

**Preventing the Press From Engendering Ethnic Violence:
Press Restraints and Ethnic Violence in Singapore**

By

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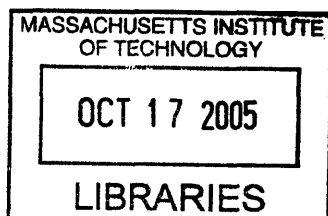
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Abstract

This thesis aims to find a solution to a commonly held problem of ethnic violence that is engendered by the press. Based on the premise that governmental influence on the press in the form of press restraints can prevent the recurrence of deadly ethnic violence, it argues for certain types of press restraints in societies that (1) are just emerging from ethnic conflict and (2) lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy, is formulated. Taking Singapore as a case study, it shows that race issues were progressively de-politicized from 1956 to 1972 as a consequence of governmental influence. The Singapore case is taken to illustrate the gains to be attained from press restraints, and also to point out some potential caveats that would need to be accounted for in policies regarding press restraints.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The press has been known to be instrumental in triggering off deadly ethnic riots in various countries. In 1950, deadly riots broke out in colonial Singapore with a Malay mob attacking Europeans and those of European-Asian descent. The riots were the result of elevated ethnic passions that resulted from weeks of inflammatory reporting in the English and Malay newspapers about a particular issue – a custody battle of a young European girl between her birth parents and her Malay foster parents. The English and Malay press were each partial to its readership; both tried to outdo each other in sensational reporting that unduly inflamed ethnic tension. The English newspapers, which had a large European readership, framed the custody battle as that of restoring an innocent young European girl to her own culture and religion. The Malay newspapers, on the other hand, framed it as a tussle between Christianity and Islam. When the courts found in favour of the birth parents, the hordes of Malays, who had stood outside the courts waiting to hear the verdict, went on a rampage. It took three days before order was restored, and a week-long curfew had to be in force.

In Rwanda, the mass media, particularly the radio, was implicated in inciting and organizing deadly violence against civilians in 1994. After Rwanda embarked on partial political opening, there was an upsurge of newspapers and journals. However, there was a lack of journalistic professionalism; much of the press was virulently biased, either

supporting the government or its political opponents. However, much of the population was illiterate and relied more on the radio than the press for their news. In an effort to subvert efforts of moderates in the government with its governmental radio station, Hutu extremists formed a radio station of their own, which was used to propagate ethnic hatred for. The radio framed the ethnic minority Tutsis as the enemy, which obligated all Hutus to defend themselves and their families. When the radio spread lies that Tutsis were out to kill all Hutus in 1994, the result was genocide.

The major cause for the outbreak of deadly violence in Singapore and Rwanda has been attributed to the misuse of the mass media rather than to culturally specific reasons. When the mass media is misused to spread ethnic hatred and fan irrational fears and passions, it can spark off deadly violence. Mass communication studies have shown that there is significant media influence on its audience's behavior during periods of instability or crisis, which enhances the media's ability to stir up acts of violence. It can do this through biased reporting, the omission of relevant information, agenda-setting and framing of issues in an inflammatory or threatening way that justifies or rationalizes the use of deadly violence, and by propagating lies consistently until its audience accepts them as truths.

Based on the premise that governmental influence on the press in the form of press restraints can prevent the recurrence of deadly ethnic violence, this thesis aims to find a solution to a commonly held problem of ethnic violence that is engendered by the press; a problem that plagues ethnic conflict-prone countries, and ethnically heterogeneous newly democratizing countries. To that aim, the thesis formulates a theory that argues for installing press restraints in societies that are just emerging from ethnic

conflict, and that also lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy. After an outbreak of violence, inter-ethnic mistrust and hostility is at its highest. Ethnic tension cannot be defused easily when unrestrained views on ethnicity, including those perceived as hostile or threatening, are allowed to be expressed in a common media marketplace as is prescribed by proponents of the Western free press model. When an absolute freedom of the press leads to extreme violence in societies with unresolved ethnic tension and hostility, then the priority of the government and policymakers is to first ensure that people are protected from violence or death. If protecting the people entails restricting press coverage from engendering violence, then the goal of a free press should be consigned to a later time when society is better able to handle the pressures from an unrestrained debate on ethnic issues.

However, the topic of placing limitations on freedom of expression is a contentious issue because freedom of expression is a highly valued trait of liberal societies. There is an opposing pull between freedom of expression and the need to maintain a peaceful, law abiding and non-violent society by limiting certain forms of expression. It is asserted that without the benefits gained through freedom of expression, one cannot have a peaceful, law abiding and non-violent society. In reality though, freedom of expression is always to an extent regulated in all societies, for example, through hate speech laws in Western societies. When rigid and hostile opposing ethnic views expressed through the press in an inflammatory manner leads to an explosion of deadly violence, then it is necessary to place limitations on freedom of the press for the greater good of society. Press restraints in regards to press coverage for ethnic issues are one vehicle to maintain opposing views, i.e., the pull between freedom of expression and

press controls, and conflicting hostile ethnic views, in a way that optimizes the benefits for all. For instance, the press restraints are specific only to press coverage of contentious ethnic issues that could lead to deadly violence while other issues are not regulated leaving the press to function as it normally would. Similarly, conflicting hostile ethnic views that are inflammatory are prevented from being expressed while balanced ethnic views are not.

Critics argue against restricting freedom of the press because typically dictators have used the same argument, i.e., placing restrictions on the press as a mean to prevent or reduce the level of violence. However, dictators do so only to maintain their hold on political power. The difference between the typical defense of dictators and the argument for press restraints proposed in this thesis is that I propose that a media regulatory body composed of not only governmental representatives, but also media owners, editors and journalists, as well as ethnic leaders or respectable citizens in society would decide on the form and duration of the press restraints to be applied. This would make it difficult for the would-be dictators to subvert press restraints for their own political gain.

Ethnic conflict resolution is a continual process that requires time for it to generate positive effects. The main aim of press restraints should be to remove the press as a source for engendering ethnic violence, so as to increase the chance for the other conflict reduction policies to work. There is the potential for recurrence of violence in ethnically fragmented societies, particularly so in societies only just emerging from violence. Therefore, it is expected that press restraints would have to be in effect for a certain period of time; and some societies would need to have the press restraints applied for a longer period than others.

In this thesis, I provide a conceptual model for the legitimacy of press restraints. The higher the level of ethnic tension, the greater the gains will be (i.e., prevention of deadly violence, and reduction in inter-ethnic tension and hostility) from the application of press restraints. For all societies, there will come a time when the application of press restraints do not result in any further gains. When that period has been reached, it can be said that the threshold level for gains in that society may have been attained. Ultimately, the gains from press restraints should become permanent, so that the removal of press restraints on race coverage will not cause a recurrence of ethnic violence. Different societies will likely reach the threshold level at different rates. One of the ways of recognizing whether the threshold level has been reached would be to reduce the application of press restraints and check for corresponding risks, i.e., occurrence of violence or increase in inter-ethnic tension and hostilities. If there is none, then removal of press restraints can proceed in step-by-step basis.

Removing the press restraints after the threshold level has been reached would not cause a recurrence in violence because the press restraints would have guided newspapers on what was appropriate and inappropriate to publish on ethnic issues, and in doing so created a culture of media professionalism, which would persist even after the removal of press restraints. Such a media culture would reject the inflammatory forms of news reporting that had previously led to deadly violence.

Most of the thesis takes Singapore as a case study. In less than two centuries, Singapore has undergone fundamental changes in its economy, landscape, population, identity and political temperament. Pre-modern Singapore was transformed first from a small fishing village into the bustling port city under British colonial rule and then into

the prosperous, disciplined and well-run corporate city-state that it is, popularly also known as Singapore Inc, under the one-party leadership of the People's Action Party (PAP). Economists have billed the tiny nation, with only a 682.3 square kilometers land area and a population of four million, as one of the Asian economic miracles. With a multi-racial population – 77 percent Chinese, 14 percent Malay and 8 percent Indian – and a substantial number of foreign residents, Singapore has been described as an ideal cosmopolitan society. It is a stable society that is without the undercurrent of throbbing ethnic tension that one usually associates with ethnically diverse countries. However, this was not always the case. The years leading up to Singapore's self-government status, its merger with and eventual ouster from Malaysia and its reluctant independence in 1965 all occurred amidst a climate fraught with the fear of communal and religious tension and deadly ethnic violence that was then endemic in the region.

The country's stability and rapid economic development after independence from third world status into first world status has fascinated many developing nations that would hope to emulate it. Interestingly, the PAP, which has been in government since independence in 1965, attributes its part of its successes to measures that are viewed as undemocratic by Westerners. For instance, the government has rejected the notion of absolute freedom of press and the marketplace of ideas in Singapore because of its potentially de-stabilizing capabilities in an ethnically plural society. In doing so, the PAP challenged the Western notion of universal values, which links progress with freedom and democracy. For now, Singapore has proven that liberal economics and political stability need not go hand in hand with liberal democracy. This gave credence to the PAP government's assertion that a pragmatic style of governance that adapts to its social

environment bears more fruit than one that solely holds firm to a particular ideology or political theory.

Much of the country's success has been attributed to the genius of the first-generation leaders of the People's Action Party (PAP) in engineering a united multi-ethnic nation after independence in 1965 from a mix of diverse immigrants. Singapore during the colonial period was essentially made up of disparate groups of people. After 123 years of British rule, Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942 during the Second World War. The Japanese occupation in Singapore lasted only three and a half years. Nevertheless in that short span of time, Singapore (and Malaya) underwent significant changes in its social and economic order. More importantly, the Japanese occupation had erased the idea of British invincibility and superiority. After the war, the British returned to a politically conscious society that had grown acutely aware of its rights. The fact that the British had been incapable of defending their subjects called into question their right to re-impose colonial rule (Thio, 1991).

Each ethnic community in Singapore experienced a political awakening brought upon by the shared experience of hardship during the Japanese occupation. The Chinese and Indians began to regard Singapore as their permanent home and accordingly became more interested in local politics, through which they hoped to secure influence and more rights. The Malays who regarded themselves as the indigenous people of the region took an active interest in the growing nationalist movement in Malaya, and were eager to protect their political privileges and rights.

It was during this politically uncertain period that ethnic tensions arose between the ethnic groups, resulting in two major race riots in 1950 and 1964. The sparking of the

two race riots was attributed to inflammatory news coverage by the local press. As a result of this experience, the PAP government, upon Singapore's independence, took a firm stance in regulating the press coverage of race issues. The PAP government embarked on vast changes in society, intervening in contentious areas such as in education, labour and the local press. The PAP's informal press policy entailed constant vigilance of all local newspapers, in an effort to prevent publication of inflammatory articles on race. The press was expected to play a role in educating the population on the merits of various government policies on race issues. The government believed that without the tough measures, the newly independent but fragile country would have been de-stabilized.

The case study includes a content analysis study of the English daily, *The Straits Times*, to determine the degree of governmental influence on the press coverage of race issues. The aim of the content analysis was to determine if there was any change in the way the press reported on issues of race in Singapore over three time periods: colonial (1956 - 1958), political contestation (1959 - 1964), and one-party rule (1965 - 1972).

Content analysis documented that race issues were progressively de-politicized from 1956 to 1972. To prevent recurrence of ethnic strife, alternative views on potentially contentious race issues were reined in, while the safe and responsible government views gained prominence. The PAP government continuously reinforced the frailty of multi-racial and religious Singapore because it believed that race, language and religion could fragment the country if left unchecked. The PAP government justified its press policy by arguing that a free press would never work in a multi-ethnic society like Singapore,

which had already experienced ethnic violence. The Western free press model with its “marketplace of ideas” framework could easily inflame deadly passions.

In time, the Singapore press came to be controlled at two levels by the PAP government. The first level of control utilized the legal system with press laws that regulated from newspaper licenses to content. The second level involved cultivating a supportive press instead of an adversarial one through the promotion of an Asian value system, which stressed on consensus and cooperation. The Singapore value system, which was initially advanced as one based on Confucianism and later as under the broader concept of Asian values, elevates or co-opts the most able in society into positions of leadership, advocates a reverence for authority and promotes consensus building over individualism. Both levels of press control constituted forms of press restraints conceived under a significant degree of governmental influence.

Apart from a minor race riot in 1969, which was due more to the contagion effects of violence in neighbouring Malaysia than to agitations caused by the local press, there has not been a recurrence of ethnic violence in Singapore. The PAP government has attributed the lack of ethnic violence partly to the non-adversarial stance of the press that it had cultivated in the early years of governance. The non-adversarial stance of the press was achieved through press restraints that were aimed at de-politicizing race and religion in Singapore, so as to prevent such issues from polarizing the ethnic groups and resulting in ethnic violence.

The Singapore case illustrates the gains to be had from utilizing press restraints in order to prevent the press from engendering deadly ethnic violence. When race was re-politicized by the PAP government in the 1980s for a variety of political and social

reasons, the Singaporean society had by then passed its threshold level where the societal gains from the press restraints had become permanent - race could now be discussed openly without fear of violent flare-ups. Even though there were episodes of ethnic tension resulting from misgivings caused by the shift from multiracial policies to Chinese majoritarian policies in the 1980s and thereafter, it did not result in the inflammatory forms of news reporting that had led deadly violence in the past. There were two aspects of press restraints that remained in place in Singapore that prevented the inflaming of ethnic passions – first, there were legal avenues through which individuals and newspaper companies could be prosecuted for inflammatory news stories, or incitement to violence; and second, the cultivation of informal out-of-bound markers particularly amongst media persons during the 1960s and 1970s that guided newspapers on what was appropriate and inappropriate for race coverage.

However, more importantly, Singaporeans themselves, made a choice to channel ethnic tension in society into non-violent avenues through which they hoped to make cultural or political gains. The period during which the press restraints on sensitive race issues were in place helped defuse inter-ethnic hostility, and it helped focus society on problems of the economic survival instead. Over time, the press was utilized to foster societal attitudes in people so that they rejected inter-ethnic hostility and intolerance as acceptable circumstances in Singapore. In the long-term, these attitudes enabled most Singaporeans to not even conceive the possibility that racial riots could recur, as evidenced in recent telephone surveys that were conducted on racial attitudes of Singaporeans (Mauzy and Milne, 2002).

The Singapore case also demonstrates caveats to press restraints that should be taken into account. In Singapore, the press restraints on coverage of sensitive race issues were expanded to include issues that were politically damaging to the PAP government, and also issues that the government deemed undesirable for the country. As a result of real and perceived penalties against errant newsmen by the government, journalistic norms in Singapore changed enough for news people to exercise self-censorship in their work, not only on sensitive ethnic issues, but also on political issues. The local press was largely expected to be discriminating when it came to criticism of the PAP leadership and its policies. In the late 1990s though, there was some attempt by the local press to reflect alternative viewpoints (George, 2000). Still, reporting on politics, especially during election campaigns, was seldom balanced (Lingle and Wickman, 1999). Therefore, it is important that there be formal provisions in policies on press restraints that would prevent the government from taking over the press for their own political gain.

Also, it was noted that the overall media credibility – that is, perceived fairness and completeness of news coverage – was relatively low in the Singapore electorate. So if the press restraints are in effect indefinitely, then the press risks losing credibility in the eyes of the public. To help counter this, there should be a specified duration for press restraints from the outset with provisions of lengthening the duration if needed. This should ideally be determined by the government representatives, press owners, ethnic leaders and respectable citizens who would form a media regulating body that decides on guidelines for the press restraints.

In the chapters that follow, I will outline the conceptual model for press restraints. I will also provide the main arguments for press restraints in ethnic conflict-prone

societies that have experienced deadly violence engendered through the press, and that also lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy. The Singapore case study is taken to illustrate the gains to be attained from press restraints, and also to point out some potential caveats that would need to be accounted for in policies regarding press restraints.

Chapter 2 shows how deadly violence can involve the manipulation of the mass media that heightens inter-ethnic hatred and tensions. It contains arguments against the promotion of a free press in societies just emerging from ethnic violence. A theoretical model for press restraints that is aimed at preventing the recurrence of ethnic violence is also provided. Chapter 3 lays an overview of Singapore's early political history with an emphasis on events involving the press and ethnic violence. Chapter 4 provides data and findings on the measurement of governmental influence on the press in Singapore, which was done through a content analysis study of an English-language newspaper, *Straits Times*, in Singapore. The findings show that race was progressively de-politicized. Lastly, Chapter 5 shows that when race was re-politicized in Singapore, and covered in the press, after nearly two decades of press restraints, there was no recurrence of deadly ethnic violence, which shows that there are lasting benefits to the application of press restraints.

CHAPTER 2

Preventing the Press from Engendering Ethnic Violence: A Framework for Press Restraints

“All that makes existence valuable to anyone depends on the enforcement of restraints upon the actions of other people. Some rules of conduct, therefore, must be imposed -- by law in the first place, and by opinion on many things which are not fit subjects for the operation of law”

J.S. Mill, 1978, p. 5

The latter half of the twentieth century saw a decline in state-to-state wars and an increase in violent clashes between different ethnic or religious groups within states. The 1990s in particular saw massive deaths resulting from ethnic conflict in various countries from the former Yugoslavia to Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Angola, Sierra Leone and in numerous other states in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Many of these conflicts see extreme violence directed at civilians leading to massive human suffering. The conditions that lead to ethnic violence have ranged from the lack of tangible basic resources due to difficult life conditions such as poverty or economic stagnation or state breakdown to societal or cultural beliefs and processes that result in sharp differentiation between “us” and “them”, which allows for extreme devaluation of others that legitimizes atrocities as morally acceptable (Staub, 1989; Bar-Tal, 1990; Mazrui, 1990).

In addition to the human costs of internal violence, ethnic conflicts can also be perceived as possible threats to international security and peace especially when there is the potential for the violence to spill across state borders. The likelihood of contagion effects of violence to another society is greater when there is a latent sense of similar type of group identity, such as ethnic identity, in the receiving society (Hill and Rothchild, 1986).

For instance, there has been violence in the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and Burundi where there are similarities in the ethnic divisions, demographics and economic contexts. Although the intensity of ethnic violence in the two countries varies from localized massacres in Burundi in 1988 to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, there are enough similarities in ethnic extremisms and beliefs to generate the same form of antagonisms between the Hutus and Tutsis in both countries (Bhavnani and Backer, 2000).

Given the human cost and the likelihood of contagion effect, as well as the reality that most states are reluctant to intervene under moral obligations to halt atrocities in conflict-ridden societies because of the principle of sovereignty (Chesterman, 2001), the subject of preventing ethnic conflict is one of utmost importance in the numerous research agendas of political scientists and government officials.

Regardless of the type of societal or cultural conditions present in a society, human rights activists and scholars alike attribute the common catalyst for extreme violence in most conflict-ridden societies to manipulative ethnic leaders who misuse the mass media by launching hatred campaigns in order to mobilize the masses into violent action. The culprits fingered are often political leaders. The prescribed form of remedy for misuse of mass media by manipulative leaders is encouraging greater press freedom, through which information monopolies are destroyed and in its place a diversity of ideas. But greater press freedoms in newly democratizing societies are often associated with renewed bloodshed (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996).

Additionally, ethnic minorities in democratizing societies are encouraged to create their own forms of media communication (Riggins, 1992). The intention is to level the

information playing field by giving ethnic minorities that were previously denied opportunities to voice out grievances, a chance to effect change in society through the media. However, this has the opposite effect. Exclusive and narrow forms of media, such as ethnic minority media, are beholden to particular parties or groups and would make little attempt to distinguish between fact and opinion (Knightly, 1975). The result is that ethnic minority media have a polarizing effect rather than an integrating effect in the society, which is counterproductive to the aims of ethnic tension reduction.

In particular, societies that are just emerging from ethnic conflict or societies that have relatively recent history with ethnic violence, and that also lack deep-rooted democratic institutions and a civil society, the promotion of an unrestrained press can and may aggravate existing unresolved ethnic tensions. Political leaders and other elites in such societies will be forced to engage in public debate in order to compete for mass support in the struggle for power (Gagnon, 1995). Under such conditions, leaders who engage in ethnic outbidding that only serves to strengthen extremist ethnic views can misuse the press intentionally, or unintentionally, which ultimately leads to deadly violence (Lake and Rothchild, 1996). Encouraging unbridled public debate through the mass media has the opposite effect to what is desired, i.e., non-violence between ethnic groups. What else can be done to prevent such an occurrence?

I argue that installing press restraints is warranted in societies that are just emerging from ethnic conflict, and that also lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy. The ethnic tension in a society that is just emerging from violence cannot simply be eradicated in a short period of time. The policies that aim to manage ethnic relations and prevent recurrence of violence have to

take into account that reduction of inter-ethnic hostility is a process that is continual. There is always the potential for recurrence of violence in ethnically fragmented societies, more so in societies that are only just emerging from violence.

Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect inter-ethnic hostility to recede when all kinds of unrestrained views on ethnicity, including those conceivably perceived as hostile or threatening ones, are allowed to be expressed in a common media marketplace as is prescribed by proponents of the Western free press model. Effective management of inter-ethnic relations would include policies that aim to re-assure ethnic groups that extreme views would have zero-tolerance in their societies. One of the ways to ensure this would be to regulate the mass media, in a way that prevents it from being misused to incite violence or stir up ethnic tensions.

One's human right to be protected from violence or death should hold priority over one's human right to freedom of expression, especially when the latter human right in societies with unresolved ethnic tension can lead to extreme violence. The Western free press model with its marketplace-of-ideas framework could easily inflame deadly passions. Given the reality of managing ethnic relations in fragmented societies, the notion of regulating press conduct on its coverage of ethnic issues should not be discounted. Instead, a free press with limits on ethnic coverage can be justified under such societal constraints.

