

## The Heavens Opened and Cried: Mediatised National Mourning for Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew

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*When Singapore's first Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, passed away on March 23 2015, a seven-day period of national mourning was declared and observed. During that week, news media emphasised stories about Lee, and these stories were widely re-circulated by Singaporeans via social media. This paper argues that during that period, a possible sacralisation of Lee was materialising through the presentation of media narratives and the contribution of tributes by Singaporeans. Using illustrative examples, it demonstrates that the mediatised ritual, viewed as the seven-day period that included the State procession and funeral on the final day, created a set apartness for Singaporeans to contemplate and reflect on Lee's values and how they shaped his contributions to the nation. It then considers the avenues of future research based on this new chapter in the making of Singapore's history.*

*Key words: mediatised ritual, national mourning, sacralisation,  
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## A NEW ERA

“We have all lost a father. We grieve as one people, one nation. But in our grief, we have displayed the best of Singapore. Ordinary people going to great lengths to distribute refreshments and umbrellas to the crowd, and help one another through the night. Citizen soldiers, Home Team officers, cleaners, all working tirelessly round the clock. Our shared sorrow has brought us closer together, and made us stronger and more resolute.

We come together not only to mourn. We come together also to rejoice in Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s long and full life, and what he has achieved with us, his people, in Singapore. We come together to pledge ourselves to continue building this exceptional country.”

Excerpt from the eulogy by current Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the State funeral of the nation’s founding father and his own father, Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister’s Office Singapore, 2015).

On March 23 2015, when it was announced that Singapore’s first Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew had passed away, news media were frenzied and social media were abuzz. On that same day, a memorial website, RememberingLeeKuanYew.sg, was launched and a week of mourning was declared by the current Prime Minister (and son of Lee Kuan Yew) Mr Lee Hsien Loong. This week of mourning culminated with a State procession and funeral on the final day.

This paper explores the possibility of the sacralisation of Mr Lee Kuan Yew out of the mediatised ritual that constituted the week-long mourning, and through the media narratives constructed to focus on Lee’s values, principles and contributions to Singapore and the world. A year later, what was the effect of Lee’s death on the idea of a national identity, and what are the long-term consequences of such media constructions?

## SINGAPORE’S LEE: MEDIA CHANGES

Lee Kuan Yew was a man of his time, and controversial in several ways. Although much can be said about how he shaped politics in Singapore, this section focuses specifically on how media changes afforded by new local infrastructure and the island-state’s digital connectivity, and as sanc-

tioned by the government, influenced the Singaporean political scene, especially over the last decade.

The dominant discourse about the formation of Singapore has focused on its independence from Malaysia since 1965, and how Lee's leadership, and the People's Action Party (PAP) he founded and led, have played fundamental roles. Unwillingly rejected by Malaysia, Lee had to improvise and strategise to ensure the nation's success, in the face of such a sudden decision. Key necessities for this transition were "exceptional leadership," "good governance" and peaceful "multiculturalism" (Mahbubani, 2013).

Lee had witnessed the British retreat from the region during World War II and his experiences during that period shaped his ideology and approach towards leading the new nation (Apcar, Arnold, & Mydans, 2007). He was struck by how easily the British could back away, and at the same time felt that the British model of governance was insufficient for the Asian context. As such, he adopted an approach that built on the British infrastructure that was left behind.

This West-and-East approach towards governance was similarly applied towards the media. Rather than a Western model that encourages "dissent" (Cottle, 2008, p. 857) and governmental accountability through freedom of the press, the Singapore media model followed that of the Japanese media, where the good of the community is considered above that of the individual (Bokhorst-Heng, 2002). Mainstream media outlets in Singapore, whether print or broadcast, are state-owned and regulated by the Ministry of Information and Communications. As such, the media's role in Singapore is predominantly to disseminate information, rather than to provoke critical reflection and civic engagement.

