

Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association

Volume 2010 *Proceedings of the 68th New York State
Communication Association*

Article 11

4-16-2012

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Recommended Citation

Tan, Jasmine E. (2011) "Talking About Motherhood Matters: Articulation of Population Policies through National Day Rally Speeches in Singapore," *Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association*: Vol. 2010, Article 11.
Available at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings/vol2010/iss1/11>

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Talking About Motherhood Matters: Articulation of Population Policies through National Day Rally Speeches in Singapore

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Women's reproductive rights have always been a site of contestation. The central question this paper seeks to answer is how motherhood is constructed through the repetition of population policies by government officials and how this articulation becomes the script through which motherhood is in turn performed. This paper examines the rhetorical construction of what it means to be a mother in Singapore through the analysis of National Day Rally Speeches. Two themes emerged from this analysis: (1) Motherhood is an expensive experience and, (2) Motherhood requires lifestyle changes. By unwittingly painting motherhood as negative experiences, population policies in Singapore could not achieve their goals. Hence, the articulation of population policies should also be considered in order to give women a positive script for performing motherhood.

Past research on women's reproductive rights have looked at population policies regarding abortion, contraceptives and sterilization (Dixon-Mueller, 1993; Hartman, 1987; Woodward, 2003). This paper takes a different angle and looks at women's reproductive rights as performative acts. By examining the articulation of Singapore's population policy through National Day Rally Speeches made by the Prime Minister, which are aimed specifically at increasing population growth in Singapore, the performance of motherhood is emphasized and reinforced in society.

Population policies have an important place in Singapore's public policies because, since 2003, the fertility rate of Singapore has remained relatively low. From 1.24 in 2003, it decreased to 1.05 in 2004 and has since seen no more than 0.94% increase in rates. In 2009, Singapore's fertility rate was 1.09. This is far from the government's ideal replacement level ratio of 2.1 as every family needs at least two children per woman to replace herself and her husband ("Singapore total fertility rate," 2009). The emphasis placed by the Singapore government on articulating population policies brings to the foreground important issues regarding women's reproductive rights in Singapore. Public policies created to target mothers and would-be mothers thus become a contested site upon which women base their performative act as mothers.

One of the challenges of discussing feminism in an Asian context is that many Asian organizations have an ambivalent attitude towards Western liberal feminism and other Western discourse (Bulbeck, 1998; Ramusack, 1999). Western feminism has been viewed as disruptive and alien and, in many ways, poses a challenge to traditional Asian values. Feminists in Asia try to dissociate with the term and prefer to use "women's agenda" or

“woman’s movement” as euphemisms for feminism so as to not be perceived as un-Asian, or worse, having sold out to Western ideals (Roces & Edwards, 2000). Asian women activists thus work around the unwanted label of Western feminism by packaging the term “feminism” within the rhetoric of modernity and nationalism. Roces and Edwards (2000) observed that, “nationalism provides a cover of respectability within its strategic use of the development narrative for women’s interest” (p. 4). The key for Asian feminists is to refocus arguments for advancing women’s status for the sake of the progress of society rather than to promote a Western philosophy. This moves Asian feminist rhetoric into patriotic discourse instead of its previous conception as an anti-male, hegemonic Western ideal. Thus, situating motherhood within patriotic discourse is essential if we are to understand how motherhood is socially constructed in an Asian context. Therefore, using National Day Rally Speeches as text for this research is not only appropriate but critical in furthering our understanding of motherhood in Singapore.

The National Day Rally Speeches in Singapore are equivalent to the State of the Union address in the United States (Tay, 2001). These speeches are annual events and typically given around August 9th, the National Day of Singapore. The event is televised extensively in the local media and serves an important political function in Singapore, which is:

To serve as a media spectacle in the ideological struggle to secure hegemony by maintaining consensus and forging new alliances among classes and social forces in a country whose increasingly global orientations are producing new divisions and complexities that disorganize and reorganize people and how they think of themselves as a nation. (Tan, 2007, p. 293)

These rally speeches also serve as a platform for announcing and justifying major policy changes and often act as a form of closure on controversial issues by issuing the final word on those topics. The rally is the most important speech given by the prime minister in any given year; it allows Singaporeans to take stock of what the government has done over the past year, and to obtain a summary of what to look forward to in the coming year.