The main criticism against restricting freedom of the press is that dictators have used the same argument, i.e., restrictions on the press as a mean to prevent or reduce the level of violence, so as to maintain their political power. Press restrictions have also been used by unpopular regimes to prevent the spread of information about domestic conflicts

to the international arena. For example, in 1985, the South African government in Pretoria imposed a ban on photographic and sound recordings of protest activities with the aim of denying protesters an international stage and consequently reducing the level of protest and violence (Singer and Ludwig, 1987). Primarily because of these reasons, it is argued that restricting the press can only lead to more evil than it can good. Instead, critics of press restraints point out that there are legislations, e.g., hate speech laws, incitement to violence laws, to punish those who publish inflammatory articles.

However, I argue that legislations are not enough because the laws are meant to punish the wrongdoers for offenses already committed rather than to prevent the publication of inflammatory articles that can lead to an outbreak of deadly violence. The existing forms of legislation are no protection from press engendering of deadly ethnic violence. Acknowledging that press restraints can be misused by government for political benefits, I propose that a media regulatory body that decides on the form of press restraints to be applied should be made up of not only governmental representatives, but also media owners, editors and journalists, as well as ethnic leaders or respectable citizens in society. The specifics in the press restraints are to be decided upon by the media regulatory body, including the time duration for the press restraints. This makes it difficult for the government to subvert press restraints for its own political gains.

In the following sections in this chapter, I lay out explanations of ethnic violence and show how episodes of deadly violence may involve the manipulation of the mass media that heightens inter-ethnic hatred and tensions. I then show how promoting the Western model of an unrestrained press in societies just emerging from ethnic violence is flawed. I also show how the current forms of press regulations as means to prevent ethnic

violence are inadequate. Finally, I provide a theoretical framework for press restraints that is aimed at preventing the recurrence of ethnic violence.

Ethnic Violence and the Mass Media

One of the ways to get better ideas on how to prevent recurrent episodes of ethnic violence is by first determining and understanding its origins or driving causes. There are four main views on ethnicity that aim to explain the emergence of ethnic violence.

In the primordial view, ethnic identities are a cultural given and a natural affinity. Primordialists believe that ethnic conflicts, especially those that are continual, are indicative of primordial ethnic hatred that cannot be reduced by interventionist methods because they are the result of long histories of inter-ethnic bloodbath (see for example Kaplan, 1993). Ethnic violence is triggered by fears over marginal status in society or changing state boundaries that unleashes memories of past ethnic injustices or violence, and previously peaceful neighbours turn against fellow neighbours. However, the argument against the primordial view is that for most groups in conflict, ethnic relations have been good through most of history: “in the scale of history, catastrophic breakdown into violence are just that – moments” (Hardin, 1995). Furthermore, ethnic hatred is socially learned and therefore cannot be truly primordial (Hardin, 1995).

In the instrumentalist view, political leaders and intellectuals manipulate ethnic identities for political ends (Rosens, 1989). Aggressive ethnic leaders use extreme nationalist propaganda to gain and hold onto power leading to ethnic rivalries within communities. People organize as an ethnic group when it appears to be the most practical way to get what they want (Kaufman, 2001). History of inter-ethnic relations does not matter because ethnic leaders can re-interpret, re-define or invent facts to suit their

arguments, including asserting past atrocities and exaggerating threats of impending violence (Kaufmann, 1996). For example, manipulative political leaders in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were able to misuse the mass media to promote their extreme ethnic views, which ultimately led to massive violence. In this view, the manipulation of the facts and the process of misinformation lead to inter-ethnic mistrust and tensions, and eventually escalate into a spiral of violence. However, such mass media disinformation campaigns would only work if there exist prior ethnic prejudices or hostility in the society.

In the third view, the constructivist model is based on insights from both the primordial and instrumental views (Oberschall, 2000). It argues that individual and group identities are fluid, continually being made and re-made. While constructivists regard ethnicity as reality in society, they also regard it as just one of many identities that are significant during ordinary times (Oberschall, 2000). During times of ethnic tension, ethnic identities become salient because of political choices and political institutions (Linz and Stepan, 1996). As in the instrumentalist view, ethnic identities are manipulable by political leaders. But additionally, in the constructivist view, ethnic conflict is the result of destructive ethnic group identities created by unyielding mythical claims that were propagated by hyper-nationalist political leaders (Little, 1994). Therefore, it is possible to de-construct dangerous ethnic identities and to re-construct a more inclusive national identity that limits the potential for violence. However, intense conflict tends to harden ethnic identities and it becomes difficult for political leaders to broaden their appeals to include members of opposing groups (Kaufmann, 1996).

In the fourth view, ethnic violence is caused by the security dilemma under conditions of state breakdown and anarchy. Ethnic groups engage in defensive arming to protect themselves against ethnic rivals, which in turn causes arming by other ethnic groups. The primary motivations for the security dilemma are fear and insecurity and not sentiments of primordial ethnic hatred (Posen, 1993).

Each view taken by itself is insufficient to explain ethnic conflict. Instead, by combining the insights from all four views, it is possible to form a thorough understanding of why ethnic conflicts occur that is translatable across cases. More importantly when different insights are combined, it becomes clear that ethnic leaders who play on people's fear and insecurity for the future often mobilize ethnic groups for violence through mass media campaigns. Additionally, the masses can also use the mass media to articulate ethnic fears and extremist positions, which then compel ethnic leaders to respond in an extremist fashion in order to stay politically relevant, leading to increased hostility, rigid stances and eventually the outbreak of violence.

For example, ethnic leaders in the former Yugoslavia were successful in manipulating ethnic identities because they had managed to activate latent ethnic beliefs through the mass media. Once the mass media propaganda was in full swing, ethnic fears and insecurity increased as the negative ethnic beliefs from past myths and history were amplified. And eventually the situation degenerated into violence. Cognitive frames were used to explain why ethnic violence in Yugoslavia occurred after decades of peaceful inter-ethnic relations (Oberschall, 2000). Cognitive frames are mental constructions that places and connects events, people and groups into meaningful narratives, so that events in the world are comprehensible and can be communicated and shared with others (Snow

et al, 1986). Yugoslavs had two frames - a normal frame during peaceful times and a crisis frame. When the mass media amplified peoples' ethnic fears and insecurities, Yugoslavs changed from their normal frame to the crisis frame, which was grounded in the experiences and memories of past ethnic wars (Oberschall, 2000). Ethnic leaders in Yugoslavia were able to successfully change peoples' cognitive frames through the mass media by amplifying on inter-ethnic fears and insecurities.

Another explanation for the ethnic violence utilizes the symbolic politics theory, which aims to explain differences in elite-led and mass-led ethnic conflicts. The central assumption of the symbolic politics theory is that people make political choices based on emotion and in response to symbols (Kaufman, 2001). If three preconditions are present – prior hostile myths, ethnic fears and opportunity to mobilize – and if these preconditions lead to rising ethnic hostility, chauvinist mobilization by ethnic leaders making extreme symbolic appeals based on hostile myths, and a security dilemma, then ethnic violence is the result. The process of ethnic conflict escalation can be either elite-led or mass-led. In the elite-led process, ethnic leaders use propaganda through the mass media and political organizations to manipulate ethnic symbols and fan ethnic hostility. This leads to mobilization of the ethnic groups and violent provocations, which begins a cycle of violence (Kaufman, 2001).

In the mass-led process, the lifting of previous barriers to ethnic self-expression – for instance, state coercion – leads to a sudden public articulation of ethnic group fears of survival. If the society has already high levels of ethnic fears and hostility, then the public articulation of different groups' stance reinforces ethnic fears. The path to violence can occur differently. For instance, the masses can reward extremist ethnic leaders with

chauvinist platforms, which lead to a security dilemma and then violence. Or the masses can engage in unorganized violent acts, which in turn create a security dilemma as the violent acts serve as reinforcement of myths and ethnic fears. More extremist ethnic leaders replace moderate leaders, which lead to organized forms of violence (Kaufman, 2001).

Similarly, in Rwanda, the 1994 genocide was the result of political leaders using the mass media to fan ethnic fears and hatred for several years before the onset of the genocide. Although the press played a role, the radio was a more efficient way to reach the masses in Rwanda, as 60 percent of its population was illiterate. And so the radio was more significant as a catalyst for violence (Kellow and Steeves, 1998). The process to ethnic violence in Rwanda was elite-led, as it was the government and extremists attached to the government that actively manipulated the ethnic fears of the public.

In 1990, Rwanda experienced limited political opening under international pressure. There was an abandonment of the press monopoly, which led to a sudden explosion of newspapers and journals (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996). However, much of the press was biased in its commentary, either supporting the government or its political opponents. A media war ensued between political opponents and the government, and there were several outbreaks of localized violence that were blamed on the heightened ethnic tension due to biased reporting (Dorsey, 1994). Many journalists on opposing sides were also murdered in the quest for media dominance (Deguine and Menard, 1994). When governmental reforms in the mid-1993 allowed moderates to take administrative positions in government, including the Ministry of Information, which controlled the official governmental radio station, Hutu extremists formed a radio station of their own

(Metzl, 1997). The extremists used the radio to propagate ethnic hatred, and then finally to incite genocide in 1994. It has been suggested that the genocide would not have happened without the four years of psychological preparation through the mass media that had indoctrinated the public. In the indoctrination process, the ethnic minority Tutsis was defined as the enemy, and it obligated all Hutus to protect themselves and their families (Gatwa, 1995).

It can be seen that the path to ethnic violence may vary in different cases. The factors involved in the emergence of ethnic violence are the existence of negative inter-ethnic beliefs and the opportunity for manipulative leaders or the masses to stoke ethnic hatred through symbols or myths based on negative inter-ethnic beliefs. This is a crucial process because it renders certain ethnic out-groups in the minds of the masses as evil enemies (Keen, 1991). Furthermore, media propaganda is effective when it exploits existing beliefs or when it associates new ideas that can be easily acceptable because of preexisting mindsets (Kinder and Sears, 1985). The negative media communication leads to mobilization of ethnic groups on opposite, and rigid platforms. And deadly violence may be the end result. If there were no underlying sources of inter-ethnic conflict, then the content of the media by itself will not be the principal cause of violence. However, in situations where inter-ethnic tensions are already a reality, then sustained mass media misuse will be able to stir ethnic flames.

Deadly ethnic violence can also occur in the form of localized rioting in divided societies that may appear to break out for no particular rhyme or reason. However upon examination, precipitating events do precede the ethnic riots, and certain features of the social and political environment may facilitate rioting without being proximate causes of

the riot (Horowitz, 2001). In such instances, there need not be sustained mass media misuse before the emergence of ethnic violence. Instead, even a short period of inter-ethnic hostility played up through the mass media suffices to cause an outbreak of deadly violence.

For instance, the outbreak of ethnic violence between the Malays and Europeans in Singapore in 1950 and the Malays and Chinese in 1964 were two instances that reflected the underlying inter-ethnic tension in the social and political environment. Notably, both instances were sparked off by a relatively short period of increased inter-ethnic tension caused by hyped-up reporting in the mass media, particularly in the local vernacular press (Turnbull, 1995). The 1950 incident was preceded by only weeks of inflammatory reporting while the 1964 incident was preceded by several months of a hatred campaign in the press.

Therefore, mass media misuse may be looked upon as one precursor to ethnic violence. It has been noted that continual media publicity about violence, and the media treatment and interpretation of violence actually contributes to its persistence and worsening of the situation rather its reduction (Brass, 1997; Gowing, 1997). One way to prevent the occurrence of violence would be to regulate the press. This would remove one avenue through which deadly violence could be sparked off.

Press Restraints Over Press Freedom

It has been shown in the previous section that when the mass media is misused to spread ethnic hatred and fan irrational fears and passions, it can spark off deadly violence. Certainly in situations where ethnic violence had occurred, it had often been preceded by the systematic propagation of hate and misinformation (Hamelink, 1997).

Notably, the mass media has been implicated in stirring up acts of deadly violence at various instances through history in different parts of the world, from the Nazi regime's use of the press and radio in its campaign against the Jews, to newspaper accusations of unfair political bias amongst ethnic groups in multi-ethnic Singapore and Malaysia, to the media institutions that supported ethnic cleansing politics during the Balkan war, and to the systematic hate campaign carried out by a radio station in Rwanda.

The numerous studies on the role and the influence of the mass media has resulted in varying theories about the ability of the media to influence the behaviour of its audience. The early communication studies theorized on the strong influence of the mass media on society while later studies showed that the mass media could exert strong or weak influences on society depending on the context and circumstances (McQuail, 1994).

Mass communication studies has suggested that media effects may be minimal during periods of stability, but media dependency or media effects increase during times of political, economic, or environmental crisis and uncertainty (Merskin, 1999). In societies with high levels of inter-ethnic tension and instability, several factors do enable mass media misuse to have considerable impact on influencing audience's behaviour in stirring up acts of deadly ethnic violence.

First, it has been found that media audiences find it difficult to come up with their own interpretation of events when the mass media omits relevant information; therefore, it becomes harder for media audiences to ignore conclusions that bother them or stick to their own beliefs (Entman, 1989). When ethnic tension and uncertainty about the future is high in a society, ethnic groups prefer to get information through media sources run by their fellow ethnics instead of relying on information from other sources. If they do so,

they miss out on obtaining the full information of events as the mass media cover stories in a biased fashion (Oberschall, 2000). When that happens, the two-step flow of communication breaks down. The two-step flow of communication shows that during ordinary times, mass media propaganda fails because people are exposed to a variety of messages and they can check them against beliefs and opinions in their interpersonal relationships (Wright, 1959). During an ethnic crisis though, ethnic groups become socially exclusive because people stop discussing public affairs and politics with other ethnics, and instead turn to fellow ethnics with whom agreement is likely (Oberschall, 2000). Exchange of views across ethnic boundaries cease, and this increases the likelihood of people becoming influenced by mass media propaganda.

Second, it has been theorized that media is able to exert considerable influence during periods of instability. There are several reasons why this is so: in times of instability, people are more reliant on the mass media for information and guidance; they may know of crucial events only through the media; and the media is more influential in matters outside of one's personal experience (McQuail, 1994).

Third, the media has been shown to be able to order and project the relative importance of issues through agenda setting (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976). An ethnic issue that under ordinary circumstances would not gain prominence, would be perceived as highly important when it is given unusually intense media attention during times of inter-ethnic tension. Furthermore, the mass media can also tell people how to think about certain issues, and thus, ultimately the media can tell people what to think (McCombs and Shaw, 1993). The media can determine the way people interpret an issue's meaning through framing (Entman, 1993). Coupled with the inter-ethnic tension

in society, the type of media coverage impacts what ethnic groups perceive as being most important – what issues they are prepared to fight for, or what acts of defence they need to engage in.

Fourth, the media with its reach of a large population is able to precipitate potent feelings of fear, anger and anxiety in response to alarming information, which is often incomplete leading to widespread panic and civil disturbance (Kellow and Steeves, 1998). Furthermore, fear-arousing appeals that were originated in a threat was found to be effective in changing one's opinions and beliefs (Oberschall, 2000).

Fifth, blatant lies propagated through the mass media, if repeated consistently, come to be accepted by media audiences. Repetition is the single most effective technique of persuasion (Brown, 1963). This is true especially when media audiences have no way of verifying the facts in news reports independently. Furthermore, if the media uses respected and well-known ethnic leaders or citizens as expert sources in their news analysis, then blatant lies are more easily accepted as truths by media audiences.

These factors show that the mass media has an immense ability to influence the behaviour of its audience during periods of instability or crisis. Mass media misuse can promote inter-ethnic hostility through the agenda setting and framing of particular contentious ethnic issues; it is also capable of stirring up acts of deadly violence when ethnic groups refer to media sources that repeatedly provide biased or false information that is perceived as fact, and is also perceived as threatening or inflammatory.

Despite the recognition that the mass media is capable of being misused to mobilize ethnic groups into committing violent acts, there have been only a few attempts to restrain the media so as to prevent the recurrence of violence. One of the few instances

when press restraints were debated internationally was after the failures at implementing ideas from two key early studies of Lerner and Schramm's. The two studies had been instrumental in shaping the dominant modernization paradigm in the 1960s that the mass media were the great multipliers of knowledge, which would accelerate development in the Third World countries (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964).

By the late 1970s, it became apparent that the promise of accelerated development through mass media initiatives had actually produced few tangible results (Rogers, 1978). These failures, as well as the growing prominence of the dependency theory, gave rise to the New World Information Order (NWIO) debate in the UNESCO during the late 1970s. Many in the Third World came to advocate the idea that the press freedoms, which the West held as universal values, were incompatible with the development objectives of developing countries. Instead, co-operative alliances between national governments and the press were formed so as to pursue national objectives for the betterment of the country (Hachten, 1986). This led to the concept of development news, i.e., any news that promoted development. Often that meant governments ended up having political control over the national mass media and enforcing press restraints, something that was contrary to press independence. The 1980s saw a rise in developing countries that advocated press restraints in the name of development.

However, development news was open to criticism because of its vulnerability to misuse by leaders who filled national newspapers and airwaves with only positive stories on political leadership, and censored those that might reflect political incompetence or corruption (Stevenson, 1988). As such, Western media organizations and public officials were strongly opposed to press restraints by national governments, which they saw as an

excuse that dictators would use to justify their repressive regimes. Often, the criticism leveled at developing countries by Western media advocates and public officials rang true: repressive governments did try to forcibly censor news that was politically damaging to themselves by terrorizing local journalists into silence (see e.g. Ricchiardi, 1999).

In later years, developing countries would try to formulate a distinctive press system. For instance, the media in much of East and Southeast Asia stressed on consensus and cooperation with an aim to build national consensus that was based on Asian cultural values while the Western media was dedicated to individual freedom and rights (Heuvel and Dennis, 1993). However, building national consensus in countries that were ethnically diverse, in particular, required active persuasion or coercion of the press that meant implementation of press restraints. For instance, the Singapore government coerced the press in the different languages of the country's ethnic groups to approximate towards one national view by using press restraints in the form of press laws and the cultivation of journalistic norms that were in favour of governmental objectives (George, 2000).

Once more, Western media advocates and public officials rejected the notion of a distinct Asian press system that advocated some form of press restraints in the name of culture, which they regarded as another excuse coined by governments to justify authoritarian rule. To that end, the critics pointed out that there was no consensus as to what exactly constituted the Asian press system since the Asian values that it was supposed to be based on was not acceptable to all Asian countries (Masterton, 1996).

For instance, the Philippines and Thailand, both with a population of ethnic minorities, have adopted a press system that is independent from the state. And yet other multi-ethnic states like Singapore and Malaysia have press systems that subscribe to the notion of press-government cooperation. Critics contend that the press in such a system would be relegated to being the public relations arm of the government (Gunaratne, 1999).

Opposed to these various contending press systems that advocate some form of press restraints is the Western libertarian press system, which was stemmed from the concept of the rational human being with an inherent dignity and the sovereignty to determine his acts and destiny (Mehra, 1989). Freedoms of speech and of the press were viewed as important instruments for the discovery and spread of truth. Central to the Western press system was the idea that one cannot achieve individual self-fulfillment or an informed electorate unless one prevented government interference in the press (Wuliger, 1991). Through unbridled debate in the press, error would be exposed and the truth would emerge, leading to opportunities for human progress: truth beats falsehood in a free marketplace of ideas. The assumption is that there is a self-righting process in which truth ultimately triumphs.

In libertarian countries, individual liberty is viewed as the cornerstone of democracy, where freedoms are typically exercised and realized in a free and open marketplace (Nordenstreng, 1997). The wording of the First Amendment in the US Constitution that specifically mentions freedom of the press in addition to freedom of speech is one argument made by advocates of the libertarian press system that the press is entitled to a special protection, beyond those accorded to speech in general (Lichtenberg,

1987). The press is regarded as a virtual fourth branch of the government that has a special watchdog function. It has been noted that on balance in mature democracies, unbridled debate does tend to discredit ill-founded myths by revealing its factual inaccuracies. The likelihood of a successful self-righting process where truth beats falsehood occurs under conditions of “perfect competition”, which has been defined as a situation of no monopolies of information or media access, low barriers to entry, full exposure of all consumers to the full range of ideas, the confrontation of ideas in common forums, and public scrutiny of factual and causal claims by knowledgeable experts (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996). Certainly it has been found that the more freedom a state accords its citizens, which includes the freedom of speech and press, the less likely it is to be involved in foreign violence; and the more freedom within two states, the less likely there will be violence between them. This violence-reducing effect of freedom was also found to extend to conflict within states (Rummel, 1984).

The question is, can the violence-reducing effect of freedom, specifically freedom of the press, be extended to societies emerging from ethnic violence, particularly if that society lacks the societal norms and institutional structures that are present in mature democracies? Does absolute freedom of the press as envisioned in the libertarian press system guarantee that there would be no recurrence of ethnic violence?

In new democracies or politically instable countries, there is highly “imperfect competition” in the marketplace of ideas, which facilitates mass media misuse leading to the outbreak or persistence of violence (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996; Gowing, 1997). This argument can be extended to societies emerging from ethnic violence – mistrust and tension between ethnic groups would be high after an experience of deadly violence, and

the promotion of a free press in such societies may have unintended consequences, especially if contentious ethnic issues are allowed to be continuously played up in the marketplace. The effect would be to polarize ethnic groups rather than integrate the groups, which leads to a cycle of mistrust and hostility, i.e., conditions for the recurrence of violence. Under such conditions, the self-righting process does not work – the free marketplace of ideas does not guarantee that the truth will emerge; falsehood may gain a foothold in people’s mind instead, which can lead to deadly violence. Press restraints that prevent inflammatory stories from triggering acts of violent behavior are justified under these circumstances.