Much has been written about Singapore's media censorship, and the climate of self-censorship it engenders (George, 2005; Gomez, 2005; Johal, 2004). To date, the nation has remained one of the lowest in the World Press Freedom Index, at 154 out of 180 in 2016 (Reporters without Borders, 2016).

State-controlled media and its climate of censorship have been maintained since Singapore's independence up until the rise of the internet and the increasing digitisation of media. The rise of alternative media platforms has challenged the status quo, primarily countering the PAP's discourse. This has led some to believe that the "spiral of silence" (Noelle Neumann, 1974) that has long permeated Singapore's socio-political life is slowly

unravelling (Chang, 1999; Lee & Willnat, 2009).

In Singapore's 2006 general election, it was the first time that Singaporeans could see, through alternative media, images of large crowds at opposition parties' rallies. These photos were posted on blogs and would typically not have been published in mainstream media. A political awakening of a sort, this general election became popularly termed the "first internet election" (Lee & Kan, 2009, p. 877). That year, the PAP still won, but by 66.6%, down approximately 9% from 75.3% in 2001. In the following election in 2011, votes for the PAP slipped further to 60.1%. Another change was that 2011 was also the year when all constituencies (electoral divisions), with the exception of Lee's, were contested. As a consequence, Lee along with former Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong, stepped down (Harvey, 2011).

In 2015, Singapore's 50th year of independence, the general election took place six months after Lee died, and a month after National Day. Despite even stronger challenges from the opposition parties, the PAP won the mandate to lead with almost 70% of the vote much to the surprise of many (Ngerng, 2015; Xing Qi, 2015). Given the context of growing dissent, this upturn in popularity is rather unusual. Although there may be other factors that contributed towards the PAP victory in 2015, here we consider how Lee's death may have contributed to this political change.

## DEATH, RITUAL AND THE MEDIA

The death of someone close, and the separation it causes, is one of the most intense experiences any human being can ever have. It can evoke various intense responses (Stephenson, 1985), and usually some form of grieving process helps people to make sense of its emotional impact (Dillenburg & Keenan, 2005). Grieving is often accompanied by a ritual of some form, a step in acknowledging the death to bring people to some closure before resuming their everyday lives (Stephenson, 1985).

Scholars of ritual are first influenced by Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, first published in 1912. Although there are many definitions of rituals (Couldry, 2003), in regard to mourning rituals, they can be seen as practices that allow a social collective to bridge from mundane everyday practices into a special event or gathering. Durkheim

noted that within such a gathering a change in collective behaviour, or what he referred to as a “collective effervescence” can occur. Earlier scholarship has considered this a space of “liminality” where disorientation and restructuring of social order can occur (Turner, 1969). This can be demonstrated by Sewell’s example of the fall of the Bastille and the start of the French Revolution (Sewell Jr, 1996).

In a media-saturated age, death and the way people mourn the dead have shifted in effect and implications. Media and ritual studies were previously separate disciplinary domains but there is growing interest in their intersection as the media have increasing performative functions that enable and enact rituals (Grimes, 2002). In fact, there are expansive ways in which understandings of media and ritual can interact, such that an understanding of ritual is not simply a “synonym for religion and the sacred” nor that which is “identified with anything routine, patterned, or stylized” (p. 224).

Hepp & Krotz (2014) use the term “mediatized world” to describe the current media environment we live in, where media, as spatial sites, have blurred boundaries and are multi-directional (p. 7). Media networks are highly interconnected, and in such a world time and space are less relevant, since information is far-reaching, and “transformations [that are social, for example] take place with a broader scope and at a greater distance” (Lundby, 2013, p. 195). This mediatised environment can affect social connectivity in several ways. In such an environment, mourning becomes less about the “who” than the “what,” in terms of shared experiences and affirmation (Walter, 2015). Death and mourning as media events in a media age have seen varied approaches and are still in evolution. This will be more closely examined here.

