What makes a place unique, that gives it its distinct identity?
Its people.
Its landscape.
Its place in the world.
Its passage through time.
Promotional Ad Campaign by ‘Uniquely Singapore,’ Singapore Tourism Board

Becoming independent and sovereign only in 1965, Singapore has emerged as one of the most economically successful and controversial nations in South East Asia. While Singapore is often celebrated for its remarkable economic success, measured through its passage from Third-World to First-World status in a short time, it is also notorious for its controlling, socially conservative government. Despite the controversy, the Singapore government makes no apologies for their state policies. Instead, it celebrates what is perceived as the unique foundation for its success.

It is from this notion of uniqueness that this project begins. As someone who has lived in Singapore for a number of years, my time away has also enabled me to look back at Singapore with a critical eye; indeed, what is it that makes Singapore unique and gives it a “distinct identity”? I turn back to the promotional campaign’s top answer: “its people.” How are the people of Singapore, its citizens, fashioned? What is the relationship between the state and the citizens of Singapore?
Through this paper, I examine three components of citizenry in Singapore – capitalism, modernity and (ethno)nationalism – that construct the ideal Singaporean citizen. The relationship between these three components, I believe, can be understood as a triad:

The Singaporean Citizen Triangle

Each of these imaginaries – nationalism, capitalism, modernity – figures in the Singaporean citizen’s identity as registers and logics through which the Singaporean citizen’s identity is read. Furthermore, each of these becomes indicative of whether the Singaporean citizen is “good”/“bad,” significant/insignificant, worthy/unworthy, productive/unproductive, etc. Each point of the triangle has its own influence. For example, the Singaporean citizen can be read through the imaginary of nationalism; various state-projects hail those within the island-state borders as national subjects and as a result interpellate the Singaporean into national ideologies and expectations. These expectations are influenced by capitalism and modernity, as the above diagram seeks to capture. Similarly, nationalism and modernity influence capitalism, and capitalism and
nationalism influence modernity in the context of Singapore.¹ Each of these relationships manifests itself into various texts that I examine through this project; my analysis attempts to capture various instances where these intersections are apparent. Furthermore, I argue that while this triangular model may be the basis of Singapore’s “success,” it also promotes a politics that ultimately excludes and alienates those who are unable to follow the codes that these imaginaries espouse.

This project begins with “Official Nationalisms: The Singaporean National Anthem and Lee Kuan Yew,” where I examine nationalist texts that are endorsed by the Singaporean nation-state, which is divided into two sections. First, “Singing Nationalisms: Language, Translation and Politics in the Singapore National Anthem,” where I start from Benedict Anderson’s argument that Christianity assumes its universal form through specific “texts.” I analyze Singapore’s national anthem Majulah Singapura in order to interrogate the ways in which the state (re)produces its national imaginary. How the Christian imagination can take particular form, as per Anderson’s argument, becomes an analogy of how to frame Majulah Singapura within a nationalist imagination. While looking at the national anthem as an abstraction of the Singaporean state imagination, a reading of the song and its translations also allow us to understand the particular ways nationalism is constructed in Singapore. This section discusses how the national anthem can be read for themes of unity and simultaneity for the purposes of nationalism, but also takes note of the ways the national anthem hails the Singaporean citizen as a modern subject by emphasizing the value of progress and success. I then look at the translations of the national anthem into English to draw out the relationships

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¹ Marshall Berman has an excellent discussion on the intersections of modernity and capitalism in All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity. See Chapter II “All That is Solid Melts into Air: Marx, Modernism and Modernization.”
between the national imagination and language politics in Singapore. I argue that despite Malay being the “national language” (as opposed to being named an “official language” like English, Mandarin or Tamil), historical tensions with Malaysia and geopolitics relegate the Malay language to a token status, thus further marginalizing the already minority Malay community. It becomes apparent that the nexus between modernity, capitalism and nationalism becomes the basis for both constructing ideal citizens and legitimating particular lived experiences. In the second section, “Lee Kuan Yew and Singapore,” I move into former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s memoirs The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew and From Third World to First: 1965 – 2000 and consider Lee’s narrative as another mode in which to read how the citizen is constructed in Singapore. What becomes clear in Lee’s memoir is how the citizen has a one-to-one correspondence with the worker. I then take up Karl Marx’s discussion on how the worker is perpetually alienated by capitalist-motivated labor. Furthermore, I look at the ways that Lee constructs and uses particular aspects of Singapore’s history in order to give license to the capitalist and nationalist logics that he implicitly advocates.

The second part of this project, “Singaporean Subjects Respond: Djinn’s Perth and ‘We Live in Singapura’” examines the ways in which the Singaporean citizen has reacted and responded to the state. This part of the project aspires to recognize the agency of the Singaporean citizen despite the oppressive ideological structures that (re)produce privilege and power. Continuing on the theme of alienation from the previous section, “(Un)Shared Values: Nationalism, Modernity and Singaporean Identity in Djinn’s Perth” examines the film Perth (2004), which addresses the anxiety that is a result of Singaporean state’s late capitalist and modernist project. As a representation of first-
generation Singaporeans, protagonist Harry Lee exemplifies economic, generational and national alienation because of his inability to translate codes of modernity. This exacerbates his desire to escape Singapore and emigrate to Perth. The film questions the efficacy of the state’s logic in their construction of a (ethno)nationalist, capitalist narrative of progress for the Singaporean subject. I finish with “Subverting National Historical Myth and Language Politics in “We Live in Singapura” which examines a satire of Singaporean national song that puts forth a revisionist history of Singapore. The song was performed by comedian and actor Hossan Leong at a gay pride event and, through its use of Singlish, the song challenges the ways in which current language politics in Singapore affects the stronghold of capitalist, modern and nationalist logics.

This project is the mere beginning of what I see as a necessary inquiry into the discursive ways citizenship is constructed in Singapore. In this project, I seek to draw the problematic relationship between the nation-state and citizen in hopes that this will lead to a larger awareness and more inclusive politics.
Part I. Official Nationalisms: The Singaporean National Anthem and Lee Kuan Yew

Section 1. Singing Nationalisms: Language, Translation and Politics in the Singapore National Anthem

This section begins with an analysis of Singapore’s national anthem *Majulah Singapura* in order to interrogate the ways in which the state (re)produces its national imaginary. In Benedict Anderson’s discussion of how imagined communities of nations follow similar logics of religious communities and dynastic realms (22), he points to how these imaginaries can be read through texts:

Christendom assumed its universal form through a myriad of specificities and particularities: this relief, that window, this sermon, that tale, [etc.] … While the trans-European Latin-reading clerisy was one essential element in the structuring of the Christian imagination, the mediation of its conceptions to the illiterate masses, by visual and aural creations, always personal and particular, was no less vital. (23)

What Anderson points out here, how the Christian imagination can take particular form, becomes an example of how to frame *Majulah Singapura* within a nationalist imagination.

While looking at the national anthem as an abstraction of the Singaporean state imagination, a reading of the song and its translations also allows us to understand how nationalism is constructed in Singapore. This section discusses the themes of unity and simultaneity in the national anthem that are evoked for the purposes of nationalism, and also takes note of how the national imaginary is typical of modern thought through the way it values progress and success. The Singaporean citizen is thus interpellated as a

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2 My use of the word “text” here is to be understood in the broadest way possible where one can read any cultural event for meaning.
modern subject. The idea that national imagination can be packaged within a form borrows from Anderson’s arguments about how national novels and newspapers circulate in such a way where language establishes itself as a large element in the formation of the national imagination. Anderson emphasizes how print-capitalism is one of the key components in constructing the national imagination, and the Singaporean national anthem can be regarded in the same way. The national anthem holds similar status where citizens can regard it as a circulated text where they come together to make meaning out of its music and lyrics. The national anthem imposes Malay on Singapore’s subject populations (42); as such, it becomes a language with elevated status. I argue, however, that despite Malay being the “national language” (as opposed to being named an “official language” like English, Mandarin or Tamil), translation, language practices and education in Singapore relegate Malay to a token status rather than an elevated one.

National Anthem as Genre and Form

In its most recent entry in 2003, the Oxford English Dictionary defines an anthem as: “A popular song with rousing, emotive, qualities, often one identified with a particular subculture, social group, or cause.” The anthem becomes useful to analyze how the state emotively rouses nationalism and/or patriotism through language and music. Because the genre of song requires singer performance and a national anthem enlists citizens, singers are interpellated as citizens. Through the utterance of lyrics and the following of a tune and performing a speech-act in perceived unison, subjects are then grouped as a national (imagined) community: “Take national anthems . . . No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same
melody” (Anderson 145 – emphasis mine). The experience of simultaneity situates the singer into a mode of reception and performance as a citizen. The song has also been historically established as an essential element in national thought through singing the song at school, singing the song during national service,\(^3\) and playing the song on television. Although one may listen to the song and not sing along, the national anthem evokes memories and recognition and thus maintains its symbolic status.

**History and Context**

Singapore’s national anthem *Majuluah Singapura* was originally written in 1958, nearly seven years before Singapore’s independence. Composed by Zubir Said, the song was first played during the reopening of Victoria Hall, which is now considered a historical landmark in Singapore. Victoria Hall had at one point served as a hospital during the Japanese Occupation and later became the site for Japanese war crime trials (“Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall”). The anthem’s composer, Zubir Said, cited a Malay proverb when he was interviewed about the composition of the national anthem: “Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung” or “You should hold up the sky of the land where you live” (“1959 - Singapore State Arms, Flags and National Anthem”). It appears that Said was responding to the trying times in Singapore; he wrote the song in an attempt to remedy the fractured community by invoking patriotism. Around the time that the song was composed, Singapore sought for self-governance through a merger with Malaysia; the time period is often characterized by riots, strikes, anti-colonial sentiment, racial tension and the “fight against communists” (Yeo and Wah 134-135). Times were not easy, as such: “a national anthem was needed to unite all the different races in

\(^3\) All men in Singapore have mandatory conscription for three years at the age of eighteen.
Singapore” and upon attaining self-governance, the popular City Council\(^4\) song was revised and replaced the colonial anthem of God Save the Queen (“1959 - Singapore State Arms, Flags and National Anthem”).\(^5\) The establishment of the anthem was accompanied with the Singapore Arms and Flag and National Anthem Act, part of which states: “[The President may make rules] to prescribe the manner in which and the places at which the Singapore National Anthem may be performed.” Some of the stipulations include not incorporating the song with any others and only singing the song in its original lyrics and not any other translation (“The National Anthem – Guidelines”).

**Reading Majulah Singapura for Content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mari kita rakyat Singapura</td>
<td>We, the people of Singapore</td>
<td>Come, fellow Singaporeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sama sama menuju bahagia</td>
<td>Together march towards happiness</td>
<td>Let us progress towards happiness together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cita cita kita yang mulia</td>
<td>Our noble aspiration</td>
<td>May our noble aspiration bring Singapore success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berjaya Singapura</td>
<td>To make Singapore a success</td>
<td>Come, let us unite In a new spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dengan semangat yang baru</td>
<td>Let us all unite In a new spirit</td>
<td>Let our voices soar as one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semua kita bersatu</td>
<td>Together we proclaim Onward Singapore</td>
<td>Onward Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majulah Singapura</td>
<td>Onward Singapore</td>
<td>Onward Singapore</td>
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</table>

There are two aspects to consider in reading Majulah Singapura; on one hand, we can read the song as a finished product of nationalism and that the song itself is nationalist. As mentioned above, this provides an understanding of how the form has a particular function; in many ways, regardless of the content of a national anthem, the

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\(^4\) Singapore, when a part of Malaysia, was governed by the City Council.

\(^5\) I have been unable to find the original lyrics of the song before it became the national anthem; access to these lyrics would likely further illuminate the logics of nationalism.
song will remain nationalist for its mere form and genre. On the other hand, the content (lyrics) of the song exemplifies how the national imagination works towards conceiving the nation and how the state configures the national imagination for citizens to conceive of themselves.

In his discussion on the roots of nationalism, Anderson argues that it was imperative for the state to seek new ways of linking “fraternity, power and time meaningfully together” (36) in order for citizens to make meaning out of their national identity. The legitimacy of the state is contingent on a population imagining itself as whole, unified and fraternal. The theme of unity is explicit through the language in both translations. When the singer sings lyrics such as “we,” “our,” “together,” and “us,” (as opposed “I,” “me,” or “my”) she instantly claims herself as speaking from the vantage point of a group. This amplifies the effect of a national anthem in that not only is unity created through the act of singing in unison, but reasserted through such declarative language. Through a reading of Walter Benjamin, Anderson also stresses the importance of the unified nation to imagine time simultaneously (24). Anderson goes on to give examples of how novels that are “bound to nationalist movements” (26) demonstrate how: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (26). Although I am not looking at a novel, the same effect of movement within history is achieved in the Singapore national anthem through word choices such as “onward” which denotes movement within linearity of time between the present (of when the song is sung) to the future. Within that
time, there is a unified movement “towards” the future; the song creates a direction through the idea that the Singaporean citizen must embark on a journey.

