

Land Imagined, Nation Cited/Sited

The National Day Parade sites and their varying conceptions of Land

By

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Abstract

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Singapore's independence was not one that was of the common will of the people and the state. The separation from Malaysia was unexpected – Singapore suddenly found her territorial boundaries re-drawn and as a result, the definition of a perceived national identity had changed. The idea of nationhood is closely tied in with the idea of territorial ground. Yet with independence, Singapore not only became 'a little red dot' derided for her diminutive physical size, there was also the corresponding concern that this lack of a relationship between nation and land would be detrimental to the survival of the country. The state then sought to impose tropes upon topographical ground and made use of this imagined 'land' to compensate for that lack of physical land.

The formation of a national identity was of utmost importance to the state. This in turn was built upon the Singapore story, a state narrative created around the trope of survival and success. This paper is based on the premise that concepts of 'land' contribute to this discourse of the Singapore story.

The National Day Parade was one of the mechanisms for the creation and propagation of this national identity. It is a yearly event calibrated to inspire feelings of national pride in the people and hence essential to the popularisation of the Singapore story which is played out yearly in varying forms. The Parade is an event staged to celebrate and instil a sense of home in the people, yet it has shifted its home several times during its history.

The paper seeks to study three previous Parade sites in relation to the overarching trope of the Singapore story: the Padang, the public housing estates and the National Stadium. These sites beyond being Parade sites, have their own exigent narratives that contribute to the reading of the Singapore story. The Parade sites are used as a lens into the study of the varying attitudes towards the concepts and meanings of 'land' that Singapore as a state and nation possesses. Through a trace of these sites, this paper attempts to study how these re-imaginings of topographical relations builds upon and contributes back to the Singapore story being performed yearly at the National Day Parade.

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Chapter 1 Happy Birthday Singapore



- 1 Recent National Day Parade at the Marina Bay Floating Platform, with the stage built upon the water and the skyline in the background across the Bay

The camera pans across a landscape of tall skyscrapers which have graced many a tourist postcard, familiar sights surrounded by newer ones, the tableau dotted with cranes working on even newer ones. It pulls back to reveal even more iconic buildings surrounding Marina Bay, the historical Fullerton Hotel, the representative Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, the looming Singapore Flyer- all fronting the water's edge at what is the focal point of the new Singapore city centre. The camera then dips to give us a view of a stage, which we realise abuts into the Bay with a backdrop of the afore-mentioned landscape across a body of water. The scene then changes to a close-up of a child, dressed in the national colours of red and white, brandishing a flag in her hand, as the camera pulls wide to reveal the audience members similarly attired, all cheering gustily to the percussion beats and performance emcees' cajoling in the background.¹

A birthday celebration with nine thousand guests gathered. That was the opening sequence from a recent National Day Parade television broadcast, a scene familiar to many, with the sea of red and white spectators and enthusiastic display of national

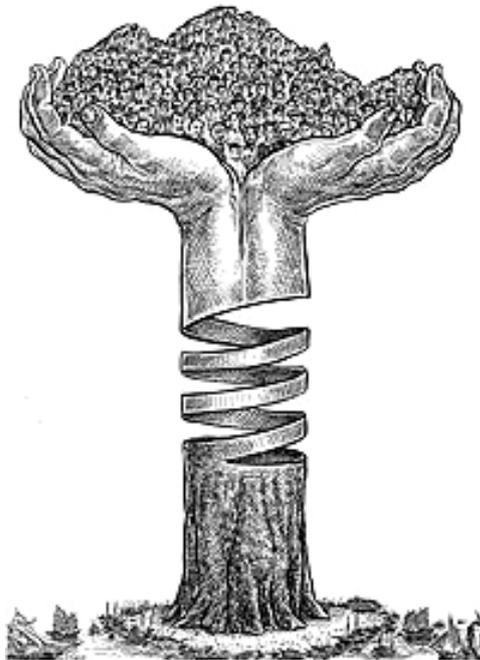
¹ Account written by the author, based on footage of television broadcast of the 2009 National Day Parade held at the Marina Bay Floating Platform

pride. This spectacle has come to be expected of a yearly national event, the largest celebration on the national calendar – the 9th of August.

The National Day Parade is a celebration of Singapore's attainment of nationhood, where the people and leaders come together to celebrate with pomp and pageantry the day of national independence. Yet this independence achieved in 1965 was one which was both unwanted and unexpected. It was this abrupt independence through the separation with Malaysia that caused a shift in territorial boundaries and hence the conception of nationhood as a shared identity with Malaysia, one that had been ingrained in many, would require a shift in perception. No longer did the people have the hinterland of Malaysia at their disposal. No longer could they think of themselves as part of a greater territory. They were left to their own devices. They were isolated. They were alone.

And they had to survive. So marks the birth of the nation of Singapore.

1.1 Parading the Singapore Story



- 2 Illustration of the Singapore tree-island, as suggested by Asad Latiff's reading of playwright Kuo Pao Kun's 'The Silly Little Girl and the Funny Old Tree'

This is a story of a tree,

Long ago, people cut down a tree. Then there was a terrible storm, the river overflowed its banks and carried the tree out. It moved over long stretches of land, but came to a rest before reaching the open sea. When the flood subsided it lay abandoned wilting away.²

The ruthless actions of perpetrators unnamed and the havoc wrecked by unforgiving natural elements. A tree, forced into a corner, desperate. This tree had been decapitated from the ground, removed from its origins. This tree had no name.

The above is how Asad Latif described the fifth scene of local playwright Kuo Pao Kun's *The Silly Little Girl and the Funny Old Tree*, entitled 'Island of the Abandoned Tree'. The metaphor of an uprooted tree, removed from the ground against its will and sent out into the harsh unknown can be seen as a parable of Singapore's coming into independence. It was 1963 when Singapore became part of Malaysia along with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak. It was a mere two years later on the 9th of August 1965, when the same stern statesman associated with that perceived triumph over the colonial rulers had to make a teary announcement about the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.

² 'Asad Latiff, 'Sinking Roots', <http://ourstory.asia1.com.sg/dream/life/ref/roots.html> (accessed 8 September 2011)

‘For me it is a moment of anguish. All my life, my whole adult life, I believed in merger and unity of the two territories.’³

Lee Kuan Yew’s statement encapsulated the emotions involved in this separation. For the people, for the state, the idea of Singapore being a separate entity from Malaysia was a thought that never crossed their minds. Independence was gained not from common will of its people but a forced expulsion from a greater territory. The people of the generation had to sing four national anthems in their lifetime, from British rule, to Japanese occupation, to being a part of Malaysia and now a National Anthem of her own.⁴ The idea of nation had changed with the redrawing of ideological and territorial boundaries and with the final separation from Malaysia, required a rethinking of a relationship that had been taken for granted.

‘Nation’ as argued by numerous scholars is a social construct and is impingent upon the creation of an imagined community. This idea is fundamentally grounded in physical space and the drawing out of an identifiable territory so that the ‘belief in the existence, legitimacy and the inviolability of the entity is reinforced’.⁵ The idea of nation is a resultant of territorial relationship, a sense of belonging to a specific geographically bounded area. The concept of nation often suggests a particular ‘mystical bond between people and place’, and the concept of a wholly Singapore identity belonging to the sovereign state only came to fore after the separation.⁶ That, together with the fact that independence was unexpected and unwanted, goes some

³ Part of Lee Kuan Yew’s speech announcing the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, http://www.scholastic-asia.com/scholastic/images/cc959_4672.pdf (accessed 8 September 2011)

⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First, the Singapore Story: 1965-2000*, (Singapore: Times Publishing Group, 2000) p.756.

⁵ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *The Politics of Landscapes in Singapore: Constructions of Nation*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2003) p.7.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.14.

way in explaining the tenuous link between nation and territory within the context of Singapore's independence.

Likening the metaphor of the uprooted tree to Singapore, there was a sense of desperation about the separation, an anxiety about the economic survival of Singapore without the Malaysian hinterland to support the former's industries. It was more than an empirical decrease in territorial area – it required a rethinking of economic strategies that were crucial to the survival of Singapore. The loss of the larger Malaysian market for Singapore's developing industries, compounded the state leaders' worries on existing domestic woes, particularly high unemployment rates and social problems such as lack of housing and poor education standards. The creation of a national identity was seen as a necessary step before those problems could be solved.