A key text in examining events that have garnered massive media broadcast and activities, is *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Making distinctions between these media events, Katz and Dayan categorise them as “coronations” (e.g., commemorative events, state funerals), “contests” (e.g., major sporting events) and “conquests” (e.g., events that involve the formation of political allegiances).

However, this approach is limited to consensual outcomes and ignore “disaster events” and others that could have the opposite effect (Couldry, 2003). Couldry suggests that to understand media events one must understand the existing structures of power embedded within institutional media

that construct a “centre” when it brings people together (p. 41). He argues that one first needs to understand “media rituals,” which are “formalised actions organised around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with, wider media-related values” (p. 2). In other words, these media values are institutionalised structures of power that enable the social effects and transformations enacted through media events.

New considerations have emerged in the face of a globalising media age, where media effects are no longer confined by local boundaries and we see a “thickening of media communication, produced not only by the mass media (television, radio) but also by the Internet and other digital media, covering different forms of ‘mediated quasi-interaction’ (e.g., www, blog journalism) and ‘mediated interaction’ (e.g., chats, online discussions) of the event” (Couldry & Hepp, 2010, p. 11). Some have suggested that this can be understood through mediatisation theory, a meta-process where “the adaptation of different social fields or systems [adhere to the] institutionalized rules of the media” (Sumiala, 2014, p. 941) and are made possible because of the presence of “disembedded” media (enabled by digital technology). Through “disembedded, modern media, the transformations take place with a broader scope and at a greater distance” (Lundby, 2013, p. 195). This understanding has been challenged by others who focus on mediation as a process that enables change, primarily through material media, with less attention to the concept of the speed and spread that digitisation has enabled (Horsfield, 2015; Morgan, 2011).

A new understanding has been proposed that acknowledges the social transformations of mediatisation processes and its impacts through rituals. This understanding has been applied through the concept and use of the term “mediatised ritual,” which has been defined as “... those exceptional and performative media phenomena that serve to sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be” (Cottle, 2006, p. 415). Particularly with death rituals, the process of “ritualization of media and media-saturation of rituals” (Sumiala, 2014, p. 943) can most powerfully be demonstrated through the media activities that death rituals can garner because of the exceptionality and quality of its event and the person it aims to honour. Through the media’s role in processes of production, consumption and presentation, the rituals of death take a particular shape. The

use of mediated ritual to understand a ritual in death then may be more appropriate.

Studies into celebrity deaths (such as those of Princess Diana, Michael Jackson and President John F. Kennedy) have often focused on the media's role in creating shared experiences for the public (Thomas, 2008). Some focus on the way audiences negotiate their grieving processes collectively through media use (Sanderson & Cheong, 2010), while others pay more attention to the way media unveil embedded beliefs and values through their constructions of celebrities' funerals. Public and mediated mournings have concerned scholars, especially where the public responses are "quite out of proportion to any authentic grief" (Walter, 2008, p. 247). For the purpose of this paper, it is more appropriate to examine works looking at the death of popular politicians, such as the state funeral for President John F. Kennedy.

Using John F. Kennedy's assassination as an example, Kitch argues that the media's role in reporting was not only factual but also drew upon "broader themes such as the country's character and future" (Kitch, 2002). With the death of John F. Kennedy Jr, "the significance of a news event lies in past events (especially events that news media covered) [and how] the storyline of current news is threaded into an existing tapestry. In its coverage, memory is simultaneously invoked and constructed" (p. 304).

In Zelizer's work on the media attention garnered from the Kennedy assassination, she concluded that the media play a monumental role towards the shaping of a historical event, and thereby influenced "collective memory" (1992). This idea of a "collective memory" that emerges out of the stories the media choose to use to portray the deceased can equally be applied in the case of Lee. In Singapore, Lee's name has been synonymous with Singapore. In a critical review of Lee's memoirs, Lysa argues that the struggles Lee endured in the formative years of the nation, demonstrated that as "he is charting his battles, ... [he is also] imprinting his role on Singapore as its creator. The Lee Kuan Yew story thus becomes Singapore's history and vice versa" (Lysa, 2002). This inseparability of Lee and Singapore can similarly be shown through Singaporean media narratives, which will be illustrated later.