These questions are explored in this paper: (1) What are the recurring themes about motherhood that are articulated through the National Day Rally Speeches? and (2) How are women expected to perform their role as mothers in Singapore?

In examining the texts I have chosen, I will first discuss existing literature on women’s reproductive rights and the theoretical framework used in the analysis. I will then provide an overview of women’s agenda and population policies in Singapore.

Reproductive Rights of Women

Radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (1970) in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*, argued against natural reproduction and claimed that nothing fundamental will change for women as long as natural reproduction remains the rule and artificial or assisted reproduction is the exception. She asserts that if natural reproduction continues to be a function of a woman's life, then everything else a woman does will be overshadowed by her need to become a mother. Critics of Firestone's argument found her claim to be without basis because they do not see why women should resent their own child bearing abilities in order to gain access to opportunities that men have.

Rich (1979) further distinguishes motherhood into biological motherhood as "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" (p. 174) and biological motherhood as an institution. Rich differs from Firestone in that she perceives the problem of motherhood to be the patriarchal idea where men control when and how children should be born and raised. Rich argues that the institution of biological motherhood is fortified by rules made by patriarchal society and these rules restrain and constrict her role as a mother to that which is sanctioned by society is problematic. Her suggestion is that women should not give up on their bodies before they have had a chance to use it as they think best.

Cultural feminists argue for a form of motherhood that embraces women's reproductive powers and celebrates women's life-giving capacities as "a paradigm for the ability of people to connect with one another in a caring, supportive relationship" (Tong, 2009, p. 82). In this view, mothering is "any relationship in which one individual nurtures and cares for another" (Jagger, 1983, p. 256). This broad definition of motherhood asserts that one does not need to be a biological mother to be a social mother. However, this definition also diminishes the reproduction capability of women by rendering it as a neutral element in motherhood.

Thus, discussions about reproduction revolve around the topic of choices—whether or not a woman wants to be a mother and how many, if any, children they want. There is an emphasis on reproductive freedom as a goal for all women regardless of cost and "to demand women's reproductive freedom, gender equality, equity and empowerment for its own sake even if it means that women will then have more children" (Balakrishnan, 1999, p. 621).

Dixon-Mueller (1993) states that there are three types of reproductive rights that can be distinguished. The first is freedom to decide how many children to have, when to have them or even whether to have them. Women are given ownership of their bodies by deciding for themselves whether they want to become a mother and, if they do, determine the time in their lives when they prefer to do so. The second right is to give women sufficient information and means to regulate fertility. Women should be educated on the different methods of enhancing or suppressing fertility and medical help should be

available to women so that they can attain the fertility level desired. The third right is to give women control over their bodies by differentiating women's sexual capacity from their reproductive capacity. Sex should not be just a tool to impregnate women because sexual freedom is a separate right accorded to women and agreement to engage in sexual activities should not be taken as consent that women are surrendering their reproductive rights.

Theoretical Framework

Foucault (1995) suggested that a docile body is one which may be subjected, used, transformed and improved. He gave the example of a trained body of military soldiers. Through the use of discipline, persons become war machines. He suggested that although we cannot see power with our naked eyes, we can see the products of power manifested in our lives. Foucault illustrated this by describing how soldiers, who have gone through rigid military training, can be identified through the "signs" of discipline:

The soldier is someone who could be recognized from afar; he bore certain signs: the natural signs of his strength and his courage, the marks, too of his pride; his body is blazon of his strength and valour; and although it is true that he had to learn the profession of arms little by little – generally in actual fighting – movements like marching and attitudes like the bearing of the head belonged for the most part to a bodily rhetoric of honor.
(Foucault, 1995, p. 135)

According to Foucault (1980, 1995), acquiring skills makes one more powerful but at the same time this power subjugates the subject by giving him/her a rigid set of identities to work from. Uncovering the work of how this subjectivity is constructed through power in our everyday lives is a central tenet of Foucauldian thought.

Butler (1993, 1999) furthers Foucault's thoughts on subjugated bodies by stating that bodies do matter as matter. According to Butler (1993), "sex" and "gender" should not be identified as distinct entities because gender is a "regulatory social practice" that conditions the way sex is materialized and that is installed on the body as a repeated stylization of power (p. 6). This intricate relationship between "sex" and "gender" works seamlessly in symmetry through the dominant discourses that are engineered and reinforced in our everyday living. Butler's work mainly focuses on how heterosexuality is performed in "endless repetition" in a bid to constitute the neutrality of sex (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1996). However, I draw on Butler's work to locate power in its articulation of motherhood in public speeches and to show the usefulness of her work in uncovering regulatory and normalizing forces that subjugate women into particular identity categories.

