*³⁹, for example, argues that while we have advanced into an age of high technology, we are 'short on soul'. Society is moving on 'fast forward', but we are in fact going 'fast forward to oblivion' because we are building a society which is inherently unhappy, dazed, confused and under stress. Another song with a similar theme, but viewed from the life of an individual, is Corporate Toil's *Johnny Says*⁴⁰, which deals with Johnny's life -- from school to employment and his climb in the corporate world, part of which was achieved through backstabbing. The picture that Corporate Toil draws is one where Johnny's life is controlled by other people right from the start; he has no freedom to choose his own path, and he is caught up in the material world. Although Johnny amasses wealth, he is unhappy. This message is further reinforced through the use

of haunting electronic sounds which were deliberately chosen to convey to the listener a feeling of the bleakness, isolation and loneliness of everyday life. In fact, the name Corporate Toil was chosen by its members to reflect the impersonal nature of modern corporate life and the obsession with amassing power and wealth at the expense of personal fulfilment⁴¹.

In the race for material gain and personal power, there will inevitably be people who are left behind, and these people are increasingly dissatisfied with their lot in life. A track from the Raw Fish's album 15⁴² tells about a person who has not received his share of the pie:

Me just standing here
Standing here in my weary boots.
Exploitation, cheap labour
You're all fucked up, been stepped over.

While this person is exploited, others who have 'found their place' and are 'headed for the big time' have had to pay a high price as well, as they are 'left alone in this loveless place'. The total effect is the conveyance of a bleak and pessimistic picture: whether one is successful or not, one stands to lose. Modern life and the pursuit of wealth are portrayed as losing games. While these messages may reveal some part of Singapore society -- its rapid development and the concomitant social and moral ills -- it is also true that many of these messages are exaggerated and may in fact reflect somewhat cynical views.

Apart from the negative evaluation of society resulting from economic growth and material progress, another theme which emerges is the control that is evident in Singapore society. The culture of Singapore society is one where social standing and age must be given authority: elders and/or those in authority in a community are to be respected and obeyed. The result of this is a society which is lacking in freedom, the most fundamental being freedom of choice. Power is concentrated in the hands of an elite few who dominate and control the lives of others. In Opposition Party's *It's Our Lives*⁴³, the songwriter complains that:

It really seems like we are borned (*sic*)
Not to be leading our own lives
Cos most of the time we are doing
Things that are usually not of our choice

Everybody tells us what to do
Everyone forces shit down our throats
They expect all their shit to be swallowed
Quietly by us without a single choke

Such lack of freedom and disillusion with social ills is what led these musicians to produce the sort of music that they have. In the words of Swirling Madness' Ray Aziz, 'music is used to express our anger at what is wrong in society'⁴⁴. It is an expression and an outlet for musicians to show their displeasure at the way in which society is developing. These messages are conveyed clearly through the lyrics, the names of groups and titles of songs, as well as the loud, frenzied, grinding guitar sounds and low-pitched guttural vocals that characterise their musical genres, conveying the anger felt⁴⁵.

These various means of conveying meanings also represent forms of resistance and subcultural solutions to the anomalies of present-day life. Resistance expressed through the sound of the music is the most subtle means, symbolic of the subculture's non-conformity to societal expectations. Many artistes expressed pleasure at the shock effect their music has on the older generation. According to Azman Omar of Detragrammatos, their death metal songs often have low-pitched growls and vomiting sounds, and these are to some extent deliberately meant to shock people, and to be a symbol of their non-conformity⁴⁶.

The names of bands and their albums also reflect their ideology and in many ways, they are also a form of symbolic resistance. Names of local bands include Band of Slaves, Rotten Germs, Harmful Creatures, Corporate Toil, Opposition Party, Swirling Madness and Global Chaos. These names reflect the chaos and alienation that are perceived as characterising modern living.

Album names are also symbolic and they represent the artistes' feelings and beliefs. The Rotten Germs' demo tape, for example, was entitled What Do You Think of Society⁴⁷, and this was deliberately done to express the artistes' belief that 'there is something fundamentally wrong with society'⁴⁸. Other demo tape titles worth noting are Mortal Flower's Bathing in the Perspiration of my Ideology⁴⁹ and Global Chaos' And It's All Our Fault⁵⁰, which were basically named for the same purpose as the Rotten Germs' demo tape. A rather more saucy title is Gang Bang, which is the title of a compilation album released in 1992.⁵¹ The

sexual connotations implied in this title could have been deliberately calculated to offend the public sense of decency, and in a sense this can be seen as a symbol of resistance. Indeed, *Straits Times* music critic Ida Bachtiar's review of this compilation was not published in the newspapers because her editor was afraid that it might offend the public⁵².

Apart from the names of bands and albums, lyrics are often the most explicit means of expressing resistance. A number of local songs berate political leaders for being power-hungry and being interested only in their own well-being. Opposition Party's *Impending Death*⁵³, for example, states that

All the so-called leaders that's supposed to run the
world
Are just gluttons with a huge appetite for power.