Furthermore, although critics of press controls claim that any form of regulation of the press is incompatible with the principle of freedom of the press in the Western libertarian press system, it is not as clear-cut as it is made out to be. Although Mill espoused on the benefits of a free marketplace of ideas, he did not claim that competition would automatically lead to the victory of the best idea, much less the truth (Holmes, 1990; Snyder and Ballentine, 1996). Instead, Mill argued that unbridled debate was a guarantee that the best ideas would not be permanently suppressed (Lichtenberg, 1990; Snyder and Ballentine, 1996). In fact, history has shown that falsehood can win out over the truth, in the short term as well as in the long term (Wuliger, 1991). In the case of ethnic conflict, if the falsehood consists of inflammatory lies and threats and are allowed to propagate and escalate ethnic tension in society, which leads to deadly violence, then one would be justified in wanting to restrict people’s access to that form of falsehood.

The well-known arguments from Mill to Kant that are for freedom of the press are indistinguishable from those for freedom of expression (Lichtenberg, 1987). Freedom of

expression has been championed for many reasons. First, it is argued that freedom of expression is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of each individual's intellectual and psychological potential. Second, freedom of expression promotes human self-actualization and restriction and censorship thwarts personal growth. Third, effective public decision-making that is needed in a healthy democracy presupposes access to all relevant information, best achieved through the full and open presentation of ideas. Fourth, censored ideas might actually be the truth and society would be deprived of the benefit of that truth. Fifth, freedom of speech promotes healthy social change. Sixth, freedom of speech (and the press) provides necessary checks on or exposes abuses by government (Johannesen, 1997). In general, the press is treated as a voice, on par with individual voices, and defending press freedoms is tantamount to defending free speech or expression (Lichtenberg, 1987). However, the press, as we know it today is quite unlike that of an individual voice. The arguments that support freedom of expression for individuals or for small publications do not necessarily support similar freedoms for the mass media (Lichtenberg, 1997).

It has been argued that freedom of the press is an instrumental good: it is good if it results in certain things and not good otherwise (Lichtenberg, 1987). When an unrestrained press, in the context of ethnic tension, is known to produce results that are contrary to the goals of freedom of expression, then that is a compelling reason for press restraints. That is, regulating the media so as to achieve the ultimate purposes of freedom of expression should rightly be considered when it fails to deliver good results. To that end, if absolute freedom of the press results in deadly violence, then press restraints on the very subjects that caused violence should rightly be considered.

It has been argued “speech, in short, is never a value in and of itself, but is always produced within the precincts of some assumed conception of the good” (Fish, 1994, p. 104). Therefore, an absolute freedom of expression as an ideal cannot be defended on its own basis. It follows then that there are legitimate reasons to curtail certain forms of expression. There is good speech that has good consequences and bad speech that has dire consequences, and the key is to find a workable compromise that gives considered weight to the value of speech and other values such as privacy, security, equality and the prevention of harm (Fish, 1994). Freedom of expression is always to an extent regulated in all societies, for example, through hate speech, solicitation to felony, slander or libel laws. Each society would have to ask itself three questions about speech: “what does it do, do we want it to be done, and is more to be gained or lost by moving to curtail it?” (Fish, 1994, p. 127). Accordingly, the answers would vary with different contexts (Fish, 1994).

Modified Libertarianism

The usual prescribed form of remedy for misuse of mass media is encouraging greater press freedom, through which information monopolies are destroyed and in its place a diversity of ideas is promoted (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996). As such the principle of freedom of the press is upheld even in conflict-prone societies like Sri Lanka (Hattotuwa, 2003) as one of the primary media reforms necessary for the prevention of violence. Nevertheless, there is the recognition that the media can aggravate ethnic tension, or escalate ethnic hatred and hostility into deadly violence. In addition to promoting the principle of freedom of the press in societies emerging from deadly ethnic violence or conflict-prone societies, there have been several strategies aimed to prevent

ethnic flare-ups engendered the media through other means besides governmental-enforced press restraints. However, many of these strategies are actually geared towards improving inter-ethnic relations, with the long-term goal of ethnic conflict-reduction. They are necessary strategies with positive aspects, but their objectives tend to bear fruit over the long-term. These strategies are not fail-safe in the short-term, in so far as the objective of preventing the recurrence of ethnic violence sparked through the media goes, especially in the tense and uncertain post-conflict period.

Promotion of Ethnic Balance in Newsroom

Media organizations are told to adopt recruitment policies that encourage the entry of ethnic minorities into journalism (Sorensen, 2002). The aim is that the newsroom should reflect the ethnic composition of society. In doing so, media organizations send a signal to society that it takes the views of all the ethnic groups seriously. Diversifying the newsroom also ensures that stories on ethnic issues are not written from the perspective of only one ethnic group. Instead, contribution from journalists of different ethnicities ensures that news stories on ethnic issues are richer, and greater in depth and understanding. Furthermore, it opens the channels to discussion in the newsroom itself, which reduces the likelihood of journalists themselves falling prey to ethnic propaganda.

Certainly, the goals of diversifying the newsroom are good. However, it does not guarantee that inflammatory news stories will not be published. Even if journalists gain a better understanding of other ethnic groups' issues, they may still have to bide by the dictates of their editors and newspaper owners. For instance, sensational stories, which one ethnic group may perceive as inflammatory, may be published just for the sake that it is sort of stories that sells more newspapers, which is exactly what newspaper owners

want. Furthermore, newspaper owners may hold strong beliefs on ethnic issues that can sway the entire work organization towards one particular view. They may also be allied towards fellow ethnic groups, or political parties, with other interests besides conflict-reduction.

In times of uncertainty, as is the post-conflict period, journalists may slant the news in favour of their own ethnic group when other groups are doing the same, performing a sort of “patriotic journalism” (Oberschall, 2000). Lastly, the policy simply does not enforce responsibility of the press.

Ethnic Minority Media

Ethnic minorities are encouraged to create their own forms of media communication (Riggins, 1992). The intention is to level the information playing field by giving ethnic minorities that were previously denied opportunities to voice out grievances, a chance to effect change in society through the media. This move can be reassuring for ethnic minorities – it can be perceived as an indication that their ethnic groups and cultures are no longer threatened, and that they do have a place in society.

However, ethnic minority media can reinforce and harden ethnic identities in a way that hinders the reduction of inter-ethnic hostility, especially if ethnic minorities are only represented through the ethnic minority media. Then it sends a message that ethnic minorities are separate from those in the larger society. Exclusive and narrow forms of media, such as ethnic minority media, are beholden to particular parties or groups and would make little attempt to distinguish between fact and opinion (Knightly, 1975). The result is that ethnic minority media has a polarizing effect rather than an integrating effect in the society, which is counterproductive to the aims of ethnic violence prevention.

In certain cases, ethnic minorities may lack the financial, structural and personnel resources to create its own media sources. And when they do manage to do so, journalists may lack the proper journalistic training and objective professionalism. News stories from such outlets may constitute of opinions and beliefs rather than objective reporting. Ethnic minority media are also prone to bias news stories in their favour, which may cause reactionary action by other media sources, leading to an escalation of ethnic tension through the media. Again, this is counterproductive to the aims of violence prevention.

Training of Journalists in Conflict Transformation and Peace-Building

Journalists are trained in conflict theory in order to gain skills and analytical instruments to report on the issues related to ethnic conflict. Journalists are also trained to understand the root causes of a conflict and the triggers that may fuel escalation of violence. In particular, training aims to (1) build a general awareness of democracy and human rights, (2) encourage independent analysis and thought, (3) interview impartially, humanize all sides of the conflict, and to find common ground (4) to strengthen civil society (SIDA and UNESCO, 2002).

The objectives of the training programme are certainly beneficial, and are a crucial aspect of the efforts to reduce ethnic tension in post conflict societies. However, this does not guarantee that the mass media will not be misused to sensationalize ethnic stories for economic profit or to deliberately stir up trouble. Unless having only trained journalists on the payroll is mandated by legislation, media owners or editors can easily replace the trained journalists with other journalists who share their likeminded ethnic viewpoints. Training programmes does not constrain those who would intentionally want to misuse the media, nor does it prevent the unintentional publication of inflammatory

stories, which always has the risk of leading to deadly violence. Lastly, journalists are not peacemakers, and should not be expected to play that role. Their primary job is to report on the news in an impartial and objective manner, which does have an effect of facilitating the healing of inter-ethnic relations.

Self-Regulating Press Councils

The press council is an institution that is intended to promote media ethics. Although the concept has existed from the time of the first press council in Britain in 1953, the press council has more recently been proposed by several international organizations such as UNESCO, the International Press Institute, the International Federation of Journalists and the Council of Europe to improve the mass media industry. Its members may consist of both media and non-media people: citizens, editors, journalists, media owners and government representatives.

The main purpose of the press council is to preserve press freedom – it is not meant to be an office of governmental censorship, an internal self-censorship bureau, a lobby serving media owners, a union of professional journalists, an arbitration agency to settle disputes among media, or a branch of a media users association (Bertrand, 2003). The press council would monitor the evolution of the media and publicize any unethical trends. It would watch government's communication policies for threats to freedom of expression, and also watch the evolution of media ownership.

Press councils lack the ability to enforce sanctions on media that engages in unethical reporting; as a result, simply publicizing mass media transgressions may not be a sufficient costly deterrent. Press councils are also voluntary institutions that are dependent on media owners for funding, the same people press councils monitor.

Furthermore, press councils are difficult to operate in countries where the media industry still under-developed, which is the situation in many conflict-prone and developing countries.

Development of a Professional Code of Ethics, and Journalistic Norms

Media organizations are encouraged to develop a professional code of ethics that will help guide the conduct of news reporting. However, inculcating journalistic ethics in the industry is a long-term objective. In societies where a sense of journalistic professionalism is non-existent, it will take some time before the code of ethics is part of the media functioning. The processes of media professionalization in Mexico indicate that lasting changes occur when journalists themselves develop new understandings and visions of their roles through the “slow process of experimentation, learning, and identity formation” (Lawson, 2002, p. 179). For instance, it was found that journalistic norms in Mexico developed in reaction to “the failings and vices of traditional Mexican journalism” rather than as a result of political liberalization (Lawson, 2002, p. 179). The failings of traditional Mexican journalism were highlighted because of exposure to foreign models of reporting and examples set by pioneering Mexican journalists (Lawson, 2002). Furthermore, transgressions of the code of ethics by journalists are non-enforceable, which renders it ineffective, at least in the short-term, in preventing the press from engendering the outbreak of ethnic violence.

Another way is to train journalists in conflict sensitive or peace journalism, which aims to teach journalists to be analytical in examining and understanding the root causes of ethnic conflict. Conflict sensitive or peace journalism does not hide harsh facts, sugarcoat or censor facts. Rather it extrapolates lessons for the future from incidents in

the present (Hattotuwa, 2003). Local journalists in post-conflict societies, or in societies experiencing ethnic conflict are trained in order to provide a background to the ethnic issues, and also to make judgment calls on ethical issues (SIDA and UNESCO, 2002).

However, this strategy assumes that there is a special category of journalism that calls on journalists to be extra sensitive to conflict. In fact, the aims of conflict sensitive journalism are what the aims of good journalism should be: factual, analytical, objective and informational. Still, this is a strategy that would be fully realized in the long-term. It does not prevent the publication of inflammatory stories, which may occur in the tense post-conflict period, or during periods of ongoing ethnic conflict. Furthermore, errant editors and journalists are not held accountable by the media trainers because they lack the authority to enforce punishments or sanctions.

Bans on derogatory speech, hate speech, and incitement to violence

One of the main strategies to prevent inflammatory news stories from provoking ethnic violence is through legislating bans on incensory language. The aim is to employ laws that deal directly with those who provoke ethnic violence without limiting most press freedoms. Therefore, the media as an industry is left unrestrained, but individuals, conceivably even editors and journalists, who flout the law, are held accountable. For instance, the US has specific legislation that targets hate speech and incitement to violence. The US Supreme Court has held that not all forms of speech are free, differentiating between speech that should be fully protected from speech deserving only partial protection and from “worthless” speech or “non-speech” that merit no protection (Johannesen, 1997). For instance, the Court has deemed “political speech” as deserving the strongest First Amendment protection. Although full protection extends to forms of

speech and writing, the Court has ruled that governmental prohibition and punishment is allowed when advocacy of the use of force or of violation of law is “directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action” (Johannesen, 1997).

Additionally, the Court has held that worthless non-speech, such as those lacking ideas and redeeming social value, warrants no protection at all. In this category are libel and slander, obscenity, false advertising and “fighting words” that are spoken directly to an individual, face-to-face, one-to-one (Johannesen, 1997). The Court determined that fighting words could “by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace” (Gould, 2001). Over time, the American courts have cut the definition of fighting words, forbidding only those words that incite an immediate breach of the peace (Walker, 1994).

However, the main problem with legislation as a mean to prevent the misuse of the press in provoking ethnic violence is that it protects only individual victims. However, inflammatory words in the press are often targeted at entire ethnic groups. For instance, the US law is specifically intended to target hate speech that is directed to an individual face-to-face. Hate speech targeted at an entire ethnic group propagated through the press would not be covered.

In the tense post-conflict period, or in a society still plagued with ethnic tension, derogatory and ethnic hatred words in the press are inflammatory words, and can be a catalyst for violence. Legislation only deals with the aftermath of the violence, supposing the transgressors can be found and prosecuted. Legislation does not prevent the

publication of inflammatory stories; so legislation does not prevent the risk of violence erupting from inflammatory stories.

Press Laws: Licenses, National Security Prohibitions, and Sedition Acts

The press is controlled through the legal system with press laws that regulate from newspaper licenses to newspaper content. The aims of press laws are to identify specific violations with which the freedom of the press can be restricted. For countries that apply press laws, it is conceptually possible for them to uphold Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers” while passing laws that restrict freedom of speech and expression for very specific reasons.

For example, in Singapore, a clause in the Constitution permits the government to restrict freedom of speech and expression for several reasons: (a) in the interest of the national security; (b) to maintain friendly relations with other countries; (c) to preserve public order; (d) to uphold morality (e) to protect Parliament privileges; (f) to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence (Ang and Yeo, 1998).

Press laws that are more intrusive include laws that require all newspapers to apply for an annual license. The printing license could be revoked if the newspaper caused the deterioration of relations between the government and the citizens, provoked communal unrest or glorified the use of violence in politics.

Laws that not tailored specifically to regulate the press can also be used to rein in errant newspapers. For instance, an Undesirable Publications Act that prohibits the

import, distribution or reproduction of objectionable publications that are published outside or within the country can be employed to sanction newspapers that publish offensive ethnic material. An Internal Security Act, a colonial law that still exists in former British colonies like Singapore and Malaysia, can prohibit the printing, publishing, circulation and possession of materials that are prejudicial to national interests, public order, or Singaporean society (Tan and Soh, 1994). Sedition Acts can prohibit any act, speech, words and publications that have a seditious tendency – for instance, those promoting hostility between different ethnicities.

The most obvious drawback of press laws is that the net effect of such restrictions may simply stifle freedom of expression. The laws are also open to interpretation, and hence may be misused by governments for reasons other than prevention of ethnic violence. For instance, the Undesirable Publications Act in Singapore is actually vague on what is defined as objectionable (Ang and Yeo, 1998). It is possible to define even political material, and not just ethnically objectionable material, as offensive, and hence those who publish sensitive political material may be subject to punishment. Therefore, when it comes to placing limits on the press, the laws would have to be as specific as possible so as to prevent governments from misusing them for political reasons.

Other measures to prevent the press from engendering ethnic violence include state-of-emergencies and press surveillance. State-of-emergencies are usually not meant to be in effect for long durations; instead, they are meant to be in effect until law and order has been restored. However, governments may impose state-of-emergencies for political ends when they are threatened with loss of power. Press surveillance may entail appointing government representatives on newspaper's management and editorial boards

so that prior censorship can be enforced. Both measures are open to abuses by government for political ends.

Block Out Completely All Sensitive Ethnic Topics

A more extreme approach would be to block all topics related to ethnicity and ethnic conflict from being covered in the media. This would entail substantial governmental control over the press. However, the complete silence on ethnic issues does not help resolve ethnic tension in society. If ethnic issues are not discussed in an open, objective, respectful and non-provocative manner in the press, then the press loses its credibility in the eyes of the people. The suppression of healthy discussion in the press also enables the societal and governmental neglect of ethnic problems. The suppression drives dissent underground where it may turn into apathy, or where it may rigidify, intensify, and ultimately explode in violence (Johannesen, 1997). People may also start to communicate in code, i.e., in an indirect and subtle manner to express criticism or dissent. Therefore, the silence of all ethnic issues in the press itself may become a risk of violence eruption.

It can be seen that the current forms of press control that are being utilized in various countries are inadequate as means of preventing the press from engendering ethnic violence. Many of the strategies are necessary in improving inter-ethnic relations, like increasing ethnic diversity in the newsroom, training of journalists, and the development of a professional journalistic code of ethics strategies but their objectives tend to bear fruit over the long-term. There needs to be a mean to restrain the press from engendering ethnic violence in the interim tense period between post-conflict and sustained peace.

Framework for Press Restraints

A workable alternative that prevents the press from engendering ethnic violence would be through employing press restraints. Press restraints are needed in post-conflict societies that also lack the societal norms and established institutions, which stem from traditions of democracy. This is because ethnic tension in a society that is just emerging from deadly violence cannot simply be eradicated in a short period of time. Instead, the reduction of inter-ethnic hostility is a process that is continual. There is always the potential for recurrence of deadly violence in ethnically fragmented societies, more so in post-conflict societies. Press restraints are an effective way to re-assure ethnic groups those extreme views, which exacerbates ethnic hatred and hostility, would have zero-tolerance in their societies. Preventing intolerant and harmful ethnic views from being propagated through the press is one of the ways to ensure that the inter-ethnic healing process is allowed to occur without agitation. Press restraints also more importantly prevent the recurrence of deadly violence through press misuse.

There are two recognizable features in conflict-prone societies that increase the chances of the press being misused to engender ethnic violence, and the existence of such features warrants the application of press restraints. First, the social, political and legal institutions in such societies are likely to be weak and fragile because they are not fully developed. Under conditions of press liberalizations, the under-developed or partially developed institutions are less likely to be able to withstand or mediate societal pressures that threaten the outbreak of violence. As such, the rapid introduction of liberalization can cause weak institutions to collapse, which leads to the renewal of violence. To prevent this, a controlled and gradual approach to liberalization is needed (Paris, 2004).

Press restraints act as a controlled and gradual approach to press liberalization in post-conflict societies that lack strong institutions. It removes the press from being an avenue through which ethnic violence may be engendered. Removing inflammatory and biased reporting from the mainstream can help defuse inter-ethnic tension and hostility, which enables other conflict reduction policies to take effect in society. In turn, weak institutions are allowed to grow and strengthen without having to deal continuously with cycles of inter-ethnic hostility and violence. The second feature of societies that would need press restraints are those that are lacking a sense of mass media professionalism. Most conflict-prone societies are polarized, and the mass media similarly reflects this polarization. They lack mass media professional bodies and the code of ethics is not part of the media functioning. Journalists are not adequately trained to reject the forms of inflammatory reporting that can cause episodes of violence. In such societies, press restraints act as a protective barrier that prevents the publication of inflammatory reports that would otherwise cause the outbreak of violence. Ultimately, the exercise of press restraints would help develop a standard of journalistic professionalism and code of ethics in the profession where none existed before.

Press restraints would be in the form of specific regulations that compel all newspapers to abide by a set of previously agreed to conventions on press conduct towards ethnic issues. Government representatives, press owners, ethnic leaders and respectable citizens should form a media regulating body to discuss what press restraints in their society would entail. Presumably, press restraints would take different forms depending on the type of ethnic conflict present in the society. The specific criteria to determine the sort of articles that are to be prohibited would also be dependent on the

assessments of the media regulating body. However, the intention is clear: press restraints are to be used in order to prevent inflammatory articles from inciting violence, exacerbating ethnic tension and hatred, and propagating extreme ethnic views, all of which are known to trigger deadly violence in conflict-prone societies.

To that effect, any framework for press restraints should differentiate between articles that clearly aim to advocate, incite, or threaten collective violence against ethnic groups, and articles that cover ethnic leaders who aim to unite ethnic groups, or articles that address genuine ethnic grievances. Both forms of articles may utilize emotive words to appeal to ethnic audiences, but the latter form of articles should not be restricted from publication for two reasons. Firstly, restricting press coverage of ethnic leaders, especially those who are known in society, will only provoke resentment from members of ethnic group who will view it as a form of repression. This is more so if the ethnic group in question is a minority, and has previously been discriminated against, or suffered great injustices. Restricting press coverage of ethnic issues brought up by affected ethnic group leaders will only increase inter-ethnic tension and hostility. Secondly, restricting press coverage of genuine ethnic grievances will impart an impression on society that the concerns of particular ethnic groups are of no value and thus deserve no attention. This can lead to an emergence of extreme or militant ethnic views as a mean to correct the injustices. Under such circumstances, there can be sudden and explosive instances of violence. Therefore, it is counterproductive to restrict articles solely on the basis that they utilize emotive words to appeal to ethnic groups. Instead, the articles should be utilized for their intended meanings. This would prevent the dampening

of legitimate discussions of ethnic grievances in the press, without which there can be no real progress made in conflict reduction.

