

# The Cultural History of Singapore Literary Anthologies

The history of Singapore anthologies begins roughly a decade before the city-state's independence with the publication of *L'essai* (1953), a collection of poetry and prose written by Raffles Institution students. On the face of it, the anthology is well suited for Singapore's multilingual and multiracial context as an aesthetic form that coheres multiple, heterogeneous pieces in a single text. Since *L'essai*, the anthology has seen significant growth.<sup>1</sup> One recent headline in a local newspaper, for example, observes "The Rise of the Anthology."<sup>2</sup> Singaporean academic and literary events now feature dedicated panels on the genre and, indeed, Singapore Writers Festival programs from the past decade reveal large numbers of panels promoting and discussing newly published anthologies.<sup>3</sup> Speakers' biographies show that many Singaporean writers are also anthology editors themselves. Anthologies are everywhere in Singapore and a staple of the literary scene.

While noting the prominence of the anthology in contemporary Singapore literature, Weihsin Gui also observes its importance throughout Singapore's literary history as a form in which "concepts of a national literature and national identity are expressed and negotiated."<sup>4</sup> In addition to the anthology's role in producing national literature, editors often perform the invisible labor of building national literary infrastructure. Take, for example, Chandran Nair, an influential figure who shaped Singapore's literary landscape.<sup>5</sup> His press, Woodrose Publications, issued ten titles, including a multilingual anthology, *Singapore Writing* (1977) and an anthology of short stories by women edited by Geraldine Heng, *The Sun in Her Eyes* (1976).<sup>6</sup> On top of establishing an outlet for local writers, Nair's efforts would eventually lead Heinemann and Federal Publications to begin publishing Singaporean works. His editorial labor, in other words, brought both local and international audiences to Singapore literature.<sup>7</sup>

The anthology has played a crucial and influential role in Singapore's literary history, and as I argue in this chapter, it is a form that was at once instrumental for state-led efforts in postcolonial capitalist development and used by Singaporean writers and editors to contest those imperatives. It is a literary and cultural site of contestation. I moreover show that because the changes in aesthetic and political priorities of the Singapore anthology track with shifts in Singapore's economic ideologies—namely, the developmentalism of early independence and Asian Values—the anthology yields understandings of the different cultural and political permutations of postcolonial capitalism. In this way, this chapter is methodologically distinct. Instead of working backward from the present through historicized close readings of post-1997 emergent genres to comprehend the workings of Global Asia, it offers a genealogical account that lays out key historical moments for the rest of the book.<sup>8</sup> Across these two periods, and as I demonstrate in later chapters on Global Asia itself, what constitutes “the global” also transforms. While “global” might typically refer to how neoliberalism of the late 1970s increased the economic and cultural interconnected coherence of the world (i.e., globalization), I use the term more broadly to refer to the external structuring force of the nation-state, a force that has its own internal logic shaped by imperial histories, as illustrated by the very notion of the post-1945 three-world order. The power dynamics of postcolonial capitalism, the anthology reminds us, do not operate in a vacuum between state and subject. Perceptions of the global also frame the nation.

Following a discussion of the theoretical significance of the anthology for postcolonial literary studies, the first section examines what I describe as the “major anthology.” These were the most prevalent type of anthology in the first phase of postcolonial capitalism, when “the global” was focalized through institutions. These major anthologies published by state agencies and international publishers were wrought with institutional interests, including those of the Singaporean state as it cultivated a nationalized manufacturing economy, UNESCO in its promotion of book development, and the oil and petroleum industry as it sought to promote a socially conscious image. During this period, the anthology emerges as a key literary form for building Singapore's cultural capital for a global audience and as a compromise that performs book development without requiring the cultivation of full-time, professional writers. Postcolonial capitalism, in this instance, operates with an assimilative logic in its attempt to prove Singapore's capacity for modernity and development. As I show, major anthologies of the 1970s and 1980s rely on already existing ordering logics (colonial-era demographic categories of race), established literary values (great authors), and emergent global values (multiculturalism) to make legible the national literary project. Yet, as I illustrate in a discussion of *The Poetry of Singapore* (1985), editors like Edwin Thumboo subtly push back against the imperatives of legibility with an aesthetic of translation.

The next section considers the Asian Values era of the 1990s, a time of increased wealth and improved global reputation, during which the “popular anthology”

proliferates. In this phase of postcolonial capitalism, the “West” (the name used to connote the United States) becomes the face of the global and is understood to be in a culturally binary relation to “Asia.” The relatively inexpensive paperbound popular anthologies that emerged had little publishing support from the state and were mostly funded by private benefactors and independent presses. With a focus on the VJ Times horror anthologies, I show how popular anthologies sought to challenge the respectability politics of Singapore’s attempts to make itself globally legible. Although popular anthologies rarely feature as literarily significant because of their imbrication with genre fiction, I argue that they perform the important nationalist function of cultivating the recognition that one’s fellow Singaporeans can occupy the status of producers of literature. Consequently, I suggest that we understand the Singapore anthology as a generative form. By using the term “generative,” I want to capture not only its denotation of production but also its etymological relation to “generosity.” If we are then to think about the anthology as Singapore’s national form, we see how collaboration, assistance, and goodwill emerge amid a sociopolitical context of intense development.

#### THE NATIONAL LONGING FOR ANTHOLOGICAL FORM

The anthology has deep historical roots and can be found in classical Greek and Chinese literatures. The word *anthology* comes from the Greek for “bouquet,” referring to a collection of poems. Anthologies have since expanded to include any number of genres, but, as Jeffrey R. Di Leo puts it, “the basic notion of an anthology as a *collection* of writings remains the same.”<sup>9</sup> As a genre, the anthology holds an unusual degree of authority because of its historical association with canon formation and preservation. Indeed, the anthology’s relationship to the (English) literary canon is a key factor in distinguishing types of anthologies. According to formal literary definitions, anthologies aim to produce a canon and are thus deemed historical texts, whereas miscellanies and collections emphasize contemporary pieces for entertainment.<sup>10</sup> The “anthology” is generally accepted as the broad umbrella term, and I deploy it here as such. However, that the technical differentiation among anthological subgenres falls along the lines of the text’s ability to preserve the canon reveals the anthology’s conservative politics.<sup>11</sup>

As evidenced by scholarship on racialized or marginalized anglophone literatures, not all anthologies have canonizing aspirations, however, and many in fact seek to unsettle Eurocentric literary values associated with the anthology’s role in preserving the canon. Asian North American, Black, and Indigenous thinkers such as Larissa Lai, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Alice Te Punga Somerville frame the anthology as a crucial site of historical contestation and potential subversion.<sup>12</sup> They also note that the anthology’s formal capacity for diverse representation can potentially unsettle its complicity in reproducing Eurocentric literary values

that are so often associated with the construction of the canon. Critics optimistic about the anthology's political potential see the form as offering community representation. As Te Punga Somerville describes it, anthologies can "create a sense of 'us,'" particularly for writers who have been historically disenfranchised.<sup>13</sup> Considering how anglophone literary values cohere around the production of the liberal, individualized subject, the work of conceptualizing this sense of "us" is no small decolonizing gesture. Anthologies moreover entail "cooperative means of production and multiple authorship," as Barbara Benedict points out, making them "material expressions of a kind of community."<sup>14</sup> As certainly evidenced in the history of Singapore anthologies, we might further add that anthologies often emerge out of and reproduce communal gatherings such as classrooms, readings, and book launches. These theorizations of the anthology from cognate fields to postcolonial studies show how the anthology is a form suited for representing what Benedict Anderson describes as the "imagined community" and thus post-colonial nationalism.

But as some critics such as Colleen Lye and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have countered, the anthology's plural form can also reaffirm a problematic racial politics that relies too heavily on the performance of diverse representation and ultimately flattens difference.<sup>15</sup> These critiques are important reminders that while the anthology's plural form can appear as opposed to Eurocentric literary values, its progressive promise can actually reinscribe some of the dominant ideologies that it seems to oppose.<sup>16</sup> Even though historical contexts of disenfranchisement or dispossession may produce counter-anthologies that challenge Eurocentric literary values and empower marginalized groups, counter-anthologies are not necessarily anti-canon formation. Indeed, as I discuss below, anthologies were crucial for performing a literary canon as a way of asserting national sovereignty and modernity in postcolonial Singapore and Southeast Asia. Counter-anthologies are not inevitably anti-canon, just as anticolonial politics are not indubitably decolonial.