As Anderson points out, the journey is significant: “The anthropologist Victor Turner has written illuminatingly about the ‘journey,’ between times, statuses and places, as a meaning-creating experience” (53). The way in which the lyrics of the song forward a notion of a progress/journey narrative is symptomatic of a modern imaginary. The influences upon such an imagination are best explained by David Harvey: “The idea was to use accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life” (12). This is, of course, somewhat idealistic and perhaps not necessarily entirely true for the agenda of the Singaporean state, but Harvey highlights how Enlightenment thought embraced the notion of progress and emphasized development and rational forms of social organization (12). In the case of the national anthem, the citizen’s task is to journey while accumulating knowledge for the pursuit of happiness. Although I am deploying the term “modernity” in a way that stems from European history, I do want to underscore Aihwa Ong’s argument for “alternative modernities” in ways that do not assume that imaginaries of modernity only stem from a Western epicenter and determination (53). Ong posits an excellent argument for how Chinese states “produce a vision of modernity without deracination in opposition to Western modernity” (52). However, the Enlightenment-project-inflected notion of modernity is one useful definition for the purposes of my reading of the Singaporean national anthem because it centers the notion of progress and rationality. I will return to Ong’s argument later in this paper.
While the national anthem situates the citizen within simultaneous time, what becomes obvious about *Majulah Singapura* is how this time is configured in a forward-thinking progressive manner. Within the anthem, the notion of happiness is contingent on success, that is to say, happiness is success and success is happiness. The word choice of “success” is interesting because denotes tangibility and finality. To claim something as a success, or even as successful, the act must be at some point of completion in order to be measurable. This may seem somewhat contradictory because the song is not a celebration of the past, or the present for that matter, but a proclamation and promise for the bright future. Arguably, the state of success is always a desirable one, but in the context of this anthem, we see how the state constructs the notion of happiness upon a tangible, attainable (albeit, still abstract in this song) goal. In other words, happiness is attainable through success (i.e., we are successful, therefore happy; not, we are happy therefore successful).

Through the amalgamation of unity, progress and happiness, or again in Harvey’s words “the enrichment of daily life” (53), we have what I would call the “nationalization of modernity.” The proposed triangular model in the introduction best illustrates this point: while the modern imaginary stands out through its own project, there is a clear overlap between nationalism and modernity in the context of Singapore. In this case, we see a clear example of a modern imaginary in a *nationalist* text. *Majulah Singapura* is largely meant to be a text that celebrates the nation, and yet, it prescribes and endorses a particular way of thinking, the modern project is also the national project. Moreover, to have a community that sees itself as part of a modern project or modern thought hails the
citizen as someone to be functional rather than merely participatory. The Oxford English Dictionary has the following entries under “citizen”:

1) An inhabitant of a city or (often) of a town; esp. one possessing civic rights and privileges, a burgess or freeman of a city

2) A member of a state, an enfranchised inhabitant of a country, as opposed to an alien; in U.S., a person, native or naturalized, who has the privilege of voting for public offices, and is entitled to full protection in the exercise of private rights.

These entries demonstrate how citizens are often members of an imagined community that are entitled to some privileges. However, through *Majulah Singapura*, the citizen is defined by, or at least called towards civic duty; in this case, the duty of making Singapore a success and progressive.

*Majulah Singapura, Language and Translation*

*Majulah Singapura* has been translated into all of Singapore’s official languages – English, Mandarin and Tamil. Interestingly, there have been two English translations; the latest “revised translation” in 2001. One could speculate about the motivations behind revising the translation, since the original itself has not been changed since its establishment as the official national anthem. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between how the two translations address the national audience. Between the two translations, there is an obvious change in tone. The first translation is declarative, commanding, and almost militaristic. Looking at the first line in the first translation, there is a declaration that seems chant-like: We! The people of Singapore! The silent listeners of the song are not situated in such a way that they are participatory; they are passive and rendered invisible as mere audience members to the national anthem. However, the
revised translation is gentle, inviting and borders on prayer-like. In the first line of the second translation there is a shift to invitation: “Come [with us], fellow Singaporean.” The non-singers are now given potential to become active, to become Singaporean. If we are to think of the Singaporean singer within the Self/Other binary, there is a considerable difference in terms of the relationality between the Self and Other. The first translation does not take the Other into consideration within the national imagination. In the second translation, the language marks and recognizes the Other in order to be included within the national imagination. Let us turn back to Ong: “I take modernity to be an evolving process of imagination and practice in particular historically situated formations that deploy preexisting ideological formations of culture and race” (55). Ironically, Ong’s definition itself evolves from Harvey, but here Ong captures how modernity is conceived through change, rather than progress. In other words, Ong does not qualify the notion of change through a register of positive or negative in the way that the notion of progress does. Similarly, the change in the translation can be read as part of the imaginary of modernity; while the change cannot be necessarily qualified to be progressive or development per se, the translation demonstrates an evolving national imaginary that is more inclusive. The second translation still deploys preexisting ideological formations of national culture; themes of unity and emphases on progress remain. Earlier, I had discussed how the national anthem is an example of the nationalization of modernity, but when we consider the two translations of the anthem we also see how nationalism is modernized. If the national anthem is a window into viewing the logics of nationalism, the revised translation demonstrates how nationalism is a continuous evolving process. The Singaporean state reimagines its national audience.
Regardless of the revised translation, the existence of the translation at all demonstrates an awareness of an audience beyond Malay speakers. In fact, other than the English translation(s), there are also translations in Mandarin and Tamil – the other two “official languages” of Singapore. That there are translations of the national anthem is rather strange, especially when considering “The National Anthem Guidelines” which states that: “It [Majulah Singapura] must only be sung following the original lyrics, not any translation of those lyrics.” What, then, is the purpose of the translations? Language in Singapore can be a complicated issue; as mentioned before, there are four official languages in Singapore and due to my own language fluencies (or lack thereof) I will only be focusing on English. Although the use of British English in Singapore is a reminder of British colonialism, it is mainly regarded as the lingua franca of Singapore. The neutrality of English in Singapore is debatable given its colonial history; however English enjoys a high status because it is seen as a language of commerce and is not bound to any ethnic group. As such, English is the sign of education and modernity; the Minister for Education, Dr. Tony Tan best explains the government’s position on English: “Children must learn English so that they will have a window to the knowledge, technology and expertise of the modern world” (qtd. in Wee, 287). The English language becomes the mode in which the Singaporean can become successful. Such thought has led the Singaporean education system to insist that every student be educated in English alongside their mother tongue (Wee 285). And yet surely, there must be a purpose to confining the national anthem to a particular language. If language is the mode in which we articulate thought, we can consider what Partha Chatterjee writes:
[Nationalist thought] is a framework of knowledge which proclaims its own universality; its validity, it pronounces, is independent of cultures … It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture. (11)

If the language of the national anthem functions as an emblem of nationalist thought in Malay, the framework of knowledge, one would suppose, is epistemologically and centrally Malay. This centers Malay and relegates Chinese, English and Tamil to the periphery by recognizing their respective communities and yet rejecting them as alien cultures by silencing performance.

The status of the Malay language in Singapore seemingly contradicts what the Malay national anthem comes to represent as an emblem of nationalism. According to the 2000 Census of Population, Malays comprised of 13.9% of the Singaporean population (qtd. in Wee 286). Since the language education policy requires that all students enrolled in public schools learn English and their “mother tongue” (determined, ironically, by the ethnicity of the student’s father), Malay-speaking Singaporeans are few and far between. Furthermore, the rather antiquated language of the national anthem is esoteric because that is spoken in Singapore has evolved differently than Malay has in Malaysia (Effendy). Considering these factors, the rationale to have an English translation of the national anthem is pragmatic; English is the most widely spoken language in Singapore, (especially in comparison to the number of Malay speakers), so the national anthem would be rendered irrelevant if only a small minority of the nation would be able to understand it. However, the English translation is not widely circulated; for example, the

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6 For census purposes, ethnicity of citizens in Singapore are based on the father’s ethnicity (i.e., if the person’s father is Malay, s/he is marked down as Malay, regardless if the mother is of a different ethnicity).
most recent music video for the national anthem has subtitles in Malay and Mandarin. Malay is distinctive because it seems somewhat shrouded in mystery, few understand the language, and yet it maintains high status. As Lionel Wee points out, there are historical and geopolitical motivations for maintaining Malay as an official and national language:

A reason for retaining Malay is essentially diplomatic: Singapore is surrounded by Malay-Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. Keeping Malay as a national language is intended to reassure these countries that Singapore will not go the way of becoming a Chinese state. (286)

Of course, with a population that is nearly 77% Chinese (286), it would be difficult to argue that Singapore is not a Chinese state.

What it at work here is a “strategic nationalism” that goes beyond Anderson’s famous expression of the imagined community. Anderson’s work explicates nationalism in terms of relationality to fellow subjects within the nation-state; however, he does not consider the relationality by those outside of the state to those within it. Nationalism, in the case of Singapore, is not only about constructing a national imagination that makes people believe that they are unified members of a progressive nation; it is also about constructing a nationalism that those outside of the nation are led to acknowledge and believe. The national anthem attempts to construct a Malay imagined community to those outside of Singapore. Arguably, this strategic nationalism can be construed as what Ong explains as the effect of “post postcolonialism” on Chinese states in Asia: “[C]urrent engagements with global capitalism or metropolitan powers . . . emphasize and claim emergent power, equality, and mutual respect on the global stage” (35). I agree that this is

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7 In the music video, the song is sung in Malay. The fact that the subtitles are in Malay (to function as a guiding sing-along) seems to indicate that Singaporeans may not know the original lyrics at all.
a large part of constructing a strategic nationalism, or even a type of strategic nationalism, particularly when considering how the nation is thought through capitalist logics. However, I’d argue the Singaporean context demands for geopolitics and racial hierarchy to be considered as the primary motivation for this strategic nationalism.8

It is problematic for the national anthem to be read as a symbol of Singaporean nationalism, particularly because it boasts a false history since nation-state’s national imagination rarely looks back at Malay(sian) history in a celebratory manner. The language of the national anthem (in Malay) indicates a particular history with, for example, the word “rakyat.” Although it is translated as “citizen,” older usage of the word signals back to Malay royalty and would have been understood within that context. Rakyat, literally translated, means “subjects under royalty” (Leong and Effendy). This is a specific word choice, and one would imagine that when the government revised the national anthem’s lyrics from when the song was a City Council song in 1959, they could have changed the word to one less weighted with Malaysian history (e.g. another word for citizen in Malay is “warganegara” where warga translates to “member” and negara to “country”) (Leong). Unless we take such a word to reference the English monarchy (as “God Save the Queen” is), the word has little historical meaning in Singapore.

Furthermore, by instating rules for performance of the national anthem, it would seem that the power of Malay as the center is reified when the translations of the national anthem are not allowed to be uttered. The logic and consciousness of the nation are isolated through Malay. In that sense, the speech-act can never be performed by the non-

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8 Motivations for strategic nationalism can be expanded when thinking how nationalism is used to benefit the bourgeoisie of a nation within a global capitalist market.
Malay speaker with vested meaning. The English, Mandarin or Tamil-speaking citizen can only read the national anthem, rendering it into a national manifesto of sorts instead.

This is not to argue that Malay as language or ethnicity is irrelevant; after all, Singapore has had close historical ties with Malaysia. The song was written in order to unite Singapore since in the time it was written, Singapore was fighting for independence with and through Malaysia. However, Singapore was ousted out of Malaysia precisely because of the racial tensions between Malaysia and Singapore; sociopolitical tensions still remain today. While the national anthem in Malay reminds Singapore of its history, it is not a history that is constantly referred to in national-cultural production or economic practice. For example, there have been language campaigns in Singapore promoting certain practice and use. In 2000, the “Speak Good English” movement (as opposed to “Speak English Well”) was established which promoted “Singaporeans to speak grammatically correct English that is universally understood. It is to get Singaporeans to speak English with confidence at work, at home and at play” (“Background”). There has also been the Speak Mandarin Campaign launched in 1979: “The task was to transform a deeply entrenched social-linguistic habit of Chinese Singaporeans who were long used to the speaking of dialects” (“History and Background”). There have been no such campaigns for Malay or Tamil. The Speak Mandarin Campaign seems to justify this lack of attention to Malay and Tamil by explaining that Malay and Tamil have less linguistic diversity, and therefore there is less need to push towards a common language in the same way that is needed for Chinese (“History and Background”). In both campaigns, there is the emphasis on the pragmatic use of each language; English is needed to communicate to the world and Mandarin is needed to unify the Chinese community. This
insinuates that Malay and Tamil have no utility in Singapore whether thinking about the
economy or unity. The Mandarin campaign also states: “The primary message to Chinese
Singaporeans was to speak Mandarin in place of dialects to help them better understand
and appreciate their culture and heritage” (“History and Background”). The stress on
culture and heritage, or history, has not come up in other campaigns targeted at Malays or
Indians which begs the question: who are being marked as legitimate and worthy
citizens? Through the Malay of the national anthem, the Singaporean state raises a token
spectre of history.