Singapore has had numerous names tagged to it and one metaphor which has often been repeated is 'the little red dot', in reference to its insignificant land area in the region. This label of a little red dot has been perpetuated as a situation wherein Singapore is perceived to be at a disadvantage due her relative size and size-associated vulnerability. It is also a label that is bandied about with much pride, where it is told that Singapore has survived despite the odds stacked against it from the point of forced independence and excelled despite being depicted as such. It is the nexus of the Singapore story, the generative basis of its national identity.

The Singapore story is often termed a success story, beginning with the unexpected independence which 'heralded a painful self-realisation of a uniformed nation, the existential fear of one's self, followed by the Herculean effort to overcome all the

odds, and finally, the achievement of success'.⁷ It is premised on the notion that the present moment of success is hinged upon the efforts of overcoming past difficulties, where this past is selectively amplified to show that it was the triumph over these obstacles that warrants the present fruits of success. It is a teleological and progressive story wherein the present is judged to be better than the past, and a harbinger of a better future to come.

The Singapore story was created around the trope of survival and success. Perhaps one can say that whilst the need for survival played a part in informing the national identity created, the creation of a national identity was also crucial for survival at that point in time. And this story continues, perpetually fluid such that even if one aim was achieved, there would always be another one to follow up upon. The signs that Singapore would survive the devastating separation came, the people rejoiced, then went back to work to ensure that the next pinnacle of success was achieved. This was a story in constant flux, always in the present with a view towards the future. Everything was in service of this trope of progress. National identity was seen as an integral part of moving forward at varying points in history.

The National Day Parade was conceived as one of the mechanisms for the creation of a Singapore national identity alongside the National Anthem and the National Pledge. It has been, since its conception, a finely calibrated event intended to inspire feelings of pride in her people and to showcase to the world what Singapore as a nation is capable of. It is a visually splendid orchestration of a spectacle intended to impress.

⁷ Terence Chong, 'Introduction: The Role of Success in Singapore's National Identity', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010) p.1.

Every sequence in the Parade has thinly veiled intentions behind it, each intended to drum home the point either through the tugging at the heartstrings of nostalgia for a shared past, or the exhilaration at what Singapore as a nation has managed to achieve. It is a celebration of the individual, of the Singaporean, as well as of the collective, that of the people of Singapore. The Singapore story plays out every year, where its evolution continues with the selective inclusion of landmark events, be it at national scale, or of personal success that the nation can collectively take pride in.

If Singapore at the point of independence was likened to an uprooted tree, it then had to grow roots, sink these roots into the ground, and then haul itself up to full height and continue growing. Yet what if this datum of 'ground' is deemed inappropriate or insufficient for the growth of the tree?

The tree had to survive.

1.2 Citing/Siting the Singapore Story

The story of the tree continues,

The thought of death roused the tree to fury. It shook and made waves in the river. It stretched its branches desperately and touched the river bed, and it sprouted leaves that caught the generous nurture of the sun. Its branches, leaves and roots awoke to life. Fish and prawns gathered around them and birds and animals bred by them.⁸

The tree survived and became an island. This island has no name.

The territorial boundaries of Singapore had earlier included that of Malaysia and these boundaries extended beyond that of the physical, and included imagined boundaries of 'nationhood'. Robin Dripps noted that the idea of ground was more than 'physical structure and processes of the earth' and that it possessed metaphorical layers beyond that, layers that were constructed by political, cultural, intellectual forces that came together to form a basis upon which human action and thought could continue acting upon.⁹ Ground, as Dripps defines it, is not a neutral material structure. As such, ground, at the point of separation, held layers that were perhaps seen as antithetical to the creation of wholly Singaporean identity. Ground then, in relation to national identity, perhaps had to be re-imagined.

⁸ Asad Latiff, 'Sinking Roots', <http://ourstory.asia1.com.sg/dream/life/ref/roots.html> (accessed 8 September 2011)

⁹ Robin Dripps, 'Groundwork', Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn (eds), *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories and Strategies*, (New York Routledge, 2005) pp.57-91.

Ray Langenbach in his thesis introduced the term ‘tropography’, a neologism based on the words trope and topography.¹⁰ Whilst tropes refer to words or expressions used in a figurative sense, topography refers to the neutral notation of a place in a way to show the relative positions of the site.¹¹ Taken together, Langenbach proposes that ‘tropography’ suggests a certain linguistic spatialisation or mapping.¹² Seen against Dripps’ definition of ground, where ground suggests a multitude of pre-existent layers built upon a physical understanding of the material reality of ground, the term ‘tropography’ whilst suggesting a basis to the physical reality of ground, goes beyond that. The tropes introduced to the specific topography allows for such physicality to be transcended, where the datum of ground is not necessarily its physical basis. In the context of state discourse, it was crucial that the Singapore identity began from a created ‘ground zero’, which meant that selective events or perspectives were amplified to serve the narrative needs of the new nation. This new ‘imagined community’ did not have the benefit of an extended relationship with the newly bounded topography that was Singapore. With that understanding of national identity being dependent somewhat on a sense of belonging to a particular territory, the formation of a national identity required a re-imagining of what the national landscape connotes.

¹⁰ Ray Langenbach, *Performing the Singapore State: 1988-1995*, (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2003) p.18.

¹¹ Definition of topography and trope, based on the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/topography> and <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trope> (accessed 8 September 2011)

¹² Ray Langenbach, *Performing the Singapore State: 1988-1995*, (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2003) p.18.

Landscape, as suggested by geographers Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, is an embodiment of both the material and the imagined, both topography and trope, and are reflective of the negotiations of power between the state and the people.¹³ Landscape is essentially a social construct. The historical study of landscape is based upon material structures as explained above, yet these physical manifestations can be created and disrupted or destroyed within the context of ideology.¹⁴ This relationship between landscape and national identity is taken as a basis upon which the premise of this dissertation is launched – a study based on the various sites of the yearly National Day Parade.

Previous studies on the National Day Parade have tended to focus on the ritualistic aspect of the Parade as a mechanism for fostering a national identity. The sites of the Parades have only been touched upon briefly and only in the context of how they contribute to the Parade as part of the spectacle, not from the perspective of how these sites, by being part of the Parade, also contribute to the reading of national identity. This paper on the contrary seeks to use the Parade sites as a lens into the varying attitudes towards concepts and meanings of 'land' present within the Singapore context.

Local art critic Lee Weng Choy speaks about how the anxiety of survival was played up by the state during the early years of independence and rationalised with Singapore's

¹³ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *The Politics of Landscapes in Singapore: Constructions of Nation*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2003) pp. 29-50.

¹⁴ Alan R.H. Baker, 'Introduction: on ideology and landscape', Alan R.H. Baker and Gideon Biger (eds), *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.3.

insignificant physical area that was equated with weakness.¹⁵ This anxiety over Singapore being an 'island' contributes to the continuation of the Singapore story, where her diminutive size, and its various repercussions, is seen as counterproductive to a nation built upon the relationship between its citizenry and ground. 'Land' within the context of this paper refers to land imagined, where 'Land' is distinct from ground, wherein 'land' is a concept made up of tropes and ultimately elevated from the physicality of topography even if its generative basis is still based on a material structure. These varying concepts of land can be read as compensatory imaginings on the part of the state with the participative action of the citizens, intended to contribute to the creation and continuation of a national identity.

The opening paragraph of this chapter refers to a recent National Day Parade sited at the Marina Bay Floating Platform, in an area that has been identified as the new city centre of Singapore. Yet it is but the latest of the few locations the Parade has been sited throughout its history. For an event that has been arranged to celebrate and instil a sense of home in the people, it is curious that the parade has no permanent home. The Parade was about contributing to, and building up an image of home, where the term home is an imagined site whereupon emotive connotations for an individual are instilled and used to fuel the Singapore story. Performed every year at the Parade, each site bore significance in augmenting the aspirations of the story. The Padang, the public housing estates and the National Stadium in their capacities as Parade sites contributed in various ways to this performance of the Singapore story. The Parade, in the words of Kuo, is the highest form of political theatre intended to unite the diverse

¹⁵ Lee Weng Choy, 'Citing and Re-Siting' in *Art Journal Vol.60 No.2*, (College Art Association, 2001) pp.24-26.

and uprooted communities of Singapore.¹⁶ In this context, its sites may be likened to stage-sets whereupon tenets of state and nationhood are parlayed to the people. On the contrary, these sites are not neutral. They have their own ‘tropography’ outside of their existence as the yearly Parade sites. They carry varying conceptualisations of ‘land’ and by extension, differing contributions to the idea of national identity. Topographic ground, with all its inherent meanings, has been appropriated by the state for the sake of economic survival to become ‘land’ and veiled in the guise of national identity.