Besides its potential to disturb Eurocentric literary values and its capacity to literarily forge communal relations, the anthology's formal capacity for consolidation also resonates with questions of nation formation, a key mode of inquiry in postcolonial literary studies. Like the novel, the typical object of study for post-colonial literary treatments of the nation, the anthology too offers coherence to difference by bringing together, as Timothy Brennan writes, "an unsettled mixtures of ideas and styles."<sup>17</sup> But what is distinct is how that difference is brought together; rather than through narrative, as with the novel, the anthology binds through editorial decisions and the material form (i.e., printing and binding technology that makes possible the portability of long-form writing). Given how, as Philip Holden points out, Singapore cannot draw on established narrative forms to assert its sovereignty, the anthology's reliance on material infrastructure and editors to engineer a non-narrative-based sense of coherence makes it a strikingly apt form for Singapore when considering its independence was gained through

its split from present-day Malaysia.<sup>18</sup> Such problems of forming national narrative have only been historically complicated by Singapore's transient, multiracial, and multilingual constituency. From the Singaporean context, we begin to see that the nation as novel premise that is so prevalent in postcolonial literary studies relies on an ideal type, in the sociological sense, of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

While I am building a case for why the anthology should be an important form for diversifying understandings of postcoloniality, the anthology also faces the problem of not being considered an aesthetic object in and of itself. Perhaps the anthology evades literary and aesthetic appreciation because editors are rarely held up as creative beings. Although editor status can confer cultural capital and authoritative status on individuals, seldom are anthology editors recognized, celebrated, or studied for the fact that they *are* anthology editors; if anything, the editor's reputation as an author or academic is what lends the editor role any kind of prestige.<sup>20</sup> In highlighting the ways that Albert Wendt is "making things possible" through his editorial labor, Te Punga Somerville implicitly comments on editorial labor as a kind of care work that is undervalued, as often happens with work traditionally associated with the "feminine." The denigration of editorial work as feminized labor is manifested in the literary criticism and its institutions. Endless journalistic and biographical writings offer insight into the creative minds of authors: their habits, their writing practices, their inspirations, and their politics. Degree programs credentialize authors as such. Literary societies exist for the study of authors. While writing, as the act of crafting language into narrative, is indeed an important source of literature, myriad institutions work in concert to reaffirm the patriarchal, capitalist values of individuality at the expense of other kinds of literary labor.

When we recognize editing as "invisible artistry," as the experimental filmmaker Su Friedrich puts it, rather than as correction, other forms and histories of literary practice emerge.<sup>21</sup> Although film and anthology editing differ in significant ways, they both involve the work of careful juxtaposition in order to create effects, whether those juxtapositions involve images, sounds, words, stories, or authors. Engaging the craft of such invisible artistry means both valuing the curatorial work of the editors and looking at the actual text in its new context, as Kristine Kotecki argues: "The process of being excerpted, translated, and arranged into anthologies . . . emphasizes in other ways the political stakes of the poems."<sup>22</sup> The political implications of the anthology, in other words, can also emerge phenomenologically from the effects produced by the texts in their new arrangement, not just the representational politics of contributors' identities or other elements of the paratextual framing.

The curation practice of anthology editors, moreover, is especially resonant with the engineer, an important postcolonial figure that emerged during the decolonization era and one that continues to be celebrated today as the exalted figure of technocratic governance. In postcolonial literary criticism, where the nation

has been treated as a potential liberatory structure, celebrated authors are often valued as revolutionary for their critical role in anticolonial knowledge production. With their abilities to craft language, to inspire, and to imagine new futures, we might say that postcolonial authors are regarded as a kind of literary equivalent of the postcolonial political leader because they share a propensity for narrative and appeal to desires for aesthetic unity. A less romanticized but still significant postcolonial figure is the engineer, as the figure that could solve the *problem* of postcoloniality: substandard material conditions as created by the history of extractive capitalism and when compared to those of the former colonial world. Writing of the Bandung period, Dipesh Chakrabarty points out that the “accent on modernization made the figure of the engineer one of the most eroticized figures of the postcolonial developmental imagination.”<sup>23</sup> Although Lee Kuan Yew was regarded as a charismatic and inspirational leader during the independence era, he is arguably more appreciated as a highly successful social engineer. Even though the terms have changed, the problem-solving engineer still remains an exalted figure, as indicated by local rhetoric and global praise regarding Singapore’s technocratic governance and its ability to shape national outcomes through design and infrastructure.<sup>24</sup> Might we then say that the engineer is one of the most eroticized figures of the postcolonial capitalist imagination and that its corresponding literary figure is the anthology editor? While the editor certainly shares qualities with Claude Lévi-Strauss’s bricoleur, as a figure that recombines preexisting pieces to create something new,<sup>25</sup> the language that celebrates Chandran Nair as an editor of *Singapore Writing* (1977), for example, is the language of engineering insofar as it highlights his role in materializing the anthology, as the person who “worked to get publishers, media and governmental support and acceptance for writers and writing.”<sup>26</sup> The editor, in other words, is a crossover figure, one that navigates both aesthetic and political worlds, instrumental for producing the anthology and, in the Singaporean context, instrumentalized by the state to produce national culture.

In short, the anthology is a significant yet understudied literary form for comprehending postcoloniality, whether because it is a form befitting a postcolonial ethos or because it is a form that is resonant with the questions of postcolonial studies around nationalism or nation formation. As a curated and engineered text, the anthology moreover invites non-narrative perspectives on nation formation. Certainly, anthologies can include narrative forms and prose, but narrative is not necessarily the anthology’s central aesthetic feature; it is but one possible option. While anglophone literary studies already predisposes its critics to narrative forms, in the context of literary theorizations of the nation, the tendency toward narrative and the novel is the consequence of emphasizing the nation as a cultural and epistemological form. Put a little differently, we have seen narrative study as central for understanding how nation and nationalism have become ideologically meaningful. My discussion of Singapore anthologies below thinks through the nation as a sociopolitical form, offering insights into the ways that nationalism

can also be a project of legibility, one seeking to situate itself in a global context. In other words, rather than framing national consolidation as primarily an internal political struggle, my discussion of Singapore anthologies thinks through questions of national consolidation with respect to its changing economic and political dynamic with the world. As I show, these national contexts are both subjected to and responding to the dynamics of the global economy and thus the imperial logics of racial capitalism.

#### MAJOR SINGAPORE ANTHOLOGIES: ISSUES OF BOOK DEVELOPMENT

Like the rest of the newly independent nations of the so-called Third World, developmentalism (or modernization) was the prevailing socioeconomic ideology of postcolonial capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s. As reflected in the rhetoric of the Bandung Conference of 1955, development and modernization were largely regarded as an issue of rights across the Third World, but in terms of policy, different kinds of economic strategies were taken up by postcolonial states. Singapore opted to focus on export-oriented industrialization (i.e., international trade through export of raw materials or manufactured goods). This was a common developmental strategy among the postcolonial Asian nations that would come to be known as the Asian Tigers (Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) and one distinct from Latin American economies, which favored import substitution industrialization. Without the available raw materials, such as the rubber or timber found in Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore's exports were all manufactured commodities such as matches, mosquito coils, fishhooks, and books. As I also discuss in chapter 3, the state's developmental discourse of the manufacturing economy drew on Japanese management techniques that emphasized efficiency, productivity, and teamwork among Singaporeans. During this period, as Jini Kim Watson's work teaches us, Singapore sought to signify the island nation's development through urban modernity and built space.<sup>27</sup>

It is against this background of great socioeconomic change, industrialization, and modernization that Singapore's national literary and aesthetic production began. During this period, the production of anthologies is dominated by state-sponsored publishers and institutions (e.g., Educational Publications Bureau, Federal Publications for the Ministry of Culture, ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information) and international publishers based in Europe (e.g., Heinemann Asia and Times International). According to Nair, this was also a time when presses "were adamantly not interested in publishing local literary output and published only school textbooks and supplementary educational materials."<sup>28</sup> The publishing industry in Singapore was also export oriented as it was attempting to position itself as a publishing hub in the region, which meant publishers from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia sent

materials to Singapore for printing and distribution.<sup>29</sup> The local literature these presses were willing to publish were pieces from the many writing competitions held at the time, as titles such as *Prize-Winning Plays I* (1980) and *Prize Poems: Winning Entries of the First Ministry of Culture Poetry Writing Competition* (1979) make clear. Of course, these writing competitions were not specifically eliciting material for anthologies. Rather, they were used to generate the short-form writing that would later become the composite parts of many early Singapore anthologies. Governmental bodies were the main publishers of anthologies in the 1970s and 1980s because they were also the most financially resourced literary institutions of the time in the context of recent independence. But anthologies need not simply be read as a vacuum of state power. The anthology was very much shaped by the broader developmental imperatives of early postcolonial capitalism in Singapore and the global cultural policies of UNESCO that emphasized so-called book development.