Similar ideas are expressed in Swirling Madness' *Sick Society and Oppression*⁵⁴. These songs hit out at the power-hungry nature of political leaders who are supposed to serve society but instead serve only their own interests. The Raw Fish's *Show Me A Sign*⁵⁵, in addition, protests specifically against the restrictive atmosphere in Singapore:

I don't know if you are a god, or if you are a king
Or if you are government.
Show me a sign that says if I chew bubble gum⁵⁶
I will fall straight into fire, fire in hell.

Yes, you have god-like powers
Show me a sign that says you are god and not government
Show me a sign that says that I must be your slave and
you my master
And I will be your NS man⁵⁸.

Show me a sign that censorship is Singaporean
Show me a sign that R(A) films⁵⁸ can become R(A)
Show me a sign that you are not allowed to show filth on
TV
Show me a sign that you must be twenty-one to watch
nudity
Show me a sign that you are not god, that you are not
king, that you are government.

This song thus berates the government for its policies which are restrictive and which infringe on personal choice, for example, the censorship laws and the ban on chewing gum. In addition, national service is compared to slavery. This song thus questions the justice in enacting such laws and policies.

What, then, are the possible ways of dealing with hegemonic rule? In Swirling Madness' *Oppression*⁵⁹, "oppressed people" are told to:

Raise up your hands and fight
Every man, woman and child
Eliminate all oppression
Get rid of dirt and slime

At another level, the forms of rebellion advocated are symbolic rather than active. For example, in a track from The Raw Fish's 15, people are told to:

Throw your anger into the trash
Shave your head, now's the time.

The call to 'shave your head' could be a veiled reference to the symbolic resistance which is employed by subcultural groups such as the Skinheads and the Neo-Nazis. The shaven head in these instances is a symbol of subcultural unity and a passive but

sinister symbol of resistance⁶⁰.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to demonstrate the nature of social relations in Singapore as encoded in popular music written and recorded by Singaporean artistes. First, music is used by ruling elites for hegemonic purposes to perpetuate their ideology and their political legitimation. Second, music is used to encourage certain modes of "socially acceptable" behaviour, such as that related to health and public hygiene. Third, music is used by other people to express their views of societal problems and as a call to resistance. Thus, apart from more orthodox means (such as letters to the press) people have found other ways of expressing their views.

To cast this discussion in a broader context, we have shown how music as a form of popular culture is constituted through individual and collective actions. Indeed, it is the meanings and intentions of music-makers as individuals and groups and the outcome of their efforts (music "texts") which make up the musical culture in Singapore. What we have also illustrated empirically is the theoretical position that culture has political undertones.

By showing how cultural forms can be appropriated for political ends, we have shown how the cultural is often also political.

Endnotes

1. Johnson, R., 'The story so far: And further transformations?', in D. Punter (ed.) Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies, London: Longman, p.280.
2. Ibid, pp.283-285.
3. See Ford, L., 'Geographic factors in the origin, evolution and diffusion of rock and roll music', Journal of Geography, Vol. 70, 1971, pp. 455-464.
4. See Carney, G.O., 'Spatial diffusion of the all-country music radio stations in the United States, 1971-74', John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly, Vol. 13, 1977, pp. 58-66.
5. See Lomax, A., and Erickson, E.E., 'The world song style map', in A. Lomax (ed.) Folk Song Style and Culture, Washington D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1971, pp. 75-110.
6. See Jarvis, B., 'The truth is only known by guttersnipes', in J. Burgess and J.R. Gold (eds.) Geography, the Media and Popular Culture. London: Croom Helm, 1985, pp. 96-122.
7. See Meltzer, R., The Aesthetics of Rock, New York: Something Else Press, 1970; Frith, S. The Sociology of Rock, London: Constable, 1978; Street, J. Rebel Rock: The Politics of Popular Music, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986; and Wicke, P., Rock Music: Culture, Aesthetics and Sociology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
8. R.S. Denisoff, 'Evolution of the American Protest Song', in R.S. Denisoff and R.A. Peterson (eds.) The Sounds of Social Change, Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1972, pp.15-25.
9. Miller, L. and J.K. Skipper, 'Sounds of Black protest in avant-garde jazz', in R.S. Denisoff and R.A. Peterson (eds.) The Sounds of Social Change, Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1972, pp. 26-37. Other examples of studies include Rodnitzky, J.L. 'The evolution of the American protest song', Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 3, 1969, pp. 35-45; and Auslander, H.B., '"If you wanna end war and stuff, you gotta sing loud" - a survey of Vietnam-related protest music', Journal of American Culture, Vol. 4, 1981, pp. 108-113.
10. See for example, Maultsby, P.K., 'Soul music; its sociological and political significance in American popular culture', Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 17, 1983, pp. 51-60; Winders, J.A., 'Reggae, rastafarians and revolution: rock music in the Third World', Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 17, 1983, pp. 61-73; Tanner, J., 'Pop, punk and subcultural solutions', Popular Music and Society, Vol. 6, 1978, pp. 68-