Post-structural theories of subjectivity capture the active process of taking up certain subject positions while they are in the process of becoming, rather than treat them as

fixed beings. According to Weedon (1997), the social structures and processes that shape our subjectivities are located within discursive fields where language, power relations and discourses, and social institutions exist, intersect, and produce competing ways of giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity. Given this dynamic relationship between discourses, power relations, historical experiences and cultural practices, subjectivity is open to reconfiguration because discourses are never closed and fixed and thus create discursive spaces for alternative sense making (Jackson, 2004). The ways in which we perceive ourselves to exist in the world can shift depending on social relations, historical experiences and material conditions. Our world is constantly molded by discursive forces as our unstable subjectivities are shaped by and in turn shapes the world we occupy.

Language then becomes an important vehicle that translates meanings and contributes to the construction of our subjectivities. Weedon called for a poststructural feminism that attends to situated meaning as an effect of language. In this view, the meaning of the subject varies depending on its context. Thus, a subject's meaning is always open to challenge and redefinition as its contexts shifts. Language, while being used to constitute subjectivity, can also provide disruptions within discursive space to provide room for further modifications and redefinitions.

Poststructural feminist theories of subjectivity can thus be productive in explicating the construction of motherhood in a Singapore context. Essentialized versions of the Western notion of reproduction rights of women deny the complexity and plurality of meanings embedded within a Singaporean discourse of motherhood. The Singaporean version of reproductive discourse is made up of a set of complex political, socio-economical and historical relations that produces meaning in its subjects.

Butler (1993) agrees with Simone de Beauvoir (1952) that one is not born a woman; one becomes a woman. Butler (1990) argues that norms formed by dominant discourses keeps the subject coherent and continuous within and among persons having particular identities (e.g., mothers) that are produced by specific power relations. Through repetitions, these illusory origins of gender function as regulatory regimes that keep us within a particular grid of intelligibility by governing and punishing non-normative behavior, displacing us back into the normative discourse (Butler, 1995).

Butler (1990) asserts that identity categories (i.e., race, class, gender) are troublesome because they are unable to fully signify what is excluded and constantly return to disrupt their own meaning. Thus, it becomes necessary to take up identity as provisional, as an "error" or a "mistake" (Butler, 1996, pp. 372-373). Identity categories are not only problematic, they reinforce their stance by a linguistic act of hailing or calling an individual that initiates him or her into subjected status and therefore into a social order of existence. Conformity is the anticipated outcome whereby a "compulsion that regulates gender formation and that governs norms of intelligibility" (Jackson, 2004, p. 677) readily further reinforces subjects' conformed identity.

Through repetition, gender is constantly a performative effect. Butler (1996) distinguishes “gender as performative” from “gender as performance” by stating that no one elects to perform gender but through participation in its performance (performative), we come to express what it means to be identified with particular categories. Therefore, we do not choose our gendered identity but our gender gets produced as we repeat ourselves. Butler (1995, 1996) identified language as the tool through which we come to perform (repetition) an action (gender) that conforms to an established model within a discourse. Language, then, is not the primary vehicle through which we express ourselves, but rather, as social practice, produces the discursive possibilities of performance and thus the “doer” becomes an effect of that language (Jackson, 2004).

Women’s Reproductive Rights in Singapore

Cultural Expectations of an Asian Woman

To identify a set of uniform value in Asia is a futile effort. The term ‘Asia’ is more political in construct than culturally conceived. Besides being a geographic marker, Asia is an oriental imaginary construct by Western societies (Said, 1979). Thus, if you examine those so called Asian values, it becomes difficult to proclaim them as unique only to Asia as, chances are, they are universal values cherished and exalted by non-Asian regions around the world as well. Having said that, ‘Asian values’ have developed over the last thirty years as a political construct to counter the colonial values that were seen as a threat to the “Asian-ness” of the region (Luke, 2002; Purushotam, 2002).