The emergence of the anthology cannot be understood separately from the history of short stories and poetry; that is, the long, anthological form must be understood through the history of its composite parts. As Holden argues, short stories were regarded as a mode of social development and “a form of training for modern national life and citizenship.”<sup>30</sup> Though education is one approach to espousing short stories as a mode of development and a number of early anthologies were indeed published out of creative writing classes, writing competitions helped generate actual material en masse. According to Holden, writing competitions that started with Radio Malaya in 1947 and continued with the Ministry of Culture, Radio Singapore, the National Book Development Council, and others played a significant role in bringing the short-story form into the national consciousness.<sup>31</sup> This mode of generating literary material is well suited to both Singapore’s industrial manufacturing economy and the cultural developmental logics derived from UNESCO.<sup>32</sup> As Sarah Brouillette writes, UNESCO’s 1972 International Book Year was especially influential in promoting ideas of “the book not as an object of portable elite cultural knowledge but instead as an agent of social and economic change in the developing world,” or what is known as “book development.”<sup>33</sup> UNESCO’s influence on Singapore literary production is especially evident in which governmental agencies organized writing competitions: the Ministry of Culture and the National Book Development Council. Such agencies are direct outgrowths of the cultural policy espoused by UNESCO, of which Singapore was a member state from 1965 to 1985.

The abiding belief in the role of literature as a developmental force was not only taken up by state agencies, however; UNESCO’s influence was evident in literary circles as well. As indicated by the proceedings for the 1976 seminar “Developing Creative Writing in Singapore,” for example, participants were given “Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World,” an essay by Philip G. Altbach, a scholar whose research on publishing in the Third World was supported and taken up by

UNESCO.<sup>34</sup> Nair, who would later go on to work for UNESCO, would frequently offer public comments about the need for Singaporeans to “nurture in our society a national consciousness . . . through the media of our literature.”<sup>35</sup> Still, Singapore’s creative writers saw themselves as at odds with the state for, as Holden puts it, “overly rationalized attempts to produce national culture,” and Nair was certainly critical about the industrialized production of Singapore literature at the expense of quality.<sup>36</sup> There was nonetheless ideological consensus between the state and subject, insofar as literature was mutually regarded as an important developmental force. A clear split emerged between the two in terms of the role of national consciousness, however: for the state it is a mode of performing economic development, whereas for writers like Nair it is a mode of developing critical, decolonial faculties. This tension between function and aesthetic taste would be borne out in the decades to follow.

While the push for literary production through writing competitions in Singapore was certainly a response to notions of book development, that such promotion occurred through short-form writing also speaks to the economic context of industrial manufacturing. In his prize-giving speech for the 1986 National Short Story Competition, Ch’ng Jit Koon speculated that the short story was appealing “to Singaporeans who are always in a hurry and often claim they have not much time for reading.”<sup>37</sup> Although Ch’ng was quick to correct the perception that the efficient consumption of short stories did not mean that they were efficiently produced, he closed his speech with a quote from Stephen Vincent Benet, who said the short story is “something that can be read in an hour and remembered for a lifetime.” Though Ch’ng’s remarks on the short story are oversimplified in a way that seems characteristic of a governmental figure, his explanation for the short story’s appeal resonates with earlier assessments made within literary circles. In her paper “The Current State of Creative Writing in Singapore,” Nalla Tan lamented the perception that “poems are not as time consuming as prose to write,” hence the prevalence of poetry over prose.<sup>38</sup> It is striking that both the reader’s and the writer’s time are portrayed as impediments to literary production. Tan also points out that Singaporeans face the perennial problem that “a livelihood from writing is not guaranteed.”<sup>39</sup> When we consider that the 1970s and 1980s were an era with a strong national emphasis on Taylorist forms of production and thus time management, task completion, and efficiency, there’s a way that—rightly or wrongly—short-form writing appeals to those sensibilities. As Ch’ng’s use of the Benet quote emphasizes, short stories are a form of literature that is *manageable* because it is an experience that can be completed within the parameters of a schedule. Moreover, that the writing was generated in competition employs the logic of mass production, which is another way we can see the influence of industrial manufacturing on literary production at the time.

Despite all the writing competitions organized by the state and creative writing programs put on by independent creative writing organizations, such efforts

were not necessarily producing *books* in service of book development. As Brouillette points out, UNESCO forwarded the notion of books, the physical objects of literature, “as agents of cultural and economic development” and, consequently, “UNESCO made the book industries themselves the subject of intense scrutiny and debate.”<sup>40</sup> Book production, then, became a measure of development. A speech by then parliamentary secretary of education Ho Kah Leong at a writer’s workshop in 1983 makes UNESCO’s influence in Singapore’s burgeoning literary scene very clear. Besides the fact that a UNESCO consultant, S. A. Klitgaard, was leading the workshop, the very developmental problem that Ho bemoans is steeped in UNESCO policy thinking: “In 1980, only 44 titles per million persons were published in developing countries as against 500 titles per million persons in developed countries. It is very obvious, then, that in a developing country like ours, there is a real and urgent need to expand and even intensify our book development programmes.”<sup>41</sup> While Ho’s speech shows that his understanding of literature is not solely about its commodity form—he discusses the need to create a local reading culture for children and the need for good writing and editing—his ultimate concern is to be able to make national development legible according to UNESCO metrics.

As indicated by the publication history of major anthologies, oil and petroleum corporations were also major ideological and financial influences on Singapore’s national literary scene.<sup>42</sup> Volumes 1 through 4 of *Prize-Winning Plays*, for example, are listed as part of the “NUS-Shell Short Plays Series.”<sup>43</sup> The oil corporation also sponsored the Shell Literary Series in the mid- to late 1980s, which included texts by prominent Singaporean authors such as Ee Tiang Hong, Simon Tay, Shirley Lim, and Angeline Yap.<sup>44</sup> Shell’s competitor, Esso, was a powerful financial influence, as illustrated by its partnership with the Ministry of Culture for a 1979 short-story competition and its sponsorship of the aforementioned creative writing seminar. Historically, the oil and petroleum industries have played a significant role in Singapore’s economy as a result of its large oil refineries. Undoubtedly, corporate sponsorship of Singapore’s literary efforts was meant to earn these environmentally violent corporations goodwill by portraying some notion of social responsibility and humanitarianism. Although anthologies generated by writing competitions and creative writing seminars appear as especially localized phenomena insofar as they seem shaped by the particularities of local debates and culture, the developmental logics that undergird Singapore’s literary production reveal the influence of the global economy.