The press restraints would be regulations that are enforceable by the government. The specific sanctions and punishments against errant newspapers, editors or journalists are to be agreed upon by the regulating body during the discussion phase. In practical terms, press restraints would involve some form of prior censorship. Articles would have to undergo vetting by the newspaper editor or a regional censorship body that monitors all the news organizations in its district.

The press restraints are not meant to be in effect indefinitely; i.e., agreed to and formal sunset provisions would be in place. The goal is that ethnic conflict reduction policies do succeed in improving inter-ethnic relations in society, and when that has been deemed to have occurred, then the press restraints will no longer be required. During the healing period, the press can be utilized to the objective of conflict transformation and peace-building, namely to build a general awareness of democracy and human rights, to encourage independent analysis and thought, to humanize all sides of the conflict, and to find common ground. The regulating body should meet periodically to assess the ethnic conflict situation in society, and also to determine if the press restraints are still required. Until that time, vigilance of the press is crucial.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model for Press Restraints

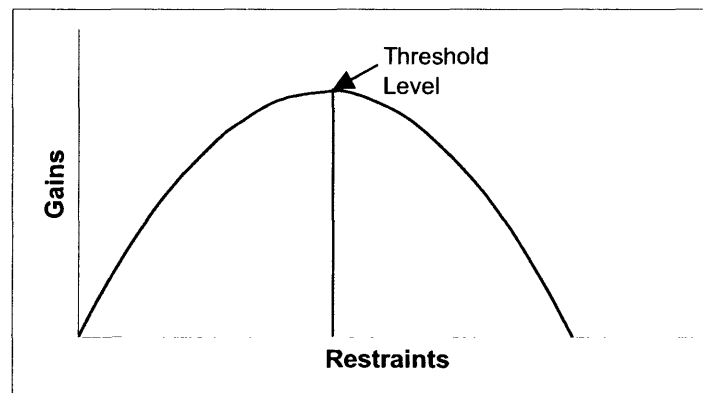


Figure 1 shows a conceptual model for press restraints, which states that the gains to be obtained in society where inter-ethnic hostility is high, or in a society that has already experienced deadly ethnic violence, increases when press restraints are progressively applied. The gains would be realized primarily through the lack of erupting deadly collective violent episodes, and inter-ethnic hostility. One way to measure the gains in society would be to numerate observations at the onset of press restraints of collective acts of violence, and demonstrations or protests by ethnic groups. Restrictions of inflammatory, threatening or humiliating types of news stories will reduce occurrences of collective violence. The decreasing occurrences of collective violence would indicate increasing gains in society.

The restriction of news stories that are ethnically biased, or that contains negative ethnic stereotypes would help reduce inter-ethnic hostility in society. Conducting surveys on a regular basis during the period of press restraints would be one way to gauge the effectiveness of the press restraints on reducing the level of inter-ethnic hostility in society. The surveys would also be a way of determining the changing values of people over time as a result of the press restraints.

The defused press coverage of race would enhance benefits of conflict resolution policies, which would increase inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation. This continues until a threshold level is reached where the gains attained from press restraints will be at their maximum. At the threshold level, the gains from press restraints would have become permanent, so that the removal of press restraints on race coverage will not cause a recurrence of ethnic violence. Different societies may reach the threshold level at different rates, so there can be no one-fit-all formula to determine when the threshold

level would be reached for a particular society. The best estimate of the threshold level would be the continued absence of violent episodes, and the reduction in inter-ethnic hostility in society. Government representatives, press owners, ethnic leaders and respectable citizens in that society who would form a media regulating body that decides on the press restraints would be ideally the ones to determine if the threshold level has been attained.

When the threshold level has been deemed to have occurred, then the removal of press restraints can proceed in step-by-step basis. Removing the press restraints after the threshold level has been reached would not cause a recurrence in violence because the experience of the press restraints would have guided newspapers on what was appropriate and inappropriate to publish on ethnic issues, and in doing so created a culture of media professionalism, which would persist even after the removal of press restraints. Such a media culture would reject the inflammatory forms of news reporting that had previously led to deadly violence.

However, as Figure 1 demonstrates, the continued application of press restraints after the threshold level has the opposite effect than what is desired; the gains in society begin to decrease as the press restraints are retained after the threshold level. There may be the recurrence of deadly violent episodes, or increased inter-ethnic hostility as press restraints are retained indefinitely after the threshold level. If the press restraints are in effect indefinitely, then it increases the probability that it may be eventually taken over for political gains, or used to censor legitimate ethnic issues from public debate. When this happens, then the press loses all credibility in the eyes of the public. Even if the press restraints are not used for political gains, the indefinite retention of press restraints would

signal to society that the gains made (for instance, increased understanding and cooperation between ethnic groups) are not actually genuine, and that would raise concerns about the addressing of legitimate ethnic issues. This leads to a cycle of inter-ethnic mistrust, tension and hostility, and potentially the recurrence of deadly violence.

Figure 2: Adjusting Press Restraints to Different Ethnic Conflict Contexts

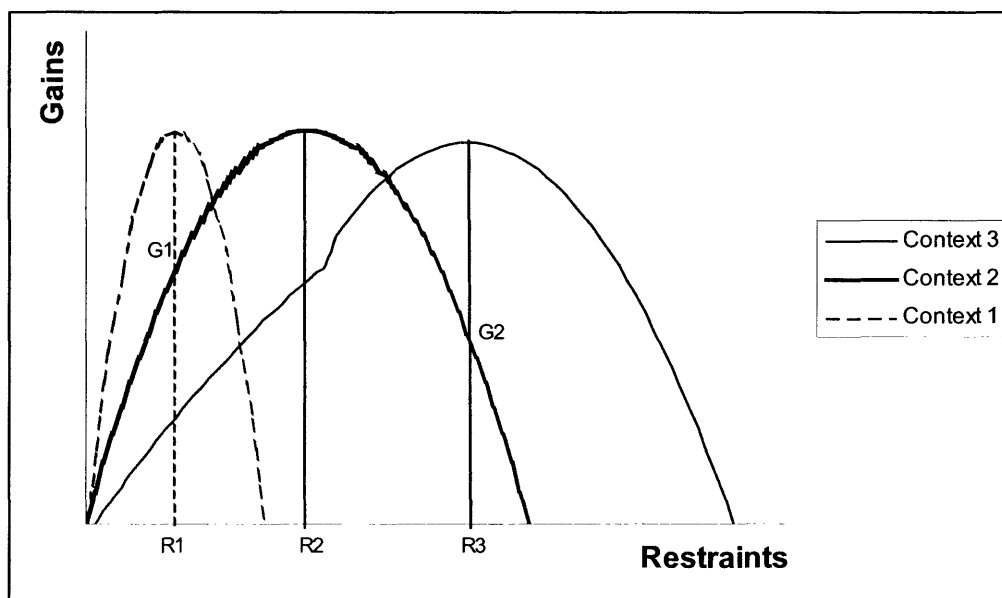


Figure 2 illustrates further how the press restraints should be adjusted to the changes in the ethnic conflict context. In Figure 2, the Context 1 curve refers to a low level of ethnic conflict and little possibility of violence, Context 2 refers to a moderate level of ethnic conflict and some possibility of violence, and Context 3 refers to a high level of ethnic conflict and a high possibility of violence.

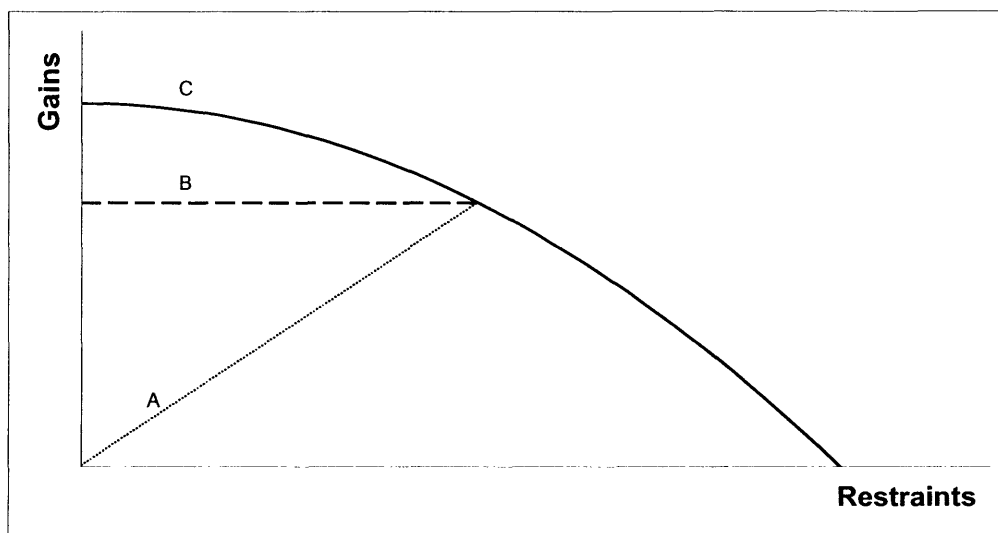
The optimal level for press restraints in Context 3 is R3, i.e., the threshold level. At R3, the gains to be obtained from press restraints in Context 3 are at its maximum level. When the threat of ethnic conflict violence recedes to a moderate level of ethnic conflict, i.e., to Context 2, but there is no corresponding down-shifting in the application

of the press restraints, then the gains would decrease to G2, and the inter-ethnic tension along with the threat of violence increases. This would occur because the level of press restraints remains at the threshold level of Context 3, i.e., R3, while the situation has changed to Context 2. This is an example where there would be too much press restraints. Instead, the gains of press restraints for Context 2 would be at its maximum level at R2.

Similarly, the optimal application of press restraints for Context 1 is at R1. However, when the inter-ethnic tension and threat of violence increases from a low level of conflict to a higher level of conflict, i.e., from Context 1 to Context 2, and there is no corresponding adjustment of the application of press restraints, then the gains from press restraints decrease to G1. The application of press restraints is too low and need to be adjusted to R2, which is the optimal level for Context 2.

The model for press restraints shows that the application of press restraints cannot be static. It will need to be responsive to changes in ethnic conflict context so as not to worsen the situation.

Figure 3: Press Restraints in Different Political Contexts



The application of press restraints may also vary with differing political contexts. Figure 3 shows three possible outcomes with the application of press restraints. In A, the application of press restraints results in an increase in incremental gains in society until the threshold level is reached. The outcome forms the basis of the model for press restraints in this thesis. It should work in countries that are just emerging from ethnic conflict, and that also lack the societal norms and established political institutions that stem from traditions of democracy. It should also work in ethnically fragmented countries that are also newly democratizing. The decline in gains begins only after the threshold level has been attained for the reasons already outlined in the explanation for Figure 1.

In B though, the outcome from the application of press restraints is that there is no incremental gains. The increase in the application of press restraints results in a decline in societal gains. This may happen in authoritarian, or other societies with a non-democratic political context, such as monarchies. Such societies by their nature should have already a relatively high level of press restraints that limit freedom of expression. It may be that non-democratic societies can succeed in preventing ethnic violence through their form of press restraints, which usually includes suppression of not only explosive ethnic views, but also political criticisms and views counter to the ruling regime. However, if the non-democratic society manages ethnic problems through only repressive means and with coercive force without any genuine effort at conflict resolution, then increasing press restraints may have a counter-effect leading to an emergence of violence as a mean to address wrongs. This leads to a decline in gains from the non-democratic attempts at press restraints.

In other societies, there is no gain to be attained from the application of press restraints at all as shown in C in Figure 3. From the very beginning, any application of press restraints leads to a decline in gains already present in society. This may occur in countries with long established traditions of democracy, with corresponding political institutions, and social and journalistic norms. Such established democratic societies have well-developed networks that can withstand competing ethnic viewpoints, reject the propagation of extreme ethnic viewpoints in the mainstream press, and they would have done so for a long period of time. These societies would have a lack of recurrent episodes of violence, the kind that plagues ethnic conflict-prone societies. It may also be that such societies are largely ethnically homogeneous, with very few minorities.

The application of press restraints in such democratic societies may be counter-productive because it may indicate to people that there is an ethnic problem in society, which is unmanageable. The thought of an unmanageable ethnic problem that requires governmental influence through the application of press restraints where none was required before can be easily construed as threatening, which may consequently lead to inter-ethnic tension or even violence. This is especially so where there has been no overt displays of inter-ethnic tension or violence in the democratic society before the application of the press restraints. In this context, the press restraints in the form envisioned in this thesis may result in the outcome shown in C.

CHAPTER 3

Ethnic Violence and the Press in Singapore

Introduction

Singapore during the colonial period was essentially made up of disparate groups of people. The loyalties of each ethnic community were mostly with their countries of origins rather than with Singapore. By the late 1800s, the ethnic communities had developed its own press that served mainly to inform ethnic members of the news in their countries of origins. Most of these newspapers were not profitable enterprises and many did not survive long. After the Japanese occupation of Singapore during World War II, the disparate ethnic groups began to see their futures tied permanently in the region. Ethnic communities began to organize and champion on political and ethnic issues, which was reflected in the press, particularly in the vernacular press.

Singapore's political beginnings were often fraught with ethnic tension that resulted in two major race riots in 1950 and 1964. The ethnic violence was attributed in part to inflammatory news coverage by the local press. As a result of this experience, the PAP government took a firm stance in regulating press coverage of race issues. Apart from a minor race riot in 1969, which was sparked off by massive rioting in neighbouring Malaysia, there has not been a recurrence in ethnic violence in Singapore. The PAP government has attributed the lack of ethnic violence partly to the non-adversarial stance of the press that it had cultivated in the early years of governance. The PAP government justified its restrictions on the press by arguing that a free press would never work in a multi-ethnic society like Singapore, which had already experienced ethnic violence.

Colonial Era

Multicultural cohesion and harmony in Singaporean society has been achieved through varied methods. Under the colonial system, the British formally segregated the population on ethnic basis through housing and economic means. This resulted in ethnic concentration in different geographical areas in Singapore and economic niches. The different ethnic groups had their own vernacular schools, and even specialized economic pursuits leading to little intermingling between the groups. There was little opportunity or inclination for the groups to develop an understanding of each other (Vasil, 1995).

Ethnic conflict was essentially minimized through the British system of segregation. However, the political awakening of ethnic groups after World War II and Singapore's impending independence in the 1950s provoked a passionate push for cultural recognition and rights. Each ethnic group mobilized to protect its perceived collective interests.

After World War II, the British began to prepare Malaya and Singapore for eventual self-government within the British Empire. The Malayan Union Scheme was formulated. The plan created a British Crown Colony called the Malayan Union made up of the nine Malay states, Penang, and Malacca; Singapore was excluded from the Malayan Union because of its large Chinese population and became a separate Crown Colony. Its inclusion might have diminished the political clout of the mainland Malays in any political reorganization of the Malayan region, and the British were sensitive to that possibility. Besides, the British intended to maintain Singapore as a free port from which they could spearhead an export drive in the East (Yeo and Lau, 1991). The British also

considered Singapore a strategic naval base as its defence strategy shifted to Southeast Asia (Turnbull, 1989).

Citizenship provisions under the Malayan Union were very liberal. Citizenship was conferred automatically on the principle of *jus soli* (citizen by residence), i.e., anyone born in the Malayan states or in the Straits Settlements (Lau, 1991). Most importantly, equal rights under citizenship were accorded to all regardless of race or religion. The British realized that increasing numbers of non-Malays (Chinese and Indians) in the region had come to settle permanently in Malaya and that their rights could not be ignored. The Malayan Union thus signified the breaking of a previous practice of preserving special Malay political rights (Andaya and Andaya, 1982). The Union plan was controversial because not only were the Malay kings asked to surrender sovereignty, they were also to accept British plans for a multiracial Malaya (Lau, 1991). As such, there was massive Malay protest over the proposed Union, sparking the formation of the nationalist party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in 1946. UMNO campaigned successfully against the Union Scheme. As a result, the British abandoned the Union plans and agreed to work out an alternative arrangement through a new Anglo-Malay committee (Hill and Lian, 1995). The British were keen to retain Malay support in combating the increasing Chinese Communist insurgency, and so they were open to upholding a pro-Malay policy (Smith, 1995).

The new Anglo-Malay agreement of 1948 created a British Protectorate called the Federation of Malaya. Under the agreement, a legislature would be established without any elected members and restrictive citizenship rules would exclude almost all non-Malays. Furthermore, the sovereignty of the Malay Sultans and the special position of the

Malays were to be preserved (Stockwell, 1979). Singapore was excluded from the Federation plans, but the British did not regard exclusion as a permanent arrangement, and were not opposed to a merger should Singapore and Malaya desire it at a later time (Yeo, 1973).

In contrast to the intense Malay opposition to the Union plan, the non-Malay response was lukewarm (Lau, 1998). Given the large number of Chinese in the region, this mild response was surprising. According to a 1929 Chinese nationality law, Chinese in Malaya were subjects of China (Lau, 1991). Therefore, most Chinese were unwilling to accept the distinction between nationality and citizenship, and hence assumed that by accepting Malayan citizenship, they would have to reject Chinese nationality (Lau, 1989). The Chinese also maintained strong links with China and had little kinship with Malaya. However, the Chinese who had been there for over one generation, particularly the Straits-born Chinese who were mostly middle-class, viewed Malaya as their homeland and were inclined to fight for their political rights (Hill and Lian, 1995). These middle-class Chinese business associations aligned with English-educated, middle-class intellectuals, and left-wing radicals, such as the Malayan Communist Party and the Malay Nationalist Party, to form a united front against the exclusionary provisions in the Federation plans. However, their efforts were in vain.

On February 1, 1948, the Federation of Malaya was established and Singapore's first popular legislative election was held on March 20, 1948. The British wanted to advance constitutional reforms in Singapore and the elections were held for a handful of legislative seats. However, the electoral franchise was restricted (Mauzy and Milne, 2002). Only a small percentage of the potential electorate voted, and almost half of them

were English-educated Indians. The Chinese majority had stayed away from the polls (Yeo and Lau, 1991). Similarly, the second legislative elections in 1951 saw voters that merely reflected the English-speaking population. The Legislative Council was more concerned with issues related to the English-speaking population, and it did not generate much public interest with the majority of the Singapore population.

The local press showed very little interest in the election issues in the two legislative elections (Shee, 1985). And before that, the local press had also engaged in subdued coverage of the Malayan Union scheme and Singapore's exclusion from the Federation (Sopiee, 1974).

The Singapore press began first under British colonial rule with the English fortnightly newspaper *Singapore Chronicle* in 1824. The vernacular press followed later - the first Malay newspaper *Jawi Peranakan* in 1876, the first Tamil newspaper *Singai Varthamani* in 1876, and the first Chinese newspaper *Lau Pat* in 1881 (Tan and Soh, 1994). None of these pioneer newspapers survived into the 1940s. Several newspapers emerged thereafter, but were closed down during the Japanese occupation of Singapore in World War II, or for economic reasons. The major newspapers in Singapore during the 1940s and 1950s were the English language daily, *The Straits Times*, the Chinese dailies, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, the Malay daily, *Utusan Melayu*, and the Indian daily, *Tamil Murasu*.

An Armenian merchant started the *Straits Times* in 1845. It began first as a weekly, and by 1869 it had progressed into a daily newspaper. By 1949, the *Straits Times* was turned into a public company, and its directors were Europeans (Turnbull, 1995). Two Chinese businessmen started the Chinese dailies, the *Nanyang Siang Pau* in 1923,

and the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* in 1929. Of the two, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* was more popular in the Chinese community. *Sin Chew* had posted overseas correspondents in China that added to its news coverage. The *Utusan Melayu* surfaced in 1939 as national Malay daily with the aim of championing the interests of the Malays. It was published in Singapore, but had circulations in both Singapore and Malaya. A leader of the Tamils' Reform Association formed the Indian daily, *Tamil Murasu*, in 1935. The paper was not very influential as it lacked the support of most Singapore Indians, the majority of whom were English-educated (Tan and Soh, 1994).

From early on, the Singapore press was noted to have effects on ethnic relations. In December 1950, Singapore's legislative council criticized the press for stirring up events that led to ethnic riots. The *Straits Times* had reported on what it regarded as a "human-interest story" involving a long-lost daughter, distraught natural parents and devoted foster parents and husband (Turnbull, 1995). The 13-year-old girl, Maria Bertha Hertogh, who was born in 1937 and baptized Catholic, was the daughter of a Dutch army sergeant and a Eurasian mother. She had been entrusted to a Malay family at the time of the Japanese invasion. However, the parents lost contact with the Malay family and returned to Holland after the war. In 1949, Hertogh was found in Malaya. She had been renamed Nadra and brought up as a Muslim (Maideen, 1989). Through the Dutch consul, her parents requested for her return through the Singapore courts, but the Malay family successfully contested the ensuing court order. Hertogh was married days later to a Malay Muslim teacher. The Dutch consul filed a summons to have the marriage declared illegal. The British judge ruled the marriage illegal on grounds of Hertogh's young age. Hertogh

was moved into a Catholic convent with her natural mother while her Malay Muslim “husband” appealed the decision (Narayanan, 2004).