Chua Beng Huat has convincingly argued that giving Malay the status of a
national language and other seemingly privileged rights is a political move by the
government that invokes the rhetoric of multiculturalism for the purposes of social
control. Some of the examples that Chua gives to demonstrate state-assigned Malay
privileges are: free primary and secondary education, guaranteed political/Parliamentary
representation and the special administrative attention given to Islam (the presumed
religion of all Malays) (64). Despite these privileges, Chua argues that “Malay ethnicity
still haunts domestic race relations,” and uses the example of how Malays are not found
in the top ranks in the national army (65). The government sidesteps the issue of
discrimination by highlighting the problematic of:

    . . . the alleged potential ‘moral’ conflict that might face a Malay soldier if
    Singapore were at war with Malaysia or Indonesia. He could be placed in a
    situation of either having to shoot his own ‘ethnic brethren’ or fellow
    Singaporeans. (65)
The government has yet to address why this is a non-issue for an ethnic Chinese given the immensity of the Chinese diaspora throughout the world. Because of the government’s apparent paranoia with the Malays in Singapore as patriotically questionable, privileges are motivated both by geopolitics and the need for social control.

While I agree with Chua in his evaluation of the state rationale in their logics regarding Malays, I would further his argument by pointing out that the social control is not only a matter of controlling alleged racial tensions, but also elevating the dominance of the Chinese and English language. As shown earlier with the national anthem, the history and culture that it evokes is not congruous to state politics. In that way, the national anthem is not only a token spectre of history, but a means of covertly marginalizing Malayness and elevating the economic value of English and the cultural capital of Mandarin.⁹

**Section 2. Lee Kuan Yew and Singapore**

Nationalism, as read through *Majulah Singapura*, is constructed upon the notion of simultaneity and produces the national imagination. However, the memoirs of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew provides a different aspect of how nationalism in Singapore is (in)formed. A recent New York Times article opens a feature piece: “Lee Kuan Yew, who turned a malarial island into a modern financial center with a first-world...”

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⁹ There are other modes in which the national anthem is given meaning outside of its lyrics. The first would be in the music itself where the composition, choice of instruments and key can elicit emotion. I am no expert in musicology, but I would imagine that there are layers of meaning that can be inscribed onto the citizen beyond the national anthem’s lyrics through the melody and tune of the music. Also important to note is the use of visual media with the national anthem. In my own memory as a child growing up in Singapore, the music video of the national anthem was played on television daily in the early hours of the morning, presumably before one would go to work or school. Although I am unsure whether this is still a normal occurrence, YouTube.com has clips of the national anthem’s music video. This video (rather different than the one that I viewed as a child) shows various scenes of people of the three main ethnic groups in Singapore (Chinese, Malay and Indian) with their families and children. The national anthem takes on another layer of meaning with the added component of visuality, especially since the video is state-endorsed/approved (as the case with all media in Singapore). Accompanied with the effects of the music and lyrics is the imagery of nationalism.
skyline, is peering ahead again into this city-state’s future, this time with an idea to seal it off with dikes against the rising tides of global warming” (Mydans and Arnold). The article is appropriately accompanied with a picture of Lee, wearing an earpiece, brow furrowed with his hand to his head in an archetypical Thinking Man fashion. What Lee has come to represent, as exemplified through the NYT article, is the quintessential modern leader.

Lee Kuan Yew is the formidable creator and father of Singapore and his acute awareness of his own status is obvious through the titles of his memoirs: *From Third World to First: 1965 – 2000* and *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. Not only has Lee created Singapore, according to these titles, but Lee is the metonymical and metaphorical embodiment of all that is Singapore. Not that this has been largely debated; Lee Kuan Yew has been celebrated through various works: “. . . a CD-ROM, a pictorial biography with Chinese and English editions, an academic work on the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, and a Lee Kuan Yew sampler . . .” (Hong 550). The University of Hawaii at Manoa’s library alone lists 69 hits under the entry “Lee Kuan Yew” ranging from books of Lee’s quotes to published dissertations.

Needless to say, considering the phenomenon of Lee Kuan Yew is integral and necessary to analyzing Singaporean nationalism, regardless of whether or not his status is deserved. Lee’s memoirs provide insights into his thoughts and rationales in the construction of the nation. This section of the essay examines several issues. First, a brief comparison between Lee’s two memoirs; the two memoirs are quite different, likely due to its different intended audiences – one in Singapore, and the other the United States. I will focus on the latter publication because its content more explicitly explains the
rationale for state policies compared to the first publication. Second, an analysis of the Singapore story that Lee posits. Lee’s memoirs not only exemplify his ardent attempts to construct a nation, but how the nation should be ideologically constructed. It becomes clear that nationalism in Singapore is not only modern, but capitalist. Moreover, Lee’s memoirs are also representative of what has become the clichéd history of Singapore; that Singapore was historically destined to fail and Singapore must continually be vigilant for potential threats to its nationhood because of its history with Malaysia. I then move into a discussion of how the state uses and constructs history to rationalize the logics of capitalism, nationalism and modernity.

**From Third World to First: 1965 – 2000 vs. The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew**

The two autobiographies Lee offers are noticeably different in tone. The first publication, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (hereinafter *Memoirs*) was published by the Singapore Press Holdings, presumably for a Singaporean audience. *From Third World to First: 1965 – 2000* (hereinafter *Third World*) was published by HarperCollins in 2000, presumably for an American audience. In the opening of *Memoirs*, the reader is bombarded with testimonies from various current and former world leaders, attesting to the brilliance of Lee and reminding the (Singaporean) reader of Lee’s significance. *Third World*, however, is more tempered and only prefaced with a foreword by Henry Kissinger, but in no less glowing terms. Perhaps, the greatness of Lee as a political figure is irrelevant to the American audience or Kissinger’s preface is evidence enough. The most striking difference is how Lee gives personal narrative in *Memoir*, ranging from talking about his family to anecdotal information on the Japanese occupation and to his experience as a foreign student in England. This personal detail is
noticeably absent from Third World, which is relegated to the preface; Lee mainly talks about state policies and his involvement in the construction of the nation-state. However, Memoirs quickly moves away from Lee’s personal narrative and goes into his experience as a lawyer and is not so explicit about his involvement with nation-formation. Third World, on the other hand, is upfront about the rationale behind state policies. Both of Lee’s narratives function to make clear that Lee is the father of Singapore and that Singapore’s story is Lee Kuan Yew. As Hong Lysa points out:

The relationship postulated between the Lee Kuan Yew autobiography and national history is simultaneously one of synecdoche and metonym … [T]he collective pronoun envelops Lee Kuan Yew as a representative part of the postulated Singapore experience. (546)

Hong is referring to how Lee interchangeably uses “I” and “we” throughout his biography; thus projecting Lee’s desires and history as a lawyer and politician as Singapore’s. Hong also rightfully points out how: “. . . Singapore’s history cannot be simply reduced to an account of his political career or a study of his pronouncements, as he himself as done” (546). However, I would argue that Lee’s career as a metaphor for Singapore’s history is not so simple; the two do not have an easy one-to-one correspondence. To title his memoirs as The Singapore Story of course signals that Lee is the heroic figure of Singapore’s adventure in going from Third World to First, but what is significant is the element of ownership that Lee seems to be entitled to. Lee begins the first chapter “Going It Alone” of Third World:

There are books to teach you how to build a house, how to repair engines, how to write a book. But I have not seen a book on how to build a nation out of a
disparate collection of immigrants from China, British India, and the Dutch East Indies, or how to make a living for its people when its former economic role as the entrepot of the region is becoming defunct. I never had expected that in 1965, at 42, I would be in charge of an independent Singapore, responsible for the lives of its 2 million people. (3)

Much like how the national anthem marginalizes Malayness as I argued earlier, Lee does the same, if not worse. The significance of Malays is put under erasure in his narrative; he does not include them as part of the “disparate collection of immigrants.” Granted, Malays are indigenous to the larger region, which Lee appears to ignore altogether, but they are still immigrants of Singapore. Moreover, what appears to be missing in these grandiose statements is any reference to the collective existence of Singaporean citizens; at least, in any active manner. Lee’s comparative metaphors for the nation are ones that objectify the nation as a fixable non-reactive thing as opposed to a living, breathing organism. Talking about Lee as representative of Singapore or Lee’s imagination as commensurate with the national imagination neglects to consider that Lee’s language claims ownership of Singapore, which is rather different. Whilst it is not my goal to undermine Hong’s crucial observation, I do think it is critical for scholarship to delineate these differences. To understand Lee’s ownership of Singapore recognizes the position of power that he is in and thus opens up questions about how Lee is to be read as a part of ideological state apparatuses. Moreover, through the lens of nationalism, which is in itself an ideological formation, Lee complicates social relations and material practice. This paper is not a discussion of whether Lee is representative of Singapore’s history. As Hong has already pointed out, to do this at best trivializes and at worst erases the
significance of other narratives that make up the Singapore Story. Regardless of the ways
that Lee is constructed, his influence is undeniably significant. Moreover, factoring in
Lee as a center of power in the national imagination of Singapore leads to what I believe
are interesting questions that complicate the ways that nationalism has been theorized
thus far.

This discussion of Lee differs from the discussion on the national anthem in the
ways that I scrutinize nationalism and the national imagination. Previously, I looked at
how the national imagination is produced through the experience of simultaneity through
performance; I’d like to problematize that very notion through Lee because his status
challenges simultaneity for the very position of power he holds. As the aforementioned
quote demonstrates, Lee conceives of himself as “in charge” of the nation; he directs and
constructs the national imagination. The preface of *Third World* states: “I wrote this book
for a younger generation of Singaporeans who took stability, growth, and prosperity for
granted” (xiii); Lee’s tone of superiority patronizes the new generation of Singaporeans
and in many ways takes away this notion of national imagination in the ways that
Anderson and Chatterjee discuss. As mentioned in the previous section, Partha Chatterjee
defines nationalism as “a framework of knowledge” which insinuates that there are
several components coming together in order to create a national imagination. However,
Lee’s position of power changes this assemblage to a top-down dissemination of
knowledge instead. The structures of nationalism are shifted and instead we can examine
the construction of the Singaporean national imagination through ideological framework.
The model of “ideology,” in this sense, borrows from Louis Althusser: “Ideology
represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”
Lee’s influence and participation in the formulation of ideological state apparatuses changes the question of nationalism from how citizens come to think together as a community, as per Anderson’s argument, to how are citizens of Singapore ideologically conditioned to think and carry out their everyday lives?

Lee himself seems unaware of the ideological work he performs: “Singapore’s secret, Mr. Lee said, is that it is “ideology free.” It possesses an unsentimental pragmatism that infuses the workings of the country as if it were in itself an ideology” (qtd. in Mydans and Arnold). However, it becomes apparent through Third World that Lee clearly understands independence and sovereignty by subscribing to a capitalist ideology. Lee explicates Singapore’s “real conditions of existence through the notion of “survival” after independence; according to the chapter “Surviving Without a Hinterland,” survival is understood through labor: “We were stripped of our role as the administrative, commercial, and military hub of the British Empire in Southeast Asia. Unless we could find and attach ourselves to a new hinterland, the future was bleak” (49).

Lee says little about other social, cultural or political concerns; his main concern was devising a (capitalist) economy for the nation: “We cast around for solutions and were willing to try any practical idea that could create jobs and enable us to pay our way” (50, emphases mine). As we see, Lee understands the livelihood of his citizens only through a register of labor and market exchange; practicality during independence means to have a job. Here we can clearly see the nexus between capitalism and nationalism as I proposed in the introduction. Lee’s memoir, as I quoted from his preface, is largely concerned with nation-building and formation; as we see through Lee’s musings of what the main crisis in Singapore was after independence, the nation needs workers to survive. As we saw the
workings of the nationalization of modernity with the national anthem, Lee’s memoir gestures towards a nationalization of capitalism. Both of these logics manifest ideologically and consequently the Singaporean citizen is interpellated into such ideology which prescribes material practices.