As illustrated by *The Poetry of Singapore* (1985), edited by Edwin Thumboo, evincing national culture was about both empowering Singaporeans with a sense of their recently gained identities and demonstrating Singapore’s capacity to keep up with global culture. *The Poetry of Singapore* is distinct as the first locally produced, canon-establishing national anthology published for a readership beyond Singapore. It was commissioned by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and

Information for a series on ASEAN's literary traditions aimed at "enhanc[ing the] consciousness of and sensitivity to each other's literature" and disseminating ASEAN literature "among the ASEAN people and the rest of the world."<sup>45</sup> The hardcover binding and nearly 600-page length of this anthology (five years later, ASEAN published the anthology, *The Fiction of Singapore*, which would total over 1,200 pages) performs the gravitas of the nation in its very material form. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its length, *The Poetry of Singapore* was initially only locally available at the "National Library and its branches, schools, junior colleges and institutions of higher learning."<sup>46</sup> Thus the volume was treated as a pedagogical text, one that required institutional access.<sup>47</sup> The anthology includes original poems in Malay, Chinese, and Tamil and their translations into English. It is organized according to language group and has both the original and translated preface for the non-English sections. Within each language group, authors are listed in chronological order according to the poet's birth year. The language identity categories organizing *The Poetry of Singapore* replicate the colonial-era logic of demography combined with an emphasis on authorship to perform a sense of "great writers." *The Poetry of Singapore* is not quite the national culture of Fanon's thinking, nor is it an example of the counter-anthologies that imagine new liberatory futures for the postcolonial nation that Lai writes of. In fact, because the anthology appears to reflect Singapore's status quo, it might seem rather unremarkable. But as I show, it in fact reflects a national culture anxious to establish itself in a global order, one that signifies an assimilatory logic to the expectation that everyone "in the modern world . . . can, should, will 'have' a nationality," as Benedict Anderson puts it.<sup>48</sup>

As the title alone suggests, *The Poetry of Singapore* is meant to be understood as an authoritative topology of Singapore's national literary tradition. It teaches readers about the many literary and cultural traditions that comprise Singapore's multiracial population, and it also performs the nation's historical stability, modernity, and development. As Thumboo himself remarked, the anthology's presentation of Singapore's racial diversity through linguistic difference is noteworthy, especially when compared to the other anthologies produced in this ASEAN-commissioned series. Also noteworthy is the presentation of English as one of Singapore's national languages.

Each nation had literary elements attracting strong politics. Malaysia would only have Malay writing; work in Chinese, Tamil, and English would be excluded. No Wong Phu Nam, sadly. Both Thailand and the Philippines had Malay writers in their southern parts. Unlike in Malaysia, they were included. For political reasons I asked that the Singapore volumes treat each language separately. Otherwise Malay would have a large beginning and then tail off, small.<sup>49</sup>

Thumboo's comments illustrate his awareness that the volume was asserting a national imagination: that is, asserting a politics of how Singapore should be read by the world. Malaysia's decision to include only Malay traditional texts

and folklore, despite its similar multicultural and multilingual context, is the literary expression of its *bumiputera* (lit. “son of earth” or “son of soil”) policies. Other volumes in the series opted to present oral literature (Indonesia), epics (Philippines), and classical religious texts (Thailand), and they separated English translations into separate volumes. Even while the series was aimed at facilitating cultural exchange within the diverse region, the outward, extraregional glance of the Singapore anthology sets itself apart from its Southeast Asian counterparts.

Unlike the other anthologies in the ASEAN series, *The Poetry of Singapore* forwards a thesis asserting Singapore as modern, bucking the trend of asserting what Étienne Balibar describes as the “myth of national origins” or, as David Lloyd puts it, the “resurgence of atavistic or premodern feelings and practices.”<sup>50</sup> Finding a common source of nationalist origin for Singapore, one that is inclusive of its diverse constituents and distinct enough from neighboring nations, has long been a headache for the state and not a controversy that *The Poetry of Singapore* looks to resolve. In fact, as Thumbo’s post-publication commentary about Malay literary traditions indicates, he was concerned about evenly presenting Singapore’s different literary traditions. This concern, it seems, manifested in selecting poems that were written within the past hundred years, even as the critical introductions to each non-English-language section makes clear that Singaporean poetry emerges from longer historical literary traditions. What are we to make of this major anthological presentation of Singapore through the genre of poetry as multilingual, in translation, recently independent, and driven by the imperative of socioeconomic developmentalism?

We can see the influence of governance in the arrangement and multicultural presentation of Singapore in this edited volume. For one, by organizing the anthology according to racialized language group, *The Poetry of Singapore* draws on the colonial logics of racial taxonomy, which persists in postcolonial Singapore through the CMIO (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other) scheme that racially types every Singaporean at birth. This official racial typing expands to understandings of language, for each group has a corresponding national language: Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. In other words, race and language are formally connected by government policy. The use of the CMIO organizing principle reflects Singapore’s administrative practices while also performing multiculturalism through linguistic difference. As Chua Beng Huat points out, multiculturalism is an instrument of Singaporean state control and one that, we should add, emerges out of Singapore’s colonial history as a port city of trade.<sup>51</sup> Besides acting as an ideological, disciplinary tool of the Singaporean state, multiculturalism follows what Slavoj Žižek has argued is the cultural logic of multinational capitalism. For Žižek, multiculturalism is the celebratory, tolerant view of difference from the perspective of capitalism, a view that “treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, as Jodi Melamed points out, liberal multiculturalism emerged as the official antiracism of the United States in the same period,<sup>53</sup> a value that would

expand along with US empire during the Cold War. In short, multiculturalism is in vogue and has increasing global appeal during this period of state developmentalism. The aesthetics of multiculturalism in *The Poetry of Singapore* therefore articulates with the globalized context in which Singapore's nation formation is materializing. Singapore's export-led industrial economy at this time required the disciplining of citizens into efficient workers as well as the assurance of hospitality to foreign investment and multinational corporations. In other words, Singapore's national culture was shaped by the state with an eye toward building investor confidence. Clearly, Singapore did well in this regard; in 1959, 83 multinational corporations operated in Singapore, a figure that increased to 383 by 1973.<sup>54</sup> As illustrated by a 1980 UNESCO report, "The Cultural Impact of Multinational Corporations in Singapore," Singapore's economic approach was unprecedented:

There appears to be an absence of acrimony and bitterness which characterize the relationship between Latin American countries and the multinational corporations. To put it rather crudely, while the multinational corporation is an ugly word in Latin America, it evokes a different response in South-East Asia. . . . Singapore appears to stand out in South-East Asia as a shining example of how domestic policy may be formulated to accommodate the demands of the multinationals in their search for profits and market shares on a global scale.<sup>55</sup>

Given all this, one could make a claim that the CMIO colonial logic that organizes the anthology and its multicultural appeal demonstrates how Singapore's national imagination in the mid-1980s was still colonized and complicit with the terms of colonial and neocolonial discourse.

But I want to also suggest that we understand anthologies like *The Poetry of Singapore* as operating within the politics of anglophonic legibility, a politics that undergirds Singapore's nationalist project of postcolonial capitalism. As an anthology commissioned and published by ASEAN, an economic and political union between Southeast Asian nation-states, it might not be expected to present what Lloyd describes as nationalism against the state but rather a nationalism acceptable by the state. Put differently, this is a nationalism articulating a respectability politics for the global economy, a politics that is especially evident in the anthology's inclusion of English-language poetry. Certainly, creating an English-speaking population for the global economy is a cornerstone of Singapore's postcolonial capitalist project. In fact, the aforementioned UNESCO report highlights how the state successfully molded Singaporeans to fit corporate needs through English-language education. In other words, English not only marks modern futures for Singapore's inhabitants, but it also has a distinct function of attracting capital. Indeed, Thumbo's introduction to *The Poetry of Singapore* is very clear-eyed about the economic uses of English:

Two cogent reasons lie behind this unique necessity for multilingual representation and translation into English. The first reflects our multi-racial origins; the second,

the imperative to develop the skills and capacities—best realized through English—essential to the viability of a small modern republic. . . . English performs a number of interlocking roles as the primary language of formal education. In addition to being increasingly the chief linguistic bridge between Singaporeans, English, already the language of international and regional contact, is crucial to training manpower for the financial, industrial, technological, and information and service sectors which make up the economy of Singapore.<sup>56</sup>

In this answer to what must surely have been a question about the inclusion of English in an authoritative nationalist text, one can detect something of a defensive tone in Thumboo's writing that anticipates the critique of English as a foreign, colonial, and politically compromised language.<sup>57</sup> Despite this defensiveness, Thumboo's crucial point that English serves "a number of interlocking roles" is precisely why this book relies on an anglophone archive to investigate Global Asia. One could critique Thumboo for his economic rationale regarding the status of English in Singapore for how it echoes some of the state discourse of the time. However, as illustrated by its address to a non-Singaporean reader, Thumboo's introduction, I would argue, is grappling with how to present the Singaporean nation as a sociopolitical form in a medium assumed to present the nation as a cultural or epistemological form, suggesting that the anthology's function of educating citizens is subordinated to its extranational consciousness.