In studies of events that are presented through the media lens, Fiske reminds that a distinction needs to be drawn between "media events" and "real events" (1994). This issue is particularly pertinent and "the term media

event is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship” between the two (p. 2). All these considerations will be made later where illustrative examples of media narratives that are presented to the public throughout the mourning period will be shown. Emphasis will be on media narratives that were widely shared on social media.

### MEDIATISED NATIONAL MOURNING FOR LEE

The week of national mourning (March 23 to 29 2015) included the State procession and funeral on the last day as a finale. It is this week-long nationally observed mourning period that is examined here as mediatised ritual. This mediatised ritual can be said to be constructed in that most of the event were presented to the public through mediated representations. During this period, mainstream media presented news features about Lee and his everyday life. On the day Lee died, an official online memorial site ([RememberingLeeKuanYew.sg](http://RememberingLeeKuanYew.sg)) was published. The final day’s State procession and funeral were broadcast live through *Channel NewsAsia* for around five hours.

There were extensive media narratives generated during this period. To give a sense of what was taking place during that week, the following will illustrate what was represented in the media, and further circulated by the public through social media.

As major breaking news, media coverage about Lee dominated the week. To give a sense of the level of media attention on English language major mainstream news outlets in Singapore alone, a search for “Lee Kuan Yew” on Factiva, resulted in 778 news articles from *TODAY*, *The Straits Times* and *Channel NewsAsia* during the week of mourning. Articles were diverse and included news reports, feature articles, tributes and eulogies. *TODAY*’s coverage was most saturating, with 55.4% (127 out of 224) of its news articles mentioning Lee Kuan Yew), next was *The Straits Times* (37.3%, i.e. 246 of 660) and coverage on *Channel NewsAsia* as 34.3% of its news pieces (405 out of 1,181).

During the week mainstream media’s news sites promoted the online memorial site via front page banners. Created by the Ministry of Communication and Information, the site ([RememberingLeeKuanYew.sg](http://RememberingLeeKuanYew.sg)) published



stories of Lee's early years, his education, marriage, and then his foray into politics during the time of Singapore-Malaysia tensions. The public could submit tributes that were reviewed before being published. A year on from his death, the memorial site published an e-book *3:18 The Rally Call*, a reference to the time of his death and how Singaporeans were mobilised into action. Images recount experiences of Singaporeans during the mourning period.

As Lee's coffin lay in state at the Parliament House, news media reported that the public was queueing for as long as eight hours to bid him farewell, to the extent that viewing hours became around the clock from March 25 (*BBC News*, 2015). On the final day, as Lee's body journeyed in a gun carriage to the University Cultural Centre where the funeral was held, the Singapore Armed Forces bid farewell to Lee via "land, air and sea" (Nyan, 2015), and special permission was granted for a 21-gun salute as "an honour usually reserved for sitting Heads of State" [State Funeral Organising Committee (SFOC), 2016]. The State procession started at 12:30pm on March 29, and was followed by the funeral which ran from 2:00pm to 5:15pm.

The funeral was attended by "2,200 people including Mr Lee's family members, President Tony Tan Keng Yam, Cabinet ministers, judges, members of Parliament and foreign leaders from more than 20 countries, as well as invited Singaporeans from all walks of life" (*The Straits Times*, 2015). Ten eulogies (representing the different generations who knew him as a Prime Minister, colleague, family and friend) were delivered: by Prime Minister and son Lee Hsien Loong, President Tony Tan, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, members of Cabinet, community leaders, and a young journalist.

The next section considers, through examples, how Lee was sacralised by the mediatised ritual. By drawing a closer correlation between Lee and Singapore, the mediatised mourning can have a significant impact on current and future imaginings of Singapore.