**Capitalist Ideology, Labor and Alienation**

The language that Lee employs places quite a bit of urgency on the necessity to enter a global capitalist economy and his logic seems to be no surprise according to Karl Marx’s writings in *The Communist Manifesto*. Singapore was compelled to enter into a global and thus capitalist market because of its material conditions, as Lee constantly reminds his readers throughout his memoirs. As shown before, Lee explains that to remain an independent country with little natural resources meant that Singapore had to generate capital in order to survive, which in turn forced the country to enter in a global market – but at least in their own terms as a sovereign nation free of British and Japanese rule. This also is where Marx points out conditions will be modified in order for the bourgeoisie to maintain its power. It is not to say that Singapore was not capitalistic before independence, but the conditions were heavily modified based on its historical experience. According to his memoirs, Lee catalyzed the change in economy – during independence, Singapore became a major port and had a flourishing shipyard industry along with some electronics production – and in “revolutionalizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society,” (248) Lee was able to create a Singaporean bourgeoisie. This is a moment of transition in Singapore, where there was a distinct shift into a nationalist capitalist class.
Ultimately, however, it may seem that Singapore remaining as a capitalistic society was inevitable as Marx points out:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization . . . It compels all nations, on the pain of extinction to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst…it creates a world after its own image. (249 – emphases mine)

One of the critiques of capitalism, according to Marxism, is the subsequent alienation of the worker. Marx begins his section titled “Alienated Labour” by criticizing the presumption that capitalism benefits a society: “When, for example, political economy defines the relationship of wages to profit from capital, the interest of the capitalist is the ultimate court of appeal, that is, it presupposes what should be its result” (85). Capitalism carries a myth with its legacy: we assume that individuals can prosper under a capitalist system, only to forget that the ostensible benefits of capitalism actually conceals and furthers inequality, class struggle and the impoverishment of the working class. What Marx finds particularly troubling are the repercussions of capitalism for labor.

Capitalism favors the bourgeoisie at the expense of the labor of the proletariat. Marx puts a large emphasis on how the worker is alienated through labor and how capitalism ultimately dehumanizes the worker. The worker’s labor transforms into a “thing” (86), an object, that is devoid of the worker’s reality and occupies a space that is exterior to the worker as “independent and alien, and becomes a self-sufficient power opposite him” (87). The power that the object wields over the worker forces the worker to
be dependent on the objects of his labor: “Thus it is his object that permits him to exist
first as a worker and secondly as a physical subject (87, emphases mine). In other words,
the worker is only recognized through the object and therefore his existence in society is
mediated by his labor in such a way that is exploitive and inaccurate. Furthermore,
merely to survive under capitalism, the worker is forced to produce labor because it is the
only way the worker understands how to attain: “. . . the satisfaction of a need, the need
to preserve his physical existence” (90). Consequently, Marx argues that human
emancipation will never be possible so long as “the whole of human slavery is involved
in the relationship of the worker to his product” (94). How this aspect of alienation plays
out as a result of nationalist capitalism will be discussed further in my analysis of Perth.

The Myth of History

In the previous section on the national anthem, I discussed the status of
Malay(ness) in relation to nationalism; the politics of Malay(ess) in the national anthem
appears much subtler compared to Lee’s memoir. In the acknowledgments in Third
World, Lee thanks several key Malay figures in Singapore and remarks: “I wanted to
avoid unintentionally hurting Malay sensitivities and have tried hard not to do so” (xviii).
Lee’s comments demonstrate his (geo)political awareness of the Malay community and
history in Singapore; he goes on to address this in the very first chapter. In “Going it
Alone,” Lee outlines several of the concerns he had as the nation became independent –
most of which involved Malaysia at some level: “We had to deter and, if need be, prevent
any wild move by the Malay Ultras (extremists) in Kuala Lumpur (KL) to instigate a
coup by the Malaysia forces in Singapore . . . ” (6). He repeats various derivatives of this
concern through the first chapter, hammering home the point that Malay was (is?) an
imminent threat. The chapter immediately following, “Building an Army from Scratch,” seems to reaffirm this fear. Lee underscores the questionable loyalty of Malays in Singapore: “Even Malays who served in our police and armed forces for many years had become very race conscious, easily swayed by racial pulls during the race riots in Malaysia” (23). In almost every discussion of Malays through *Third World*, Malays are referred to as some social or political problem.

When considering the relationship between Lee and national narrative, this equation of the Malay community as a sociopolitical issue is a key point in understanding the ways in which Singapore forms as a nation-state. The structure of the Malay nation-state is read through the Malay community in Singapore as a political, social and ideological threat. Whether referring to this paranoia through the national anthem as discussed before, or more explicitly through Lee’s memoir, or even vaguely through Lee’s NYT interview: “To understand Singapore…you’ve got to start with an improbable story: it should not exist” (Mydans and Arnold), Malays(ia) is an integral part of Singapore nationalism. In “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” Etienne Balibar discusses the transition between the pre-national state to the nation-state (133) in which he argues that the pre-history of the nation is essential to the notion of nation-formation, or he puts it: “the nationalist myth of linear destiny” (133). Following Balibar, we can locate Malaysia as a part of this pre-history; Malaysia expelled Singapore out of the Federation, the race riots were allegedly instigated by the Malays and so on. The function of this pre-history in the larger national narrative gives license to the nation-state to “rationally” form in particular ways. In the case of Singapore, this line of thinking that
Malays are problematic and therefore the state must defend Singapore is seen through the several examples given in the first section.

While tensions with Malaysia and Malays are continually touted as key features of Singaporean history, it is important to note that this history is constructed as such and assumes and naturalizes subsequent events. The ways in which Lee’s memoirs cites Malay(ness) as a problematic in the nation-state’s history inscribes meaning onto particular events particularly because of the position of power that he is in. In “Surviving Without a Hinterland” demonstrates how Singapore’s history with Malaysia has become significant in justifying why and how the Singaporean nation-state has been constructed as such. Lee rationalizes: “[O]ur Dutch economic adviser . . . painted a grim but not hopeless picture. If we continued on with no common market with Malaysia and no trade with Indonesia, by the end of 1966 unemployment would exceed 14 percent. This would mean social unrest” (50). Lee later goes on to explicate the ways that Singapore has developed its economy on a global scale by becoming a service center to western multinationals which continues on today. It seems doubtful that social unrest would only arise from unemployment; as we will see in the next section, dissenting voices are largely concerned with their social alienation and marginalization.
Section 1. “(Un)Shared Values: Nationalism, Modernity and Singaporean Identity in Djinn’s Perth

Perth (2004), described by some film critics as “Singapore’s Answer to [Martin Scorsese’s] Taxi Driver” (Ricketts Video News) addresses the generational and social alienation of subjects in Singapore, contrary to what the film title may suggest. Filmed by Singaporean director, Djinn, Perth tells the story of Harry Lee, a self-described “simple man” living in Singapore, who longs to emigrate to Perth, Australia. After Harry, a former merchant seaman, loses his job as a security guard at a shipyard and his wife gambles away his life savings, Harry’s friend Angry Boy Lee offers him a job as a driver for a Vietnamese prostitute named Mei in Singapore’s red light district, Geylang. Much like Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver, Harry experiences various forms of alienation, finds solace in his attraction to her, and offers to buy her freedom; the film culminates in his violent and bloody confrontation with gang members who control Mei.

Perth presents the problem of the “rat race” lifestyle in Singapore through a cautiously expressed anxiety and frustration with the state. Within a larger cultural discourse, these rather repressed sentiments can be seen in venues such as internet forums, blogs, literature and, more recently, alternative media. My reading of the film critically examines Harry, who represents a usually-forgotten perspective, and the ways in which Perth articulates a common anxiety and angst felt among many Singaporeans as the country rapidly modernizes. As a representation of first-generation Singaporeans, Harry

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10 It appears that Djinn’s last name is a moniker; in certain movie databases he is listed with the alternative name of Ong Lay Jinn. However, because the film credits lists the director as Djinn, I will refer to him as such.

is unable to fit within the codes of modernity shaped by the state’s push to become a
perfect, modern and global nation. Through a Marxist critique, I read Harry’s
maladjustment to Singapore’s modernity as representative of the ways in which (late)
capitalism subjugates the proletarian class;\textsuperscript{12} moreover, Harry’s identity and alienation
are largely determined by the politics of class. This is seen in three forms: first, in a
Marxist sense, Harry feels the frustration of his life being dictated by (late) capitalist
ideals. Harry, an alienated worker, continues to unwittingly dictate his value system
according to a capitalist register. The second instance of alienation is symbolized by
Harry’s relationship to his son. Singapore’s capitalist agenda promotes differing social
codes of modernity and values between first and second generation Singaporeans,
exacerbating the divide between fathers and sons in understanding each other’s world.
The third type of alienation is caused by Singapore’s immigration policies, which have
been part of the state’s vision of capitalist progress; the constant movement of foreign
workers to Singapore disrupts the national narrative and community. In this social and
economic context, Harry’s labor – which symbolizes his productivity and place within
the national community – is replaced both by the second generation and foreign
immigrants. The multiple forms of Harry’s alienation, and his inability to adapt to the
new rules of modernity, result in his longing to emigrate out of Singapore. Through these
three forms of Harry’s alienation – economic, generational and national – the film
questions the efficacy of the state’s efforts to construct a narrative of national and
capitalist progress for the Singaporean subject.

\textsuperscript{12} My deployment of “proletarian” is meant to be regarded in an abstract sense; my use of it is to underline
the significance of the exploitative relationship between the bourgeois and proletariat.
The History and Context of Singapore

Before its independence in 1965, the Republic of Singapore faced British colonialism (1826-1941), Japanese imperialism (1941-1945), and economic exploitation at the hands of Malaysia (1955-1965)\(^\text{13}\) (Turnbull). Initially, the government of Singapore had no confidence that the country would be economically successful as an independent state and also needed a way to counter British colonialism; thus, Singapore pushed for a merger with the Malaysian Federation in the early 1960’s. In 1963, Singapore signed The Malaysia Agreement, but Malaysia’s prioritization of the indigenous Malays conflicted with the dominant Chinese population of Singapore which led to political tensions and racially-fueled riots. The Malaysian Federation expelled Singapore, which consequently was declared to be an independent sovereign state on August 9, 1965. Although Singapore was not necessarily looking to be independent at this time, they were left with no choice.\(^\text{14}\) To remain an independent country with little natural resources, Singapore was compelled to enter and aggressively advance in a global and capitalist market. Singapore thus made a distinct shift into a nation with a clear goal for capitalist success; these goals, however, are expressed through a nationalist framework. As noted in earlier sections, it is difficult to separate the two spheres of capitalism and nationalism in Singapore, because the two are depicted as mutually constitutive of each other (i.e., a good capitalist in Singapore helps the nation, and a good nationalist in Singapore is a successful capitalist).

The national formation of Singapore was meticulously planned on contemporary and late capitalist notions of success: state social control to maintain economic

\(^{13}\) The time period in which the national anthem was written.

fluctuation, advanced technology, increased surplus value, etc. Yet, these notions are moderated by more conservative and “traditional” ideals of Confucianism, strong national defense through conscription, limited free speech, etc. In the engineering of the nation, the Singaporean government seemed to be all too aware of the consequences of engaging with a capitalist system. In order to enter the global capitalist market, Singapore has promoted itself as an entry point for western multi-national corporations, meaning that there would be unavoidable western influence. At the same time, the Singaporean government has also openly taken an anti-western, and particularly anti-American, stance in regards to the west’s cultural values. (This is not to be conflated with how Singapore regards the US politically or economically as Singapore does have a free-trade agreement with the US and also allies itself with the US in terms of war involvement). According to Chua Beng Huat: “The official fear is ostensibly that liberal individualism will make inroads into the cultural sphere of local Asian populations, leading them away from local ‘traditional’ values and undermining local social cohesion” (Chua 13). Singapore needed to mitigate capitalism’s tendency to promote profit (i.e., western tendencies) with nationalist ideals in order to advance economic progress. In the eyes of the Singaporean government, individualism and self-interest would inevitably lead to “disastrous consequences [such] as high divorce rates, legal protection for criminals over the rights of crime victims, sexual promiscuity and drug abuse” (Chua 12). In other words, in what appears to be a partial defense of Singaporean conservatism, the government subscribes to an Occidentalist discourse, in which the west is stereotypically decadent.

Although Singapore culturally positions itself against the west, state policies are not constructed as oppositional, but primarily based on modernist, late capitalist ideals.
These ideals of modernity follow the rationale of an Enlightenment project of progress with an inner logic that will ensure “human freedom” through scientific discovery, social organization, and enrichment of everyday life. Aihwa Ong argues modernity in Asia has particular modernist, nationalist and capitalist ideals that can be at odds with each other: “the modernist imaginary of the nation-state . . . [is] in tension with modernist imaging of entrepreneurial capitalism”(172). Ong argues modernity is largely influenced by the Chinese diaspora in Asia, consequently modernity in Asia is site-specific with its inherent contradictions. This inner cultural logic of Confucian values that underlies state imaginaries has been often criticized by the west as a traditional conservatism/backwardness and thus maintains the east/west binary. I believe, however, that the Singaporean state primarily constructs its policies upon their own modernist imaginary, but uses the west (and its so-called decadence) as part of the rationale behind their state policies. By Othering the west, Singapore is able to justify its policies for their citizens. Although modernity and capitalism are not interchangeable terms, the project and success of modernity in Singapore are measured on a capitalist register. In the same vein, capitalism is understood on a register of modernity. The two occupy different, but overlapping spheres – modernity in this case is often understood through culture while capitalism is understood through the economy. Overarching these two imaginaries is (ethno)nationalism where tradition plays a large factor in policy construction, in the way that Ong describes.