In other words, *The Poetry of Singapore* is less a working through of what consolidation, homogeneous time, or imagined communities look like in the context of newly won sovereignty and more a presentation of national culture that is legible to power outside of the nation-state. That desire to make Singapore legible to the West operates with a historical consciousness of racial capitalism. This is where we read for the logics of postcolonial capitalism. When we treat *The Poetry of Singapore* as a representation of the nation for an audience outside of Singapore and Southeast Asia, the anthology's CMIO arrangement and multicultural aesthetic offer the myth of origins of multiculturalism rather than the prehistory of the nation. As I have pointed out, multiculturalism already has a capitalist appeal. On top of assuring readers of Singapore's ability to consolidate racial difference and a performance of a respectability politics for the global order, *The Poetry of Singapore* effectively presents the image of Singapore as *already* multicultural and thus *already* developed and modern by featuring poets born before the time that multiculturalism appears as a favored political philosophy or official policy in the West. This is not to suggest that the anthology paints a simplistic picture of Singaporeans happily coexisting. Indeed, poems like "My Lion City" by Masuri S. N., "The Beginning" by S. Markasan, "Who Are We" by Tie Ge, and "An Old Church in Malacca" by Zhong Qi grapple with the hardships of Singapore's independence and its national, modernizing project. Nor is an originary claim about multiculturalism in the former colonies a complete myth. Colonial trade routes

helped establish port cities like Singapore, Hong Kong, and Manila, sites that were regarded as polyglot centers of cosmopolitan, urban modernity. Archaeological digs reveal that Singapore was already a port city as early as the fourteenth century.<sup>58</sup> While the anthology does not seek to present Singapore as multicultural since antiquity, we still see that it sets up the conditions to make a claim for emergent power in a global context through its multicultural aesthetic.

Even while the anthology draws on the disciplinary logics of colonial and postcolonial governance to make Singapore legible for the purposes of the global economy, it also has an aesthetic of mediation, one that interrupts a smooth or total concession to economic hegemonies. Thumboo's decision to present Singapore's multicultural modernity through linguistic difference may appear to follow the status quo, but the anthology's calling attention to the role of translation suggests something much more aesthetically and politically deliberate. A Spivakian reading might interpret the anthology's translation of Malay, Tamil, and Chinese poems into English as accommodationist, a political concession to what Minae Mizumura coins the "Age of English."<sup>59</sup> By including the original alongside the translation, itself an aesthetic choice, the anthology nonetheless reminds us that the language we receive as readers is mediated. Such an effect is further amplified by the fact that Thumboo is but one of many people who make the anthology's meaning possible. Masuri S. N., V. T. Arasu, Wong Yoon Wah, and Lee Tzu Pheng, listed as section editors, all authored substantial critical introductions to each section and also presumably contributed their linguistic competency and literary expertise to major editorial decisions. Readers also see the names of translators listed at the end of each poem, serving as another reminder that the text has undergone a process of change. The anthology's paratextual apparatus constantly calls attention to the mediation of meaning, supplementing the use of poetry to depict the nation, which averts the possibility of bringing full legibility to Singapore. As Jahan Ramazani points out, "Poetry, especially in its lyric mode, cannot be adequately studied in translation in the same way that drama, epic, and the novel can be studied within their generic frameworks even when translated into another language."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Arasu's introduction to Tamil poetry notes the impossibility of translation:

A major limiting factor . . . was the need to choose poems that will lend themselves to translation—poems that would still retain a strong flavor of the original when rendered into English. It is admitted that translation is a compromise, an approximation of the original. . . . Many of the beautiful Tamil poems with their singing metres, chiming rhymes and their play on words are too alien to be transmitted through English.<sup>61</sup>

Even as it cedes to the postcolonial capitalist politics of legibility, *The Poetry of Singapore* never quite offers full or direct insight into the inner life of Singapore.

In other words, the volume at once performs legibility *and* illegibility: it offers an aesthetic experience that is also about what cannot be understood.

Even though the English-language poetry in the volume is not mediated by as many linguistic modes, *The Poetry of Singapore* reminds its readers that English will never offer full legibility of Singapore's national culture but only offers partial insights as permitted by its multilingual presentation. The consciousness of partiality acknowledges both the borders of various language communities and the fact that English is part of the larger whole. In its consistent emphasis on how meaning is conveyed and on the limits of that meaning, *The Poetry of Singapore* in fact calls attention to the distance between languages—precisely what translation seeks to overcome. The act of translation is a negotiation of what Spivak describes as the “spacy emptiness between two named historical languages.”<sup>62</sup> In its aesthetic of mediation, *The Poetry of Singapore* offers a literary and historical consciousness of those spaces between languages that can be incorporated into our reading practices. Here Spivak's notion of the reader-as-translator—or the RAT, as she likes to put it—is useful.<sup>63</sup> The RAT in multilingual Singapore is not someone necessarily thinking about how meaning moves between languages but someone who brings to her reading practice a consciousness of the spacy dynamics among languages and an awareness of partiality. The reader as translator, in other words, is someone who is intensely aware of how language is situated, how it is couched, and how it has developed among others. To read as a translator means that we do not simply think through the anglophone as an autonomous, separate world but that we also think through how we feel the textures of the sinophone, Malay, or Tamil in the anglophone.

As a literary form responsive to the economic conditions of the time, established as they were by colonial histories of racial capitalism, anthologies are produced by miming the cultural logics of postcolonial capitalism. The formation of national culture was both an assertion of cultural autonomy and a performance of Singapore's readiness to integrate into the global economy. The emergence of the Singapore anthology builds on the combined effects of the global and local economic contexts of book development and time management for Singapore's burgeoning manufacturing industries. Just as we see the early Singapore anthologies responding to economic ideologies, we also see the kinds of nationalist work they do for UNESCO, ASEAN, and other institutional permutations of the global. Singapore anthologies do different kinds of nationalist work for local and global audiences. Major anthologies did offer readers a sense of a national culture and local identity—the sense of “us” that Te Punga Somerville writes of—while also offering evidence of the nation-state's success in the cultural sphere through its book development. Although *The Poetry of Singapore* demonstrates how anthologies use the terms of colonial and postcolonial governing logics to appeal to the reigning capitalist sensibilities of the time, multilingual and translated anthologies also trouble the possibility of representing Singapore as fully legible.

ASIAN VALUES, THE ASSERTION OF DIFFERENCE,  
AND THE RISE OF POPULAR ANTHOLOGIES

While canon-performing and prize-winning major anthologies edited by well-known Singaporean writers and academics were still proliferating during the Asian Values period, the popular anthology also began to emerge. In contrast to the major anthologies that were published by established institutions, popular anthologies, which were relatively inexpensive, informal, and paperbound, operated by the selection principle of pleasure rather than literary greatness and were published by institutions outside of the state-sanctioned literary system. Within anthology studies, critics typically distinguish between anthologies and miscellanies along the lines of their relationship to history and literary canons. "Miscellanies," Michael F. Suarez explains,

are usually compilations of relatively recent texts designed to suit contemporary tastes; anthologies, in contrast, are generally selections of canonical texts which have a more established history and a greater claim to cultural importance. The miscellany, then, typically celebrates—and indeed constructs—taste, novelty and contemporaneity in assembling a synchronous body of material. It should be distinguished from the anthology, which honours—and perpetuates—the value of historicity and the perdurance of established canons of artistic discrimination in gathering texts recognized for their aesthetic legitimacy.<sup>64</sup>

In its emphasis on pleasure, the popular anthology as I have defined it has much in common with the eighteenth-century anglophone miscellanies that Suarez writes of, but I depart from him in my desire to foreground the institutional conditions of production in a fashion similar to the distinctions made between independent aesthetic productions and the culture industry. In doing so, I mean to also situate understandings of popular anthologies within local and global systems of power, specifically, the economic contexts and power dynamics shaped by the history of imperialism. If we are to take canonicity as the defining feature of anthologies, as it so often is, then compiled literary texts from recently independent nations or disenfranchised groups would be excluded. Primarily defining anthologies in terms of establishment, in other words, does not entirely make sense for contexts in ongoing formation and has the further effect of reproducing notions of historical lag.