Throughout this period, the *Straits Times* carried emotional reports on the trial evoking sentiments of “restoring an innocent young girl to her own culture and religion” in its largely European readership (Turnbull, 1995). It had also earlier reported that Hertogh was reluctant to meet her natural mother and was emotionally attached to her Malay foster mother. On December 5, The *Straits Times* published a picture of Hertogh playing in the convent. The same day, another English daily, the *Singapore Tiger Standard*, published a picture of Hertogh holding hands with the Mother Superior of the convent. The *Utusan Melayu* reacted by publishing pictures of a weeping Hertogh on December 7. An editor-in-chief of two Muslim newspapers formed a “Nadra Action Committee” (Turnbull, 1995). This decision served only to hype up the situation as a tussle between Christianity and Islam.

The head of the Special Branch warned the Colonial Secretary of the tension caused by the press reports and pictures, and suggested that Hertogh be removed from the convent. His warning went unheeded. On the last day of the trial, a crowd of almost 1000 people, mostly Malay Muslims (and some Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims) stood outside the courts to hear the verdict on the appeal (Narayanan, 2004). The police constables deployed outside the courts were all Malays, who had been subjected to propaganda from the Nadra Action Committee and the press. They allowed some demonstrators to pass through their ranks unopposed, which emboldened the crowd. When it was announced that the appeal had failed, rioting broke out (Clutterbuck, 1985). The Muslim mobs attacked Europeans and Eurasians, i.e., those of a European-Asian

descent. A week-long curfew was declared, and it took three days for order to be restored. By then, 18 people had been killed and 73 injured (Hughes, 1982).

In the inquiry held in the aftermath, senior police officers attributed the first cause of the riots to elevated passions that resulted from reporting in the English and Malay newspapers, and from Hertogh's placement in the convent (Hughes, 1982). The Legislative Council also placed blame on the local newspapers for trying to outdo each other in sensational reporting that only inflamed passions and hatred. Thereafter, the *Straits Times*' policy was to tread carefully on racial and religious issues (Turnbull, 1995).

By the early 1950s, the social fabric of Singapore had deteriorated enough for ordinary people to become interested in politics. Half of its population was under the age of twenty-one, and unemployment was higher in 1954 than in 1947 (Turnbull, 1977). Singapore also saw an influx of Indians from Malaya looking for employment. The political debates in Malaya over what language was to be given priority in a national education policy sparked public interest in Singapore (Hill and Lian, 1995). The Chinese were mobilized politically in two ways. First, the majority Chinese ethnic group was galvanized under the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce to campaign for equal recognition of Chinese education, a multilingual policy, and a Singapore citizenship law that would enfranchise the Chinese population (Yeo, 1973). Second, the Malayan Communist Party, which had been driven underground after 12 years of political repression, regained its foothold among the disgruntled Chinese workers and students as a bastion of Chinese rights. The Malayan Communist Party engaged in disruptive strikes (Clutterbuck, 1985). Both groups managed to raise the political consciousness of the

Chinese in Singapore. At the same time, the Malays in Singapore were acutely aware of the developments in neighbouring Malaya, where there was a political drive towards articulating the special rights and privileges of the Malays as the indigenous people. The Malays did not form a majority in Malaya and this led them to fear being dominated by the non-Malays in their own country (Vasil, 1995). For instance, in 1941, excluding Singapore and including Penang and Malacca, there were 2.1 million Malays to 2.4 million non-Malays, of whom 1.7 million were Chinese (Lau, 1998). Malay fears of being dominated by the Chinese and the Chinese dissatisfaction at being excluded from political and citizenship rights polarized the two ethnic groups through the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1949, a group of Malayan students in London formed the Malayan Forum. Three of its members, who would be influential leaders, were English-educated ethnic Chinese Singaporean - Lee Kuan Yew, Toh Chin Chye and Goh Keng Swee. The three men wanted to form a socialist Malayan movement that transcended communal loyalties in order to achieve an independent Malaya that included Singapore. Upon their return to Singapore, Lee and Goh set up the Council of Joint Action (CJA) in July 1952 to represent legally several government unions and associations on strikes (Lee, 1998). The unions and associations had Chinese links through the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). After a series of talks between the MCP and Lee's group, they agreed to a policy of cooperation. Lee wanted access to the Chinese-educated world, which the MCP had cultivated for over 30 years, a world that was "teeming with vitality, dynamism and revolution" (Han et al, 1998, p. 47). For its part, the MCP wanted to present a united nationalist front in its battle against the British.

On November 21, 1954, Lee Kuan Yew and his group, including Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan, secretaries-general of two main trade unions with leftist (Communist) leanings, formed the People's Action Party (PAP) to contest the 1955 general elections. The PAP called for an immediate Singapore-Malaya merger and independence. Other left-wing political parties were also formed to contest the general elections. They were the Singapore Labour Front (SLF) and an alliance party consisting of the UMNO, the Singapore Malay Union (SMU) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). The right-wing parties contesting the elections were the Democratic Party (DP) and the Singapore Progressive Party (SPP).

The 1955 general elections saw the SLF winning 10 seats, the Alliance Party three seats and the PAP three seats. The PAP had contested only four seats with the intention of forming the opposition believing that it was not politically advisable to form a PAP government when Singapore was still under British rule (Bloodworth, 1986). The SLF and the Alliance party formed a government with David Marshall, of the SLF being the first Chief Minister of Singapore. The PAP, per its plans, formed an opposition in the government along with six elected members from the SPP, DP and three Independents (Yeo and Lau, 1991).

From 1955 to 1959, the SLF government faced numerous communist inspired labour-student uprisings that threatened to destabilize the government. Chief Minister David Marshall, of Iraqi-Jewish descent, was forced to suppress the uprisings through the closure of several Chinese schools and detention of troublemakers. This only served to reinforce the negative public perception of the SLF, which benefited the PAP politically. The SLF under Marshall did attempt to win over Chinese support by proposing a new

liberal citizenship law that would include China-born immigrants who had lived in Singapore for ten years (Chan, 1984). This led to a protest by the Malays under the Singapore wing of UMNO who feared being dominated by the Chinese. Nevertheless, the new citizenship law was introduced in 1957, and the ethnic make-up of the Singapore electorate changed dramatically with the inclusion of China-born immigrants (Yeo, 1973).

Although the PAP gained tremendous mass appeal during this period, the local press was harsh in its treatment of the party, which they considered as Communist-dominated. Lim Chin Siong, a left-wing member of the PAP, was equally virulent in his denunciation of the *Straits Times*, which he regarded as a mouthpiece of British colonial interests. Lee Kuan Yew, the secretary-general of the PAP, was viewed as an anomaly in his own party. The *Straits Times* wrote in September 1956 that Lee “thinks more as a British socialist than as a Chinese communist...his ambitions and his impatience have put him in the wrong party” (Turnbull, 1995, p. 202).

Political Contestation

In 1959, preparations were made for the general elections. The PAP contested all 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly - in 1955 it had contested to become the opposition and in 1959 it contested to “win decisively,” to form a government (Lee, 1998). The other parties contesting in the election were Lim Yew Hock’s SLF, renamed the Singapore Peoples’ Alliance (SPA), the UMNO-MCA alliance and eight other minor parties.

Friction between the domestic press, particularly the *Straits Times*, and the PAP intensified during the campaigning. In April 1959, Lee claimed that the paper was biased in its reporting. The *Straits Times* reacted angrily to his accusations, as it had given him

and his party greater publicity than any other newspaper. In its editorial, the *Straits Times* questioned if Lee's definition of press freedom "means printing every word the PAP says under headlines that must win PAP approval" (Turnbull, 1995). A few days later, the *Straits Times* complained that in event of a PAP victory at the polls, Singapore's press freedom would be curtailed. In May 1959, a *Straits Times* reporter asked Lee if he thought that the antagonism between the PAP candidates and the UMNO-MCA alliance would affect Singapore's hope for a merger with Malaya. Lee responded that any merger would be dependent on bigger issues, but if the Tunku, leader of the Federation of Malaya, made it a condition that his 13 Alliance candidates must win the elections for a merger to occur, then the PAP would work for a victory for those candidates. The *Straits Times* reporter relayed Lee's response to the Tunku for comment, as per established newspaper practice. The Tunku was curt in his reply. He said the Alliance needed no gifts from the PAP and retorted that "if we are to lose, let us lose the seats honourably" (*Straits Times*, May 17, 1959).

An angry Lee then threatened the Singapore press: "Any newspaper that tries to sour up or strain relations between the Federation and Singapore after May 30 will go in for subversion. Any editor, leader writer, subeditor, or reporter that goes along this line will be taken in under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance. We will put him in and keep him in" (*Straits Times*, May 19, 1959).

The editor of the *Straits Times*, Leslie Hoffman, a local-born Eurasian, responded with scathing editorials criticizing Lee. Aware that plans were underway for Hoffman's transfer to Kuala Lumpur for the formation of a new company, Lee accused the editor of taking flight. He also made his criteria for the distinction between foreign and locally

owned newspapers clear: “We the PAP believe just as zealously in the freedom of the press. If locally owned newspapers criticize us we know that their criticism, however wrong or right, is bona fide criticism because they must stay and take the consequences of any foolish policies or causes they may have advocated. Not so the birds of passage who run the *Straits Times*. They have run to the Federation from whose safety they boldly proclaim they will die for the freedom of Singapore” (Turnbull, 1995, p. 217).

Hoffman refuted Lee’s assertion that he was a “bird of passage” and defiantly said he intended to stay in Singapore, even if the Public Security Ordinance was used against him. However, Hoffman left for Kuala Lumpur before the election was over.

On May 27, 1959, five days before polling, Hoffman argued his case before the International Press Institute, then meeting in West Berlin. He said that the *Straits Times* could not be regarded as foreign-owned or controlled because most of the shareholders were local people. Hoffman contended that the PAP “should be proud that the leading newspaper,” had moved to Malaya - especially since the PAP was so passionate about a merger between Singapore and Malaya. He also claimed that the PAP was “a group of power-mad politicians” who could not tolerate criticism or opposition from the *Straits Times* - a newspaper that had been in existence for 110 years and that was “written, produced and controlled” by those who had been born in Singapore and Malaya (Turnbull, 1995, p. 218).

Hoffman’s departure from Singapore was widely perceived as being forced by the PAP’s threats. In reality, his move to Kuala Lumpur had been planned a year ahead and the new company in Malaya was established some months before the elections. However, Lee was not so much concerned about the newspaper’s impact on the election outcome as

the PAP had been secure of the support from its majority Chinese-educated voters. Instead the PAP had been worried about the impact the *Straits Times* would have had on the English-educated Malayan politicians on the issue of merger with Singapore (Turnbull, 1995).

Despite the increasing tension between the *Straits Times* and the PAP during this period, the newspaper did reflect public opinion and accurately predicted a PAP victory in elections. The PAP won 43 seats, or 53.4 per cent of the total votes (Haas, 1999). The first Government of the State of Singapore was sworn in on June 5, 1959 with Lee Kuan Yew as Singapore's first prime minister.

Although Lee did not immediately carry out his threat to curb press freedom after he took office, he did rebuke newspaper editors privately over news articles that displeased him (Haas, 1999). The PAP government believed that the English-language press was biased and had failed to educate the English-educated population about the causes behind the political turmoil. The English-educated, as a class, had voted against the PAP, and did not grasp the deep social, economic and political grievances that drove the Chinese-educated to support the Communists (Lee, 1998). Lee was determined that things would change: "Now that we were the government, they had to listen, and the English-language press had to print what we said. So we began to get our message through" (Lee, 1998).

Between 1959 and 1963, the PAP government worked to promote the idea of a merger with Malaya. However, the left-wing elements in the PAP did not favour a merger, which would bring Singapore under the control of an anti-communist Malayan central government. Upon the Tunku's declaration in May 1961 of an inevitable merger

of Singapore with Malaya along with Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia, the left-wing faction sought to undermine the PAP leaders and take control of the government. This led to an open conflict that resulted in the breakaway of the left-wing faction from the PAP (Chan, 1971). The left-wing faction head by Lim Chin Siong formed the *Barisan Socialis* taking away many of the PAP's workers and its majority Chinese-educated supporters. The Chinese in Singapore had come to see themselves as the dominant majority in Singapore and were less inclined to heed PAP rationalizations for merger based on economic and nationalistic imperatives (Vasil, 1995).

Still, the PAP engaged in a massive campaign to educate the citizenry on the benefits of merger through the media for nearly a year. The *Straits Times* was used as a forum through which Lim and Lee exchanged salvos via published letters. Lee also made use of the television and radio, both under state-control, to recount fully the details leading to the PAP's formation, its collaboration with the Communists and its current confrontation (Bellows, 1970). Lee was careful to present the issue of merger as being the reason for the split in the party, and not because the PAP no longer wanted to be associated with the Chinese Communists. He did not want to appear opportunistic, i.e., dropping the Communists after the PAP had made use of them, for fear of losing the support of the Chinese-speaking population (Lee, 1998).

In 1963, a referendum on the proposed merger was held. The PAP argued that all political parties had accepted merger in one form or another, and so the electorate was asked to choose what type of merger they preferred and not whether they rejected or accepted merger (Lau, 1998). The referendum showed a 71 percent vote for the PAP-preferred form of merger (Mauzy and Milne, 2002). The *Barisan Socialis* was

discredited, and many of its members were arrested under Operation Cold Store initiated by the Internal Security Council five months later. The arrests provoked unrest, which only justified further arrests and eventually led to the *Barisan Socialis* political demise.

The PAP's merger efforts involved attempts to de-emphasize the "Chineseness" of Singapore so as not to create ethnic tension in an already cautious Malay populace in Malaya and thus jeopardize its entry into Malaysia. The PAP had to educate the Chinese majority not to view Singapore as a Chinese state, but as a multi-racial polity that belonged equally to all of its ethnic groups (Vasil, 1995). Thus, the PAP's management of ethnic relations entailed according equal status to all ethnic groups with regard to culture, language and religion. Despite its commitment to equal rights for all Singaporeans, the Malays were given special recognition as the indigenous people. Efforts were also made to promote the Malay language, which was set to become the national language in the newly formed Malaysia in 1967.

After its success with the merger referendum, the PAP government called for a general election in 1963. The PAP won 46 per cent of the vote, but 73 per cent of the seats in single-member districts (Haas, 1999). The main terms of the merger, agreed on by the Tunku and Lee, were to have central government responsibility for defence, foreign affairs and internal security, but local autonomy in matters pertaining to education and labour. Malaysia was formed in September 16, 1963 and consisted of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah.

However, the merger was quickly fraught with ethnic tensions between the Malays and the Chinese over several issues. First, the PAP government had recognized the special position of the Malays as indigenous people (*bumiputra*) in Singapore.

However, special position of the Malays in Singapore was not accompanied by the special privileges that were accorded the Malays in Malaysia. After merger, the Malays in Singapore came to view themselves as part of the larger Malaysian Malay ruling ethnic group instead of a small powerless ethnic minority. The Malays expected preferential treatment in public service employment and promotion, business licenses and entry into universities that was accorded to their fellow Malays in Malaysia (Vasil, 1995). However, the PAP was unwilling to accord the Malays more than the symbolic recognition based on its commitment to multiracial equality and meritocracy. These symbolic gestures did not benefit the Malays in material terms, leading to Malay dissatisfaction. Second, the PAP wanted to replace the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in the government alliance with UMNO. They had expected to form a PAP-Alliance coalition within the central government in Malaysia. However, none of the PAP leaders was appointed to a high position in the central government in Malaysia upon merger. Instead, the UMNO-Alliance took part in the Singapore general elections in 1963, contesting seats in the Malay constituencies. However, UMNO lost to the PAP in the Malay constituencies. This indicated that the Malays had voted on a non-communal basis for the PAP party over the Malay nationalist party UMNO. This was in contrast to the 1959 election where Malays had voted for UMNO out of fear of the non-Malays in a competitive Singapore. After 1959, the PAP had introduced a programme that convinced the Malays that their advancement in Singapore lay in wise socio-economic and educational policies and not in special Malay privileges (Lau, 1998). UMNO's entry into Singapore's elections led to the entry of the PAP into the April 1964 Malaysian federal

elections, a move that was viewed by the Tunku as a violation of prior agreements made between Lee and himself.

Lee passionately campaigned for a “Malaysian Malaysia” that was intended to be non-communal in its appeal. However, it was mostly non-Malays who were receptive to his vision and the “Malaysian Malaysia” campaign ended up being racially divisive. Although the PAP lacked widespread support in Malaysia thus posing no threat to UMNO, it was regarded as a potential threat to the dominant Chinese political party in the Alliance government, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). The Tunku gave his support to the MCA. Malay extremists in UMNO accused the PAP of trying to unite Malaysia’s Chinese against the Malays. Lee was also accused of trying to become prime minister of Malaysia – not an impossibility given the demographics of a Malaysia at the time. In 1960, the Malays in the Federation numbered 3.1 million compared to the 2.3 million Chinese and 700,000 Indians. With Singapore’s inclusion, the combined Chinese population of 3.6 million outnumbered the Malays at 3.4 million (Han et al, 1998).

The situation worsened when a hatred campaign against Lee was launched through the Malay-language press. In response, Lee filed lawsuits against the *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay-language newspaper and an UMNO politician. The PAP chose to contest seats in areas that were not predominately Malay in an effort to prove its appeal over the MCA. Although the PAP campaign rallies were well attended, it managed to secure only one seat through an Indian Singaporean (Mauzy and Milne, 2002). Despite the PAP’s massive loss in the federal elections, Malay radicals in the UMNO had been sufficiently provoked by Lee’s implicit challenge to Malay supremacy through his Malaysian Malaysia campaign as to channel their energies to discredit the PAP. The

Singapore wing of UMNO (SUMNO) alleged that the PAP was a Chinese party that would persecute the Malays adding to the Malay dissatisfaction in Singapore. It was against this political backdrop that saw race riots between the Malays and Chinese break out in mid-1964.

The riots broke out on July 22, on Prophet Muhammad's birthday, in which tens of thousands of Malays staged a celebratory procession through the streets. The event came only two days after Lee held a meeting with Malay organizations in a bid to quell Malay dissatisfaction, and three months after an intensive campaign by the SUMNO and the Malay press to depict the Malays as victims of racial prejudice by the PAP (Lau, 1998). There are two conflicting versions as to what actually sparked the riot. The federal government suggested that the outbreak had been spontaneous, caused by someone throwing a bottle into the crowd. The implication was that the instigator was Chinese. The PAP government suggested that the trouble began when a segment of the procession broke away and refused calls by the police to rejoin the procession. In other words, the instigators were Malay. The PAP also alleged that the unrest had been planned by extremists in the UMNO in order create chaos in the city so that the federal government would have to impose martial law. On the first day of the riots, four people were killed and 178 injured before the PAP government issued an overnight curfew. The military and police were stationed in the streets. The first few instances of violence involved Malay groups attacking individual Chinese bystanders. In response, members of the Chinese secret society quickly organized roaming bands to single out Malays for revenge attacks. The unrest lasted for nearly a week and the curfew was lifted only after 12 days. In all, 22 people died while 460 were injured, and thousands were detained. On September 3, riots

broke out for a second time and curfew was re-imposed. The toll this time saw 12 dead and 87 injured (Narayanan, 2004).

Immediately after the riots broke out, the government established “goodwill committees” of Malay and Chinese leaders that toured the villages in Singapore appealing for calm. The government also made efforts to regulate the press so as not to incite hatred or violence. The Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye called for legislation to be introduced that prevent newspapers from publishing articles that incited communal strife (Narayanan, 2004). The riots sparked a beginning of an effort to regulate the press and bring it in line with the PAP. It also signaled the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. A year later, Singapore was officially separated from Malaysia to become an independent nation.

One-Party Rule

Creating a new nation from a heterogeneous society divided by race and religion was a challenge for the PAP government. The Malaysian government installed policies that favoured Malays in administration and education. The PAP re-affirmed that Singapore would be a multiracial and multilingual society, with equal opportunities for all.

The main English-language paper in Singapore at the time was the *Straits Times*. However, the *Straits Times* headquarters, where all the important decisions were made, was in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The *Straits Times* office in Singapore was a branch office responsible for supplying Singapore news. After the separation in 1965, the *Straits Times* published and circulated two editions; one for Singapore and another for Malaysia, but mostly the newspapers’ contents were the same. Similarly, there were other

newspapers published in Malaysia that continued circulating in Singapore. For instance, the Malay-language newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, continued its circulation in Singapore, despite having been accused by Lee as having contributed to the tense atmosphere that led to the race riot in 1964. This was probably done to allay Malay fears in Singapore after the separation; along with *Utusan Melayu*, the Malays had only one other Malay-language paper, the *Berita Harian* (Turnbull, 1995).

It was not easy to eliminate ethnic tension. In 1969, race riots between the Malays and Chinese broke out in Kuala Lumpur after the Malaysian general elections. The fear was that similar unrest would break out in Singapore as well. This time around, the PAP government was more prepared. There was heavy military and police presence in the streets, and violence was minimal. The government was also quick to crack down on the press, which was seen as stirring up racial unrest. The *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay-language paper, was banned in 1970, after being accused of fermenting Malay racialism following the 1969 riots (Clutterbuck, 1985). The ban signaled the PAP government's increasing control over the newspapers that it saw as a danger to inter-ethnic relations. This included restricting circulation of the Malaysian newspapers. Efforts were also made by the PAP government and newspaper management to make the *Straits Times* a Singapore-based newspaper. In 1972, the *Straits Times* was split into the *New Straits Times*, and the *Straits Times*, which became the Malaysian and Singaporean national dailies respectively (Turnbull, 1995).