The essay seeks to study these sites in relation to the overarching trope of the Singapore story and about how these sites, beyond their utilisation for the yearly event, have their own exigent narratives that contribute to the reading of the Singapore story. It is not a survey of suitability of the sites as Parade grounds, but rather, through the study of these individual ‘tropographies’, constitutes an attempt to understand of how the various concepts of ‘land’ are integral to the Singapore story.

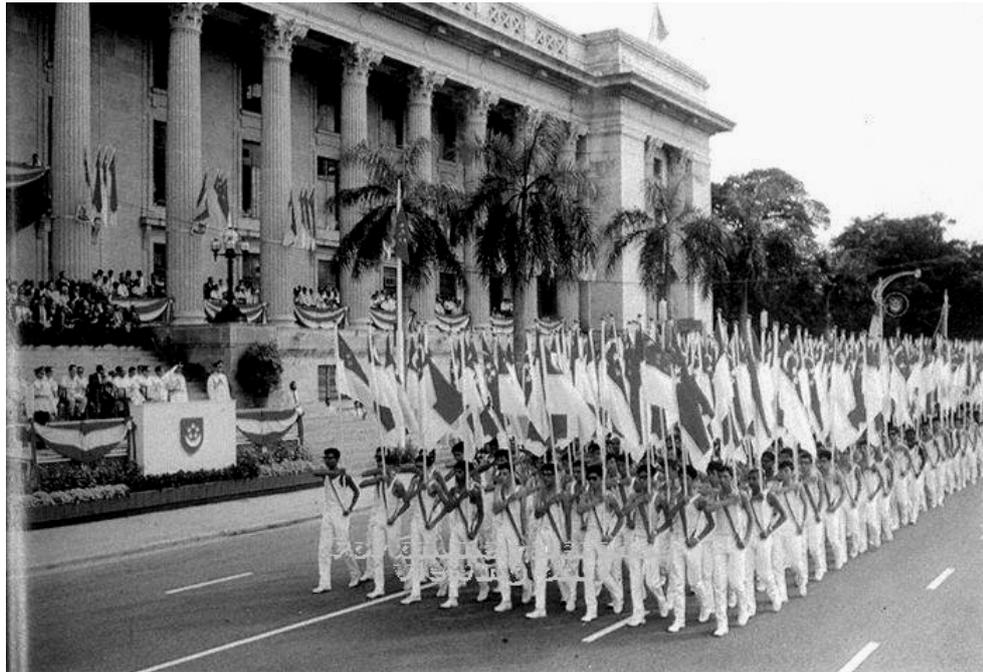
Like the metaphor of an uprooted tree set out at sea, Singapore then had to construct roots in the fluid body of water to anchor itself, to allow its people some semblance of connection with the newly drawn territory. These roots are imaginings of the typical topographical relations of home where in the complicit relationship between people and state, are to compensate for the lack of these typical physical relationships and to alleviate the anxiety created and sustained by the state. What then are these imagined roots in each iteration of the Parade sites and how are they manifested?

¹⁶ John O’Toole & Kate Donelan, *Drama, Culture and Empowerment: The IDEA Dialogues*, (Brisbane: IDEA Publications 1996) pp.164-174.

The uprooted tree had grown to form its own island. The island had to survive.

The island depended on these roots to survive.

Chapter 2 The Padang



- 3 1966 Parade at the Padang - scene of marching contingents passing by the viewing dais upon the steps of City Hall

The camera pans across the expanse of an empty field, settling on the steps of City Hall which are lined with people seated in chairs, fanning themselves with paper booklets, shielding their eyes from the sun, fidgeting about in the heat and humidity with their eyes trained expectantly at a corner of the field. The scene then switches to close-up shots of the audience in attendance and one begins to recognise several faces, familiar to the people as the state's leaders who had been marshalling the newly independent Singapore the past year.¹⁷

The first National Day Parade was celebrated with much fanfare at the Padang, meaning 'field' in the Malay language. The Padang is essentially an open grass field fronted by the City Hall and bound in on both sides by the Supreme Court and Saint Andrew's Cathedral, significant landmarks that had been constructed when Singapore was still a British colony. On both ends of the field stood the Singapore Cricket Club and the Singapore Recreation Club which used the grounds as a playing field for colonial sports such as cricket, lawn bowling, tennis, football and rugby and whose membership was limited to the European and Eurasian communities during colonial rule.¹⁸

¹⁷ Account written by the author, based on footage of television broadcast of the 1965 National Day Parade held at the Padang.

¹⁸ Ananda Rajah, 'Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade', *Our Place in time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999) p.101.

The Padang was a site that held much significance as 'a locus of colonial power and civic pride'.¹⁹ The decision to have the very first Parade celebrating Singapore's independence there was an acknowledgement that when it came to the staging of a spectacle, the role of the landscape was more than a mere 'passive backcloth'.²⁰

¹⁹ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'The Construction of National Identity through the production of ritual and spectacle: An analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore' in *Political Geography Vol.16 No.3*, Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd 1997) p.220.

²⁰ Ibid, p.220.

2.1 Colonial origins



- 4 View of Padang during celebrations, seen with buildings of colonial significance around the periphery of the field.

The typology of the *Padang* has its roots in the *maidan* in Calcutta, India, conceived by the British colonial rulers as a type of artificial lawn and in itself can be read as an accumulation of various town planning and planting precedents in other parts of the British colonies.²¹ Being 'visually and defensively open', the *maidan* in Calcutta was essentially used as a point to survey the colonial town.²² Further, the term *maidan* had its beginnings in ninth-century Persia, and was a mainstay in Islamic cities where it was the name for formal public squares. 'Functions of state power, religion, commerce, education, recreation and commemoration'²³, were arranged around its perimeter and the *maidan* was described as the site for the performance of various imperial spectacles. Architectural historian Lai Chee Kien suggested that the *Padang* form in Singapore, as is in much of British Malaya, was a hybridisation of the Calcutta *maidan* and the historical public square of Islamic cities. Singapore, being a part of British Malaya, had been occupied since 1819 and the British colonial leaders had altered the landscape along the coast for the inclusion of such a field, having identified defensive advantages of a look-out point over the colonial settlement and anchorage area.²⁴

The Padang, having historically been used for military, recreational and ceremonial purposes, was a preliminary interface landscape between the colonial leaders and the local residents. The National Day Parade as a parade typology was not a foreign entity in the context of the Padang. Prior to this, the Padang had been the site of several parades during British rule, such as Empire Day Parades, the Victory Parade after the

²¹ Lai Chee Kien, 'Maidan-Padang-Bay: Reinventions of Urban Fields in Singapore', *1000 Singapores: A model of the Compact City*, (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects 2010) p.170.

²² Ibid, p.170.

²³ Ibid, p.170

²⁴ Ibid, p.171.

end of the second World War and the Queen's Birthday Parade just to name a few.²⁵

These parades were not unique to Singapore for the colonial leaders had various manifestations of such Parades throughout their colonies.