Although there is not one universal set of Asian values, there is a general consensus that family is an important unit, and that the family is the locus of social and financial support and security in times of crisis. Culturally embedded in the narratives that emerge from Southeast Asia are the qualities of:

A strong patriarch-headed and intergenerational family unit, in customs of filial obedience and personal (not state) responsibility for kin and aged, a communitarian rather than individuals ethos, alleged propensities for avoiding rather than engaging in conflict, respect for one’s superiors in family and workplace hierarchies. (Luke, 2002, p. 643)

In Singapore, reproductive rights are subsumed under the family because the family unit is the top priority in one’s life and, by implication, one’s body therefore does not wholly belong to oneself (Chong, 2006; Peterson, 1996; Purushotam, 2002; Tan, 2003, 2007; Teo & Yeoh, 1999). Thus, if the right of the individual is compromised for the good of all, this right is first, and foremost, compromised with respect to the good “of the family” (Purushotam, 2002, p. 342). This location of individual within a family structure has a few implications. First, it is important that an individual is always located within a family unit and be part of a collective, communitarian environment. Second, family work is essentially the work of the homemaker. In a patriarchal family unit, this implies that

women should perform work that contributes to the well-being of the household. Third, men are depended upon as providers insofar as it is assumed that a man's career is given priority and that he receives sufficient support from his family unit to pursue this goal (Purushotam, 2002).

Reinforcing the construct of a patriarchal society, the Prime Minister of Singapore, in the early 1990s, openly endorsed the government's position on expectations of women by stating that:

In a large patriarchal society, minor areas where women are not accorded the same treatment should be expected so long as the welfare of women and of the family is protected. I would not regard them as 'pockets of discrimination' or 'blemishes' but as traditional areas of differential treatment. (Goh, 1993, p. 29)

Purushotam (2002) suggests that Singapore women are a configuration of what he calls 'middle class woman.' He describes Singapore women as "dressed as potential purveyors of change, of upward mobility, or liberation, and even, sometimes of feminism" (Purushotam, 2002, p. 337). However, he argues that this particular breed of women with a modern image is framed by pre-given national interests that need to be defended and protected vehemently.

Motherhood in a patriarchal state is thus a naturalized state of being for women. It implies a set of responsibilities that women inherit as their birth right. Situating women within a family structure creates boundaries for women even as they venture into nontraditional activities such as higher education or gainful employment; there is essentially no activity or reason that can displace women from their mothering responsibilities. In Singapore, this immobility has created a tension that working women face as they seek out gainful employment. To relieve working women of homemaking duties, foreign domestic helpers are hired to take care of what otherwise would be the jobs of women. This creates a dilemma for women in Singapore because they are constantly embroiled in a state of guilt—from wanting to work outside of home, and from transferring their homemaker's role to hired help.

Population Policies of Singapore from 1966 to Present

In 1966, the government launched a national campaign to target population control called "Stop-At-Two" (children) policy with the slogan: "Girl or Boy – Two is enough" (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006). This was the first in a series of government led efforts to achieve demographic ideals that would promote economic growth in the newly independent state (Singapore became independent in 1965). The campaign was successful and saw fertility rates fall from 4.66 in 1965 to 2.1 in 1975 and continued to fall to a low of 1.44 in 1986 (Cheung, 1990; Saw, 1987, 1999).

In 1983, then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, was unhappy with the falling fertility rate because he observed that graduate women got married later and were not contributing to the population numbers of Singapore. In his 1983 National Day address, Lee expressed alarm that women university graduates were averaging 1.65 children while uneducated women were averaging 3.5 children (Tremewan, 1994). Lee determined that social engineering was needed to promote higher birth rates amongst the elites. The results were population policies aimed to achieve three goals (Chan, 2000; Tan, 2003). The first goal was to encourage graduate women to have more children and thus contribute to a new generation of intelligent children. The Graduate Mother Scheme, started in 1984, gave priority to school registration for children whose mothers had obtained education at the tertiary level. This scheme was extremely unpopular and was stopped a year after it started (Bulbeck, 1998). The second governmental goal was to increase the number of marriages amongst graduates, especially the women, in the hopes that they would someday have children. The Social Development Unit (SDU) was set up to organize social activities for graduates to give them an additional outlet for finding a marriage partner. The third goal was aimed at discouraging women with lesser education from having children. Women with educational levels less than the tertiary level were given a ten thousand dollar incentive to sterilize themselves after having two children (Tan, 2003).