The Singaporean state’s goal of constructing policies that will secure the health, productivity and security (Ong) is articulated in “The Shared Values.” According to Singapore Infopedia, an online resource sponsored by the Singaporean state, the idea to
create a national ideology was suggested by former Deputy Prime Minister Goh Cheok Tong in October 1988 in order to: “... preserve Singapore's Asian identity in an era of globalization where Singaporeans would be exposed to external influences” (“Singapore Shared Values”). The national ideology, eventually coined as “The Shared Values,” was instated in Parliament in 1991 (“Singapore Shared Values”). It is difficult to articulate how effective “The Shared Values” are, particularly because this national ideology is not publicly paraded. However, I would argue that Singaporeans have an implicit understanding of these values, even if they are not able to, say, recite them off from memory. The rhetoric that underlies these values, what Chua terms as “communitarian,” comes up through various nationalist discourses such as national song. What is notable about “The Shared Values” is the mere fact that they have been written and officially sanctioned – ultimately they reveal something of the Singaporean state’s logic.

“The Shared Values” are one example of the Singaporean government’s tendency to combat individualism, seen as the negative cultural ramifications of capitalism. These values articulate a national identity that would defend Singapore from the effects of westernization (“Singapore Shared Values”), which the Singaporean government associates with moral degradation, and reify what the state views as their cultural values. Here we see how Singapore uses the west as a means to an end; these values are written on the premise of defining a national identity as non-western. The Shared Values are modeled on Confucian principles and the government claims them as “Asian” values.16

15 For example, in the song “One People, One Nation, One Singapore” part of the lyrics read: “One people, one nation, one Singapore/That's the way that we will be forevermore/Every creed and every race, has its role and has its place.” The song follows similar logic of “The Shared Values” in terms of notions of communitarian, though it is much more explicit about the labor of the citizen.

16 See Chua Beng Huat’s “‘Asian-Values’” Discourse and the Resurrection of the Social” for a history and excellent discussion of the notion of ‘Asian values.’ While I appreciate how argues that the “Asian” in “Asian values” must be...
This is extremely problematic and essentialist and it is certainly contradictory to think of Singaporean society as multicultural if the nation’s values are modeled on the product of Chinese culture. The use of the word “shared” insinuates, and perhaps forces, the notion that all Singaporeans have this commonality despite The Shared Values’ explicitly Chinese roots. Even more contradictory, the governmental figures who wrote these values were usually educated in the west. Nonetheless, this forced binarism between the east and west as posited by the state was institutionalized as a national ideology by Parliament in 1991 as follows: “Nation before community and society before self. Family as the basic unit of society. Community support and respect for the individual. Consensus, not conflict. Racial and religious harmony” (“Singapore Shared Values”). “The Shared Values” are written not for the Singaporean worker, but for the Singaporean citizen. However, because the government is explicitly concerned with the economic and capitalist progress of the country, the citizen and the worker are the same; one cannot be addressed separately from the other. Consequently, it constructs the notion that the Singaporean worker’s labor is ultimately for the benefit of the nation. As an example of how the Singaporean government painstakingly attempts to plan their nation, “The Shared Values” can certainly be read as a means to overcome the tension between capitalism and nationalism.17

17 This is not to say that capitalism is a self-determining force that cannot be intervened into by humans; it is important to keep in mind that capitalism (loosely understood in this essay as an economic structure whose mode of production is privately owned/(bourgeois) class controlled) is a social construction which has a large (but is not the sole) influence in the way in which individuals form their social relations. Furthermore, I want to note here that capitalism takes particular forms dependent on its context, and although some consistencies can be drawn across different contexts, it is important to pay attention to where and how it is situated.
Film Industry in Singapore and *Perth* as Social and Political Criticism

*Perth* presents a social and political critique of Singapore’s modernization, but not without facing political and cultural constraints. Although my own critical reading interprets *Perth* as a social critique, the film is ridden with violence, crude humor and gore. Because of the violence, this film can be easily dismissed as an action film of sorts. However, given the conditions for self-censorship and film productions in Singapore, the violence has a specific function in concealing the film’s social intent and overcoming the challenges of a limited market for films. The Singaporean government is very conservative about free speech and expression; as a result, the media is state-sponsored and controlled. Moreover, media from other countries are strictly regulated -- films are often censored, pornography is banned, and at one point, there was limited access to various internet sites.\(^{18}\) Despite this, there have been quite a few films produced from 1991 to 2004 in what Olivia Khoo coins as “the revival period” (87). During this time period, Khoo points out, two types of Singaporean films have emerged: “local content films” and “international film entries” (87). Of these two genres, the former tend to be comedic and much more commercially successful in Singapore, whilst the latter usually constitute independent movies and have been more successful overseas. Independent films in Singapore have difficulty making profits, and distributors have been prudish about screening artistic films (“An Exclusive Interview…”).\(^{19}\) As Djinn notes in an interview, although Singapore has the largest per capita movie watching audience in the world, the film industry is not a lucrative business because of the small size of the

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\(^{18}\) With cable internet now common in most households (where internet access is not filtered through proxy servers), the internet has been increasingly difficult to regulate.

\(^{19}\) Director Djinn has also noted: ‘Local films have traditionally (with a couple of exceptions) not done well for distributors…’ because they often are perceived as ‘artistic.’
market; local filmmakers in particular must face a film audience that is skeptical of independent films (“Interview with…”).²⁰ It appears that Perth attempts to bridge the gap between “local content films” and “international film entries” through certain marketing strategies (i.e., framing the film as a Singaporean Taxi Driver) and by attempting to add some Hollywood gloss to the plot and film. The film is produced and pitched in a style that can compete with more commercially viable Hollywood, Hong Kong action, or Japanese horror films.

Perth has been Djinn’s most successful and commercial film to date. His first film, Return to Pontianak (2001) (and renamed Voodoo Nightmare for overseas distribution) is a horror film with a contemporary spin on a Malay folklore story about a forest spirit. The film had lukewarm reception.²¹ Perth, with its apparent political stance, is a far cry from Djinn’s previous film. Although a native Singaporean, Djinn had already been living in Los Angeles, California for seven years at the time of filming.²² It is unclear if Djinn’s relocation from Singapore had anything to do with his dissatisfaction with Singapore or its politics, but ostensibly, Djinn’s distance from Singapore influenced his critical perspective on Singapore and likely biased his representation of Singapore.

Although Perth attempts to be more commercial, it appears the film is firmly situated as an “international film entry.” The film has won some awards in film festivals internationally and was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006. Other than one film review in The Straits Times by Editor Richard Lim where he deems Perth as the “…most coherent […] and authentic Singapore film ever made,” (“No pain, no gain”) very

²⁰ There are also limitations for profits on an island whose population in 2004 (when Perth was released) was 4.3 million (Singapore Department of Statistics) with only 147 screens with a seating capacity for 38,000 people (Film Industry: Facts and Figures).
²² http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117925809.html?categoryid=31&cs=1&p=0
little, if any, criticism has been published about the film. Most of the literature I was able

to find about the film was mainly interviews with the director by independent film
reviewers in the west. It is difficult to discern whether this is due to poor local reception
or due to the relatively recent release of the film, particularly since other local films (such
as Eric Khoo’s 12 Storeys and Mee Pok Man) with equal status to Perth have garnered
criticism. Regardless of the lack of academic and public reception, I assume that the film
has caught the attention of local audiences to some degree, as locally-made films in
Singapore are a rarity.

Despite the seemingly Hollywood-style fetishization of violence, the film makes a
subtle yet astute political and social criticism of Singapore. The main character’s name is
Harry Lee, the nickname for Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. As noted in the previous
section, Lee Kuan Yew is a highly respected figure, but shrouded with controversy
because the laws and policies he implemented were totalitarian, oppressive of free speech,
and intent on explicit forms of social engineering.23 Giving Harry the name of the figure
largely responsible for his alienation, the film makes a jibe at Singapore’s history and
political climate. Perth provides the narrative of a first-generation Singaporean that has
otherwise gone unnoticed and unrecognized. Although these anxieties are now expressed
through venues such as the internet, the narratives of first-generation Singaporeans are
often left out. The film thus gives voice to the first-generation through Harry’s character.
Harry’s inability to decipher codes of modernity is a result of his alienation from a nation
whose agenda for capitalist success moves on ruthlessly without him.

Capitalism and Consumption in Singapore

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23 For example, Prime Minister Lee’s social policies have been accused of practicing eugenics. For more, see Lee Kuan
Yew’s memoir for his take on how and why certain social policies were put into place. Also recent feature in the New
In *Perth*, it is clear that despite his misfit relationship with Singapore’s late capitalism, Harry is nonetheless a part of the growing globalized consumer lifestyle.\(^{24}\) His HDB flat (Housing Development Board apartments are built and subsidized by the government and are where the large majority of Singaporeans, regardless of class, live) is decorated with ornamental objects such as a plastic Christmas tree, a Chinese brush painting, and a television. The plastic Christmas tree seems out of place; there is nothing in the movie that signals that it is Christmas time, nor does Harry acknowledge the tree’s presence at any point. However, the tree does symbolize a western holiday that is perhaps recognized more as a yearly consumer tradition than a religious tradition.\(^{25}\) The other objects seem more in sync with Harry’s lifestyle and cultural background: the Chinese brush painting shows Harry’s appreciation for Asian/eastern aesthetic, while the television is an artifact that is a part of his modern lifestyle. Although these objects symbolize a range of cultures (west, east, modernity), they don’t seem to carry particular significance to the plot or to Harry’s character; they are largely ornamental and reflect a mainstream consumer lifestyle. Harry’s labor has been devoted to attaining these decorative objects that signify his position in the consumer market. Harry’s economic role extends from a worker to a consumer, and is sustained through his consumptive practices. Karl Marx criticizes how the worker ultimately is bound to the product of her labor for the capital it generates for her survival and is consequently alienated from her species-being. In respect to Harry, his life as an alienated worker is re-alienated through his consumer practices because his life is contained within other workers’ summaries of labor; he is one step removed from the already alienated state that Marx describes.

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\(^{24}\) In the introduction of *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities*, Chua Beng-Huat notes: ‘sustained economic growth had translated into a rapid expansion of consumerism as part of daily life’ (1).

\(^{25}\) Christianity isn’t a particularly influential religion in Singapore.
Harry’s consumer practices also mark a break from early capitalism to late capitalism where the worker’s alienation is maintained by consumerism rather than labor production.

Harry’s consumer lifestyle is the very source of his frustrations because it maintains his distance from self-determination. The reality of Singaporean capitalist development leads to Harry losing his job as shown in an early scene in the film:

AB LEE. Harry, don’t get me wrong, you’ve always been good to me… Look. Oh, I’ll tell you anyway. The shipyard is downsizing now. So they want me to volunteer to retire everybody.

HARRY. Really?

AB LEE. Yah. Nowadays, there’s no place for us. They want some fucking super computer for security. Right now we are being replaced by poly grads. Tell me how…? How do we fight…? Cannot fight. Surrender already.

This scene encapsulates the general sentiment of the film: the rapid technological and economic development of Singapore leaves the first-generation Singaporean worker behind and renders their skills obsolete. Harry’s blue-collar job as a security guard at a shipyard is no longer needed because he will be replaced by technology, or as Angry Boy Lee describes it, a “super computer.” This technology will be run by second-generation Singaporeans, white-collar workers with education from polytechnics. Thus, the labor of the first-generation Singaporean cannot be converted to fit into the late capitalist, technologically and educationally advanced nation.