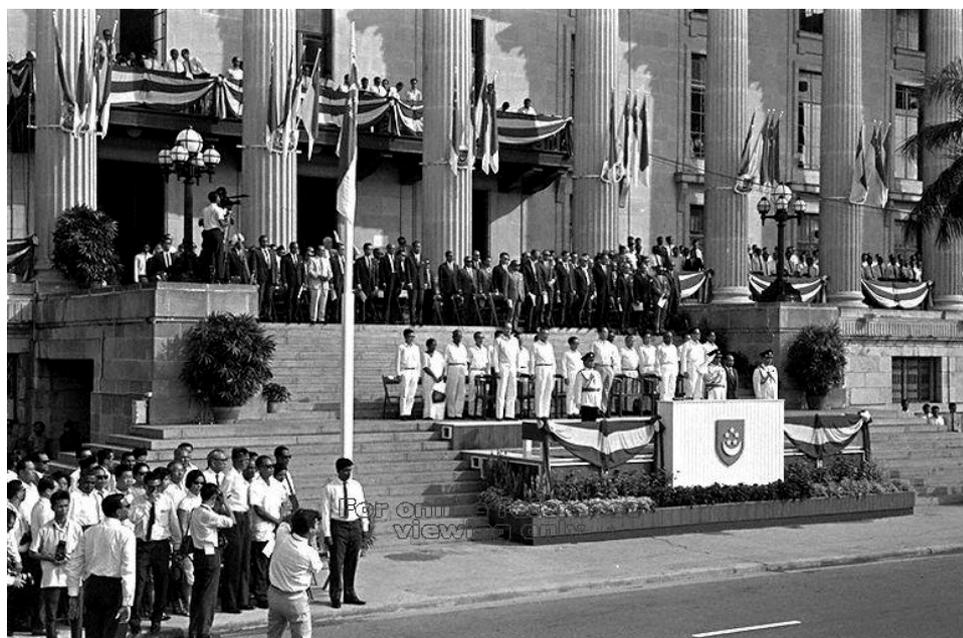
Singapore had gained full independence from its colonial leaders in 1963 by forming the state of Malaysia, something the state leaders had been doggedly pursuing for years, believing that the survival of a Singapore independent of colonial rule depended on being one with Malaya. The abrupt expulsion of Singapore from the entity called Malaysia, meant that contingency plans for survival had to be forged without the backing of Malaysia's resource-rich hinterland. The Padang provided a space through which the National Day Parade could consciously tap into a shared history, even if that bit of history, albeit a colonial past, was one which the state had sought to escape from initially.

²⁵ Ananda Rajah, 'Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade', *Our Place in time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999) p.101.

2.2 Borrowed images, Remade state



5 Images of Power: British and Japanese military leaders walking down City Hall steps after the Signing Ceremony for the surrender of the Japanese at the end of WWII.



6 Images of Power: National Day Parade 1966 at Padang – View of independent Singapore's leaders on the steps of City Hall

At times, the mirror increases a thing's value, at times denies it. Not everything that seems valuable above the mirror maintains its force when mirrored. The twin cities are not equal, because nothing that exists or happens in Valdrada is symmetrical: every face and gesture is answered, from the mirror, by a face and gesture inverted, point by point. The two Valdradas live for each other, their eyes interlocked, but there is no love between them.²⁶

Like Valdrada, the independent Singapore state borrows in kind the image beyond the image surface, where 'land' here is borrowed to be re-imagined and remade in the image of the state. The state in making use of the inscribed meanings behind the landscape that is the Padang was probably aware that this usage invited comparisons with the former colonial state. But whilst the physical landscape remains unchanged, the tropes associated with the site had been altered with intentionally additional meanings.

In borrowing the 'tropography' of the Padang and commodifying it by inserting the new state into a landscape that had long been associated with colonial power, the state leaders had tapped on the evocative powers of the landscape and associated themselves with its inherent meanings. The Padang had become borrowed 'land' where the meanings embedded within its historical associations were extrapolated to cement the position of the new state leaders, fashioning a new self-image for the state. Like the twin cities of Valdrada, the sovereign state of Singapore while seeking to

²⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, (Florida: Harcourt 1978) p.43.

borrow the images associated with power in colonial Singapore, was also conscious of several key differences.

The re-appropriation of the Padang as may also be seen as an attempt at returning the land to the people. The Padang with all its colonial roots and association with state power was a useful tool for state leaders to model their own version of governance, but by borrowing it to create and disseminate a new national identity through the National Day Parade event, it also implied that the people were treated as complicit participants in this new equation of power.

Unlike the earlier heady days of colonial power, the Singapore people of 1966 were not sojourners who came to make their fortune and send the money back to their respective homelands spanning across far-flung geographical boundaries. They were immigrants or descendants of immigrants who had decided to stay and eke out a living. With the separation from Malaysia, this group were now Singapore citizens under a common government that had made the equal treatment of every citizen regardless of race or religion the basis of all their policies.

Whilst the state was against the favouring of specific communities with special rights in the creation of a new national identity, they were not above drawing racial lines if these articulations of difference were intended to foster mutual understanding and tolerance. Although the lines between racial communities in which the population were initially allocated living quarters had been blurred with the progressive urban development following the very initial foundations laid down by Sir Stamford Raffles,²⁷ the legacy of colonial planning still lingered. These land allocation policies were meant

²⁷ Sir Stamford Raffles, a historical figure that had been somewhat mythologised by the state as the founder of Singapore as the port city we know today.

to help new immigrants settle down more easily and be provided help by their compatriots. Yet these policies also laid down a foundation upon which the self-images of latter day Singapore are based upon, where the concept of a multi-racial society is fundamental to the created national identity, where racial differences are embraced and people cautioned that harmonious relations were crucial for the success of the Singapore story. The use of the Padang, a field that had belonged to the European community, to stage an event where the independence of Singapore was celebrated was akin to making use of a symbolic landscape. By appropriating it and by the new associations drawn, it was co-opted as a part of the national identity discourse even if its origins were decidedly colonial and thus antithetical to what the state leaders had once stood for.

The Padang had been a landscape associated with colonial power and the state leaders understood that the Padang was a source of shared history that would aid in structuring the Singapore story as a basis for the creation of a Singapore identity. Yet unlike the administration of colonial Singapore, the state leaders had fashioned themselves to be seen as one with the people. The people despite having their differences highlighted, were reminded that they shared a common identity through the yearly Parade ritual. The image was one of solidarity between the state leaders and the people of differing backgrounds, where the plight of Singapore as an abandoned entity after the separation was one which was shared between the two.

The creation of Malaysia of which Singapore was a part of, was based on the common belief that the territories could function and be ruled by her own people. The expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia meant that independence was gained without

the trigger of nationalism. This phenomenon is, according to sociologist W.E. Willmott, the emergence of the state not as a result of nationalist politics, but rather, the state itself becoming the first major symbol of national identity.²⁸ With that in mind, 'land' in this case is borrowed, where extant meanings and associations with power are extrapolated and used to legitimise the existence of the state before any serious action towards a creation of national identity could be undertaken. The state with independence had come into full ownership of the land as a topographical entity but it had not made 'land' a national entity yet.

²⁸ W.E. Willmott, 'The Emergence of Nationalism', *Management of Success: the moulding of modern Singapore*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 1989) pp.578-598.

2.2 Parading the Borrowed Image



- 7 Aerial View of 1995 Parade at Padang, with the field's periphery surrounded by temporary spectator stands fronting the old colonial edifices, with the skyline of the new City in the background

The camera pans across the steps of the City Hall, where the state leaders are seated, dressed in their party colours of white, presenting an image of solidarity against the edifice of the City Hall. The scene changes to one with an overview of the Padang from above the building, where the periphery of the green field is surrounded by people seated on temporarily erected spectator stands. The camera focuses on the military contingents lined up on the field, sweeping across them to reveal a view of skyscrapers towering in the distance, the foreground framed with buildings of colonial origin.²⁹

In the early years, the format of the Parade was largely military in set-up, with marching contingents carrying the bulk of the programme. The Parade then was by invitation only and guests were seated along the steps of City Hall, with the distinctive neo-classical facade behind them, looking out into the Padang. Military contingents lined up along the field to await the inspection by the head of state. The review of the Parade took on a similar guise to that of colonial times, where the participants were being observed by the state leaders who stood upon the steps of City Hall. Yet inherent in that image is a change in the relationship between the leaders and the people, where this landscape of power now belonged to the nation, which the Parade sought to reinforce.