The Singapore government continued to use economic incentives as bait to stimulate population growth. In 1987, the government started a campaign to promote a three child policy with a slogan “if one can afford it” (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006). Families would get a \$20,000 tax rebate when the fourth child was born. On April 1, 2001, the government announced the “Baby Bonus” scheme (still in existence) which promised cash grants for the second and third child for the first six years of the child’s life. Despite these attractive monetary incentives, Singapore women were not taking the bait (Leong & Sriramesh, 2006) as evidenced by lethargic fertility rates in Singapore over the last nine years.

The population policy now in place in Singapore is the Baby Bonus Scheme, a set of financial incentives aimed at helping families cope with the rising costs of having and raising a child. The policy states that, for the first and second child born in the family, the child’s parents will get a cash gift of four thousand dollars and for the third and fourth child in the family, the families will get a cash gift of six thousand dollars. In addition, all children born after 17 August 2008 will receive dollar-for-dollar matching from the government for education funds parents save for their children. All these education funds are deposited into special savings accounts called the Child Development Account (CDA). The government matches parent’s savings until the child is six years old and there is a cap, in increasing amounts, applied to each child in the family.

Methodology

The National Day Rally speeches, first delivered in 1966, are given annually. However, I chose speeches from 2001 – 2009 for my analysis because I want to focus on the current population policy in place in Singapore. In 2001, the government came up with the Children Development Co-Savings (Baby Bonus) Scheme, more affectionately known as the Baby Bonus Scheme. This scheme consists of cash and tax incentives given to parents to support their decision to have more children by lightening the financial costs of raising children (MCYS, 2009). This pro-natal policy has been in place for nine years and has shown no sign of going away. In fact, in August 2008, the government has enhanced the policy by extending the financial incentives to benefit more family members. Out of these nine speeches, population issues were discussed extensively in the years 2004 and 2008. The Baby Bonus Scheme was briefly mentioned in a short paragraph in the year 2005.

I did a close reading and detailed notation of the National Day Rally speeches and preliminary broad themes or codes were noted. The speeches were then analyzed for themes, patterns, and categories related to the construction of motherhood by the government. Coding continued until the categories became redundant and themes emerged

Rhetorical Construction of Motherhood

Three categories emerged from close readings of the speeches. The first theme that surfaced is the additional financial burden of having a child. The second theme focused on the tensions between motherhood and work. This second theme is further broken down into two main areas: (1) the role of being a mother is at odds with the role of a working woman and (2) the necessity of finding work-life balance after a woman becomes a mother.

Motherhood and Finances

The cash incentive to entice couples to have children was put in place in the recognition that raising children in Singapore is expensive. In the rally speech of 2004, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong read an email he received from a married woman who had a four-year-old son and was pregnant with twins at the time she penned the email (Lee, 2004). She specifically requested that PM Lee do the following three things to help her family: lower the monthly maid levy fee, allow her husband and her to use more Medisave (a government funded medical insurance) for the Caesarian, and increase the length of her maternity leave period. Her email was particularly chosen by PM Lee to read in the NDP speech of 2004 because he thought it was a very “sensible letter” (Lee, 2004, p. 26). After reading the letter, PM Lee began to trace the care required for a child from the moment s/he was born until s/he became a teenager. He discussed infant care as a gap in the system but countered the issue by announcing that the government would subsidize four hundred dollars a month for couples who wish to put their child in infant

care (Lee, 2004). He also acknowledged that couples needed help to care for their baby by agreeing to assist them in getting hired help through lowered maid levy fees.

PM Lee moved on in his speech to discuss the financial advantages of having more children. He told a story of his friend who had three children and the “economies of scale” the family got from having an “ecosystem” where the children learned from each other and took care of each other (Lee, 2004, p. 24).

In his 2005 speech, PM Lee declared that excess money from the Baby Bonus could be converted to an education fund that would continue to grow with government subsidies till a child reached eighteen years old. The government demonstrated concern about the rising costs of raising children in Singapore by providing financial subsidies to help parents raise their children until they reached adulthood.

Tensions between Motherhood and Work

Motherhood in Conflict with Work. There are several population policies created by the government to help women continue to be gainfully employed while being a mother. In both the 2004 and 2008 speeches, PM Lee advocated that workplaces become friendlier toward women who were pregnant and/or were mothers. He asked companies to be fair to their staff and allow them to take time off to attend to their children whenever the need arose. In 2004, Lee announced that the Civil Service sector would have five-day work week so employees could enjoy the weekend with their families (Lee, 2004).