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26 Poly grads, or graduates of polytechnics (about equivalent to a graduate from a US community college).
27 Language in Singapore is a rather complicated issue. Most of the dialogue in the film is spoken in English and Singlish, which is a creole language of (British) English, Hokkien, Malay, and Tamil. For the purposes of this paper, I am generally working off the subtitling and thus translation of the movie, but I have made some slight changes in my transcriptions to fit a little closer to the actual dialogue where I believe the readers will still be able to infer meaning. For instance, this particular scene, AB Lee actually says ‘surrender already’ in English, while the subtitling says ‘I give up.’ I assume this change was made in order to accommodate to an international audience who would not necessarily understand the accent or Singlish phrases.
It is clear that Harry’s working life operates as an allegory of changing conditions and the onset of modernity in general; to illustrate this point, it is useful to follow Harry’s career beginning as a merchant seaman, to a shipyard security guard to a taxi driver. As a merchant seaman, Harry traveled the world and his labor, for his time period, would have marked him as a “modern man” of sorts, and a true contributor to the progress and success of a then-struggling nation. Harry is aware of the prestige that such labor used to carry, particularly because trade was the primary mode for Singapore’s economic importance and progress at that time; his labor directly furthered Singapore’s economic growth and modernization. As a security guard, Harry’s labor is not as prestigious or indispensable because he is no longer at the forefront of the industry, carrying out the essential duties of trade. However, as a security guard he protects the assets of trade and is still associated with modernity through his labor. Harry still maintains an element of pride: in a scene where he is clocking in for work, we see Harry primping in the mirror and smoothing his security guard uniform and carefully shining his name badge. His uniform reminds the viewers that the importance of his labor is closely linked to his role as a national subject – although the uniform is generic in many ways, it is denotes an “officialness” somewhat reminiscent of the army. However, as a taxi driver, Harry is no longer modern and has no significant role in contributing to the success of the nation. He is at the beck and call of anyone and has no power or authority in his labor. Harry, once the modern man, shifts into the role of the worker and is alienated from his national identity. Harry’s labor does not forward the “progress” narrative in Singapore where the

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28 Singapore has a three year mandatory conscription for males when they turn 18; this service is often regarded as a rite of passage.
29 All transportation is strictly regulated by the state (http://www.lta.gov.sg/public_transport/index_pt_taxi.htm) in Singapore and furthermore taxis must be
citizen’s worth is measured by his labor (which functions as a code for modernity); as such, he is not taken seriously – by himself or other characters in the film. It is clear his passengers have no respect for Harry as a taxi driver. We see a passenger drunkenly vomit in his taxi and other passengers who generally ignore or belittle his existence. Through these interactions, we see that the passengers, as other Singaporean citizens and workers, decode Harry’s labor as inadequate and treat him as such. Harry is unable to adapt to the new cultural logic that has developed with the shift into the late-capitalist/post-industrial economy and society.

What constitutes as the “good” and “productive” Singaporean citizen is overdetermined by notions of modernity and nationalism. As we see with the trajectory of Harry’s labor, his alienation from the state is not contingent on class – there are no huge transitions Harry makes in terms of class, as he remains a member of the working class through his life. From a Marxist critical perspective, we see how Harry further moves away from the mode of production. The significance of his labor is temporal and dependent on the most current notion of modernity (and in turn, closely tied to late capitalism). Shortly after Singapore’s independence, trade was the most significant industry; now commerce and biotechnology are the upcoming lucrative industries. Harry, with his apparent lack of education, is unable to keep abreast of contemporary labor practices.

Unshared Values

Naruse 46
The film suggests that communitarian solutions advocated by “The Shared Values” are supposed to but do not actually overcome Harry’s frustrations with capitalism. After Harry tells Angry Boy Lee about an altercation with an unnamed bus driver, Angry Boy offers to help Harry with his situation and declares: “You are a Lee, right? We take care of our own kind. And I’ll take care of you.”

Like the logic of “The Shared Values,” by referring to the ethnically Chinese name Lee and using pronouns such as “we” and “our,” Angry Boy defines his and Harry’s identity in ethno-nationalist terms. In the same vein of “The Shared Values,” a community-based loyalty amongst all Lees is called for. In a different scene, where Angry Boy tells Harry that he would soon be fired from his job, one sees on the wall next to Angry Boy several stickers (or possibly magnets) in various languages with slogans such as “We Try Harder” in English and “Kami Cuma Sedaya Upaya,” Malay for “we try with all our might.”

Much as how the ideology of “The Shared Values” presumably functions to mitigate what the government views as the negative effects of capitalism, these slogans are intended to offer Harry community-based solutions to allay his frustrations with the effects of capitalism.

The film’s critique of Singapore’s national ideology lies in Harry’s refusal to partake in these communitarian solutions. The film illustrates that the ideology these slogans promote do not actually solve Harry’s problems. The very character that is named after the man who oversaw the development and construction of the nation wants no part of these plans. Harry believes that the best way to solve his frustrations is to move to Perth, his imagined utopia where he will be free of such meticulous planning. Ironically,

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30 An alternative reading of this could be that it is an allusion to the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew again, who has since retired and has been replaced by his son Lee Hsien Loong, who was transitioning into office around the time of production.

31 See Ong’s discussion on guangxi

32 My appreciation goes to Yin Peng Leong who helped me with the translation of the Malay phrase.
not only does Harry want to escape from Singapore – a place which is an attempted
utopia – but his solution is to move to his imagined utopia. Harry’s desire to escape
Singapore signifies his complete avoidance and non-participation in the national
community, and thus contradicts the values that “The Shared Values” attempts to espouse.

The issues of modernity and capitalist development are also articulated through
Harry’s relationship with his son. Harry’s great frustration as an ousted worker is
manifested in the generational divide between him and his son. Harry’s son is about to
close married, and Harry is not invited to the wedding, but he goes to the wedding reception
in attempts to reconcile with his son, bringing a peace offering of a jade pendant
necklace. Before Harry enters the scene, his son is chatting with a woman who has
made an appearance earlier in the film as a passenger in Harry’s taxi. In that earlier scene,
she tells Harry in a strong British accent that she is Singaporean but she lives and works
in London; she is the quintessential modern Singaporean woman who embodies global
capitalism. In the wedding reception scene, this same woman asks Harry’s son
sarcastically, “Another round of yam seng?” As Harry’s son rolls his eyes, he replies,
“Good God, no.” The newer, and more westernized, generation of Singaporeans has less
tolerance for cultural rituals, and this is another factor exacerbating the generational
divide. When Harry enters the scene, the highly-emotional confrontation between him
and his son reveals a few characteristics of their dynamics. First, Harry’s son speaks with
a Singaporean accent when arguing his father. The son communicates differently to his
father, a blue-collar worker with no education, than to his friend who lives and works in

33 Generally speaking, Chinese culture values jade for its aesthetic properties and for its protective powers.
34 At most Chinese wedding receptions, it is ritual for the bride and groom to go to each guest table with glasses of
cognac or some other spirit, and yell, ‘Yam seng!’ as they down their drinks. The meaning of the phrase is something to
the effect of ‘Cheers!’
London. Harry is aware that his son thinks himself better than Harry: “Wah! Big time now, ah? What? You’re embarrassed with me [showing up at your wedding], is it?” This scene gives a glimpse of a long-standing feud between father and son who are unable to understand each other’s worlds and values. Harry’s son, as a second-generation Singaporean, has fewer qualms about late capitalism; it is the life that he knows. This is made apparent at the end of the film, after Harry’s death, when his son comments: “It is regrettable that my father has achieved so little with his life.” What Harry’s son considers as “life achievements” is based on his modern values: education and capitalist gain.

The third instance of alienation arises out of the Singaporean state’s push to become a modern, cosmopolitan, global city-state. Arjun Appadurai’s term ethnoscape is useful to describe this condition: “. . . the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons who constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (32). Singapore is a globalized landscape where the constant movement of immigrants, guest-workers, and tourists into and out of Singapore alters the rapport among Singaporeans. The late capitalist agenda of the state has inherent contradictions: on the one hand, it tries to promote “The Shared Values” based upon assumptions of an ethno-nationalist cohesive nation; on the other hand it promotes mobility of capital and people which threatens the very cohesiveness of a national community. Despite the explicit attempts of “The Shared Values” to ideologically construct a national/cultural community, the capitalist agenda of the state fosters a “rat-race” culture in Singapore and thus renders The Shared Values moot.
Singapore’s global state is shaped by the government’s encouragement of foreign workers to work, live and seek citizenship in order to make up for the low birth rate and aging population (“Singapore Seeks…”). According to the article “Singapore Seeks Young Rich Expats,” the new governmental plan to encourage the arrival of an additional two million people to the island nation has led to anxieties about race relations and the fear that Singaporeans will lose their jobs to foreign expatriates. Already in 1999, the Singaporean government had made changes to its immigration policies to shorten the time required for expatriates to attain Singaporean citizenship (“Coming to Singapore…”).

_Perth_ acknowledges the presence of two “types” of foreigners in Singapore. In one scene, when Harry is looking out his window while smoking a cigarette, he sees a foreign domestic worker cleaning the windows in the neighboring HDB flats. The majority of middle to upper-class families employ live-in maids from neighboring poorer countries in the region (e.g., Philippines, Indonesia) as domestic help to do household chores. Given the desperate circumstances from which these domestic workers generally come, they have little bargaining power and thus pose little threat to Singaporeans; this is perhaps best understood by how the state categorizes workers in Singapore. In the case of domestic help, maids are categorized as “guest workers,” and under some headings, known as “unskilled labor” or “foreign workers” (Yeoh). In this category, workers have two-year renewable contracts and generally have limited freedoms because of the laws they are governed under; for example, domestic workers are not allowed to marry Singaporeans nor are they allowed to get pregnant. The other more “threatening” foreigner is shown in a scene where Angry Boy beats up two white expatriate men who
yell obscenities at Angry Boy and Harry as they drive by. The film’s representation of these foreigners is a stereotype of the “ang moh,” literally translated as “red-hair.” Despite the fact that the professional expatriates in Singapore are not all white and male, this scene shows the threatening foreigner as racialized, drunk, violent and obnoxious. This stereotype is in line with the underlying anxieties in Singaporean society and is likely a response to the ways in which the state encourages particular foreign workers as mentioned above; these workers are generally referred to as “foreign talent” (Yeoh). When there are already underlying anxieties about the Singaporean rat-race, we can see how these worries may be amplified. The mere wording for the titles of these two categories of workers demonstrates the importance put on professional immigrants. These anxieties are highlighted with a sense of resentment, as seen through the stereotyped white expatriates in the film, particularly because “foreign talent” is attracted to Singapore by high salaries and generally enjoy a more privileged lifestyle (often referred to as the “expat lifestyle”).

Harry’s desire to move to Perth shows a desire for a home where he can happily live and escape from the unrelenting march of late capitalism; what becomes ironic is that Perth is also late capitalist and Harry is unable to think out of capitalist terms. These desires are best displayed in the scene where Harry and his best friend Selvam reminisce about the past when they were modern men of their times. Harry paints a picture of Perth as a place where they can enjoy the fruits of their labor:

HARRY. The buggers are making life for us difficult here. We’ll go over there and we’ll live like kings. Who’s there? Jerry da Costa, Hong is there, Steven

35 It’s likely no coincidence that the scene with the white expatriates culminates in violence, since they are regarded as more threatening, unlike the scene with the maid which can be easily overlooked since there is no dialogue or confrontation; this can partly be read as racism/classism but also demonstrates what the CNN article above articulates.
is there, Francisco is there. All your friends are there. Come and stay with me first.

SELVAM. I think everybody is there already.

HARRY. That’s what I mean, I’ve been telling you this for some time. The beer is cheaper, the food is cheaper and we’re not getting any younger. Here the buggers will work you to death. Over there it’s more relaxed. Four day week…West Coast [of Australia] there are more Asians. Also better food and less racism. Gold Coast, I don’t know. Forget about this place, forget it! It’s expensive, there’s no place for us. No offense, Selva, but you and I are not educated…The army has been good to you and the sea has been good to me. We are the generation who worked with our bare hands. Nowadays there is no more use for us.

When Harry tells Selvam about all his friends living in Perth, the scene cuts to quick shots of his friends in Perth. Jerry holds a thumbs-up sign and grinning as he is fishing, two white women hold onto Hong in either a casino or a bar, and Steven and Francisco sit in a racecar with their thumbs up. He tries to convince Selvam that because their friends have already migrated to Perth, Harry and Selvam are left behind. To stay in Singapore means that Harry must cope with the obsolescence of his labor in the Singaporean marketplace where he cannot generate enough wages to afford the cost of living. Harry paints Perth as a place where their labor will have more value and as his friends demonstrate, life will be nothing less than one big holiday; they will still work, but they will cheaply enjoy consumer practices of drinking beer and eating better food. Harry unrealistically romanticizes Perth in crude consumerist terms.
In various scenes, Harry displays an intense nostalgia for his past. He reminisces about his travels as a merchant seaman: “I’ve been around the world. Seen it all. Europe, France, South America, South Africa… Cambodia. Vietnam.”\(^{36}\) The souvenirs that Harry purchased during his travels (a miniature Statue of Liberty, Chinese junkboat, mini-bottles of alcohol, a teddy bear, a jade dragon- just to name a few) are reminders of his past and can also be read as a manifestation of his (un)conscious desires. When Harry worked as merchant seaman and traveled the world, he already demonstrated a relentless and unconscious desire to leave Singapore. These souvenir commodities are physical memories of the times he was not in Singapore. Harry’s souvenirs also function as material proof of his travels around the world which Harry uses as cultural capital brags about at various points in the film. When Harry chats with Selvam and brings up his past as a merchant seaman, Selvam always gravely nods and looks dutifully impressed. However, in the scene where Harry gives the British-educated woman and her friend a ride in his taxi: Harry comments that London is a beautiful city and that when he was last there, “. . . the dollar was eight to the pound!” Here, Harry is trying to connect with the second-generation passenger, but her response is, “Please fucking kill me, I have a headache.” Her friend, more friendly and polite, comments to Harry: “Your English is just perfect, by the way,” to which Harry gleefully replies, “Of course! Why not! Ooh la la! I used to work in the merchant navy!” Although Harry believes he possesses codes of modernity, through his ability to speak English (as opposed to speaking Singlish) and his worldliness, Harry is still alienated because his accomplishments do not translate to the second-generation who dictate the significance of these codes.