The Padang holds great significance as a site that has been witness to numerous landmark events in the history of Singapore before and after the independence of

²⁹ Account written by the author, based on footage of television broadcast of the 1984 and 1995 National Day Parade held at the Padang

1965. It has to be noted that even as the state then consciously modelled its self-image after that of the colonial state, the Padang had also been witness to other iterations of state power. The City Hall building had been the site of several changes in power, from the occupation of the Japanese to their surrender to the British, from the independence of Singapore from the British to the merger which would form Malaysia, until the emergence of Singapore as a sovereign state with the expulsion from that ill-fated union. These events taking place in the City Hall meant that the Padang, being an empty field next to several important state buildings which people could congregate upon, was a site where people could witness the changes in power first hand.

‘Land’ in the early years of independence featured in the Singapore story as a crutch to reset ideas and expectations the people would have of the state leaders. It was a device which was used to aid in the propagation of self-image and to legitimise the right of the state leaders to lead the people. The Padang illustrates the state’s attempt to create in the image of the colonial leaders, a version of itself. But this image included that of the people, who by being a part of the national contract, were complicit to this creation of a national identity. Like Valdrada, the independent Singapore state borrows in kind the image beyond the mirror’s surface, yet the actions are not symmetrical for the ends are dissimilar.

The opening paragraph to this section describes a recent Parade at the Padang, which is a recurring site in the history of the National Day Parade. The organisers chose to return to this site every few years despite new sites that could accommodate ever larger audience numbers and better suited for the performance of this yearly spectacle. This version of ‘land’ in recent years of siting the Parade at the Padang was

not so much a continuation of the borrowing of the image of colonial power to legitimise the state but a re-iteration of the beginnings of the Singapore state. The colonial buildings were now framed by the tall skyscrapers of the financial district behind them and the Padang with further land reclamation was now further than ever from the seafront. The Parade now featured spectator stands that were temporarily erected around the periphery of the Padang allowing for more people to partake in the yearly ritual. The Padang may have been borrowed initially to reinforce the image of the state, but this version of 'land' was now playing a very different role in the continued reading of national identity

'Land' here was based upon the borrowing of inscribed landscape meanings in a site that held much connotations of power. Yet as ascribed in the words of geographers Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, even as the National Day Parades drew from the 'historically sedimented symbolic capital' of the landscape, the Parades themselves also inscribe new meanings and perhaps even obscure the old.³⁰ The anxiety over the lack of physical land and the associated economic issues may have prompted the state to legitimise its position in the Singapore story by making use of the Padang's inherent meanings, but with every iteration of the Parade at the Padang, it also served to emphasize a new image of the state and national contract as the Singapore story continued to evolve with time.

³⁰ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'The Construction of National Identity through the production of ritual and spectacle: An analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore' in *Political Geography Vol.16 No.3*, Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd 1997) p.220.

Chapter 3 The Public Housing Estates



- 8 National Day Parade 1975 at Queenstown Sports Complex, in the Queenstown public housing estate, with the familiar tableau of apartment blocks in the background



9 National Day Parade 1975 along the streets in Tiong Bahru public housing estate, with people lining the streets below their block of flats to partake in the celebrations

The scene captures the crowd gathered under the shelter, cheering as they strained their necks to get a view of what was happening on the field where the performers had gathered. It was morning and rain had begun falling, yet the procession of the Parade proceeded unhindered. The tableau then changes to one of people dressed comfortably in shorts and slippers lined along the streets, capturing a scene of a mother carrying her child, peering over the railings of the corridor outside her apartment, their gazes fixed on the scene unfolding on the street below. The image changes to that of a school field with high-rise apartment blocks visible in the background. As the military contingents marched past, the frame includes that of the figure of a state leader standing on the unsheltered viewing dais, as he waves away an officer offering him an umbrella. The festivities continue despite the rain.³¹

The National Day Parade had moved from the Padang to the humble public housing estates. The single grand event was decentralised and broken up into several satellite Parades across several housing estates across the island.

³¹ Account written by the author, based on numerous newspaper articles on the 1975 National Day Parade held at the various public housing estates.

The move and change of the Parade format in 1975 was supposedly to bring it closer to the people by 'invading the spaces of everyday life and transforming ordinary streets into theatres of pomp'.³² By bringing the Parade to the people, it was hoped that more people would be able to be involved in the celebrations first-hand and not merely through the usual television broadcasts.

³² Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'The Construction of National Identity through the production of ritual and spectacle: An analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore' in *Political Geography Vol.16 No.3*, Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd 1997) p.222.

3.1 Homes for the People



10 Newly constructed Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats in Tiong Bahru

Propping our kampong huts on stilts,
Raised over mangroves and lallangs;
Our homes aspired
Now our houses stand
On all floors
Stacks, in columns, towers, across the island
Propping sky and soul
These are not prophecies
They are promises.³³

The Singapore of 1965 faced numerous problems as a newly independent nation and one of the most pressing ones was that of housing shortage. The state leaders identified this and saw the resolution of the housing issue as one of key components to achieving the success sought by the state, framed within the trope of progress in the Singapore story.

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) was started with the explicit mission to solve prevalent housing issues of people living in unhygienic and potentially hazardous environments of slums and squatter settlements. Progress as a nation was thus pinned

³³ Darren Shiau, 'Providence', *No Other City: The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry*, (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2000) p.76.

down to progress from the grassroots level, where the living conditions of the people were to be improved upon as a harbinger for future progress.

The success of the HDB was measured in terms of how fast and efficiently it could provide new units of public housing. It was seen as essential in the overall state vision that housing, be one of the first issues resolved as it was recognised that Singapore's only resource was her people and the unit of the familial home was to form the basis of social stability. Ideologically, it was hoped that expanded property ownership would result in the populace developing a personal stake in the survival and progress of Singapore. Increased home ownership was seen as a key factor in ensuring political and social stability with a shared basis of home, essential for economic growth and the subsequent fulfilment of the progress promised – all framed within the main theme of survival of those early years of independence. The portrayal of the newer HDB housing estates against the negative qualities of the *kampong* (Malay for village) and the associated lifestyles they had replaced, contributed substantially to this trope of progress. Hence the notion of being the owner of one's own home was seen as indispensable to a country that had economic and social ambitions.

While home ownership led to a considerable improvement in the quality of life as promised and fulfilled by the state, it also effectively raised costs of living and this subsequently meant that home owners had to contribute more actively to the workforce. In the words of sociologist Chua Beng Huat, public housing was a very

important factor in the pragmatism practised by the state in its economic agenda to 'speed up the population's transformations into a disciplined workforce'.³⁴

With a large percentage of the citizens owning their own homes and forming familial units in these public housing estates, the public housing system effectively became a conduit through which suitable values of family and community were inculcated in the populace. Whilst this may be seen as a discreet form of social control to gradually transform the behaviour of population to improve the quality of the workforce, it would not have been possible without the complicity of the people residing in these flats. It was one thing to displace these people from their villages into a new environment that expects a particular quality of behaviour, but another to have them abide by it and as a consequence, contribute to the fulfilment of the promise. And it is this reciprocal reaction that creates the 'heartland', suggesting a certain primordial quality upon which the nation could take root and flourish.

³⁴ Chua Beng Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing:Stakeholding in Singapore*, (New York: Routledge, 1997)

3.2 The Heartland created

Perhaps I, alone, can't take on a large task,

But I can work hard and contribute a decent effort.

Perhaps I, alone, can't shine brightly,

But I can contribute some light.

I have never really taken it to heart,

Because being average is also a blessing.

Looking at capable people hurrying about,

My time is within my control.

An average life is also a well-lived life.³⁵

To work hard, to put in effort. To work well with others and not yearn for individual glory. The story of a simple man living an average life.

These are part of the lyrics of a song performed yearly by the choir during the Parade, a song which tune is popularised and a mainstay of the National Day Parade's choir repertoire. The lyrics paint a picture of an average Singaporean, an image of what former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong would term 'heartlander'. This average

³⁵ A song written in the 80s for a popular local Chinese television drama and has since then become a part of the repertoire of National Day Parade songs.

<http://eservice.nlb.gov.sg/opencmscontent.aspx?id=78d14334-fb77-42a2-aaa2-34ad9cb61e6d>
(accessed 8th September 2011)

Lyrics as translated from Chinese by author, as affixed in Appendix I.

Singaporean refers to the individual residing in one of the units that made up the prevalent public housing landscape, one of nearly ninety percent of the population.