In order to transform and unite Singapore, the government realized that it would first need to restructure the education system. English, the colonial language was continued as the language of government, administration, law and commerce. The

government allowed the continuation of vernacular schools in the Chinese, Malay and Tamil languages, with English being the second language for all citizens. These vernacular schools were given equal treatment as the English-language schools (Vasil, 2000).

After 1970 as foreign investment increased, English was promoted as being of economic value to Singaporeans. The government also emphasized that vocational and technical schools train students for work in the developing industries. Eventually, enrollment in vernacular schools declined, and they ceased to be viable. Bilingual education in English-medium schools was firmly established: all students were required to learn English as a first language and a mother-tongue language – Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for the Malays and Tamil for the Indians – as a second language (Gopinathan, 1991).

The changes executed by the government did not all go down without protest. The increased prominence given to English in 1970 incurred opposition among the Chinese-educated. The Chinese-language press became the forum through which the Chinese-educated could voice their grievances. One leading Chinese newspaper, *Nanyang Siang Pau* published letters, opinion columns from various Chinese community leaders and editorials that highlighted the government's bias between the Chinese-educated and English-educated until May 2, 1971, when four senior executives of the paper were detained by the government. They were charged with launching a deliberate campaign to stir up Chinese racial emotions by portraying the PAP government as an oppressor of Chinese language and education (Chan, 1991).

The PAP government kept a close track of the press in Singapore, both domestic and foreign. Lee would personally read four to five newspapers each morning, searching for any newspaper that carried “a daily dose of language, cultural or religious poison” (Han et al, 1998, p. 434). The government’s unapologetic treatment of the press reflected its experience in 1964.

From using ethnic sensitivities to justify curbs on press freedoms, the government widened its rationale to other aspects of the press it deemed troubling. The press restrictions that would follow after the *Nanyang Siang Pau* incident were not related to flouting of ethnic sensitivities by newspapers. Two weeks after the *Nanyang Siang Pau* arrests, Lee accused the *Eastern Sun*, an English-language daily, of being financed by Communists. The *Sun* was not confrontational and had consistently supported the government. Its alleged use of funds from Communists, though, made the paper and its staff susceptible to charges of Communist sympathy. The paper’s editor and staff resigned, refusing to work under the cloud of suspicion, and the paper ceased to exist (Tan and Soh, 1994).

A new English-language tabloid, the *Singapore Herald*, also incurred Lee’s wrath with its news coverage and spirited letters to the editor. Lee charged the paper of “taking on” the government and imposed a boycott: official advertising was withdrawn; its reporters were denied access to press conferences and briefings; and subscriptions were cancelled. The paper was already in financial difficulty, and the boycott reduced its revenues. Once more, Lee spoke of suspicious “foreign investors” and their ulterior motives. Lee also harassed the newspaper’s financial backers, including Chase Manhattan. The government’s onslaught received wide criticism from many

Singaporeans. The National Union of Journalists launched a “Save the *Herald*” campaign and circulation increased from 13,400 to 50,000. Nevertheless, the paper succumbed to political pressure (Davies, 1999).

By controlling the spread of dissent through the media, the PAP government effectively managed to quell serious opposition to its racially contentious language and education policies. Challenges to the attitudes and values advanced by the government were also reduced. Instead, the media was encouraged to help promote consensus and government policy.

After the series of ugly confrontations between the government and the local press in 1971, Lee sought to ease the backlash of criticism from the West by speaking at the June 1971 conference of the International Press Institute in Helsinki. His speech served as a foundation for much of the PAP government’s policy on the press. Lee maintained that (a) newly independent countries like Singapore had the right to control the input of foreign images, messages and influences so as to facilitate national development; (b) the local media had to help foster, rather than undermine, the societal values and attitudes that were being inculcated in national schools and universities; (c) freedom of press had to be subordinated to the overriding needs of Singapore and to the primary purposes of achieving the development objectives of an elected government (Wong, 2001).

Lee argued that limits on press freedom were necessary because of Singapore’s potent mix of race, religion, and language. Drawing references to prior race and religious riots sparked by “the printed word” in his 1971 speech, Lee suggested that government vigilance towards the press would have to be permanent:

I used to believe that when Singaporeans become more sophisticated, with higher standards of education, these problems will diminish. But watching

Belfast, Brussels and Montreal, rioting over religion and language, I wonder whether such phenomena can ever disappear (Han et al, 1998, p. 430).

Over the years, the PAP government continued to bring up the possibility of chaos arising partly as a result of an insensitive and irresponsible press. The government, on grounds of achieving racial unity, initially justified formal and informal curbs on the press. The regular chastisement by the government, especially during the early years of Singapore's independence, led the press to adopt a "solidly pro-establishment perspective," that stressed cooperative press-government relations (George, 1973, p. 132).

CHAPTER 4

Press Coverage of Race in Singapore

Measuring Government Influence on the Press

In order to ascertain if there was indeed a significant degree of governmental influence on the press coverage of race and religious issues in Singapore, several hypotheses were posed, which was then tested through a content analysis study of the *Straits Times*. Content analysis was performed on articles from the *Straits Times*, and its Sunday edition, *The Sunday Times*. Kuo (1993) had determined that the English-language press was the main area of readership overlap for the three major ethnic groups – Chinese, Malay and Indian. All three major ethnic groups in Singapore read English-language newspapers. Therefore, the *Straits Times* was picked for the content analysis study as its articles would have reached a wide range of Singaporeans.

The content analysis categories were coded using four types of newspaper articles: editorial, political news, i.e., articles on speeches and policy news, forum, i.e., letters by citizenry, and human-interest stories. The aim of the content analysis was to determine if there was there any change in the way the press reported on issues of race and religion in Singapore through an analysis of the variable listed above over three time periods: colonial, political contestation, and one-party rule.

Certain years in the three time periods were selected so as to be fairly representative of the time period under study. For the colonial period, articles in March 1956, March 1957, and March 1958 were coded; for the political contestation period, articles in March 1959, March 1961, and August 1963 were coded; and for the one-party

rule period, articles in March 1965, March 1968, March 1970, and August 1972 were coded.

Additionally, two years in which there was the occurrence of race riots were also specially selected: August 1964 and June 1969, the former was coded in the political contestation period, and the latter was coded in the one-party rule period. Appendix I contains a full explication of the coding methodology and criteria, and sample selection rationale.

Each of the following hypotheses (H) posed was answered by the coded categories (C):

(H1) If there has been a significant degree of governmental influence on press coverage of race and religious issues in Singapore, then there will be a decrease in the number of articles in newspapers on race and religion from the colonial period to the one-party rule period. There will also be a decrease in the number of articles on the four main ethnic groups.

(C1) frequency counts for topics on race and religion that was intended to measure the level of news coverage on race and religious issues, and hence determine the salience of race or religious issues in a particular time period, accounting for H1.

(C2) frequency counts for references to the four main ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian) that was intended to measure which ethnic group was most covered by the press.

(H2) If there has been a significant degree of governmental influence on the press coverage, then the governmental view on race and religious issues would be given more

prominence then non-governmental (opposition politicians, social actors, and citizenry) views in the one-party rule period.

(C3) frequency counts for references to government actors and non-governmental actors that were intended to measure the level of press usage of type of sources.

(C4) frequency counts for type of terms used, i.e., popular or governmental discourse, that was intended to measure level of press affiliation with the citizenry, and hence to determine the reception of press to societal views as opposed to governmental views in a particular time period. For example, popular terms in the political contestation period included “community cultural rights”, and governmental terms included “danger of communalism”.

(H3) If there were a significant degree of governmental influence on the press coverage, then there would be a more favourable editorial stance towards government policies on race and religion during the one-party rule period than in the colonial period.

(C5) each editorial was determined if it was favourable, unfavourable, or neutral to government policies or directives on race/religious issues. Numerical values of 1, 2 or 3 were assigned to favourable, neutral and unfavourable respectively. The numerical values for the editorials in each time period, i.e., colonial (1956-1958), political contestation (1959-1964) and one-party rule (1965-1972) were added up. Then, the average was calculated for each time period, giving values that was used to determine the approximate tone of editorials in each time period.

An example of how the editorials were coded is shown in an excerpt below. The pertinent phrases of a March 1956 editorial that was used for coding the tone are shown underlined:

Earlier, the president of Eurasian Union of Malaya had said that Eurasians considered themselves “a part of the indigenous population.” He rejected the view that they constituted a “minority.” These statements are to be welcomed, coming at a time when it is being suggested that an executive committee of minorities should be formed. Communalism is by no means dead. It will be a long time dying, however, unless there is a greater readiness than is now apparent to abandon “majority” and “minority” attitudes, somewhat too assertive on the one hand and too defensive on the other. The future of this country is not hopeful if these divisions persist (*Straits Times*, March 12, 1956).

In this editorial, the underlined phrases indicate that the newspaper disagreed with a suggestion by sections of the Singapore Legislative Council that a committee of minorities be formed. Therefore, the numerical value given for this editorial was 3, i.e., unfavourable to government.

(H4) If there were a significant degree of governmental influence on the press coverage, then the press would refrain from advocating a course of action on race and religious issues that was different from the government.

(C6) frequency counts for prescriptive frame of the article, i.e., whether the article proposed (or advocated) a form of action pertaining to race or religion issues that was different from the government, accounting for H4.

An excerpt of an article coded for the prescriptive frame is shown below:

The present recession has reduced opportunities in commercial firms. Even without recession, there are not enough openings for the increasing numbers of School Certificate holders...However, they are likely to face competition from applicants who possess the Lower Certificate of Education. This certificate has been described in official quarters as a passport to Government employment and entry into training colleges, although in many respects it demands much less of a student than does a Cambridge School Certificate. It is true that the L.C.E. includes Malay as a compulsory pass subject. The national language may or may not be one of the subjects taken by those who have passed the Cambridge School Certificate. It would not be right if they were discriminated against on this score. It is not their fault if they were not given the opportunity to study Malay (*Straits Times*, Mar. 12, 1958).

Here, the article argued against an official policy that favoured job applicants who had studied Malay over those who had not for government positions. Instead, the article prescribed a policy that would be non-discriminatory, contrary to the government policy.

Content Analysis Findings

Table 1 shows that there was an overall decrease in the average number of articles on race over the three time periods. The most noticeable decrease in average number of articles on race was from the colonial period to the political contestation period. There were significantly fewer articles on religion than race for all the three time periods, which indicated that race was more of a salient issue than religion.

Table 1: Average number of articles in colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule (1965-1972), and combined total for race and religion.

	RACE	RELIGION	TOTAL
Colonial	28.3	3.0	31.3
Political Contestation	16.8	2.3	19.1
One-Party Rule	12.0	0.4	12.4

In order to further verify an overall decline in number of articles on race over the three time periods, time-series graphs for the selected years coded in March for race are shown in Figure 2.

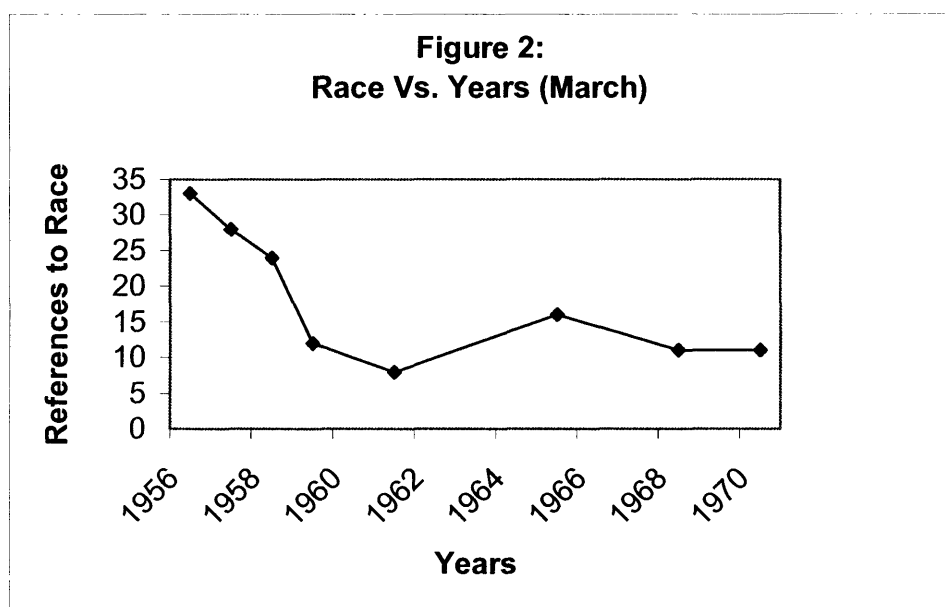


Figure 2 shows a time-series for (1) colonial period: March 1956, March 1957, March 1958, (2) political contestation period: March 1959, March 1961, (3) one-party rule: March 1965, March 1968, March 1970. It shows that there were more articles pertaining to race during the colonial period than during the political contestation and one-party rule periods. The lowest number of articles pertaining to race was found in March 1961 - approximately two years before Singapore was to merge with Malaysia.

There was a slight increase in articles on race from March 1961 (8 references) to March 1965 (16 references) whereupon articles on race decreased and then leveled (11 references for March 1968 and March 1970). Overall, there is a decline in articles pertaining to race over the three time periods.

In Table 2, we see that there was a large increase in articles pertaining to race (14 references to 33 references) from August 1963 to August 1964. The spike in articles pertaining to race in August 1964 was the product of race riots in Singapore one-month prior. The following year in March, there was a decrease in articles pertaining to race. In March 1965, there were 16 references as compared to the 33 references in August 1964. This suggests that the spike in articles pertaining to race in August 1964 was due to the special circumstances in that year as opposed to other reasons, for instance, a politicization of race issues.

Table 2 also shows that there was a decrease in articles pertaining to race from August 1964 to June 1969 (33 references and 12 references respectively), both of which were coded one month after the occurrence of race riots in Singapore. The first race riot in 1964 occurred during the political contestation period while the second race riot in 1969 occurred during the one-party rule period. One possible reason for the noticeable difference in the number of the articles pertaining to race in the two riot years is that there may have been a difference in the way the press covered events, or that the race riot in 1964 had more of a lasting effect than the race riot in 1969 and hence there were more news generated in the former year as opposed to the latter year one month after the event.

Table 2 further shows that there are very few articles pertaining to religion as compared to articles pertaining to race for the same years coded in the month of March.

For instance in March 1956 in the colonial period, there were only 5 articles pertaining to religion as compared to the 33 articles pertaining to race in the same period. Similarly in March 1970, which was in the one-party rule period, there were no articles pertaining to religion as compared to 11 articles pertaining to race. This was also seen in the selected years coded in the month of August: 1963, 1964 and 1972 had only 5, 1 and 2 references to religion respectively. Noticeably, during the riot years of 1964 and 1969, where articles were coded one month after the event, there were only 5 and 0 articles pertaining to religion respectively as compared to the 33 and 12 articles that were coded for race in the same period. The results suggest that race was more of a salient issue than religion during 1956 to 1972, and this was true even during the riot years.

The primary focus of the few articles found on religion was on Islam, which is the dominant religion of the Malays. However, this finding does not suggest that the religious component of the Malay identity was less salient than the ethnic component. For instance, the riot in July 1964 was sparked at a Muslim celebratory procession where taunts by Chinese bystanders was followed by chants of "Allahu Akhbar" by Malay Muslims in separate incidents that preceded the attacks (Lau, 1998). The few articles on religion can be explained by the conflation of the Malay identity with Islam. To be considered Malay, one had to be Muslim, speak Malay, and observe the traditions of Malay culture (Rahim, 1998). As such, Malay concerns including religious ones were essentially regarded as issues of the Malay ethnicity.

Table 2: Frequency counts of references to race and religion in the colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule period (1965-1972), and combined total for race and religion.

	Mar 1956	Mar 1957	Mar 1958	Mar 1959	Mar 1961	Aug 1963	Aug 1964	Mar 1965	Mar 1968	June 1969	Mar 1970	Aug 1972
Race	33	28	24	12	8	14	33	16	11	12	11	10
Religion	5	4	0	1	2	5	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	38	32	24	13	10	19	34	16	11	12	11	12

Table 3 shows that on average there were a larger number of articles with references to all four ethnic groups during the colonial period as compared to the other two periods. Specifically, there were a larger number of articles about the Malay ethnic group as opposed to the other three ethnic groups during the colonial period. The difference though was not significantly large. Generally, it can be said that the Malay ethnic group was the subject of a larger number of articles on race than the other three ethnic groups during the colonial and political contestation periods. This appeared to change little during the one-party rule period.

References to all ethnic groups were on the decline during the period of one-party rule. However, the results also show that there was no significant difference in the number of references between the Chinese and Malay ethnic groups. Malay and Chinese ethnic groups were politicized during the colonial period and political contestation periods, but not so during the one-party rule period. In comparison to the Chinese and Malay ethnic groups, the relatively fewer articles on Indians and Eurasians indicate that the two ethnic groups were not politicized in the way Chinese and Malays were during the first two periods.

Table 3: Average number of references to the Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian ethnic groups in the colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule (1965-1972).

	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Eurasian
Colonial	18.3	12.3	7.0	0.7
% Colonial	47.8	32.1	18.3	1.8
Political Contestation	15.0	9.8	7.0	0.4
% Political Contestation	46.7	30.4	21.7	1.2
One-Party Rule	7.6	6.2	2.8	0.0
% One-Party Rule	45.8	37.3	16.9	0.0
% Total References 1956 -1972	47.0	32.5	19.3	1.3
% Population From 1957 Census	13.6	75.4	9.0	2.0
% Population From 1970 Census	15.0	76.2	7.0	1.8 ¹

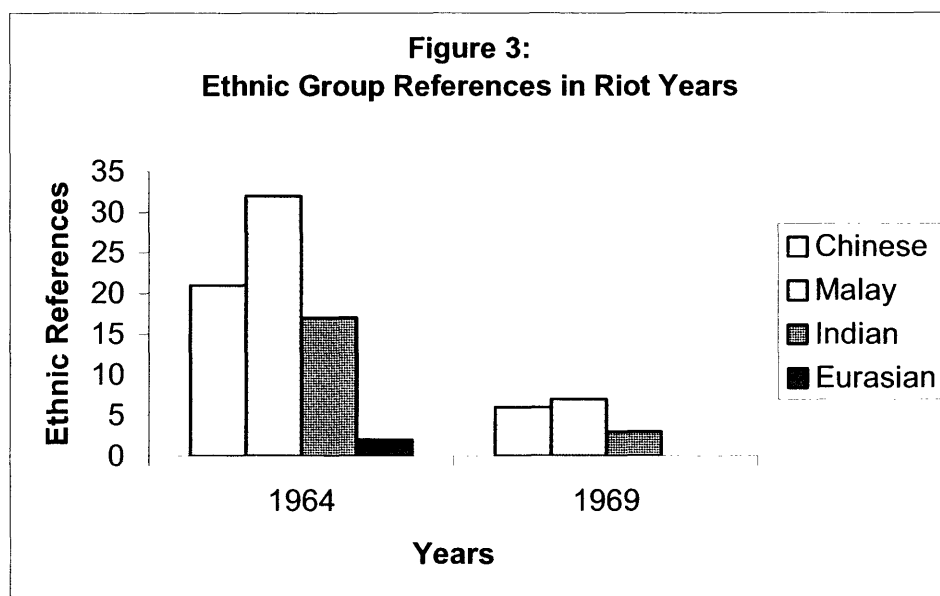


Figure 3 shows that there were more references to the Malay ethnic group in August 1964, one month after a riot. There were 32 references to the Malay ethnic group as compared to 21 and 17 references to the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in August 1964. There were only 2 references to the Eurasian ethnic group. In June 1969, one

¹ The percentage figure here includes Eurasians and other smaller ethnic groups like Arabs, Europeans and Nepalese that are categorized in the census as “Others” (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 1983).

month after the riot, there was a noticeable decrease in references to all four ethnic groups. This is in accordance with the decrease seen in Figure 3. Furthermore, there was little variation in the references between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups in June 1969 as compared to August 1964. For instance, there were 7 references to the Malay ethnic group and 6 references to the Chinese ethnic group. Overall, there was a significant decrease in the number of all ethnic group references from 1964 to 1969, which suggested that there might be a significant degree of governmental influence.

Table 4 shows that there was an overall decline in the average number of references to non-governmental actors, i.e., opposition politicians, social actors and citizenry, over the three time periods. There was also a decrease in average number of references to governmental actors between the colonial period and the one-party rule period, but the decrease was not as large as the decrease in non-governmental actors in the same time frame.

Table 4: Average number of references to governmental actors and non-government actors in the colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule (1965-1972).

	Govt	Non-Govt
Colonial	11.0	14.7
Political Contestation	12.3	7.0
One-Party Rule	8.4	4.4

Table 5 further shows that there were a larger number of references to non-governmental actors than to governmental actors during the colonial period. During the political contestation period, there was a decrease in the number of references to non-governmental actors and an increase in the number of references to governmental actors. By March 1965, the beginning of the one-party rule period, there were 14 and 3 references to governmental and non-governmental actors respectively. However, between

March 1968 and March 1970, the gap between the references to governmental and non-governmental actors appeared to be narrowing. In March 1970, there were 7 and 3 references to governmental and non-governmental actors respectively. For the selected years coded in the month of August, there was a similar narrowing of the gap between the references to governmental and non-governmental actors. In August 1972, there were 8 and 6 references to governmental and non-governmental actors respectively.