\(^{36}\) It is rather unclear to me whether Harry’s conflation of continents and countries signals a lack of education or that he never actually traveled to these places. Nonetheless, he convinces himself that he is a worldly man.
The capitalist logic that Harry subscribes to extends beyond his labor practices and manifests itself through his interpersonal relationships. Through the film, Harry’s feelings of angst and frustration manifest themselves in acts of denial and violence. From the opening scenes of the film, it is clear that Harry is an alcoholic. His first gulp of alcohol is before dawn and throughout the film Harry is constantly drinking and getting drunk and endlessly smoking cigarettes; forms of addictive behaviors which insinuate a state of denial or avoidance of reality. But when Mei enters into Harry’s life, he believes that he has a “solvable problem” because he can help Mei out of prostitution by paying her family debt. Harry feels that helping Mei can redeem him from his frustrations and unsavory behaviors. However, Harry is denied control and redemption when the gang refuses to let Harry buy her freedom. This becomes the climax of the film: Harry, already frustrated and unable to find a way out of his alienated state, finds that he has an obstacle that he can actually confront. Harry eventually murders several gang members with his parang in a fit of rage, and ends up getting killed himself. In terms of the plot, violence plays two significant functions. First, Harry’s violent encounter with the gang is a culmination of the frustration, angst and lack of control over his livelihood. For the latter half of the film, the gang comes to symbolize late capitalism in the sense that they control his labor and thus livelihood. Harry’s narrative ends with death, leaving the audience to consider the futility of Harry’s confrontation with the gang and the impossibility of addressing the problems of late capitalism. Second, Harry’s encounter with the gang is one of the most explicit similarities to Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*. For the knowing audience, this may deflect a reading of the film as a social criticism because the audience is reminded of *Taxi Driver* and begins now read the film as “Singapore’s Answer to *Taxi Driver*.”
“Driver” as its been advertised. But even for the audience member that has not watched *Taxi Driver*, the violent encounter with the gang redirects the possibility of reading Harry as a subject of the Singaporean state. At no point of the film is there explicit mention of how the state is implicated in Harry’s alienation and general unhappiness, but the plot now forces the audience to implicate the gangs in Harry’s death.

Harry and Mei have similar problems in terms of being trapped within the pressures of late capitalism. Mei is in Singapore for capitalist gain, to earn money as a prostitute to pay off her family’s gambling debt. Her story is similar to Harry’s in many ways: she wants to escape the living conditions in Singapore (to go back to Vietnam) and is confined by her economic circumstances. Unlike Harry, however, the economic circumstances that trap Mei in Singapore are gendered and much more desperate; she has less agency than Harry. When Harry recognizes this in Mei, he wants to be of help and works towards buying her freedom; again Harry operates on consumerist terms. This relationship between Harry and Mei is not only a matter of Harry’s projection of capitalist, sexual and perhaps even paternal desires onto Mei, but also says something about how gender relations also cannot escape capitalist logic. Unlike Harry, however, Mei does subscribe to the logic of “The Shared Values,” and in this case, with specific attention to the first two points of “The Shared Values”: “Nation before community and society before self. Family as the basic unit of society.” Mei is working to solve her family’s financial problems and as “The Shared Values” espouses, the family comes before self. Mei submits her body to her violent, but paying customers and pimps and (like Harry) is unable to escape.
Through his alienation in the film, Harry is also emasculated through his role as a worker and a father. His emasculation, measured through the worth of his labor, is read firstly through the relationship with his wife. Harry is already marginalized and when his wife gambles his savings away, and he tries to regain his masculinity and maintain the little power and authority he has left by physically abusing her. Not only is Harry’s worth measured on a capitalist register, but his wife’s worth as well. Harry depicts her as an evildoer because she lost his savings; he makes no mention of any other redeeming qualities and only reads her within this logic. Harry’s abuse presents little solution or closure for Harry, but when Mei appears in his life, she presents a tangible and material solution to his emasculation. His solution of buying her freedom follows the same logic of his desires to buy a plane ticket to move to Perth; again Harry maintains his role as a consumer by trying to purchase Mei’s freedom. This becomes futile when the gang leader refuses to comply, despite Harry’s financial ability at this point to buy her freedom.

Similar to other recent cultural expressions in Singapore, *Perth* expresses frustration with Singaporean state policies, but Harry’s story is unique in that it provides the oft forgotten perspective of a first-generation subject. Ironically, the fruits of Harry’s labor are his economic, generational and national alienation. *Perth* gives insight into the negotiation of national identity in Singapore, taking into account the overdetermining ideological discourses of modernity, late capitalism, (ethno)nationalism. Harry’s interpersonal relationships, desires, and labor demonstrate the close ties between one’s social identity and national identity. Harry demonstrates the impossibility of escaping the ideologies he despises and finds himself in a downward spiral that leads to his demise.

Ultimately, *Perth* offers two solutions: move to Perth or death. Although *Perth* is meant
to be a Singaporean adaptation of *Taxi Driver*, Harry Lee dies while Travis Bickle lives. This marks Djinn’s reading of Singapore as more dire than Scorsese’s post-Vietnam War New York City. *Perth*’s escapist solutions insinuate the futility of objecting to the Singaporean government. While this paints Djinn’s film as rather depressing, the film is limited in scope; the plot and characters do not offer a means to subverting the state, except if we read the film itself as an attempt to subvert the linear and ‘unique’ progress narrative of Singapore. However, this cultural representation of identity politics, provides valuable insights and questions how the tensions between state and subject must be negotiated. The audience is left to consider what the implications are for Singaporean subject and whether the project that the Singaporean state continues on is worth the expense of alienation.

**Subverting National Historical Myth and Language Politics in “We Live in Singapura”**

Whilst film productions such as *Perth* demonstrate the resultant angst and anxiety of national subjects in Singapore, there have been other cultural responses that exemplify subversive politics and greater agency. In 2006, actor and comedian Hossan Leong performed the song “We Live in Singapura” – a satire of national song and national history - as part of a gay-pride event in Singapore. This section will examine the ways in which Leong’s cultural response successfully queers and subverts the national myth through language. As discussed through the national anthem, language politics in Singapore and the relationship between language and history plays a large role in the national imagination; through a revisionist and satirical history and the use of Singlish, “We Live in Singapura” challenges the ideologies that are put forth by the nation-state.
“We Live in Singapura” was performed during “Indignation” – a gay and lesbian pride “season” in Singapore. Admittedly, I was both amazed and pleased upon learning that such a visible collective even existed in Singapore. Indignation has a short history with its inauguration only in 2005. Not surprisingly though, Indignation has not had an easy time; as its website says:

It is never easy organising gay-related events in Singapore. Many kinds of events require licences from various government departments, which tend to react with suspicion towards anything that is gay-themed. Even when licences are given, past experience has shown that intimidatory tactics from the police can still be expected. (“About Indignation”)

Given its conservative stance on most social and cultural issues, Singapore’s homophobic stance comes as no surprise. For example, section 377a of the Singapore penal code continues to criminalize male homosexuals:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years. (“Outrages on Decency”)

The political climate and government stance is shifting; Lee Kuan Yew has made hints towards eradicating 377a and gays and lesbians are increasingly becoming visible through advocacy groups, film narratives and alternative media. Nonetheless, gay and lesbian rights still have a ways to go.

As a part of the activities during Indignation, the controversial pro-free speech website TalkingCock.com organized the closing event “We the Citizens – TalkingCock
in Parliament,” where various figures ranging from actors to editors joined to give “their personal accounts of fitting in (or not) with the official portrait of Singapore.” As one of these speakers, Hossan Leong performed his song. Leong is a fairly recognizable figure in the Singapore public eye as a comedian, actor and radio DJ (“About”). While my analysis is not based on how intersections of queer identity and national identity subvert the politics of Singapore, it is nonetheless important to note the significance of the visibility of the gay community.

Beginning from the title of the song, the naturalized notion of Singaporean citizenry is challenged. Unlike other national songs such as “We are Singapore” and “One Nation, One People, One Singapore,” where the title assumes the singer-citizen as a metaphor for the nation-state, “We Live in Singapura” (emphases mine) shifts the relationship between the citizens to the nation-state through the verbiage in the title. By noting that the citizen only lives in the nation-state not only recognizes the agency of the citizen, but also rethinks the permanence of the nation-state borders because it emphasizes the incidental locatedness of the citizen. Interestingly however, the chorus does not stay to the title of the song: “I live in Singapura/It’s not perfect living/But at least it’s interesting/I live in Singapura/Though it’s kind of crazy/We win other country.” Although this song has not (and perhaps will not) come to the point of collective performance and the song was indeed sung by a solo performer, the use of “I” in the chorus is significant. As discussed with Majulah Singapura with the notions of unity, fraternity and simultaneity and The Shared Values, communitarian politics largely drive nationalism, capitalism, modernity and thus citizenry in Singapore. The use of “I”

37 “Talking cock” is a Singlish phrase used to describe someone that is talking nonsense and can also be used to describe casual banter.

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subverts these politics and again recognizes the Singaporean’s agency in his identity politics.

By making references to aspects of Singaporean history in a humorous matter, “We Live in Singapura” destabilizes the often trite and “uncultured” history that is espoused by the state. *Majulah Singapura* does not have any cultural referents in its lyrics and implies that imaginaries of modernity, capitalism and nationalism are cultural. Moreover, it does not invoke any historical referents. While Balibar argues that the ways in which culture and history are used for nationalism are often problematic, to reduce the Singaporean to a worker, modern subject and/or citizen without history erases the complexities of how history can be significant and unique aspect of (Singaporean) identity. “We Live in Singapura” aspires to challenge the erasure of identity; for example, in the first stanza: “Sang Nila Utama/Saw a lion, alamak/Name the village Singapura, then run very far” the lyrics refer to the legend of how the prince of Sumatra, Sang Nila Utama, discovered Singapore during a hunting trip and saw a lion, hence the name Singapura – Malay for Lion City. The word “alamak,” a Malay expression for dismay roughly translating to “Oh my God,” pokes fun at the legend; perhaps because it has since been debated whether lions were ever present in Singapore and that Utama might have mistaken a tiger for a lion. This mention of ancient Singaporean history that was recorded in Malay literature is not often touted; Utama is not a figure that looms over the national imagination, say in the same way that Christopher Columbus does in the United States. Instead, Stamford Raffles is often credited with the founding of modern Singapore and continues to be commemorated; for example, through the name of the Raffles Hotel and Singapore Airlines’ business class is “Raffles Class.” The song also satirizes the Japanese
occupation in Singapore: “Singapura very strong/Big guns all pointing wrong/Japanese, came on bikes invade us from our backside.” Here, the lyrics refer to the embarrassment the British faced upon being taken over by the Japanese, particularly because the Japanese arrived on bicycles. While the lyrics stay true to history, the tongue in cheek “invade our backside” at a gay-pride event points out the irony.

Through popular culture referents, the song emphasizes the need to recognize how the everyday lived experiences of Singaporeans are not only points to celebrate, but also an integral part of the Singaporean identity. The song also satirizes state policies that have been instated as part of the state’s rationale to become a success and what have practically become urban legends about Singapore in other countries. For example: “Everyone its fun to flush/Bubble gums are all banned/Ask your friends buy from Thailand” refers to fines for those who don’t flush toilets in public bathrooms and the infamous gum ban in Singapore. The lyrics articulate aspects of Singaporean culture that are at once both trivial and significant in a humorous manner, and in doing so, rewrites the ways that the state represents the nation. The lyrics also make pop culture references: “McDonalds Hello Kitty/Everyone drink Bubble tea/Crushing cockroach Margaret Chan, James Lye is VR Man.” The first two lines of this stanza refer to island-wide crazes: Hello Kitty collectable dolls that came with McDonalds Happy Meals and a popular drink made with milk, tea and tapioca balls. The latter two lines of the stanza refer to local celebrities. The event where the song was performed was advertised as a “celebration of Singaporean-ness”; and indeed we see how other characteristics of the Singaporean identity are brought to the fore. In other words, rather than articulations of capitalist or modern success, popular culture highlights the everyday (i.e., experienced

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and temporal) lives of Singaporeans instead. This is not to say that the lyrics do not signal capitalism or modernity; indeed there are several lines in the lyrics that reference capitalist and modern practices. However, the perspective contrasts that of *Majulah Singapura* which deploys a consequential approach because it considers what the Singaporean should be as opposed to what the Singaporean is.