In 2008, PM Lee publicly applauded employers he knew who allowed women to work from remote locations using technology. These companies gave women the flexibility of working from home. PM Lee strongly advocated for companies to provide a family-friendly work environment that would make it “easier for women to have both, to work and to have children” (Lee, 2008, p. 10).

Another policy put in place to help women balance their roles as homemakers and as productive workers was to decrease the tax rate paid to the government when couples hired helpers to ease the burden of housework. Being a patriarchal society, Singapore women assume the homemaker role while being an active member of the workforce. To cope with the demands of managing both roles, hiring women from other Asian countries to work as helpers in the household has become a common phenomenon. As illustrated from the email from the woman who requested a reduction of maid levy fees, cited by PM Lee in his 2004 rally speech, mothers face the dilemma of having to choose between being gainfully employed or staying home to look after their children. To soothe this tension, foreign women (mostly from Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka) were hired as domestic helpers to take over the role of homemaker while mothers remained active in the workforce.

Motherhood and Work-life Balance. PM Lee encouraged women to maintain a good work-life balance through his speeches. In 2004, he started off by urging married couples to have structured work hours because he believed that working late into the night was a reason why couples were not having children. He gave the example of the United States where employees work very hard during the work week but over the weekends, they partook in volunteer services or spent time with family members (Lee, 2004).

In his 2008 speech, PM Lee shared his personal experience with the audience. He talked about how his mother, who was a lawyer, made time to have lunch with him and his siblings while he was growing up. He recalled that his mother would avoid going out for functions at night and consciously made the choice to take on less work so that she could be at home more often to be with her children (Lee, 2008).

In both his 2004 and 2008 speeches, he concluded by asking the audience to “reorder their priorities in life”(Lee, 2004, p. 28) and to “put emphasis on marriage, on family, [to] make these your priorities, [and] have a full and happy life” (Lee, 2008, p. 12).

In his 2008 speech, Lee shared his insights after he visited several dating agencies. In particular, he highlighted the problem of women in their 30s who were unable to find a mate. He suggested that this was because men in their 30s want women in their 20s (Lee, 2008). Based on his dialogue with those women in their thirties, he concluded that these women had put their career first and had put off having a family till they were in their thirties. He acknowledged that the government did not have a solution for this but he urged single people to hold realistic expectations of their mates. He encouraged single Singaporeans to take a practical approach to dating. According to PM Lee, one should not be carried away by romantic images from movies as models of fruitful relationships. A realistic approach, he concluded, would ultimately lead to more weddings and thus more children for the country (Lee, 2008).

Motherhood as a Performative Act

Being a mother is one of the ways through which women participate in the category of women. However, who a mother is, is a debatable subject. Motherhood might appear to be an identity rooted in biology and could be defined by a particular relationship between a woman and an infant and/or children. However, relying on biological linkages between a woman and her child is insufficient to articulate the range of relations, emotions and actions a woman performs as a mother figure. Motherhood may be taken for granted or even assumed to be “natural” for some but who is allowed to be a mother is strongly contested (Woodward, 2003).

Through the National Day Rally Speeches, the government provided a convincing blueprint for a script of the mothering experience in Singapore. The importance of having children moved from a realm of private decision to a public one by virtue of the economic incentives awarded to couples who made the decision to embark on

parenthood. Although most of these couples might have been thinking of the economic incentives when they made their decision to have a child, the government's involvement in their lives after they had their child is undeniable.

There were two significant themes which emerged from the analysis. The first was that the emphasis on financial aid for parents signified that motherhood is an expensive experience. The second theme was that motherhood required lifestyle changes for women. The changes noted were not always positive and many times it required that women made sacrifices in order to assume their role as primary caregivers to their children.

Motherhood is an Expensive Experience

The Baby Bonus Scheme, the Infant Care Subsidy and discussions about the perks of economies of scale with having more children all pointed towards the high cost of raising a child in Singapore. In trying to compensate for the cost of having and raising children, the government had unwittingly emphasized the financial costs that came along with having children. Furthermore, it suggested that having a child is an expensive experience not just at the time of conception but throughout the child's life until he or she reached adulthood. Even after the medical fees are paid, raising a child had to be subsidized by the government. Besides a child's basic needs, would-be parents needed to consider other costs such as education, provision of care giver should the mother decide to rejoin the work force, and/or the loss of family income should the mother decide to stay home to assume the role as the child's primary caregiver.