## THE SACRALISATION OF LEE IN THE MEDIATISED RITUAL

In a fast-paced society like Singapore, death has a way of bringing its rapidly spinning cogs to a sudden halt. In jolting people out of their

everyday preoccupations, their attention is turned towards the frailty of the human condition, and they are reminded of the uncertainty that lies ahead for all.

Elsewhere, it has been argued that for Singaporeans, immersions in a society “on hyperdrive” had so severely disrupted reflective processes that when it comes to civic political engagement with the immediacy made available through social media, rather than be reflective Singaporeans have become more reactive (Weng, 2012). This section first looks at how people were brought from mundane everyday practices into a special time in the making of Singapore’s history. Next, it shows news media examples that focused on various positive perspectives of Lee.

Because of the sudden social vacuum created by death, rituals such as mourning periods and funerals become means through which people gather and collectively make meaning out of them. During the seven-day mourning period for Lee, front page banners of him lined major news sites *The Straits Times*, *TODAY* and *Channel NewsAsia*. These were constructed not only as a sign of remembrance and respect, but also as a visual reminder that the nation was mourning his death in togetherness. These media constructs can be seen as accepted and owned by the public, because news features about Lee were shared through social media such as Facebook. As part of their mourning the public shared personal tributes about Lee as well as these articles, as they negotiated and made sense of what had happened.

At the same time that focus was on the positive contributions Lee had made to the nation, the world and individuals who had benefitted from his achievements, dissident, alternative voices were being silenced. This may be similar to practices during a Chinese funeral, where it is taboo to speak ill of the dead (Siew-Peng, 2003). This censorship is probably most obvious through two incidents. The first was the jailing of 17-year-old blogger Amos Yee who had posted controversial materials about Lee soon after his death (Nylander, 2015; Raguraman, 2015). The second was controversies around satirical posts by popular playwright Alfian Sa’at on his Facebook days after Lee’s death (Nanda, 2015). The sacredness around Lee that was created through the news media brought Singapore together in consensus about his value, and concern that his name and reputation not be desecrated especially during the mourning period.

During the week of mourning, news features by mainstream media focussed on Lee as a good father, husband, and exceptional leader. Especially

since these insights were often provided by his colleagues and family, these articles could be seen as subtle instruments used to counter anti-PAP discourse that perpetuated alternative media platforms. Some of the anti-PAP sentiments included suspicions about high ministerial salaries, and suggestions of nepotism because of the rise of his son, Lee Hsien Loong, as Prime Minister, all of which serve to accuse Lee and the incumbent government of self-interest and corruption.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat wrote a post on his Facebook, which subsequently appeared in *The Straits Times* (Tham, 2015) and was widely shared on social media. Anecdotes out of that article focused on the red box that Lee carried, a briefcase which first came from the British government and was used to carry government documents between offices. This red box became a symbolic representation of Lee's personal values and his unwavering service to the nation, and was subsequently displayed in the National Museum of Singapore (*Channel NewsAsia*, 2015).

The red box also came to symbolise Lee's utmost focus and dedication towards the ongoing and future well-being of Singapore. The public was told:

“The red box carried a wide range of items. It could be communications with foreign leaders, observations about the financial crisis, instructions for the Istana [residence and office for the President of Singapore] grounds staff, or even questions about some trees he had seen on the expressway. Mr Lee was well-known for keeping extremely alert to everything he saw and heard around him when he noticed something wrong, like an ailing raintree, a note in the red box would follow.”

Lee's modest lifestyle was demonstrated through the reflections of Heng Swee Keat. Lee's simplicity in his lifestyle came through his daily breakfast – “a bowl of *dou hua* (soft bean curd), with no syrup” which he takes without coffee or tea but with “room-temperature water”. This frugality was also depicted in another article which provided visual insights into the humble interior of his home with furniture dating from the time he first moved in after his marriage (Chew, 2015). In yet another, the public was told that Lee's children did not grow up with “posh or exotic” family holidays’ as he did not “want them growing up feeling entitled,” an account

which Lee Hsien Loong affirmed as true (Lin, 2015). Lee's reported frugal and humble lifestyle and parenting choices even contradict the materialistic lifestyles that Singaporeans have been accused of being accustomed to.