Through the use of Singlish in its lyrics, the song also subverts the ways that the state has used language policies to influence the national imagination. Singlish is the Creole language of Singapore and is a hybrid of English, Malay, Hokkien and Cantonese. Singlish, like other Creole languages, developed out of the co-existence of multi-lingual ethnic groups who needed to communicate with one another. In Debbie G.E. Ho’s essay, “‘I’m not west. I’m not east. So how leh?’: Identity in flux: A Singlish Speaker’s dilemma,” she describes the conditions that necessitated the birth of Singlish: “At the people’s level, the need to communicate with one another and be understood resulted in a contact pidgin that consists mainly of English spiced with local dialects: the beginnings of Singlish, a variety that emerged for the sole purpose of intra-communication” (Ho 87).

By virtue of Singlish being a Creole language, specific to a particular geographical location, it is a marker of locality. In this way, Singlish can also been understood as a “people’s” nationalism in that Singapore had “…no single indigenous language to claim as a symbol of nationhood, given that Singapore was essentially an immigrant society where people of all walks of life came to work and live together” (87). Singlish is fairly exclusive to Singapore (parts of Malaysia also have picked up Singlish, but Malay Creole English is also referred to as “Manglish”) and is a marker of locality. English has been described by the state as a “neutral” language because it is not tied to any major ethnic
group in Singapore; this claim can be easily challenged on the basis of Singapore’s
colonial history and how class status largely determines acceptable usage of English.
Singlish on the other hand, is neutral in the sense that no single ethnic community in
Singapore can claim ownership of the language, nor can the state enforce this status as
seen through the “mother tongue” education language policies. Like other Creole
languages, Singlish is the people’s language; to therefore use Singlish in “We Live in
Singapura” celebrates Singaporean culture. Moreover, to use Singlish in Singapore is a
direct challenge to state ideologies that are enforced through language politics,
particularly because the state has made public statements about not speaking Singlish.
The lyrics of the song make a jab at this in the line: “Stop speaking Singlish lah” and
ironically uses the Singaporean discourse particle “lah.”

Using Singlish in its lyrics ultimately subverts the ideologically charged
nationalism in Singapore because Singlish as a creole language resists translation. The
national anthem is translated into the three official languages of Singapore, this may not
be possible in the case of Singlish. It would be a near impossible project to translate
Singlish in such a way that would be able to capture the different languages within
Singlish and its slang-like (i.e., temporal) nature. In other words, Singlish is able to stay
intact. In the case of the national anthem, translation functions as an ideological tool to
forward nationalist thought. “We Live in Singapura” is nationalist in the sense that it
celebrates the notion of a Singaporean national identity; however, Singlish as “people’s
language” is seemingly less alienating and has lesser ideological consequences. Moreover,
the state has expressed distaste for Singlish and has attempted to eradicate the language
through various campaigns, automatically marking Singlish as a language that is polarized to the nation-state.

**Conclusion**

This project began in an attempt to capture the complexities of nationalism in Singapore. In Part I, through readings of the Singapore national anthem and Lee Kuan Yew’s memoirs, I drew out how state imaginaries of nationalism, capitalism and modernity both interpellate and overdetermine the Singaporean citizen. In Part II, the cultural responses of *Perth* and “We Live in Singapura” demonstrate that while imaginaries of nationalism, capitalism and modernity may be the basis for Singapore’s “success,” the politics that these imaginaries produce ultimately exclude and alienate the Singaporean citizen. As we enter the age of globalization and Asia increasingly garners considerable economic and cultural capital, it is necessary to examine Asia’s political, cultural and ideological complexities not only for multicultural awareness, but to also theoretically rethink the nation. My particular focus on Singapore serves as one such burgeoning example of how intersections of nationalism, capitalism and modernity work through language politics and construct Singaporean identity.

Of course, this project can be opened up and problematized in several ways. The Singaporean state continues to develop and change its political stance; with the new Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (Lee Kuan Yew’s son) the state is ostensibly changing its policies to become more liberal and inclusive. There will be interesting developments as state politics begin to shift. Moreover, one may wonder whether the Lee Kuan Yew legacy will live on with his son. Additional work must also be done to examine how ideological structures maintain their power because it does not wholly operate top-down;
here it would be useful to think through Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to scrutinize how Singaporean citizens are complicit with and reify the ideologies the state espouses.

This project ends with the hope of putting forth questions rather than answers. By opening up a framework in which to examine identity politics of the Singaporean citizen, critical work can be done to think through the relationship between the citizen and the state. Whilst there appears to be some hope that the Singaporean state will develop more inclusive politics, these changes may be capitalistically motivated. So long as Singapore continues to ideologically construct the nation according to capitalist or modernist ideals, the stronghold of the bourgeoisie will remain at the expense of the proletariat and the alienation of those who are unable to fit within pre-determined ways of being a model Singaporean.
Appendix 1.

Literal Translation with the help of Yin Peng Leong and Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mari kita rakyat Singapura</th>
<th>[come] [we/us] [citizens/subjects under royalty] [Singapore]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sama-sama menuju bahagia</td>
<td>[together] [head towards-going] [happy/happiness]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cita-cita kita yang mulia</td>
<td>[ambition] [us/we] [that is] [the good people/humbleness]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berjaya Singapura</td>
<td>[succeed] [Singapore]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilah kita bersatu</td>
<td>[come] [we/us] [unity]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dengan semangat yang baru</td>
<td>[with] [spirit/inner power/will/motivation] [that is] [new/renewed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semua kita berseru</td>
<td>[all] [us/we] [exhort]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majulah Singapura</td>
<td>[succeed] [Singapore]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majulah Singapura</td>
<td>[succeed] [Singapore]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2.

Lyrics to “We Live in Singapura”; written by Edmund Tan, performed by Hossan Leong
Edited by Cheryl Narumi Naruse

Sang Nila Utama¹
Saw a lion, alamak²
Name the village Singapura, then run very far
Years later, ang mor³ came
Stamford Raffles⁴ was his name
Posed for statues very nice, we kenna⁵ colonize
Singapura very strong
Big guns all pointing wrong
Japanese, came on bikes, invade us from our backside
War is over, ang mor back
Singaporeans no respect
Commies come, make a fuss, Singapore independence!

CHORUS
I live in Singapura
It’s not perfect living
But at least it’s interesting

¹The legendary Malay prince who founded Singapore
² Malay term loosely translated to “Oh my God!” but more with a comical valence such as with a phrase like “Holy cow!”
³ Word used for white foreigner, literally translated to “red hair.”
⁴ As an employee for the British East India Company, Raffles is considered the founder of modern Singapore.
⁵ Malay term meaning “to get.”
I live in Singapura
Though it’s kind of crazy
We win other country
David Marshall\(^6\), Lim Yew Hock\(^7\)
National Anthem starts to rock
Yusof Ishak\(^8\) the big man, guess who’s PM?
Malaysia say, come join me
Two of us be same country
Then not happy, Then make PM cry
PM Lee lead country
Build Jurong\(^9\) and HDB\(^10\)
Made the country clean and green, opposition cannot win
JB Jeya\(^11\) no more funds,
Chee Soon Juan\(^12\) won’t eat his buns
Lim How Doong\(^13\), what a goon, ‘Don’t talk cock’ in Parliament
CHORUS
Kick out from Malaysia Cup\(^14\)
Michael Faye\(^15\) pain in the butt
S-League\(^16\), Tea Dancing, Ah Bengs\(^17\) love Modern Talking\(^18\)
McDonalds Hello Kitty
Everyone drink Bubble tea\(^19\)
Crushing cockroach Margaret Chan\(^20\), James Lye is VR Man\(^21\)
Reclamation\(^22\), Tuas Causeway\(^23\)
Malaysian water buay ho sei\(^24\)
Mahathir’s\(^25\) friend Datuk Anwar\(^26\), Mathathir says he’s chow Ah Qua\(^27\)

\(^6\) Marshall was the former Chief Minister of Singapore in 1955. He was also leader of the Singapore Labour Front.
\(^7\) Lim was also the former Chief Minister of Singapore in 1956, after Marshall was forced to resign due to his inability to attain Singapore independence.
\(^8\) Former president of Singapore (1965-1970) and is also pictured on the Singapore two-dollar bill.
\(^9\) An industrial town area on the west side of Singapore.
\(^10\) Acronym for Housing Development Board which refers to government subsidized housing where the majority of Singaporean citizens live.
\(^11\) JB Jeyaratnam was a political figure from the Worker’s Party who was sued for defamation and consequently had to declare bankruptcy many times.
\(^12\) A political figure in Singapore who has been sued and consequently bankrupted by the People’s Action Party for defamation.
\(^13\) Former Parliamentary figure from the Singapore Democratic Party.
\(^14\) A former national soccer tournament that Singapore was expelled from for match-fixing.
\(^15\) An expatriate American who was caned for vandalism.
\(^16\) The Singapore League is a local soccer league that was created in lieu of the Malaysia Cup.
\(^17\) A colloquial term used to describe younger Chinese males that are characterized by their fashion; usually used with a somewhat derogatory valence.
\(^18\) A German music duo that was particularly popular amongst ah bengs.
\(^19\) A popular drink that originated from Taiwan.
\(^20\) A local celebrity who became famous for the line “I’ll crush him like a cockroach!”
\(^21\) A local model turned television celebrity who starred in the show \textit{VR Man} which was not well received.
\(^22\) Malaysia made complaints that Singapore had infringed on international law because of land reclamation; Singapore was eventually cleared by The Hague.
\(^23\) A highway built between Singapore and Malaysia.
NDP\textsuperscript{28}, aunties rush
Everyone it’s fun to flush
Bubble gums are all banned, ask your friends buy from Thailand

CHORUS
Driving car, not funny
Bid on cars with C-O-E\textsuperscript{29}
E-R-P\textsuperscript{30}, Road Tax, PARF\textsuperscript{31} until I want to barf
Why our locals have to pay?
Foreign talent are okay
Housing estate upgrade
By contractors who go pok kai\textsuperscript{32}
IMF\textsuperscript{33} must follow
Want to protest, go indoors
M-R-T\textsuperscript{34} not so fast
Newater\textsuperscript{35} they laugh at us

CHORUS
Baby bonus\textsuperscript{36}, maid levy\textsuperscript{37}
Singtel\textsuperscript{38} Shares give out for free
Jack Neo\textsuperscript{39}, Kit Chan\textsuperscript{40}, sexy pastor Ho Yeow Sun\textsuperscript{41}
Beckham parties with models
Has affair but no one knows
S-league, go World Cup, can come true if they don’t suck
Mahathir then Abdullah\textsuperscript{42}
Bar top dancing at the bars
Budget airlines start to pa

\textsuperscript{24} Hokkien phrase that literally translates to “sell very good.”
\textsuperscript{25} Former president of Malaysia (1981-2003).
\textsuperscript{26} Former protégée of Mathathir who was eventually jailed for homosexuality.
\textsuperscript{27} Colloquial Hokkien phrase that literally translates to “smelly” (chow) and “little/shriveled one” (ah qua).
\textsuperscript{28} Acronym for National Day Parade.
\textsuperscript{29} Acronym for Certificate of Entitlement – a deed that must be purchased in order to buy a car.
\textsuperscript{30} Acronym for Electronic Road Pricing, a road tax that is automatically charged through an automated road toll sensor.
\textsuperscript{31} Acronym for Partial Additional Registration Fee, a rebate that is given to car owners that must rid their car after ten years.
\textsuperscript{32} Colloquial phrase that translates to “empty pockets.”
\textsuperscript{33} Acronym for International Monetary Fund.
\textsuperscript{34} Acronym for Mass Rapid Transit, a subway system that is a major aspect of public transportation in Singapore.
\textsuperscript{35} In efforts to become self-sufficient with water; Newater is an attempt to alleviate Singapore’s water dependency on Malaysia. It is drinking water that has been recycled from sewage.
\textsuperscript{36} To discourage the decline in the national birthrate, the government offered a cash bonus as incentive for couples to have more children.
\textsuperscript{37} A fee that Singaporeans must pay to the state in order to hire a foreign domestic worker.
\textsuperscript{38} A major communications company in Singapore that was previously in the public sector.
\textsuperscript{39} A film actor and producer with several acclaimed films.
\textsuperscript{40} A local actress that eventually “made it” internationally.
\textsuperscript{41} Former Associate Pastor of City Harvest Church who became a famous pop star both locally and internationally.
\textsuperscript{42} Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, current Prime Minister of Malaysia (2003-present).
Stop speaking Singlish lah!
Gay is okay says PM
SM\textsuperscript{43} Lee becomes MM\textsuperscript{44}
PM Lee the same name, here we go all over again.
WE LIVE IN SINGAPURA!

\textsuperscript{43} Acronym for Senior Minister.
\textsuperscript{44} Acronym for Mentor Minister.
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