The term 'heartland' was coined by Goh and brought into popular discourse in his 1999 National Day Rally speech. Goh had in that particular speech divided Singaporeans into two generic groups, the 'heartlanders' and the 'cosmopolitans'. The former referred to Singaporeans supposedly rooted to the locale and the latter to those globally mobile. Underlying his broad categorisations of types of Singaporeans were values pegged to each one. The 'heartlander' is presumed to be the one who is hardworking and sincere, playing the role of 'maintaining our core values and our social responsibility' and painting a picture of the working class as being loyal and rooted to the nation.³⁶

'Heartland' having the root words of 'heart' and 'land', suggest a degree of emotional attachment to this public housing landscape. This landscape of high-rise apartment blocks, seemingly homogenously produced and replicated to fulfil the mission of the HDB in the early years, appear to be anonymous towers of dense living. Yet when broken down, these towers are composed of multiple units of families stacked upon one another, with vertical living achieving density of living and compensating for the perceived lack of land. If the Padang was a borrowing of inscribed landscape meanings to propagate a new image of nation, the creation of the 'heartland' was a creation of a brand new landscape and by this, imposing new ways of living on the people to create a new nation, where the people and the abilities developed were to form the bedrock of the Singapore story. The creation of the 'heartland' semantically was a conjoining of

³⁶ Terence Chong, 'Fluid Nation: The Perpetual 'Renovation' of Nation and National Identities in Singapore', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010) p.514.

the word 'heart' to 'land' and when read against the backdrop of the nation's anxiety over the perceived lack of physical land and the assumed dichotomy of nationhood depending on the links between the imagined community of nation and land, 'heart' was seemingly treated as a compensatory term. It seems to suggest that the typical Singapore landscape of home is only complete when the people form some emotional attachment to their volume of living on a particular floor and by extension their particular apartment block and furthering that, the particular neighbourhood.

Yi-Fu Tuan introduced the idea of rootedness as historically being one which is objectively defined as a prolonged habituation at one location and subjectively defined as a state of being made possible by a disinterest in the outside world and a lack of sensitivity towards the passing of time.³⁷ Seen in context of a newly independent Singapore where the people not only had to overcome their early allegiances to the union of Malaysia and be made aware of the ethnic differences amongst them, many also had to cope with the move to these newly-built public housing estates, accept and embrace a new way of living and a quality of life that the state had deemed desirable in its blueprint of progress.

The Singapore story's inbuilt trope for progress runs antithetical to the idea of rootedness. Yet in the construction of a national identity, the aim of creating a 'rooted people', so to speak, is the ultimate goal. Rootedness in this case is not a situation dependent upon a prolonged historical association to a particular physical landscape.

Tuan forwarded another point of view that rootedness could instead be about a state of mind in which to acquire 'a sense of extended time and genealogical depth, it may

³⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Rootedness Versus Sense of Place', Nigel Thrift and Sarah Whitmore (eds), *Cultural Geography: Critical concepts in social sciences*, (New York : Routledge, 2004) pp.263-271.

be necessary only to live in the house that one's grandfather had built'.³⁸ With the provision of public housing, the state had become the erstwhile 'grandfather' that had created a framework and opportunities for the people to construct their own versions of home. In this sense, it was not so much the physicality of living in the house that one's grandfather had built, but building upon the relationships attached to that physical space.

The physical reality of the heartland was a promise made by the state and in the fulfilment of it, created a physical framework of empty stacked volumes of living space within which the populace was placed and expectations placed upon them. With the accompanying economic constraints created by the promised improvement in standards of living, the populace had every incentive to contribute actively to the workforce and to emulate the qualities expected of a productive workforce. The housing estates were initially a new ahistorical landscape created for the populace. In time, these estates stood for familial and communal networks that transcended the anonymity of the repetitive blocks of flats.

³⁸ Ibid.

3.3 Parading the Heartland

The 'heartland' is an essential part of the lives of the average Singaporean. In selecting to base the Parades in these supposed spaces of everyday life, it was a deliberate juxtaposition of a decidedly national spectacle emphasizing the idea of home as one that was shared, against the most basic domestic unit in the landscape of public housing estates. It was an opportunity for the people to congregate on the streets or selected venues near their high-rise apartment blocks and participate in the roving revelry, everyone celebrating a sense of nationhood that had come right into their own neighbourhoods. It was also an attempt at allowing more people to have a stake in participating in one of the most important events on the national calendar.

The scaled down yearly spectacle meant that it could include more people in the management and consumption of the celebration. Each scaled down Parade was scheduled for different times throughout the day with various state leaders in attendance at each venue. This participation at a more intimate scale with the appropriate humility and solidarity with the people is ascribed in the scene opening paragraph, where then Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam declined the umbrella offered by an aide, choosing instead to brave the drizzle along with the participants. It suggested that rank and file were put aside as the mechanisms of the yearly Parade were taken apart and re-appropriated in a scale commensurate to that of the 'heartland'.

The Parade was to be held exclusively decentralised every other year until 1984. While it is to be noted that prior to the 1975 Parade, the marching contingents made up of the military and grassroots organisations had continued their marching procession into various neighbourhoods after the main event at the Padang, the 1975 Parade marked the first of five times that the event was to be entirely decentralised. The HDB had been billed a resounding success by then. The ubiquitous concrete slab-block had become the image of the typical Singapore home – there was no need to borrow upon images of the past, for there was now one that was created by the state and endorsed by the people.

The motif of continuous high-rise apartment blocks found in close proximity is an image associated with the idea of home in Singapore. To have the Parade traverse this landscape is akin to acknowledging the critical mass these public housing estates hold in the creation of a national identity. The ‘heartland’ is the fertile ‘land’ upon which the Singapore nation was to take root and whereupon the creation of a national identity is based. Yet this ‘land’ refers not to physicality of the housing blocks. If having the Parade at the Padang was indicative of the state borrowing inscribed meanings inherent in a landscape of colonial power to legitimise its own, then the siting of the Parade within the public housing estates reflects a different instance of ‘land’ contributing to the reading of national identity.

‘Land’ here is a metaphorical construct based upon the inherent relations of the Singapore version of home in the public housing estates. While these form what is seen as a national landscape, the notion of ‘land’ here is one that is made up of the repository of the emotional connotations of home and made to grow over time along

with the continued progress of the Singapore story. The lack of physical land may have been a trigger for the construction of dense vertical living, but this is not what compensated for the anxiety over the land-nation dichotomy. Instead, the 'heartland' created is what provides a basis for the growth of the people, a crucial pillar for the continued progress of the Singapore story.

Chapter 4 The National Stadium



11 Aerial view of National Stadium during the National Day Parade 1985



12 The mass of spectators in the stands cheering on the marching contingent, National Day Parade 1985

The scene is taken from a helicopter hovering above the stadium. Seen from such a height, the scene takes in the relatively calm surrounding landscape, the stadium but an insignificant blob with some signs of activity going on within. The voiceover continues as the scene changes to show a close-up of a soldier standing in the field. The camera pulls back, to reveal the faces of his fellow soldiers, then the other military contingents, then the massive wall of red and white dots in the background. As a crest of singing by the choir begins, the camera begins to pan over the audience. The wall of dots earlier now had faces to them, and as the camera zooms in, they are seen singing along and waving their miniature national flags. The camera focuses on a little girl, a stick-on tattoo of the flag on her right cheek.³⁹

The National Stadium first played host to the National Day Parade in 1976, three years after its completion. Capable of seating 60,000 people as compared to the 20,000 at the Padang, the National Stadium was able to accommodate the large crowds deemed necessary for the yearly spectacle to be a success, in light of the Parade being intended

³⁹ Commentary by the author, of a typical National Day Parade at the National Stadium. Based on footage of television broadcast of 1985, 1988 and 1992 Parades.

to 'demonstrate consensus and civic solidarity'.⁴⁰ This move to the National Stadium as a centralised location for the Parade indicated the organiser's desire to increase the number of spectators and the pride in having a new national structure.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'The Construction of National Identity through the production of ritual and spectacle: An analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore' in *Political Geography Vol.16 No.3*, Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd 1997) p.222.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.222.