While the developmentalism of the decades before cultivated a taste for easily produced and consumed short literary forms by virtue of its producibility and manageability, anthological production during the Asian Values period grew alongside the increasing local appetite for short genre fiction—namely, horror. Anthologies flourished during this period, with 110 published between 1985 and 2000, in contrast to the 40 that were published in the twenty-year span that preceded it. Of these 110 books, roughly 40 were major anthologies and 70 were popular anthologies.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, the proliferation of anthologies and Singaporean

literature more generally can and should be understood as a phenomenon reflecting the wealth and thus new spending power that Singaporeans had accrued. “Singaporeans with more spending power and leisure time,” a 1989 *Straits Times* article declares, “are famished for books set in Singapore, about Singapore and penned by Singaporeans. Singaporean books have come of age. They have at last captured the public imagination.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the article claims, the desire for local literature was a result of an education system that saw a generation of Singaporeans who were “brought up on stories written by Singaporeans.”<sup>67</sup> Although increased wealth and national education undoubtedly produced a reading public amenable to local literature in the ways that the article suggests, these factors cannot fully explain the appeal of genre fiction or anthologies at this time. With a particular focus on the popular anthologies put out by Pugalenthi Sr’s *VJ Times*, I suggest that we see pleasure in national culture emerging during this period. This localized pleasure tracks with the inward-facing, nativist posture of Asian Values but rejects the state developmental imperatives of early postcolonial capitalism (i.e., book development and institutionalized values of what constitutes “the literary”). It is precisely because the anthology as a genre is historically mired in institutional politics that ideological challenges to institutional values emerge from it. Like Lai’s counter-anthologies, popular anthologies “emerge from outside the academy,” but they are not themselves conceptualized as a direct challenge to the major anthologies, nor are they attempting to make legible socially marginalized communities.<sup>68</sup> Rather than try to reclaim the historical time of the nation, these popular anthologies emphasize pleasure in the present and encourage less-established or amateur writers to be received as aesthetic producers. In this way, popular anthologies begin to take a stronger inward orientation compared to the major anthologies. Whatever counterhegemonic politics they enact are oblique.

In contrast to the early years of independence, an era characterized by the desire to demonstrate how Singapore’s industrial modernity was on par with the so-called First World, the later decades of the twentieth century were guided by the assertion of Singapore’s cultural difference and the rise of what is variously referred to as “Confucian capitalism,” “Asian Values,” or “communitarianism.” This assertion, as we will see in chapter 4, is foundational to the neo-orientalist formations of Global Asia. Following the global shift toward neoliberalism, or free-market capitalism, the unprecedented rate of development of the “newly industrialized economies,” “Asian Tiger nations,” or “Asian Miracle nations” of Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Malaysia was viewed as anomalous because of their strong, interventionist states. These “single-party-dominant states, with or without military backing,” Chua writes, “were as glaringly successful economically as they were ruthless in suppressing political dissent on the road to successful national capitalist growth.”<sup>69</sup> While critics point out that states are, in fact, very involved in implementing deregulatory policies, the general narrative put out by Western proponents of the “free market” is that neoliberalism means a receding of the state and hence freedom. Thus, Asian Miracle nations defied the prevailing

economic theories of the time, ones that were rooted in US and Cold War notions of freedom. Rather than revise neoliberal free-market theories, Western intellectuals argued that “high work ethics, education attainment, family and group orientation [that came from] major ‘Asian’ civilization and traditions” explained the economic successes of these exceptional postcolonial Asian nations.<sup>70</sup> The orientalist appeal of explanatory frameworks like Confucian capitalism and Asian Values, Chua argues, coincides historically with the collapse of socialism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe; thus, the Asian Miracle nations would come to replace the socialist world as the new Other to what he describes as globalizing liberal capitalism.<sup>71</sup> Similar theories about Asian American model minorities would also intensify around the same time. In Chua’s account, this Western, culturalist explanation for Asian economic success was quickly appropriated and promoted by a number of Asian politicians and “discursively transformed into a political value and an attitude towards ‘collective’ orientation, which in turn finessed an explanation for the supposed absence of ‘popular demands’ for liberal democracy.”<sup>72</sup> Lee Kuan Yew and other politicians essentialized tenets of Confucianism as “Asian” and deployed Asian Values discourse to fend off human rights critiques of authoritarian Asian states and to maintain the status of economic exceptionalism. In other words, what we see during this period is a turn back to presenting the nation as a cultural and epistemological form using the terms of self-defined orientalism and occidentalism rather than presenting the nation as a sociopolitical form as in the earlier years of independence.

While Asian Values had a representative function on the global stage, it had more of a disciplinary function in the national context of Singapore. The discursive shift to pronounced difference from the West accompanied Singapore’s increasing wealth, economic stability, and improved global reputation. Even though the manufacturing sector was still driving Singapore’s economy at this time, the commodities it was producing—electronics and petrochemicals—had greater global importance in the 1980s. Moreover, as Chua writes, the improved standards of living and increased affluence in 1985 were evident in the “possession of consumer durables . . . at the level of the developed nations,” increased fashion consciousness, more cars, and modern buildings.<sup>73</sup> Although such material improvements and increased consumerism served as evidence of Singapore’s economic success, Singapore and many of the other Asian Miracle nations viewed such excesses as ideologically dangerous. Indeed, Goh Chok Tong delivered a 1988 speech, “Our National Ethic,” that warned against the perils of individualism:

Our society is changing. . . . Singaporeans have become more affluent. We have become more English-educated. We travel widely, read foreign newspapers and journals, listen to BBC and watch American TV programmes. . . . There is a clear shift toward emphasis on self, or individualism. If individualism results in creativity, that is good, but if it translates into a “me first” attitude that is bad for social cohesion and the country. . . . We are concerned because it will determine our national competitiveness, and hence our prosperity and survival as a nation.<sup>74</sup>

As Goh's language reveals, the West is the cultural threat. For the way that such discourse positions itself as a defense against Euro-American neoimperialism, we see a subtle shift in postcolonial capitalism from a motivational, liberatory rhetoric supporting development and industrial modernity to a protective position justifying and maintaining postcolonial capitalism's continuation. Yet even as state figures repudiate the Western cultural influence outright, Singapore's postcolonial capitalism accepts the imperial terms of the global economy. At all times, Singapore's relation to the former imperial powers are still operative in the nation's capitalist formation.

The turn to Asian Values not only articulated with the state's defensive posturing, but it also built on an ongoing national controversy over questions of what constitutes Singaporean identity. State anxieties over a shared national ethos began to heighten in the 1980s when there was a sense that state developmental imperatives were no longer motivating or meaningful among Singaporeans. As asserted by Stephan Ortman, it was during this time that "the government increasingly became aware that economic growth alone cannot be the only basis for Singapore's national identity."<sup>75</sup> The drive to invent a shared national identity was eventually codified in a 1991 parliamentary White Paper known as the Shared Values. According to the paper, the Shared Values were drawn from Confucian ideals and encapsulated by five statements: "Nation before community and society above self; Family as the basic unit of society; Regard and community support for the individual; Consensus instead of contention; Racial and religious harmony."<sup>76</sup> The implementation of the Shared Values came in the form of public education as schools administered civics and moral education lessons. It also involved building on Singapore's bilingual language policies that required that all students learn English, as Singapore's official language, alongside one of their "Mother Tongue" languages (Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil), in order to maintain a sense of cultural heritage. Parents were also asked to help develop a sense of national identity. "All parents," the White Paper declares, "have a responsibility to bring up their children, not just to meet their physical needs, but to prepare them to be good parents and citizens in their turn."<sup>77</sup> Although the Shared Values were seen as something of a corrective to the developmentalism of the years before, the formalization of national identity and ideology was still given an economic justification, as underscored by Goh's point in the aforementioned speech about the need for Singapore to both "prosper" and "survive"—economic success is postcolonial survival in a world shaped by imperialism.