Table 5: Frequency counts of references to governmental actors and non-government actors in the colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule period (1965-1972).

	Mar 1956	Mar 1957	Mar 1958	Mar 1959	Mar 1961	Aug 1963	Aug 1964	Mar 1965	Mar 1968	June 1969	Mar 1970	Aug 1972
Gov	11	15	7	3	7	11	28	14	5	8	7	8
Non-Gov	6	20	18	10	2	10	6	3	6	4	3	6

For the riot years, 1964 and 1969, there was a decrease in the references to governmental and non-governmental actors. For 1964, there were a larger number of references to governmental actors: 28 governmental actor references to 6 non-governmental actor references. By contrast though, in 1969, there were only 8 governmental actor references and 4 non-governmental actor references. This result is in accordance with the results obtained for the number of articles pertaining to race found in 1964 and 1969. Since there were fewer articles pertaining to race in 1969, it was not surprising to see fewer references to both governmental and non-governmental actors.

The results imply that the newspaper increasingly relied more on governmental sources for its articles that pertained to race and religion than it did non-governmental sources over the three time periods. This suggested that the newspaper might have portrayed the government view on race and religious issues more than it did those with alternative views increasingly over the three time periods.

Table 6 shows that there were a larger number of popular terms used than commonly used government terms in the articles during the colonial period. Thereafter, for the political contestation and one-party rule periods, the number of popular terms used in the articles declined while the number of government terms used increased.

Table 6: Average number of references to popular discourse and government discourse, and prescriptive frame of articles in the colonial period (1956-1958), political contestation period (1959-1964), and one-party rule (1965-1972).

	Popular	Government	Prescriptive
Colonial	6.7	2.0	6.3
Political Contestation	2.2	7.8	2.0
One-Party Rule	1.0	6.0	1.4

The increase in average number of references to commonly used government terms was due in part to the riot years, in August 1964 and June 1969. There were a larger number of references to commonly used government terms: 19 government term references to 1 popular term references. In June 1969, there were only 7 commonly used government term references and 1 popular term references. Once more, it was not surprising to see fewer references to both commonly used government terms and popular terms. The results show that the level of press affiliation with the citizenry decreased over the three time periods. Therefore, the press was less likely to reflect popular views on race issues than it did the government's view.

Table 6 also shows that the average number of prescriptive frame of articles, i.e., articles that independently proposed (or advocated) a form of action pertaining to race or religion issues that was different from that of the government decreased over the three time periods. The press was less likely to prescribe an action in the periods of political contestation and one-party rule than it was in the colonial period. Coupled with the decrease in number of non-governmental references used in the latter two periods, as well

as decrease in the popular terms used, the results suggest that alternative views on race issues were less likely to be presented than the government views.

Table 7: Sample size of editorials, editorial mean, assigned tone of coverage and standard deviations

	N	Editorial Mean	S.D.
Colonial	17	1.95	0.70
Political Contestation	14	1.67	0.63
One-Party Consolidation	7	1.29	0.49

One of three choices - unfavourable, favourable or neutral tone of coverage of the government - was assigned to the editorials regarding race. Table 7 shows that the average tone of editorials for the colonial period was neutral. Taking the standard deviation into account though, it can be seen that there were editorials that ranged from favourable, neutral and unfavourable tones. Therefore, it can be said that there was a variety of editorials with differing tones during the colonial period. For the political contestation period, the average tone for editorials was neutral. Taking the standard deviation into account, it can be seen that the tone of the editorials ranged from favourable to neutral. Therefore, there is some shift in tone of coverage from the colonial period to the political contestation period with the editorials becoming less unfavourable to the government view on race issues.

For the one-party rule period, the average mean indicates that the editorials had a favourable tone. It must be noted that there were fewer editorials that pertained to race in the one-party rule period than in the other two periods. Despite the fewer numbers in

editorials, the editorials that were coded in this period were on average favourable to the government. Taking the standard deviation into account, it can be seen that the editorial ranged from favourable to neutral tone of coverage. However, the neutral end of the range was closer to the favourable end than it was during the political contestation period. This also shows that the tone of editorials during the one-party rule period was more constrained than in the other two periods. Therefore, it can be said that overall the editorials were more favourable to the government during the one-party rule period than it was during the other two periods. Furthermore, there was a significant decrease in editorials on race from the first two periods to the one-party rule period.

It can be seen that the number of articles on race decreased from the colonial to the one-party period suggesting that the government policy of de-politicizing race had influenced press coverage, which proves correct, the first hypothesis. References to all ethnic groups declined in the one-party rule period, and there was almost no significant difference in the references between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups, the two ethnic groups that were the most politicized during the colonial and political contestation period. References to non-governmental sources significantly decreased over the three time periods, while references to governmental sources increased, which implied that increasingly the government view of race issues were portrayed more than alternative views during the political contestation and one-party rule periods. Overall, the editorials were more favourable to the government during the one-party rule period than it was during the other two periods. There was a decline in articles that independently proposed (or advocated) a form of action pertaining to race or religion issues that was different from the government over the three time periods.

Content analysis suggested that race was a more salient issue than religion in the newspapers from 1956 to 1972. For instance, all of the editorials coded were on race issues instead of religious issues. Second, race issues were de-politicized over the three time periods. There were more articles on race issues in the colonial period than in the periods of political contestation and one-party rule. In effect, race was discussed in the colonial period and de-politicized progressively over the next two periods. Third, the Malay ethnic group was the focus of most race articles, followed by the Chinese ethnic group during the colonial period and political contestation period. These two ethnic groups were the most discussed of all the ethnic groups. References to all ethnic groups declined in the one-party rule period, and there was almost no significant difference in the references between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups. The Indian and Eurasian ethnic groups were hardly discussed in the three time periods the way the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups were. Four, references to non-governmental sources significantly decreased over the three time periods, while references to governmental sources increased. The government view of race issues was portrayed more than alternative views during the political contestation and one-party rule periods. Five, references to popular terms progressively declined over the three time periods indicating a decreased level of press affiliation with the citizenry. In the one-party rule period, the press was less likely to reflect popular citizenry views on race issues and more likely to present government views than in the colonial period. Six, there was a decline in articles that independently proposed (or advocated) a form of action pertaining to race or religion issues that was different from the government over the three time periods.

Governmental Influence on the Press and the De-politicization of Race

There are several explanations that may account for the progressive de-politicization of race. First, there may have been a marked change in the population of the country by ethnic group. A dominant ethnic group may cease to be so due to population changes that render all ethnic groups in the country equal in terms of size. No single ethnic group would be dominant and so issues of race may not be as pertinent as people contest on issues with a non-ethnic basis in order to obtain a dominant bloc. Therefore, race issues lose newsworthiness and are reported less in the press. However, this explanation can be dismissed in Singapore's case. As Table 3 showed, there was hardly any change in the population breakdown by ethnic group in 1957 and 1970 census. The Chinese remained the dominant ethnic group throughout the three time periods. And despite the size of the Chinese group, it was not the most discussed ethnic group in the colonial period where there was the largest number of articles on race. Instead, the Malay group was the most discussed.

A second explanation for the progressive de-politicization of race issues may involve an increase in intermarriage or some other factor between the dominant ethnic group and other minority ethnic groups that makes the boundaries between the groups indistinct. Large-scale intermarriage between different ethnic groups suggests sufficient commonality that weakens ethnic barriers. As Singapore progressed from 1956 to 1972, the socio-economic situation was improved, which gave rise to conditions that increased intermarriages. Such conditions may include the educational differences between the groups that were minimized through national schooling initiatives, which imparted a common set of values and attitudes (Lee, 1988). These values may have included more

liberal attitudes on inter-ethnic group relations and eventually barriers to intermarriage were diminished. The longer one stays in school, the more likely it is individuals are exposed to others of different ethnicity with similar values. Another condition that may facilitate intermarriages may be the increased use of English as the medium of instruction in schools that allows people to communicate in an extra-ethnic language that transcends the cultural system of ethnic groups and languages (Lee, 1988). When intermarriage increases, race issues lose its salience and the press has fewer reasons to cover it.

However, this explanation too does not apply to Singapore. For instance, a study of intermarriage in Singapore between 1962 and 1969 showed that there was no significant change in the pattern of interethnic marriages in Singapore throughout the decade of the 1960s. The Chinese inter-married the least, followed by the Europeans, the Malays, Indians and Eurasians. The Malays and Indians tended to inter-marry more among themselves (Lee et al, 1974). Furthermore, it was found that from 1967 to 1970, interethnic marriage between adherents of the same religion was significant. The two religions that were most significant were Christianity and Islam. There was also a higher intermarriage rate between Malays and Indians that was attributed to the fact that significant segments of each share a common Muslim religion (Kuo and Hassan, 1976). Nevertheless, the intermarriage pattern showed no change and so it cannot explain the de-politicization of race. Furthermore, there was a race riot in 1969, which indicated that there was still ethnic tension in society, especially between the Chinese and Malays.

A third explanation that would account for the de-politicization of race would be due to the political influence from the PAP government on the press in Singapore. The PAP government attempted to de-politicize race issues in Singapore, so as to prevent

such issues from polarizing the ethnic groups and triggering ethnic strife. Lee believed that the “American concept of the marketplace of ideas” would not work in Singapore because of its volatile racial and religious mix, and that history had shown that such “ideas” have led to riots and bloodshed instead of harmonious enlightenment (Han et al, 1998, p. 434).

The PAP government determined that the role of the press in Singapore was that it should be a partner of the state, and not an adversary. For instance, Lee would rebuke newspaper editors privately over news articles that displeased him (Haas, 1999). Lee would also read four to five newspapers each morning searching for any newspaper that carried inflammatory articles (Han et al, 1998). In later years, the PAP government would legislate laws that in part served to regulate the conduct of local newspapers.

In effect, the Singapore press came to be controlled at two levels by the PAP government. The first level of control employed the legal system with press laws that regulated from newspaper licenses to content. The second level involved cultivating a supportive press instead of an adversarial one through the promotion of an Asian value system, which stressed on consensus and cooperation (George, 2000). The press subscribed to the notion of press-government cooperation that was based on the Asian values of consensual and communal traditions, emphasizing on duties and obligations to the collective and social harmony (Mehra, 1989).

In a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1988, Lee questioned the applicability of the Western press model in Asian countries. He noted that the marketplace contest of ideas in the countries of Sri Lanka and India had “ended in less than happy results” (Lee, 1989). In both countries, heterogeneous and multiracial

societies have clashed on race, language and culture, spurred by a diverse and partisan media that aroused emotions. The result, Lee believed, was “confusion and dissension, rather than enlightenment and consensus” (Lee, 1989). To avoid such a situation in multiracial Singapore, Lee had encouraged the press in the different languages to approximate towards one national view. The press was expected to play a role in educating the population on merits of various government policies on race issues.

The PAP government was able to influence the press coverage on contentious issues such as race relations largely because of the lack of political contestation in Singapore. The lack of political contestation facilitated the co-opting of the press by the one-party political system in Singapore. With time, the one-party rule of the PAP was able to influence changes in journalistic norms on the reporting of race issues. The lack of political contestation, i.e., mobilization from formal opposition political parties, or interest groups in civil society, meant an absence of organized expression of different opinions on race issues. Thus, the likelihood of the press subscribing to governmental norms on race issues increased in such an environment. Nevertheless, regardless of how the press restraints in Singapore came about or were facilitated, the findings demonstrate that when the press coverage of race was de-politicized, there was no recurrence of ethnic violence, except for the race riot in 1969. The 1969 incident in Singapore was sparked off by the massive rioting in neighbouring Malaysia instead of ethnic agitations in the local press. By 1969, the PAP government had tightened its control over the local press. The outbreak of violence was due to the contagion effects, i.e., the transfer of violence from one society to another that occurs when there is a latent sense of similar type of group identity, such as ethnic identity, in the receiving society (Hill and Rothchild, 1986). The

1969 incident had occurred only four years after the deadly violence between the Chinese and Malays. Given the short span of time between the two incidents, the ethnic groups in Singapore could have identified with fellow ethnics across the border, which lead to the ethnic violence.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

“Every person shot by a bullet in a battle has first been killed by words in the media wars.”

Popular journalistic saying quoted in Reljic, 1997.

Findings

Singapore experienced two incidents of deadly ethnic violence in 1950 and 1964, both of which were attributed to inflammatory articles in the press that had stirred passions in society. As a result of this experience, the PAP government placed restraints on press coverage of race. Content analysis on articles in the English-language daily newspaper, *Straits Times*, between 1956 and 1972 showed that there was a progressive de-politicization of race in Singapore. Governmental influence on the press was found to have been more significant during the one-party rule period than in the colonial and political contestation periods. This finding demonstrated experimentally that the press restraints that were in effect during the one-party rule period substantially reduced the press coverage on race, a finding that is consistent with anecdotal stories. Except for a race riot in 1969, which was minimal in contrast to the deadly violence in 1950 and 1964, and that was sparked off by massive rioting in neighbouring Malaysia instead of ethnic agitations in the local press, there has been no recurrence of ethnic violence since the press restraints were put in place.

For the most part, the PAP government actively sought to de-politicize race as part of its efforts to prevent the escalation of inter-ethnic tension. Instead, the PAP government's early policy initiatives focused on matters of survival – i.e. bread and butter issues like food, housing, jobs and security. The government's press restraints

ensured that the press covered these issues instead of contentious race issues. There were reasons why the de-politicization of race, in the political arena and in the local press, was required to manage ethnic relations during Singapore's political beginnings.

Prior to Singapore's merger with Malaysia in 1963, the PAP government actively sought to create a Malayan national culture that encompassed the ideals of multiracialism. However, since the government believed then that Singapore could neither survive nor prosper without a merger with the Malay-dominated Malaya, it also accorded a special place to the Malays, as the indigenous people, along with their language and culture. The PAP government had recognized Malay as the national language of Singapore and it was not averse to promoting a Malayan culture that was considerably based on the heritage of the Malays (Vasil, 1995). Additionally, the PAP government was also careful to ensure that the cultures and languages of the Chinese and Indians were not suppressed in the name of creating the Malayan national culture, and that they were recognized as an important part of the national culture. This was to form the multiracialism ethos of the PAP government during the 1960s.

However, it was precisely on basis of its multiracialism ethos that the PAP government was opposed to offering the Malays in Singapore any further privileges. After the merger in 1963, the Malays in Singapore became dissatisfied because the Malays in Sarawak and Sabah, as well as the Malays on the mainland, had secured better deals than them. During the two years that Singapore was part of Malaysia, the PAP government had to engage with Malay leaders in Singapore repeatedly to pacify the growing Malay alienation and anger over their indigenous status in Singapore. The reluctance of the PAP government to concede on Malay demands made it easy for the

Malay extremists in UMNO to create communal tension through the press that ultimately led to the 1964 race riots, and Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia.

After separation in 1965, the Malays in Singapore suddenly found themselves a minority, and were unable to turn to Malaysia for leadership. Singapore was nearly three-quarters Chinese, and maintaining a national culture based mostly on the Malay heritage appeared unsustainable. Still, the PAP government had to be cautious in its treatment of the Malay minority since the group was an ethnic majority in the region. Malays in Malaysia could have easily acted as an external lobby state for fellow Malays in Singapore. In fact, during Singapore's early years of independence, Malay leaders in Malaysia considered themselves the protectors of their fellow regional kin (Vasil, 1995). Therefore, the PAP government had to manage ethnicity in a manner that was acceptable to Singapore Malays, and that would not incur regional interference. The PAP also banned the circulation of Malaysian newspapers in Singapore in order to prevent Malaysian views on ethnicity from influencing Singaporeans. The PAP government had to re-affirm its commitment to multiracialism, and it mostly took care to maintain its principles. Further, the government promoted a multiracial meritocracy ideology that was based on an assumption of equal opportunities and rights for all the ethnic groups (Rahim, 1998). In this context, the de-politicization of race, especially in the local press, was a crucial aspect in the PAP's management inter-ethnic relations.

Politicization of Race and the Absence of Ethnic Violence

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the government quickly established practices of a paternalistic and illiberal style of government that was explained away as being pragmatic or necessary to ensure Singapore's economic survival. Since the government's

multiracialism ideology was based on an assumption of equal opportunities and rights for all the ethnic groups, there were no political gains in politicizing race, only the opposite, i.e. elevated inter-ethnic hostility and possibility of deadly violence. Therefore, race remained de-politicized during this period.

However, by the 1980s, there was change in the PAP government's practice of multiracialism. This change involved the politicization of race, which had the effect of increasing inter-ethnic tension in society. It was triggered by the governmental perception that the Chinese were experiencing a cultural erosion because of the national emphasis on English education, more so than for the Malays or Indians. The government never did substantiate this claim, but the idea was actively promoted in the national press, an indication of the PAP's success in cultivating a supportive press instead of an adversarial one. Although verifying experimentally the politicization of race in the local press coverage was beyond the scope of this study, it has been acknowledged widely that race was indeed increasingly brought back into the political rhetoric and local media after the 1970s (see for example, Chua, 1995; Heidt, 1987; Hill and Lian, 1995; Rahim, 1998; Mauzy and Milne, 2000; Wong, 2001).

A more plausible explanation for the PAP move towards politicization of race would be that the massive move to English education and the promotion and emphasis of English in business and technology had alienated large segments of the Chinese-speaking citizenry, which was a sizeable segment of society. In addition to others who were dissatisfied with the PAP government, opposition politicians could tap the Chinese-speaking segment of society for votes, especially since they constituted a significant number. This is evident in the general election results. In the 1968 general election, the

PAP had won its highest popular vote, 84 percent, and won all of the 100 seats in parliament. In 1972 general election however, although the PAP retained all of its seats in parliament, it won only 69 percent of the popular vote. The 1976 general election saw the PAP winning 72 percent of the vote while retaining all of its seats. Thereafter, the popular vote for the PAP declined in the 1980s, reaching a low of 63 percent in the 1984 general election. However, what was most troubling in that election for the PAP though was the loss of three seats to opposition politicians in 1984.

In order to woo the Chinese-speaking segment of society, the PAP government actively promoted Chinese cultural values, and specialized Chinese-language education programs. The government did not make the same effort for the ethnic minority cultures, creating segments of dissatisfied citizenry, i.e., the Malays, Indians and some English-speaking Chinese who were “understandably concerned,” (Wong, 2001, p.114). Apart from the political motivations, the PAP government also viewed Singapore as an open English-speaking society, which was vulnerable to Westernization, a process that could undermine the country’s Asian heritage and affect the survival of its cultures and identities (Clammer, 1985). Furthermore, the government was concerned that its stress on meritocracy in the workforce and schools had given rise to excessive individualism - me first, society second - that was perceived as being bad or Western. Meritocracy, according to the government, included the ability to lead a team or work as part of a team (Chua, 1995). The emphasis was on collectivism rather than individualism.

As Singapore rapidly progressed economically in the 1980s and the 1990s, the government latched onto the notion that Confucianism contributed to its developmental success. The prevalent theory then pushed in academic circles was that the East Asian

newly industrializing economies succeeded because of Confucian values and culture (Wong, 2001). Confucianism appealed to the government for its stress on order and harmony, avoidance of overt conflict in social relations, and loyalty and obedience to hierarchy and authority (Chua, 1995). The government developed a set of moral codes for itself: following the code of *jin zi* (honourable men) it would govern in the best interests of the country rather than for self-benefit. Therefore, the government managed to explain its illiberal political practices as simply reflecting the traditional Confucian ethos of Singapore (Chua, 1995).

A new moral education programme was introduced to primary and secondary schools in 1979 - the aim was to create good citizens, and underscore the importance of racial harmony and social integration in society. In 1982, the government made courses in Religious Knowledge a compulsory subject in upper secondary schools. The Religious Knowledge subject covered the main religions practiced by Singaporeans. Confucianism, although not a religion, was included for those who did not adhere to the major religions. The Singaporean education staff developed a separate curriculum for Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Bible Knowledge. On the other hand, the government invited Confucian scholars from abroad to help develop a Confucian Ethics curriculum, indicating that there was an absence of Confucianism in Singaporean's daily lives and that it needed to be implanted into Singaporeans (Chua, 1995). While the PAP leadership managed to "confucianise" itself, it was less successful in promoting Confucianism to Singaporeans, even with the majority Chinese population. By 1989, enrollment in Confucian Ethics was 17.8 per cent compared to 44.4 per cent for Buddhism Studies and 21.4 per cent for Bible Knowledge (Chua, 1995).

However, after an alleged Marxist plot by Singaporean Catholic workers in a church welfare programme that was foiled by the government in 1987 with the arrests of the suspects under the Internal Security Act, the government commissioned a study on religion. The findings released in 1988 found that Religious Knowledge programme had intensified religious fervour amongst Singaporeans that served to highlight differences between students, which could potentially contribute to inter-religious conflicts in the future.

The arrests and the subsequent findings may have been politically motivated. Some of the 22 Catholic workers arrested had connections with the opposition Workers' Party, although the government did not reveal this fact. The detainees confessed on television and were subsequently released. In 1988, several were re-arrested after claiming that their confession had been coerced through physical and psychological torture. Francis Seow, a lawyer for two of those arrested, was similarly detained and accused of being an American agent – part of an American plot to build up a strong opposition against the government (Haas, 1999).