Even while Lee was grieving the death of his wife, he continued in his unwavering attention towards the maintenance of Singapore as a green country. This dedication was further demonstrated by how he held on to the red box, even up until the day before his hospitalisation. Such accounts demonstrate his concern for the nation well above himself.

Lee was not only humanised through Heng's account, but almost "über-humanised," portrayed as working all the time, and managing on little sleep:

"In his days as PM, Mr Lee's average bedtime was three-thirty in the morning. As Senior Minister and Minister Mentor, he went to sleep after two in the morning. If he had to travel for an official visit the next day, he might go to bed at one or two in the morning. Deep into the night, while the rest of Singapore slept, it was common for Mr Lee to be in full work mode."

While it is popular knowledge that Singaporeans work long hours to provide for their families and/or maintain a certain lifestyle, this is contrasted with Lee, who appeared to be selflessly striving day and night for the nation, having little time to himself.

Grief and the outpouring of loss of Lee were depicted through media visuals of commemorative acts, people paying their last homage, and large crowds of people in a state of mourning during the week. This outpouring was not only shown through the presentation of crowds queuing for long hours into the night to pay their final respects to Lee as he laid in state, but also through quotes gathered from everyday Singaporeans. Many gave details of how Lee's contribution to the nation had impacted their lives. For instance, when Mr Veerakan Aran was asked why he had queued all night to say his final farewell, he said that his sacrifice of losing a night's sleep was incomparable to the sacrifices that Lee had made for the well-being and success of the country (Yong, 2015).

News media also presented tributes from around the world. One instance was a story that appeared in *TODAY* which made its rounds online, about a village in Tamil Nadu, India, that put together a memorial event for

Lee to coincide with the State funeral on March 29. Some of the reasons for this outpouring from afar were communicated through the news article, and included the villagers' gratitude to Lee for providing employment in Singapore for their countrymen, such that the "money earned by migrant Indian workers ... has helped provide electricity in one of the most underdeveloped regions in India" (*TODAY*, 2015). At the same time, Lee was given credit for raising the profile of Asian languages by making Tamil one of the main languages of Singapore. Leaders from over 23 countries, including former US Secretary of State and close friend of Lee, Henry Kissinger were in attendance at the televised State funeral (Au-Yong, 2015). Their combined presence, along with Kissinger's emotional farewell, further communicated Lee's impact on the world, and the strength of Singapore's foreign relations.

Out of the mediatised ritual, the use of the term "founding father" has been emphasised. Although it is not a new term to describe Lee, the repetition of its use throughout the mourning week further synthesised Lee as a person with Singapore as a country into an almost symbiotic relationship. The choice of the word "father" framed him not only in a personal relatable way, but also acknowledge his active creation of contemporary Singapore. Through the sharing of these media articles, images, and the addition of personal tributes the public was effectively approving and affirming the mainstream media's creation of Lee's legacy, in spite of the changing media environment.

#### DISCUSSION: A POST-LEE ERA A YEAR ON

The media news cycle returned to a state of normality after the conclusion of Lee's State procession and funeral, a day where emotions and knowledge collided in a performative end. Out of that mediatised ritual, this paper makes a few suggestions in regard to the media construction of Lee through the event, its potential impact on the nation going forward and its possible contribution to current theoretical understandings about the connection between media and ritual.

Firstly, through the affordances of digital media technologies the public was enabled to both consume and reproduce stories and tributes about Lee. Singaporeans were able to consider, negotiate and personalise their individual

identities as they interfaced with a collective national identity. For a young nation that had struggled with its unique culture and identity (Kong, 1999), Lee's death offered a mental and emotional space for such contemplation. Through a combination of the media's constructions of Lee and the public's negotiation and personalisation of symbolic meanings out of them, a stronger correlation was drawn between Lee as a person and Singapore as a nation, such that he was seen as the lived embodiment of Singapore, where his values and principles then characterised the ideal Singaporean. This correlation has been affirmed by the implementation by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (2016) of national guidelines on how Lee's images can be used in the future.