Motherhood Required Lifestyle Changes

It was suggested in the speeches that there would be uncertainties in a woman's work life if she wanted to be a mother. The policies prescribed by the government to help women navigate through their roles as mother and worker only served to accentuate the difficulties of shouldering both tasks. The presence of these remedies signified that the work culture in Singapore was opposed to women taking up motherhood—at least enough to warrant state intervention. There was the danger of losing one's job after one got pregnant and even if one was able to keep one's job, there was the danger of not being welcomed back to one's previous employment after a period of maternity leave. In addition, women were uncertain about how to balance work life with their role as homemaker; even with domestic help, there was no guarantee that a woman could successfully meet the demands on her time.

PM Lee's wise words encouraging couples to prioritize family life also suggested that a shift in mindset and a change in priority were necessary in order for one to get married and start a family. This implied that being a mother meant that one had to first be situated within the framework of a heterosexual family order, and second, motherhood required that one had to reorganize one's life to accommodate the changes that came with starting

a family. PM Lee gave the example of how his mother overcame the conflicting demands between work and motherhood by choosing to cut down on socializing at work in order to spend time at home with him and his brothers. This example suggested that motherhood and work need not be in conflict because family took precedence and sacrifices, whenever necessary, would be made. In his speech, there was no mention of his father, who was Prime Minister at that time, making efforts to spend time with him and his siblings. The role of mother as the primary caregiver was assumed and “naturalized.” This assumed role of women as primary caretakers of children implied that motherhood should be given priority over the other roles that women take on.

Through the articulation of various public policies by the state to encourage families to have more children, the identity of what it meant to become a mother in Singapore was constructed. The emphasis on monetary benefits to help parents ease the high cost of conceiving and raising children highlighted the financial burdens that came with having children. Other policies to help women negotiate their work life balance accentuated the difficulties of women rejoining the workforce after they became mothers. The prime minister’s emphasis on having a pragmatic mindset to marriage and having children also revealed the state’s patriarchal roots in situating women, especially mothers, within the family unit.

According to Butler’s theories of subjectivities, an individual’s subjectivity is informed by one’s participation in a particular identity category. Repetition of the subjectivities further reinforces the act of performance until conformity is reached. By framing motherhood in a negative light, the government might have unwittingly led women further away from motherhood, as evidenced by the continued low birth rates in Singapore.

It is important to note that the goal of this paper was not to criticize the government’s efforts aimed at helping and encouraging families to have more children. These policies, especially the Baby Bonus Scheme, have been especially helpful to those families who needed financial incentives to help defray the high cost of raising children in Singapore. However, in terms of meeting the nation’s population goals of encouraging more women to have children, the repetitive articulation of these policies might have done more harm than good in encouraging women to embark on the journey of motherhood.

Teo and Yeoh (1999)’s research claimed that for most women, when a population policy conformed to their plans and decisions, it would be taken advantage of, however, if a policy ran against their desires, they would simply ignore it. In this case, the Baby Bonus Scheme was rewarding women who had already chosen to become mothers. However, its bid to entice women to become a mother through the provision of monetary incentives may not have been as well received.

Analyzing repetitive articulation of public policies by government agents can contribute to our understanding of gendered performances. If gendered roles were indeed

repetitively acted and reinforced by language, then policy makers should be especially careful in the ways in which they craft policy messages because the script which would guide gendered performances could be more important than the policy itself. In this case, motherhood was repeatedly constructed by government officials as a negative process, which ultimately impeded the goal that the government was trying to achieve with these policies.

Conclusion

Moving issues of women's reproductive rights from a personal locale to include articulation of population policies is important because it moves research in this area to include not just the rights of women to decide when they want to have children but also how their role is performed after they choose to become mothers. Future studies should look into points of disruption and resistance within population policies towards state prescribed policies. It is important to understand these disruptions and resistance because only by doing so can we truly understand how women can navigate the tensions created by state enterprise to control women's bodies and thus their reproductive rights. On a more practical level, it will also help in formulating population policies that are sensitive and inclusive to the needs of women.

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