4.1 Theatre of Dreams

The idea to build a National Stadium was conceived in the 1950s and mooted in the mid-1960s, amidst what was described as a ‘process of restoration, an effort to reorganise ourselves, a push towards rebuilding’, in the aftermath of the separation from Malaysia, when Singapore ‘had to create dreams and fulfil them’.⁴² The National Stadium belonged to an era which saw the construction of national icons such as the National Theatre and the Singapore Conference Hall, where such built structures served a greater ideological purpose of instilling a sense of pride in the people by having something iconic they could call their own. The National Stadium was lobbied for after Singapore’s independence and only completed in 1973. The desire for a National Stadium was reflective of the zeitgeist of the time, as described in the words of then Minister for Social Affairs Othman Wok, ‘We are a nation of predominantly young people. Young and growing people must have the facilities to develop their bodies and minds’.⁴³ For a Singapore that had just emerged from an unwanted independence and focused on survival, the anxiety over the perceived lack of land and natural resources necessitated the view that the populace was crucial to achieving the state vision of progress. The people would form the workforce and as the only natural resource Singapore had to bank on for achievement of that vision, the development of the individual was seen to be of utmost priority in line with the Singapore story’s trope of progress.

⁴² Godfrey Roberts, *The Dream Lives On*, (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2008)

⁴³ Ibid.

The National Stadium in its sheer capacity ensured that many more people would be able to bear witness to the yearly Parades in person rather than from the relatively more impersonal television broadcasts. It was able to create through its excess of space, convergence of people and technological sophistication⁴⁴ a version of occasion and ceremony that was based on its own merits rather than borrowing upon historical meanings as the Parade at the Padang had done.

The Stadium was envisioned to be the centrepiece of an entire series of programmes and facilities built to further the aim of 'sports for all'. Rather than focusing on the chase for sporting glory, the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle was what was emphasized as more important to the young nation then. However, more than being a mere representation of a way of life that the state was actively encouraging, the stadium through its imposing form, also embedded the aspirations of a people. It was here in the Stadium that numerous competitions were held, where people competed against one another for the glory of a winner's podium. It was here that crowds gathered to witness their fellow countrymen competing for the country, cheering for the same men together regardless of disparity in their backgrounds. It was here that the 'Kallang Roar' was born.

⁴⁴ Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'The Construction of National Identity through the production of ritual and spectacle: An analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore' in *Political Geography Vol.16 No.3*, Great Britain: Elsevier Science Ltd 1997) p.223.

4.2 Aspirations Performed



13 Spectators cheering, National Day Parade 1991 at the National Stadium



14 Closer view of spectators cheering, National Day Parade 1991 at the National Stadium

The National Stadium, other than the National Day Parade once a year from 1976, was also the site of at least one Malaysia Cup football game every ten days from the late 1970s till the early 1990s. Football was a highly popular sport then and the intense rivalry between Singapore and the various Malaysian state teams meant that tickets to the games were hard to come by and the National Stadium's stands were packed for every game the Singapore team played at home.

The Stadium allowed for the convergence of a massive number of people in the spectator stands. The mass supporters contributed actively to the competitive field – the people's cheers, in football speak, constituted the twelfth man on the playing field. The Stadium bore witness to the creation of the eponymous 'Kallang Roar' which had been described as "(it) silenced everything else (a)nd its echoes resonated with a young nation's spirit and sentiment; that of facing challenges and overcoming adversity with the night of togetherness".⁴⁵

Geographer Tim Edensor noted that sport was one of the most powerful forms of national performance, where by being situated in the everyday by forms of practice, media and culture, it had the ability to galvanise large groups of people.⁴⁶ The games brought people together to not be mere spectators but made them feel as if they were invested in the outcome. It allowed for people to bond across disparate backgrounds and ethnic differences. The spectators shared the sporting aspirations of these athletes, seeing them as being one of the crowd and by extension, sharing the same aspirations of victory for the nation.

⁴⁵ Godfrey Roberts, *The Dream Lives On*, (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2008)

⁴⁶ Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002) p.78.

The Stadium was a venue that allowed for such collective memories. It was a structure built during the nationalistic milieu that was to become a site that witnessed numerous landmark events. This was a landscape that was created from the collective, a site which echoed with the loudly expressed aspirations of the crowd, a space that went above and beyond a mere physical structure for 60,000 spectators.

The 'Kallang Roar' was a performative element associated with the trope of the National Stadium outside its usage as a Parade site. If the Padang was a borrowed colonial landscape and the public housing estates the creation of a 'heartland', the National Stadium stood for the creation of a landscape that depended upon the performative aspirations of the people to exist meaningfully.

Edensor notes that spaces are produced by performers as sites of importance and that the relationship between performer and site is a reciprocal one.⁴⁷ The National Stadium was not a landscape of national significance that was built out of steel and concrete – it formed the basis upon which the landscape of national identity could be re-enacted, 'informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity'.⁴⁸ The 'Kallang Roar' was a manifestation of this sentiment, where the audience had become part of the performance, where the collective action of the people became part of the enactment of national identity. Similarly, the Parades also saw an extension of this spirit of the 'Kallang Roar'.

The National Day Parade in moving to the National Stadium, then had a purpose-built venue with state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems that would enhance the

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.70.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.69.

atmosphere of the staging of the spectacle. From that point, the Parades gradually went from the basic military contingents in march-pasts to including mass displays that increased in theatricality of presentation as the years passed. The military segments for instance went from emphasizing might and precision to a display of skill and sophistication, with free-fall parachute displays, synchronised military drills set to popular music and even aerial displays. The cultural segments gradually became more choreographed than mere display floats, where mass displays became more sophisticated and narratives were woven in. There were segments added such as the choir-led singing of patriotic songs, flashcard displays and cheerleaders engaging the crowd. The audience were gradually elevated from mere viewers to active participants, and this could be easily seen in the scenes the cameras chose to capture in the television broadcasts. The early years were filled with footage of scenes focusing on the presentation on the field and gradually, more scenes showing the audience were spliced in as the spectators got more involved with the celebrations, with each Parade segment intended to please and awe and elicit a response from the audience.

Like how the 'Kallang Roar' added to the performance of the athletes they were cheering on, the increased participation of the audience provided traction for the spectacle that was the National Day Parade. The National Stadium was built with the intention of fostering a sense of nationalistic pride, but it was by itself a passive landscape without the performance of these events, where the participation of people in the audience provided the impetus to charge the Stadium as a site of importance playing out a national identity.

The National Stadium in its sheer capacity ensured that many more people would be able to bear witness to the yearly Parades. The Stadium as a structure, unlike the other Parade sites which could borrow the physical properties of the landscape to some degree to enhance their contribution to the Parade, was an empty stage-set that depended on the cast of actors to bring across the enacted Singapore story. The Parade is a staged spectacle, and within the context of the National Stadium, without the people, audience and performers alike, was but an empty vessel.



- 15 The performances at the earlier Parades at the Padang were relatively simple in choreography and set-up



- 16 The performances at the latter day Parades were more sophisticated in terms of choreography, making use of lighting and mass displays on the field and in the audience stands to produce and present a rich tableau of images intended to inspire awe.

These changes to the Parade format reflected a gradual shift in the factors contributing to the notion of national identity. The Singapore story had progressed, where the desperation of the early years for survival had eased with the fulfilment of the state's various promises as markers of progress. Yet with these aims fulfilled, there were new ones to consider in what art critic Lee Weng Choy terms 'sustained anxiety' on the part of the state, where rather than attempting to disperse that anxiety, it is maintained so as to continue the trope of progress inherent in the Singapore story. In the context of the Parade, this continued progress meant that the stage set of the National Stadium soon proved inadequate for the aspirations of the nation.

4.3 Parading the Nation's Aspirations

A boy returns from his studies abroad only to enlist in the army two days later.

Amidst the nagging from his family about preparing for the big day, he goes about attempting to come to terms with his impending enlistment, reminiscing about his time abroad.

From hurrying the lady at the photo-shop for his travel photographs to meeting up with his friends at the empty National Stadium, the boy remains pensive.

The conversation with his friend, interspersed with scenes of the empty National Stadium, injects moments of light-heartedness. Yet the boy's subdued mood remains as he questions his obligations to his country, his home.