- 71; Hebdige, D., Subculture: The Meaning of Style, London: Methuen, 1979.
11. See however, Frith, S. Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock, London: Constable, 1983; Peterson, R.A. 'Market and moralist censors of a Black art form: jazz', in R.S. Denisoff and R.A. Peterson (eds.) The Sounds of Social Change, Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1972, pp. 236-247; and Denisoff, R.S. Solid Gold: The Popular Record Industry, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1975.
 12. Thompson, J.B., Studies in the Theory of Ideology, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984, pp. 3-4.
 13. Often, the "dominant class" or ruling elites refer to those who own and control the factors of production, namely labour, capital and land.
 14. McDonough, R., 'Ideology as false consciousness: Lukacs', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), On Ideology, London: Hutchinson, 1977, pp.35-44.
 15. Cosgrove, D., 'Geography is everywhere: culture and symbolism in human landscapes', in D. Gregory and R. Walford (eds.) Horizons in Human Geography, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989, p. 128.
 16. Gramsci, A., Selections from the Prison Notebooks, New York, International publishers, 1971, pp. 245-246.
 17. See Giddens, A. Sociology, Oxford: Polity Press, pp. 59-88.
 18. Jackson, P., Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography, 1989, p.53.
 19. Only the English music scene will be analysed here although a vibrant Mandarin music industry exists as well, alongside some Malay musical activities.
 20. Chan Chee Seng, 'Speech delivered at the Vesak Prelude 1972 held at the Victoria Memorial Hall on 15th May 1972', in Ministry of Social Affairs: Speeches, Statements, Press Conferences and Interviews, 1971-73, Singapore: Information Division, Ministry of Culture, 1972. Chan Chee Seng was the then Parliamentary Secretary (Social Affairs).
 21. BigO, September 1990, p.27.
 22. Demo tapes are not produced for mass consumption. Instead, they are produced by artistes for a small group of listeners, usually numbering not more than a hundred. Many artistes also send their demo tapes to record companies in the hope that these companies will offer them a recording contract after listening to it.

23. A fanzine or "fan magazine" is a magazine or circular whose readers are people who are interested in local music. These magazines may also feature foreign bands making independent or alternative music. The production of fanzines usually involves a small group of people whose aim is not profit-making, and the target readership is usually small.
24. The Oddfellows, Teenage Head, released by Tim Records, 1991.
25. Dick Lee, The Mad Chinaman, released by WEA Records, 1989.
26. Dick Lee, Asiamajor, released by WEA Records, 1991.
27. MC Siva C and the Kopi Kat Klan, Why U So Like Dat, released by Pony Canyon Singapore, 1991.
28. "Singlish" is a unique style of English spoken by Singaporeans. Singlish commonly borrows words and phrases from other local languages or Chinese dialects and it is spoken in a distinct manner.
29. This function has since been taken over by the Publicity Section of the Ministry of Information and the Arts.
30. Ministry of Communications and Information, Sing Singapore, Singapore: Psychological Defence Division, Ministry of Communications and Information, 1988, p.96.
31. McDonough, op cit, pp. 36-39.
32. The Straits Times, 2 May 1992, p.28.
33. See Parkin, F., Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique, London: Tavistock, 1979, pp.44-79.
34. BigO, May 1991, p.34.
35. Global Chaos, And It's All Our Fault, independent release, 1990.
36. Swirling Madness, The Right to Play, independent release, 1992.
37. Global Chaos, op cit.
38. Interview with Adam bin Mohd Yusop, 2 July 1992.
39. The Watchmen, This Savage Garden, independent release, 1992.
40. Corporate Toil, EP, independent release, 1986.
41. Interview with Joe Ng, 18 June 1992.

42. The Raw Fish, 15, independent release, 1991.
43. Opposition Party, unrecorded track, 1992.
44. Interview with Swirling Madness, 4 July 1992.
45. Interview with Joe Ng, 26 June 1992.
46. Interview with Azman Omar, 28 June 1992.
47. Rotten Germs, What Do You Think of Society, independent release, 1989.
48. Telephone interview with Sean Francis, 17 July 1992.
49. Mortal Flower, Bathing in the Perspiration of My Ideology, independent release, 1989.
50. Global Chaos, op cit.
51. Various Artistes, Gang Bang, released by Red Records, 1991.
52. Statement made during "Brave New Frontiers", 13 June 1992.
53. Various Artistes, New School Rock, released by BigO, 1991.
54. Swirling Madness, op cit.
55. The Raw Fish, Obscurity Time Again, independent release, 1992.
56. There is a ban on the importation of chewing gum into Singapore.
57. National Serviceman. In Singapore, male youths are required to serve two to two-and-a-half years in the armed forces, police force or civil defence force.
58. This refers to the "Restricted (Artistic)" or "R(A)" film category. In Singapore, only those aged 21 years and above are allowed to enter cinemas screening R(A) films.
59. Swirling Madness, op cit.
60. See Clarke, J., Hall, S., Jefferson, T., and Roberts, B., 'Subcultures, cultures and class: a theoretical overview', in S. Hall and J. Henderson (eds.), Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain, London: Hutchinson, 1976, pp. 9-74.