In this context of increased wealth and heightened anxiety over national identity, VJ Times's publications began to take hold and the anthological landscape too began to shift. In many ways, Pugalenthi Sr's VJ Times has much in common with Nair's Woodrose Publications. Both were small presses that sought to bring visibility to Singaporean writers and cultivate a local reading public. Although the two share a common literary ambition, they also have very different relations

to established, national institutions. For one, Nair is himself a celebrated poet in Singapore's literary canon and held a number of positions that would confer literary authority and public visibility on him: Nair's commentary on the importance of national literature appears in the local newspaper archives, and he also made a number of television appearances.<sup>78</sup> Nair is, in other words, a figure of the establishment. In contrast, Pugalenti Sr has little public or archival presence. Despite the major influence that Pugalenti Sr has in shaping Singapore's literary landscape, he only garners a brief critical mention in Koh Tai Ann's *Singapore Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography* (2008), which notes Pugalenti's incredible and bestselling output. The appearances he does make in the archives are often unflattering: a news story about him and his publishing company being banned from the Singapore book fair for not following rules, a news story about his publishing company's aggressive telemarketing, and reports of numerous disputes over salary put to the Ministry of Labour, to name some examples. Methodologically, postcolonial studies has emphasized subaltern histories and perspectives, but what Pugalenti Sr and VJ Times represent in Singapore's literary history is the unseemly and less celebrated. Their anthologies represent a trend toward popular or commercialized literature rather than the formation of aesthetic sophistication. This is not to say that Pugalenti Sr or VJ Times rejected institutionalized literary values wholesale. Rather, they operated within cultures of capitalism to cultivate a national literature and local reading public. In this way, Pugalenti Sr and VJ Times also operate within a similar postcolonial capitalist logic as the state, even though the values they each espouse are somewhat opposed.

The height of VJ Times's anthological production coincides with what Ng Yi-Sheng describes as the 1980s to early 2000s "boom in local horror."<sup>79</sup> While Nair expressed some scorn for popularized literature, VJ Times clearly had no such qualms. Pugalenti Sr edited four volumes of horror anthologies, starting with *Black Powers* (1991). VJ Times would go on to publish a number of single-authored collections as a part of its Nightmare series (1996–2003), including some written by Pugalenti Sr himself. Although horror was already an established popular genre before the 1980s, as Ng points out, its boom during this period is striking for the sheer number of publications, with some even being adapted for local television.

How are we to understand horror's particular appeal at this time? Weihsin Gui notes the growing popularity of noir fiction, a genre adjacent to horror, in the twenty-first-century context of Singaporean writing and argues, "Imagining a grim world where hopes are relentlessly dashed and dark passions unleashed, noir presents a counterpoint to exuberant narratives of 'Asian Rising' while gesturing toward a more just and equitable society that is discernible but not yet achievable."<sup>80</sup> Gui also notes the critical propensity of gothic fiction, which has a shared aesthetic emphasis with horror in terms of affect and atmosphere, to "reject a Euro-American penchant for narrative cohesion and implicitly critique Singapore's biopolitical technologies of social engineering."<sup>81</sup> Certainly, a similar

claim might be made of horror in the 1980s: it served as a counterpoint and challenge to the relentless state developmental discourses of the time. Writing more specifically about the ghost story anthologies from the 1980s and 1990s, Alfian Sa'at, on the other hand, argues that horror speaks to the appeal of Singaporean oral literature: "We tell ghost stories among ourselves not just to scare one another but also to bond. What cannot be explained can at least be narrated, and to be able to narrate in the presence of listeners—some of whom might just believe you—is a kind of reassurance that you are not going mad."<sup>82</sup>

Because a number of the ghost story collections were purported to be compiled from real accounts from ordinary Singaporeans, Alfian further argues that the popular ghost story collections "remove[d] the need for actual face to face transmission, making them accessible to all [and conjured] an imagined community of readers and storytellers."<sup>83</sup> The key point in Alfian's incisive commentary is the significance of how these anthologies position fellow citizens as storytellers because this gives us a different gloss on how to conceptualize imagined communities than is provided in Anderson's original formulation, which theorizes nationalism as a shared *reading* experience. Although the success of horror clearly indicates that there was a shared reading experience, ghost story anthologies also confer authority to Singaporeans for their "particular social networks" and the cultural insights—and warning—that such stories provide. When we further consider how the developmentalism of the previous decades produced a "style of politics on the part of the leaders that could only be called *pedagogical*,"<sup>84</sup> we see how horror anthologies offer new ways of imagining relations of power. What one might describe as pedagogical, others might pejoratively describe as paternalistic. This is certainly the case in Singapore, insofar as the state has always regarded itself as in the position of authority not just in terms of power, but in terms of actual knowledge. Such a vertical model of power and rhetoric was amplified and culturally rationalized during the Asian Values era, when Singapore drew on Confucianism to "support a paternalistic type of authority."<sup>85</sup> Although anthologies pedagogically situated Singaporeans as authoritative sources of knowledge of the supernatural world, these were not stories seeking to develop the reader as a national subject. Instead, they offered an enjoyable reprieve from state paternalism by providing alternative sources of cultural authority.

While Pugalenth Sr's VJ Times cannot be credited with originating the horror boom of the 1980s and 1990s, their active participation in the cultural phenomenon attests to their attempts to build a national literature based on pleasure. In response to Alfian's social media commentary on Singaporean horror stories, Pugalenth Sr writes, "A nation needs pop-literatures that entice and entertain a new generation. And it's from those readers that you will get a group that reads poems and other heavy fiction."<sup>86</sup> Although we might detect a developmental logic in Pugalenth Sr's thinking that popular literature makes possible a readership engaged with "high" forms of literature, he also makes clear the importance of

taking joyful, leisurely pleasure in “low” forms of literature. Such pleasure must be understood as a counterpoint to imperial ideas that cast literature as educational or virtuous as reproduced by state institutions and global institutions like UNESCO. In other words, Pugalenthi Sr forwards the notion that there is pleasure to be taken in literature independent of any institutional function. Of course, as with the correlation between the appeal of short literary forms and Singapore’s burgeoning industrial modernity that I discussed earlier, this pleasure is not unfettered. It is still circumscribed by the working day and enabled by Singapore’s increased wealth. Amid a literary landscape that emphasizes development, international legibility, and literary quality, however, Pugalenthi Sr’s desire to cultivate the reading and writing of literature as a site of national pleasure is notable.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, VJ Times faced some public derision for its literary output. Certainly, one can easily imagine a critique of Pugalenthi Sr as opportunistically taking advantage of a profitable cultural phenomenon, one regarded as superfluous in the context of a burgeoning national literature. Indeed, Kirpal Singh worried that the trend of “ghost stories, sensational stories of one description or another,” was overly prolonged and that he was “not assured that the direction we are taking is altogether wholesome or qualitatively better.”<sup>87</sup> Such trends, Singh argues, were detrimental because they would preclude Singaporean literature from “mak[ing] the kind of international impact it deserves to make.”<sup>88</sup> Regarding the appeal of genre fiction as “indulgence” and in contrast to “worthwhile and wholesome books” by writers such as Suchen Christine Lim and Catherine Lim, Singh calls for “real commitment” from Singaporean writers to “sharpen the focus, to express the deeper anxieties and experiences of a people.”<sup>89</sup> Though he acknowledges that VJ Times’s output is necessary when considering that a “society needs all kinds of books to satisfy different needs and cravings,” it is clear that he subscribes to the idea that national literature must be serious in tone, consequential in impact, and internationally validated.<sup>90</sup> As illustrated by the prefatory material to many of their volumes, Pugalenthi Sr and VJ Times were well aware of such criticisms: “At this juncture, we would like to thank our ardent readers who have supported us throughout our strenuous growth. Though our books were frequently ignored or savaged by jealous critics, this new breed of Singaporean readers have boldly supported our books and our endeavour.”<sup>91</sup> The choice to describe their readers as “bold” is notable for how it suggests a stance that goes against institutionally determined literary values. The conflation of “support” with “purchase” reveals a logic that consumerism can enact some kind of restorative justice—in this case, rectifying VJ Times’s and Pugalenthi Sr’s marginalized statuses—and also reveals postcolonial capitalist logics at work. There is a notable shift in context here, however. Though postcolonial capitalism tends to operate with a consciousness of colonialism mostly understood as foreign power, Pugalenthi Sr locates the colonial structure of power in the nationalized institutions and figures that perpetuate colonially determined literary values.