Boy: When did they say they're tearing this place down?⁴⁹

Friend: Sometime already (sic)

The National Stadium, a venue many children of the eighties and nineties associate with the yearly National Day Parade was facing demolition.

⁴⁹ Italicized text is dialogue from the short-film *Keluar Baris* by local film-maker Boo Junfeng.

Boy: Before I went to Spain, I thought maybe it would be nice to be a part of the National Day Parade during my National Service. You been to the National Day Parade before?

Friend: Yeah, last time. Secondary school. You know what, I cried.

Boy: Serious?

Friend: During the finale, when fireworks came on, it was so touching. It was, like, so different from watching on TV. Anyway you can still try for the National Day Parade. They are going to build a new stadium somewhere.

Film-maker Boo Junfeng described his protagonist as this boy who had subscribed to the national ideology presented every year at the National Day Parade, only to return from a stint abroad and realise that this physical manifestation of the yearly performance of national identity was going to be demolished very soon. Therein lay a conflict of what he then, as a soon to be enlisted soldier, would be defending if such a sturdy structure was to be removed so easily.

When the nineties came with increased expectations placed on the quality of stadium facilities, it became apparent that the National Stadium had seen better days and was unable to match up to other similar 'world-class' venues. It saw its last Parade in 2006 and was demolished in 2010 to make way for a new stadium and other ancillary facilities that were known collectively as the Singapore Sports Hub due to be completed by 2014. Unlike the landscape of the Padang which still wields power in its

history and the site of the public housing estates which are a permanent necessity in its primary political function, the National Stadium was built at a particular point in time to fulfil a particular aspiration. With time these aspirations have changed.

‘Land’ in this case is based upon the performed aspirations of the people. The National Stadium may have been a stage-set, much like how the Padang and the HDB heartlands are also the backdrop of the previous Parades. Yet unlike these other sites, the concept of ‘land’ has transcended association with the physical manifestations of the site, where in spite of the National Stadium being the stage-set upon which the performance of collective aspirations was fostered, the continued progression of the Singapore story meant that this site was now irrelevant to the times. The Parade had to find a new home, but as the protagonist’s friend in Boo’s short film suggests, the Parade will just move to a new stadium built to replace the current one – the Parade as a spectacle and performance of national aspirations had through the years gained sufficient traction through repeated enactments to exist on its own.

Chapter 5 The Marina Bay Floating Platform



- 17 Recent parade sited at the Marina Bay Floating Platform, with the skyscrapers of the new city centre in the background.

The opening paragraph in the introduction to this paper described a scene from a recent Parade at its latest site, the Marina Bay Floating Platform and as its name suggests, is built upon water. This site is the latest in the varying iterations of the National Day Parade sites. The Marina Bay area is newly reclaimed, where the new city centre of Singapore is to be extended. The Floating Platform sits in an artificial bay surrounded by icons of the new Singapore. This Parade site floats. The assumed datum of ground is no longer.

From the Parade at the Padang which borrowed inscribed landscape meanings of historical power, to the Parade at the public housing estates which made use of the self-created meaning of 'home', to the Parade at the National Stadium which served to harness the performed aspirations of the people – these are all examples of various sites which had been appropriated by the state to become 'land'. 'Land' here refers to 'tropographies' imagined and conceptualised to make up for the acute sense of anxiety over the perceived lack of a relationship between ground and nation brought about by the sudden change in territorial boundaries and the economic repercussions. It has to be noted that these imaginations and conceptualisations are not entirely enforced by the state. The state merely sets up conditions which is thought most conducive to achieving its aims, and without the complicit participation of the citizenry this would not be possible.

The Parade sites prior to the Marina Bay Floating Platform have all in one way or another in generating their versions of 'land', been premised on the physicality of the site. The Floating Platform in this sense, is not premised on the topography of the site but the image of Marina Bay as the promised new Singapore. The Parade as a

celebration of national identity, an imagined community brought together by the Singapore story wherein the trope of progress is omnipresent, is now sited upon an image – the image of a nation’s achievements and further aspirations.

5.1 Majulah Singapura, Onward Singapore

So they went on, generation after generation, with the old ones burying themselves, turning into ashes and nourishment, feeding those who came after them. Finally, the abandoned floating tree had grown into a little island.⁵⁰

The rootless tree was no more. It had grown roots to become an island. The island flourished even if its 'land' was mostly made up of its own roots. The island now had a name.

Singapore in its incessant push for progress and fulfilment of the self-created Singapore story had to re-imagine and reconstruct the tenets of national identity on various levels. Yet this story is one that is never quite finished.

The early years of nationhood tended to be more concerned about the generative basis of a national identity, where issues such as housing and racial equality were given much emphasis in deciding what makes a Singaporean. This was because the formation of a sense of belonging was seen as 'a means to secure Singapore's future economic prosperity, rather than an end in itself'.⁵¹ As Singapore became more prosperous, the Singapore story needed to evolve and the only constant was progress. The Singapore story is forever an unfulfilled prophecy, yet this situation is a result of its own engineering.

⁵⁰ Asad Latiff, 'Sinking Roots', <http://ourstory.asia1.com.sg/dream/life/ref/roots.html> (accessed 8 September 2011)

⁵¹ Yolanda Chin, 'Community Confidence and Security', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010) p.444.

Come, fellow Singaporeans
Let us progress towards happiness together
May our noble aspiration bring
Singapore success

Come, let us unite
In a new spirit
Let our voices soar as one
Onward Singapore
Onward Singapore⁵²

The National Anthem reminds the people of the constant need for progress. With that, the Singapore story has continued its evolution. The Parade sites in their varying concepts of 'land' contribute to this reading of national identity, where they build upon one another to continue the Singapore story. Yet in this compounding of various 'tropography', one questions what they add up to – progress towards what? The image of further aspirations of the new Singapore is what the latest iteration of the Parade site attempts to make use of – this site is no longer even built on ground. Land now is literally created with reclamation.

The floating tree may have grown into an island by extending its mass of roots. The old is buried by the new, where the new makes use of the old to continue its growth. The island may have flourished but like the tree, it still floats.

⁵² <http://app.www.sg/who/124/National-Anthem-in-English.aspx> National Anthem of Singapore, Onward Singapore. Translated from the original in Malay, as affixed in Appendix II.

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APPENDIX I

也许我一个人
不能成就一番大事业
但我尽力贡献一份微薄的力量

Perhaps I, alone,
can't take on a large task,
But I can work hard and contribute a decent effort.

也许我自己
不能发出万丈光和亮
但我能为都市带来足够的光芒

Perhaps I, alone,
can't shine brightly,
But I can contribute some light.

我从来都不在乎
自己不是一个大人物
因为平凡也是一种幸福
看到名人总是忙忙碌碌
我的时间由我控制
平凡的日子一样会充实

I have never really
taken it to heart,
Because being average is also a blessing.
Looking at capable people hurrying about,
My time is within my control.
An average life is also a well-lived life

The original Chinese song is entitled ‘小人物的心声’

Translated as ‘Voices from the Heart’ in English, the original Chinese lyrics were translated by the author.

It is a song written in the 80s for a popular local Chinese television drama and has since then become a part of the repertoire of National Day Parade songs.

<http://eservice.nlb.gov.sg/opencmscontent.aspx?id=78d14334-fb77-42a2-aaa2-34ad9cb61e6d>
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APPENDIX II

Mari kita rakyat Singapura	Come, fellow Singaporeans
Sama-sama menuju bahagia	Let us progress towards happiness together
Cita-cita kita yang mulia	May our noble aspirations bring
Berjaya Singapura	Singapore success
Marilah kita bersatu	Come, let us unite
Dengan semangat yang baru	In a new spirit
Semua kita berseru	Let our voices soar as one
Majulah Singapura	Onward Singapore
Majulah Singapura	Onward Singapore
Marilah kita bersatu	Come, let us unite
Dengan semangat yang baru	In a new spirit
Semua kita berseru	Let our voices soar as one
Majulah Singapura	Onward Singapore
Majulah Singapura	Onward Singapore

The original National Anthem in Malay on the left, with lyrics officially translated to English.

<http://app.www.sg/who/124/National-Anthem-in-English.aspx> (accessed 8 September 2011)