That year, the government banned four Muslim preachers from India, Malaysia, and Indonesia from entering Singapore on the grounds that they “were attempting to incite Muslim feeling and civil disorder,” (*Straits Times*, September 2, 1987). In 1990, the Religious Knowledge programme along with Confucian Ethics was phased out. The moral education programme was retained in primary and secondary schools. To help counter religious division, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act passed in 1990 regulated speech of religious leaders who commented on social and political issues in their capacity as preachers. The aim was to separate politics from religion. However,

opposition politicians and Muslim minority groups pointed out that the PAP did fuse politics and religion themselves – for instance, a Malay Muslim PAP minister was simultaneously the minister for Malay/Muslim affairs, speaking on religious issues, and minister for environment (Rahim, 1998). Furthermore, Muslims perceived the Bill as flouting the Islamic doctrine, which viewed “Islam as a religion that encompasses all aspects of life,” including politics (Rahim, 1998, p. 101).

Apart from its constant use in political discourse, Confucianism had failed to take root in the daily lives of Singaporeans (Chua, 1995). In 1988, a government committee was appointed to develop a national ideology to help anchor a Singaporean identity that incorporated the values of the varied Asian cultures. This resulted in the “Shared Values” - these were values that place nation before community and society before self, upheld the family as basic building block of society, resolved issues through consensus instead of contention, stressed racial and religious harmony (Chua, 1995). The government made an effort to emphasize the multiracial basis of the Shared Values although it made no specific mention of any ethnic groups. However, it acknowledged that the Confucian ideal of government was still suited to Singapore. In the White Paper on Shared Values, the ideal of having *jin zi* in government was reiterated (Chua, 1995).

Notwithstanding the government’s rhetoric on preserving Singapore’s Asian values, it had for the large part used a minimalist approach in assisting the minority groups in its cultural preservation. This was in contrast to the government’s unconditional and interventionist approach in providing assistance to the majority Chinese community to strengthen perceived cultural weakening. For instance, the government promoted the “Speak Mandarin” campaign for a decade, advocated virtues of Confucianist philosophy,

and developed the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) thereby creating elite Chinese secondary schools where Chinese students were educated in English and Mandarin as first languages. Minority groups perceived the government's actions as evidence of Sinicization of Singapore. This left minority groups such as the Malays "deeply unhappy" with the declining importance of the Malay language despite its formal status as the national language of Singapore (Rahim, 1998, p. 112). After English, Mandarin had become the most important official language as a consequence of the government's active promotion of the language as the lingua franca of the Chinese community (Rahim, 1998).

Furthermore, based on its meritocracy principle the government had resisted providing special assistance to the minority communities. To the government, all Singaporeans were accorded equal access to resources and competed on equal footing in the meritocratic race. It discounted the historical and institutional factors, as well as forces of discrimination against ethnic minorities that impeded social mobility (Rahim, 1998).

However, the government was forced to address the growing socio-economic and educational marginality of the Malay community after a 1980 census (Rahim, 1998). The government sponsored the establishment of a Malay ethnic self-help body, Mendaki, under the leadership of PAP Malay members of parliament in 1982 to improve the academic prospects of the community. In 1989, a similar organization, SINDA, was set up for the Indian community to help the lower educational achievers. Following the logic of multiracialism, the CDAC, a Chinese self-help group was established for the Chinese community (Chua, 1995). Still, the emphasis here was on the "self-help" and "ethnic"

nature of these organizations. Each community was encouraged to tackle their specific problems within the community organizations.

Despite allocating government funds for the self-help community programs, there was little government effort to promote minority cultures despite the rhetoric about the importance for all Singaporeans to maintain their Chinese, Malay and Indian heritages. Instead, the government expressed its preference for the Chinese culture, going so far as to bias its immigration policy to favor ethnic Chinese immigrants over others in order to maintain the racial make-up of Singapore. The government justified such measures by questioning, "whether Singapore could survive without these core values of thrift, hard work, and group cohesion which were identified in Chinese culture" (*Straits Times*, July 27, 1991).

This line of reasoning suggested that the government believed that these three core values were absent in the Malay and Indian minority cultures of Singapore. Specifically in line with the government's "cultural deficit thesis", the Malays were portrayed in the media as being poorly educated, unintelligent, unmotivated, and prone to large families and divorce, thus they were expected to hold menial or low status jobs in society (Rahim, 1998). The double standard employed by the government in its active promotion of the majority Chinese culture over the minority groups' cultures created an undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the minority groups.

There were several other incidents with the PAP government and the minorities, especially the Malays that increased inter-ethnic tension. In 1986, the Malay Muslim community protested against inviting Israeli President to Singapore because it opposed Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The visit went through anyway.

Later, Lee accused the Malays as behaving more as Malay Muslims than as loyal Singaporeans (*Straits Times*, July 20, 1987). Then Lee's son, Lee Hsien Loong, a Brigadier-General in the military, revealed that sensitive posts in the Singapore Armed Forces were closed to Malays for national security reasons. The younger Lee added that the policy was in place to prevent Malays from being placed in a position where they would have to choose between loyalty to the state and religion (*Straits Times*, July 20, 1987). This made the community feel "humiliated and under siege" (Rahim, 1998, p.100). Tensions flared further when Malay opposition supporters heckled a PAP Chinese politician, Goh Chok Tong, at a polling station during the 1988 general elections. Goh threatened to withdraw PAP support for Mendaki, the Malay self-help group. The *Straits Times* editorial was put it in this terms: "The outcome for the Malays, or for that matter, any other community which spurns the PAP could be to become a less important consideration in the party's order of priorities. The reality is, in politics, as in any other business, an old principle applies. It is called quid pro quo," (*Straits Times*, September 29, 1988).

During the campaigning for the 1991 general elections, a Malay opposition politician used generic Islamic words in his rally speeches – "*Insha Allah*" (God willing) and "*Alhamdulillah*" (All Praise to God). The PAP portrayed him as a communalist who was agitating the Malay ground (Rahim, 1998). The local media subsequently published graphic photos of the 1950 and 1964 racial riots that served to remind Singaporeans of the dark consequences of communalism. Communalism became a major election issue despite assertions by Muslim leaders that the Islamic terms had not been incorrectly used as claimed by the PAP (*Straits Times*, September 8, 1991).

It can be seen that there were sufficient reasons for the increase in ethnic tension as a result of the politicization of race, especially the realization of Chinese cultural interest over that of minority cultural interests. Particularly, the largest of ethnic minority groups, the Malays, were specially affected. Over time, there came to be in existence, a contradiction between the multiracialism ideal that had formed the basis of the country during its nation-building years and the East Asian values political rhetoric in the later years. And yet, despite the uncomfortable position of the ethnic minorities during the period of the politicization of race, and episodes of elevated ethnic tension in society, there was no recurrence of deadly ethnic violence.

There are several arguments that may account for this. First, the expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 saw the re-drawing of state boundaries that rendered the Malays to an ethnic minority status. This may have resulted in a change in the frame of the Malays, who may have seen no benefit in agitating violence for more rights. Over time, the Malays may have simply accepted the permanence of minority status, and therefore the periodic episodes of inter-ethnic tensions after 1980 did not provoke the re-emergence of violence. However, this argument presumes that the re-drawing of the borders was simply enough to cause a change in the frame of the Malays. But it does not explain why this would be so. The expulsion when it happened was not widely viewed as permanent. It was explained as a necessary, but temporary move. For a few years after the expulsion, Singaporean political leaders even publicly expressed the possibilities of re-joining Malaysia. That may explain why there were no outbreaks of violence at the time of the separation; Malays in Singapore may have harboured hope that their ethnic minority status would change soon enough. When re-unification was recognized as

impossibility after some years, there were Malay efforts to protect ethnic rights. For instance, the only ethnic minority opposition political party in Singapore is Malay. The Singapore Malays National Organization's (PKMS in Malay) mission is to struggle to uphold and protect Malays rights and interests. There are no other ethnic minority political groups in Singapore, and this attests that while the Malays in Singapore recognized their minority status, they were also keen to protect themselves by having a voice apart from that of the Malay representatives in the PAP. The PKMS has been instrumental in publicly airing out Malay issues in an outright fashion that have not been addressed by the PAP, much to the chagrin of PAP's Malay representatives. Given that Malays have not been passive in Singaporean politics since 1965, the argument that the re-drawing of state boundaries changed Malay's frame to one of acceptance of minority status, does not serve as an adequate explanation for why Malays would have refrained from violent activities, especially since race issues were still important to the Malays.

Instead, I argue that deadly violence was no longer an option because the Singaporean society had passed its threshold level where the societal gains from the press restraints had become permanent - race could now be discussed openly without fear of violent flare-ups. While press coverage of race increased during this period of the politicization of race, there were two aspects of press restraints that remained in place in Singapore that prevented inflaming of ethnic passions – there were legal avenues through which individuals and newspaper companies could be prosecuted for inflammatory news stories, or incitement to violence, and the cultivation of informal out-of-bound markers particularly amongst media persons during the 1960s and 1970s that guided newspapers on what was appropriate and inappropriate. So even the ethnic tension resulting from

misgivings caused by the shift from multiracial policies to Chinese majoritarian policies in the 1980s and thereafter did not result in the inflammatory forms of news reporting that had led deadly violence in the past.

Several other factors also accounted for the absence of a recurrence of deadly violence. For one, economic conditions had improved vastly, and everyone regardless of their ethnicity had much to lose from promoting or engaging in deadly behavior. This was in contrast to the poor socio-economic conditions during the period when the two major race riots occurred. Second, the period of press restraints had defused the likelihood that Singaporeans would want to resort to violence. A telephone survey in 2000 revealed that 83 percent of Singaporeans did not believe that a race riot would erupt in the next ten years, and that 70 percent believed that ethnic relations were better than they were ten years ago (Mauzy and Milne, 2002). This demonstrates that society had evolved and had been conditioned against ethnic violence during the healing period when press restraints on race coverage were in place during the nation-building years in the 1960s and 1970s.

Instead, ethnic tension from misgivings in society was channeled into other actions apart from violence. For instance, unhappiness by the Malays over representation of their community by the Malay Muslim leadership in the PAP provided the impetus for the creation of the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) by a number of young Malays in 1991. The AMP functioned as a Malay-Muslim think tank. In 2000, the organization pushed the political boundaries by overtly proposing a plan for a collective Malay leadership, as an alternative to PAP's Malay leadership.

Recommendations and Caveats on Press Restraints

While the PAP government initially argued that press curbs were necessary given the reality of managing ethnic relations in plural society like Singapore, it later expanded the arguments to include curbs on anything that it deemed undesirable, which ranged from coverage of local opposition politicians to Western popular culture involving sex, drugs and violence. Although a conservative Eastern society may retain the right to restrict the influx of potentially damaging and offensive cultural information, such as pornographic magazines, the broad restrictions on the press regarding political coverage are difficult to rationalize, much less accept in democratic societies, especially the restrictions on criticism of the government.

Therefore, it is important that there be formal provisions that prevent the government from taking over the press for their own political gain. Apart from the press laws that were legislated, there never was a formal set of agreed to guidelines for press restraints in Singapore. Having no formal guidelines is not advisable because it leaves open the possibility that the press restraints may be in effect indefinitely, and even expanded for political reasons. If the press restraints are in effect indefinitely, and are eventually taken over for political gains, then the press loses all credibility in the eyes of the public. For instance, in Kuo's (1993) empirical study on the media's coverage of general elections in Singapore, he determined that overall media credibility – that is, perceived fairness and completeness of news coverage – was relatively low in the electorate.

It has to be clear from the outset what the aims of press restraints are. Press restraints are crucial in defusing ethnic hostilities in societies, which are at their highest

levels just after an outbreak of violence. The duration for which press restraints should be in place to prevent a recurrence of deadly violence may be different for different countries. The goal is that other ethnic conflict reduction policies do succeed in improving inter-ethnic relations in society, and when that objective has been achieved, then the threshold level (i.e. gains from press restraints) would have been reached. When that has been deemed to have occurred, then the press restraints will no longer be required. This should be determined by the government representatives, press owners, ethnic leaders and respectable citizens who would ideally form the media regulating body that decides on guidelines for the press restraints. The regulating body should meet periodically to assess the ethnic conflict situation in society, and also to determine if the press restraints are still required.

However, it may be difficult to get people from the different sectors of society to discuss the issues together, much less convince ethnic leaders from communities that have just experienced deadly ethnic violence to participate in the discussions. The PAP government was able to influence the press coverage on race relations largely because of the lack of political contestation in Singapore, especially during the 1960s. The lack of political contestation facilitated the co-opting of the press by the one-party political system in Singapore. With time, the one-party rule of the PAP was able to influence changes in journalistic norms on the reporting of race issues. The lack of political contestation, i.e., mobilization from formal opposition political parties, or interest groups in civil society, meant an absence of organized expression of different opinions on race issues. Thus, the likelihood of the press subscribing to governmental norms on race issues increased in such an environment.

Nevertheless, it is possible for press restraints to work in countries that have active political contestation. First, to get representatives from the different sectors of society to participate in the regulating body, they should be made to understand that failure to participate might mean that their interests may not be known, much less realized. Any one who fails to participate has much to lose. For instance, the government may first work on getting the support from one ethnic community. This may be the very incentive needed to propel other ethnic communities to want to participate, lest they lose out in some way. Differing viewpoints may emerge during the discussions, but ultimately the very process of getting them out may help formulate press guidelines on race coverage that will be workable and abided by all involved.

It can also be argued that press restraints are likely to be ineffective when foreign sources of media, especially the television, are easily accessible. That may indeed be true, but in the least, the local mass media through the exercise of press restraints should aim to educate the population on what is acceptable discussion of ethnic issues, and what is not, i.e., inflammatory and violent views would be rejected. It can also counter biased foreign reports with its own balanced and factual reports. This would entail the monitoring of foreign media sources in order to provide sufficient informational rebuttals. The aim is that the local mass media would ultimately set the societal standard where tolerance and respect for balanced ethnic viewpoints are the norms, and not ethnic extremism.

The conceptual model for press restraints shows that the gains to be obtained in society where inter-ethnic hostility is high, or in a society that has already experienced deadly ethnic violence, increases when press restraints are progressively applied. The

gains would be realized primarily through the lack of erupting deadly collective violent episodes, and collective demonstrations of inter-ethnic hostility. It argues for press restraints in societies that (1) are just emerging from ethnic conflict and (2) lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy.

Iraq is one country that may benefit from the application of press restraints, as it meets the two necessary conditions that warrant its use. Iraq has been described as a country with unnatural boundaries that were carved out by its former British colonizers, who did not appreciate the profound ethnic differences – as such, Iraq encompassed diverse groups with ethnic and religious differences. Its dominant majority are Shiite Arab Muslims, and there are two ethnic minority groups, the Kurds and Arabs, who are both Sunni Muslims. Each group is, to a large extent, territorially concentrated, which allows a possibility that ethnic groups may contest for separation or autonomous rule within a federation in the future. It has been argued that former President Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Arab, forcibly held the country together through harsh dictatorial means, without which the country would have broken apart. Today, Iraq is undergoing democratic institutional-building after decades of political suppression. The Shiites and the Kurds have a chance to participate in the political process now, as compared to before when they were mostly shut out of governance by the Sunni Arab ethnic group. Although the Hussein's ruling government was not wholly Sunni Arab, there were many instances when the government discriminated against the Shiite Arabs and Kurds, and Sunni Arabs were favoured. Government-sanctioned acts of violent repression have been committed against the Shiites and Kurdish ethnic groups, and it has been perceived as being Sunni Arab inspired. There is a reason to assume here that there would be inter-ethnic hostility

and violence based on this prior (albeit) recent history. This was evident in events soon after the Americans invaded Iraq. There were massive looting, revenge killings, and disappearances between ethnic groups that the Americans failed to control.

Today, the constant episodes of deadly violence in Iraq against Americans and the Iraqis allied with the Americans makes it difficult for peace-building initiatives to work. The bloody violence is not engendered by press reports rather it is stemmed from the presence of American military in Iraq. Nevertheless, there are fears that the country could enter into an ethnic conflict situation that would be even more bloody when (or if) the American forces leave Iraq. Therefore, it is imperative to begin building inter-ethnic ties through press restraints. The press restraints can also help set a standard that prohibits the glorification of violence against the Americans, and fellow Iraqis, whatever their ethnicity. For that matter, the local press can be utilized to focus attention on institutional-building initiatives rather than focus on accounts of deadly violence that may exacerbate the situation leading to more violence. It can also help counter the emotive and biased regional media sources that frame the events in Iraq in a manner that fuels tension and hostility against the Americans, or Iraqis seen as aiding the Americans.

Finally, the local press can help build on inter-ethnic ties that will help cement the foundations of Iraq. There is not much evidence of “ancient hatred” between all three ethnic groups, apart from the recent historical events. Instead, there is a much longer history of peaceful co-existence than not. This is a factor that should be emphasized more in the local press. Furthermore, to Iraq’s advantage, the common religion factor (Islam that includes even the Shiites) can be played up in order to unite everyone. Such efforts

would do much to ease inter-ethnic tension and to minimize the emergence of inter-ethnic violence.

Future Research

The thesis formulated a theory that argued for installing press restraints in societies that are just emerging from ethnic conflict, and that also lack the societal norms and established institutions that stem from traditions of democracy. It also provided a conceptual model for the legitimacy of press restraints. It argued that the higher the level of ethnic tension, the greater will be the gains from the application of press restraints, i.e., the progressive prevention of deadly collective violence, and the reduction in inter-ethnic tension and hostility. When the application of press restraints does not result in any further gains, the threshold level for gains in that society has been attained. Ultimately, the gains from press restraints would be permanent, so that the removal of press restraints on ethnic coverage will not cause a recurrence of violence.

Future research may include studies that measure the gains from the application of press restraints, and determine the threshold levels for different types of countries. Such studies would provide empirical material that would better inform the theory on press restraints and its application in post-conflict societies.

APPENDIX

Coding Methodology and Criteria, and Sample Selection Rationale

Sample Source:

The sample included all possible news articles that cover race and religious issues in *The Straits Times*, and its Sunday edition, *The Sunday Times* for the stated time period.

Sample Selection:

The following years were selected so as to be fairly representative of the time period under study.

Colonial Period: March 1956, March 1957, and March 1958

Political Contestation Period: March 1959, March 1961, August 1963, and August 1964

One-Party Consolidation Period: March 1965, March 1968, June 1969, March 1970, and August 1972

Rationale for Sample Selection:

- 1 The general election years were selected: 1959, 1963, 1968, and 1972. The general election years were selected based on the assumption that there would be a higher likelihood of racial and religious issues discussed in the press than at other times. Issues of language and vernacular education were two especially pertinent racial issues that occurred during the colonial and political contestation periods. For the general election years, the newspapers were coded one month prior to the polling date. This was based on the likelihood that political parties would discuss these racial policies that were of crucial importance to the electorate during the election campaigning period.

- 2 The years between the general elections years were selected. For example, 1961 was a selected non-election year between the selected election years of 1959 and 1963. There is the expectation that there would be a heightening of racial and religious issues during the election years. Therefore, coding the non-election years was crucial in order to obtain a balanced sample. The rationale for this was to code for racial/religious issues on a non-election year when there would be less of an imperative for political parties to either bring out new racial policies, or re-hash political rationale for what had already been done. The month of March was chosen for all of the non-election years because there were two election years that were also coded for month of March, and so this was done for the other years to maintain some level of coding constancy.
- 3 There are two election years that were coded for August, and two non-election years (years in which race riots occurred) that were coded for June and August. Therefore, one could have also chosen to code for August in the sample years for the same reasons March was chosen. However, March was selected because it was earlier in the year - new government policies if they were to be implemented would be introduced relatively earlier in the year rather than later.
- 4 Two years in which there was the occurrence of race riots were selected: June 1964 and August 1969. The newspapers were coded one month after the race riots occurred. This was to examine the newspaper's reaction to government directives and policies in the aftermath of the race riots.
- 5 For the colonial period, access to newspaper records was only available from 1956 onwards. Therefore, all of the three years in the period (1956 - 1958) were

included in the sample. Again, coding was done for the month of March in each of these years for the reasons already stated.

Code:

Articles were included in the sample if they fell into two categories: race and religion. An article that contained two or more of the keywords that have been identified for a category was included in the sample.

Keywords for Race Category:

Race, Asian, Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, Mandarin, Hakka, Hokkien, Hainanese, Tamil, Sikh, Malayalee, Bengali, Punjabi, Chinese towkay, dialect, language, education, Asian culture, Asian values, racial minorities, English-educated, Chinese-educated, Malay-educated, communalism, linguistic groups, vernacular schools, racial riots, racial discord, racial harmony, racial integration, special Malay rights, national language, official language, language chauvinists, language policies, race policies.

Keywords for Religion Category:

Religion, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Muslims, madrassas, religious harmony, religious riots, religious policies.

Design of Study:

1. Type of newspaper articles: Editorial, Political News Reports, Forum (letters by citizenry), and Human Interest Stories.
2. Tone of Editorials: The tone was determined by focusing on descriptive phrases in the coded editorials. The phrases were then analyzed for their intended meaning. Then each article was determined if it was favourable, unfavourable, or neutral to government policies or directives on race/religious issues. Numerical

values of 1,2 and 3 were then assigned to favourable, neutral and unfavourable respectively. For each month coded, a mean score and standard deviation for the editorials was calculated.

3. Frequency count of article subject: Race or Religion
4. Frequency count of references to government politicians, government officials or government representatives.
5. Frequency count of references to opposition politicians, social actors or citizenry.
6. Frequency count for major ethnic group references: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian.
7. Frequency count for discourse used: Government Terms or Popular Terms
8. Frequency count of prescriptive nature of article: Yes or No
9. Frequency count of more than one point of view expressed: Yes or No

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