Pugalanethi Sr's publishing practices openly embrace the relationship between literature and cultures of capitalism. As remarks about VJ Times's prolificacy and participation in Singapore's horror boom suggest, the disdain of what Pugalanethi Sr represents in Singapore's literary scene was often expressed as a problem of sophistication. This is, of course, unsurprising, as literature is so often associated with learnedness, worldliness, and the class marker of leisure time. In this way, we can read the criticisms of Pugalanethi Sr and VJ Times as a symptom of anxiety on the part of institutions and individuals that want to maintain a sense of literature as an autonomous domain, especially because this domain was understood as a mode of proving modern development. The anxiety surrounding maintaining literature as an autonomous site of sophistication was especially evident at the 1993 International Festival of Books and Book Fair, when Pugalanethi Sr was censured for violating the rules. According to newspaper accounts, these violations included "displaying unauthorised posters with special offer prices and comparing them with normal prices," "hawking their books, disturbing neighbouring booths," and "ignor[ing] the organiser's repeated warnings."<sup>92</sup> By promoting their books as desirable commodities rather than aesthetic objects of moral or developmental significance, Pugalanethi Sr and his associates drew attention to the book fair as a site of commerce. Moreover, by using boisterous techniques associated with street vendors, VJ Times essentially undid the association of books with sophistication, revealing books are like any other commodity and subject to economic desire.

In spite of the many volumes of ghost stories and pulp fiction that VJ Times published, it would be unfair to regard Pugalanethi Sr as merely a shrewd businessman or as someone who did not value literariness. His output of anthologies is especially substantial. VJ Times anthologies included not only different kinds of genres but also different levels of experience with literary craft and levels of investment in literature. *Motherland, Vol. 2* (1993), for example, includes a short-story thriller by Eddy Lam Yew Chiang called "Blood Lust" that draws on conventions of horror and detective fiction alongside a poem by Aleric Er called "Yonder" that employs elevated language and plays with spacing to achieve aesthetic effect. Similarly, *The Chrysanthemum Haiku* (1991) combines short thrillers with more abstract or idyllic poetry. In the volume readers can observe different levels of literary aspiration, with some pieces more personal, raw, and even juvenile and others reflecting a writer drawing on or experimenting with different literary and poetic styles. Some of the writers included in the volumes would go on to become noteworthy figures in Singapore's literary scene (e.g., Alvin Pang), while others now have little to do with Singapore literature. Perhaps the authors wrote their pieces on a whim in their youth, or perhaps they were taken by the back matter of a VJ Times volume that invited readers to submit their own pieces for publication.<sup>93</sup> We see in many VJ Times anthologies an assembly of both "high" and "low" literary forms and a compilation of mixed quality (an assessment I am making from

an institutionalized perspective). The VJ Times anthologies, in other words, have what we can describe as a very uneven aesthetic.

The uneven aesthetic of these anthologies at once reflects the economic context in which Singapore literature is evolving and a nationalist ethos of generosity on the part of VJ Times. Already in 1980, a UNESCO development report noted that despite prevailing critiques that Singapore has ignored the arts in favor of economic development, the “cultural life and vitality to be experienced, notably at amateur and community levels, is remarkable for a young rapidly developing and urbanizing society.”<sup>94</sup> Although amateur arts productions were flourishing, the report also noted that there was a real “need to establish a professional dimension to the arts in Singapore.”<sup>95</sup> UNESCO was calling for art practitioners to be remunerated (i.e., the antonym of *amateur* is *professional*), but this call for professionalized arts is also an exhortation to *institutionalize* the arts. Before the internet, the production and dissemination of creative writing, perhaps more than any other art form, required institutional structures. Of course, the professional and material barriers to publishing amateur writing are not unique to Singapore, but writing in the context of a newly independent country poses particular challenges compared to writing in the context of the United States or the United Kingdom, where minoritized writers have some degree of access to established presses and publishers. The problem of publishing access was even more pronounced in Singapore because there were very few periodicals wherein English language creative writing might appear. Cynically, one could accuse VJ Times of taking advantage of Singapore’s lack of a professional writing scene (as some have intimated), but I prefer to view VJ Times’s anthological production as generous; that is, it is an inclusive form that inspires new aesthetic relations, whether literal or metaphorical, and that creates the conditions for local writing to appear during an era when, as Pang explains, “there were hardly any opportunities for publication: no journals, no e-zines.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, as we see throughout the many Singapore-focused volumes dedicated to Singaporean readers, VJ Times sought to remove barriers for fledgling writers and treated the anthology as a generative form in the name of a nationalized literary culture. As the front matter of the *Motherland* series declares, “Through the publication of ‘Window of Singapore’ series and other numerous titles, we have successfully launched more writers and poets than any other publisher in Singapore for the past five years.”<sup>97</sup> The generative possibilities of the Singapore anthology meant forgoing institutionalized literary values.

With their immersion in locality, VJ Times’s popular anthologies articulate a kind of nativist sentiment that turns inward, away from the global, in a similar manner to how the Asian Values narrative also turns away. But this turn away from the global is not of the same kind that we see operating in state discourse. The assertion of Asian Values by the state was still operating within orientalist codes of intelligibility, whereas there is very little evidence that VJ Times was seeking international legibility.<sup>98</sup> The popular anthology instead rejects normative,

respectable ideas of the nation that perform development, modernity, or economic exceptionalism, opting instead for a conceptualization of the nation where Singaporeans take pleasure in each other as aesthetic producers. Those pleasures, the VJ Times popular anthologies insist, need not be restricted to literatures that have been sanctioned by powerful institutions. Indeed, the very content of these popular anthologies are not the kind lauded by Asian Values discourse. In other words, the state's and the popular anthology's turns away from the global are historically synchronized, but they are not in political consensus. Although the marginalized position that VJ Times represents within Singapore's national literary scene might suggest a politics of resistance, its popular anthologies were also operating with the logics of postcolonial capitalism in their reliance on consumerism. The history of Singapore anthologies in this period reveals the ways that the sociopolitical dynamics of postcolonial capitalism produce unexpected literary cultures and relations. In this case, the Asian Values era gave rise to a hyperlocalized cultural and literary phenomenon. Although this would seem to be the natural outcome of a state discourse that emphasizes cultural difference, anthologies offered relief from state developmental imperatives and the aspiration to global legibility.

#### CONCLUSION

After Singapore's post-1997 Global Asia turn, Singapore's anthologies reached new heights. With the exception of the ones given some support by the Singapore National Arts Council, anthologies have by and large been put out by private, independent publishers such as Ethos Books and Epigram. Even though there are more opportunities for individuals to make a living by writing and the global anglophone literary market allows for local and national literatures to gain international repute, the Singapore anthology continues to be both a generative and a generous form. Sing Lit Station, the Singapore Poetry Writing Month, and other such programs produce many anthologies. A number of anthologies also use prompts to generate new writing and thought experiments. Anthologies are also the grounds for transnational collaborations. Besides a number of Singaporean and Malaysian collaborations, there are also ones between Australia and Singapore, Italy and Singapore, Kerala and Singapore, and the Philippines and Singapore.<sup>99</sup> Anthologies not only provide the conditions for amateur writing; they also generate unexpected literary encounters and relations. Rather than frame the anthology as a national declaration of "what we are," the anthologies of the Global Asia period take on more experimental questions such as, "What do we look like in this configuration?"

In this chapter I sought to lay out a brief history of early postcolonial capitalism, the prevailing economic ideologies through which it is expressed, and the changing face of "the global." Postcoloniality, as read through this history of postcolonial

capitalism, is not one homogeneous period. Already at stake before Global Asia were questions about how Singapore should be made legible. In the rest of this book, I investigate similar questions by turning to the contemporary genres of demographic compilations, coming-of-career narratives, and the princess fantasy, which all emerge after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. As I show, the formation and dynamics of Global Asia cannot simply be understood as postcolonial answers to the imperatives of contemporary, global capitalism. Rather, Global Asia also responds to the dynamics of postcolonial capitalism as laid out here.