Secondly, media constructions of Lee were acknowledged and affirmed by the public, illustrated not only by the extent to which news media articles were widely shared on social media, but also by the minimal opposition towards these narratives and images. Alternative discourse was severely frowned upon by the public. It can be argued that the "collective effervescence" out of the national grieving process that Singaporeans experienced had an effect that carried forward into the GE 2015 political outcome. Continued observation of future GEs, and the ways in which references to Lee's legacy may emerge from ongoing political rhetoric, can provide further insights for future research.

Finally, the aim of this paper was to consider a possible sacralisation of Lee as an outcome of the mediated ritual. Paralleling the ways in which Singaporeans were brought into a sacred, contemplative space through a set apart mourning period declared by the Prime Minister, a space which was further supported by the news media and the performative death ritual of the State procession and funeral, Lee can be said to have been elevated from the status of statesman to one of founding father through the continuous moulding of his image and personality before the mediated public eye. As Kitch has argued, the news media perform the role of a kind of awakening, uncovering sentiments that are prevailing within a culture (2002). The same can then be said of Lee's relationship to Singapore, where a dominant and more popular discourse has been retold, emphasised, affirmed and approved by the public. Despite recent criticisms of Singapore's mainstream media it is arguable that this discourse still holds a trusted position when it comes to national imaginings and is perceived to play an important role in the construction of national values and beliefs.

A year on, some controversies have emerged out of the continuation of Lee's legacy, and especially the way he was commemorated, which may support the sacralisation argument. One such incident was a widely reported case of teachers at a kindergarten who made students bow to an image of Lee, a ritual that mirrors Chinese shamanistic practices (*Asia One*, 2016b). In another incident, Lee's daughter, Dr Lee Wei Ling, was made indignant by the 'hero worshipping' that came out of the first year commemorative efforts, where she said it was in contradiction to what Lee himself would have wanted (*Asia One*, 2016a). She aired her opinion on Facebook and this was later picked up by news media. In response to criticisms about the excessive commemorative efforts, the People's Association (a statutory board established to promote racial harmony and social cohesion in Singapore) said that most of the commemorative activities were initiated by the community (Au-Yong, 2016). As it is, how, and the extent to which, Lee ought to be commemorated remains controversial. At the same time, these occurrences further demonstrate the impact of Lee's death on the public and a nation's struggle to find appropriate means of commemorating him.

Although a more in-depth understanding of the development of this dominant understanding about Lee's legacy can be shown through his strong character, charisma and the authoritarian way in which he led Singapore, it requires a historical perspective which this paper has restrained from going into. Rather, it specifically focuses on a particular period of time to examine, with the development of a media context in mind, to examine the ways in which Lee's death has been constructed, and communicated, and its social effect. It has shown, through examples of what occurred during the mediatised ritual, how Lee's legacy and link with Singapore as a nation was forged more strongly. It will take future research to inform the extent of its social and political implications in the long-term, if any, and the extent to which alternative discourses can be given space when Lee's legacy has been memorialised.

At the same time, this paper contributes to the field of media and ritual, which is still in evolution (Sumiala, 2014), through testing its theoretical understandings in a media context that differs from those previously examined (Coudry & Hepp, 2010). The concepts of media and ritual are highly applicable to examination, particularly in a densely populated and digitally networked global city such as Singapore. Although there has been criticism

against the Durkheimian framework of solidarity (Couldry, 2003), media constructs around Lee's death show that a dominant discourse was present, and there was still consensual agreement a year on. Other considerations, such as cultural and political context, will have to be factored in. Again, a longer period of observation will be required to understand fully media's transformative effect, if any, on the construction of national identity and values through such an emotionally charged event.

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