
There's no place like home: Remembering and experiencing the changing Singaporean cityscape

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Executive Summary

Widespread urban redevelopment has profoundly impacted how the Singaporean people understand the built environment. Analysis of Singaporean collective memory and hidden transcripts will demonstrate a growing detachment from national heritage and disengagement from the international image promoted by the government. This disengagement is exacerbated by the Singapore Tourism Board's reduction of cultural heritage to themed attractions. This will be demonstrated by examining the development and local understanding of key sites in the city, including the Merlion, museums, Bugis Street, and former ethnic enclaves at Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India.

The destruction of peoples' connection to the past and places has resulted in a tabula rasa for redevelopment of the built environment. The contemporary Singaporean cityscape will be considered using the theoretical framework of Marc Augé and Rem Koolhaas to determine whether a new sense of place can be established or if the city is becoming a non-place. Modern urban design is increasingly promoting a transitory relationship between Singaporeans and the city, producing spaces that are passed through rather than places to engage with. This is reducing peoples' identity to a contractual relationship with their function of the environment (a customer, a traveller) rather than an independent, self-directed individual.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled *There's no place like home: Remembering and experiencing the changing Singaporean cityscape* has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201500911 on 10 December 2015.



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There's no place like home: Remembering and experiencing the changing Singaporean cityscape

Chapter 1

Introduction

Singapore has undergone wide scale, fast paced development of the urban environment since becoming an independent nation in 1965 (Alhabshi 2010). In this rapid development, an environment that fosters economic investment has undoubtedly been created. However, does this new environment also provide a space for the Singaporean peoples' socio-cultural needs and identity? Or has the reorientation of Singapore to the global market alienated people from their own country? Does the modern cityscape offer a sense of place that allows Singaporeans to engage with the built environment (Yuen 2005)? How have peoples' experiences of the urban environment and their understandings of place changed through the redevelopment when under a 'benign' authoritarian government (Means 1996)? These questions will be explored by looking at two main themes; connection to the past through collective memory and the social meaning the new built environment has for Singaporeans.

The radical changes to the city and the increased emphasis on integration to the global market have disconnected Singaporeans from their heritage and remodelled their imagination of the idea of nation (Gellner 1994). To explore how this change has alienated the Singaporean people from their homes, Chapter Two will analyse the narratives of Singaporeans and how their stories contribute to collective memory. These interactions and shared experiences help create a sense of unity within a group and contribute to the groups' sense of identity by tethering present day life to narratives of the past. This reaffirms the groups' connection with the heritage of its ancestors and provides a shared sense of meaning that is used to understand themselves and their environment (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011, Chang & Huang 2005). Yet this narrative understanding of identity and place are being pushed to the margins thereby creating a hidden transcript that quietly disagrees with public political discourse (Scott 1987).

The shared social understanding of memory and constructed identity have been reshaped and commodified by the necessity of fast globalization within the built environment (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff 1983). As the Singaporean government has reorientated itself to attract foreign investment and tourism, the socio-cultural needs of its people are no longer the priority. This shift has introduced new ways of life that conflict with the traditional understanding established by collective memory and Singaporeans' traditional understanding of themselves (Sin 1995). This will be demonstrated by comparing the narrative description of key sites around the city that have been geared towards reconstructing Singapore's international image, such as the Merlion, museums, Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India and Bugis Street.

Chapter Three will examine whether the redevelopment has opened new space for people to engage with their environment in new ways. Is it possible to rebuild the same connection with place when the new city scape is dominated by sterile, homogenous looking high rise (Ooi 1994)? In an environment where redevelopment never stops, iconic places like your home or school could be entirely demolished and rebuilt within years into something unrecognisable. Additionally, given the authoritarian government, people are not even consulted about what should be kept or what holds socio-cultural or historic value to them (Teo & Huang 1996).

To understand what scope, if any, remains for meaningful engagement with the built environment in Singapore, Marc Augé's (1995) theory of non-place will be applied. It will be demonstrated that Singapore's urban environment consists of numerous non-places by analysing the built environment's connection to the past, the potential space for meaningful social interaction and the opportunity for people to recognise themselves in the city (Augé 1995). Rem Koolhaas' concept of the Generic City will also be used to demonstrate how the alienation experienced in the modern Singaporean cityscape compound the loss of identity for the Singaporean people (Koolhaas 1998). This will be demonstrated by reviewing how redevelopment has created severed ties to the past through the destruction of burial sites and how constant rebuilding prevents any new connections forming (Koh 2007, Kong 2012). This is then compounded by the introduction of new urban design that deters people from meaningful social interaction through the reduction of public space in both the city itself and within residential accommodation (Kong, Yeo & Teo 1996, Latif 2004).

The socio-political context of contemporary Singapore

After parting ways from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore faced a variety of hurdles in reconstructing itself into a self-sufficient, independent nation. These issues included wide spread housing shortages, limited availability of land and no availability of natural resources that could provide the basis of rebuilding their economy (Chua 2007). These problems were further compounded by existing social tensions between different races that erupted into riots between Chinese and Malay groups in 1964 (Chee 1995). With no resources available beside the labour power of the Singaporean people, ethnic tensions were considered a threat to Singapore's national security. For this reason, tolerance of racial diversity has been championed by the government as being vital to the nation's success (Sin 1995).

Underlying this benevolent discourse, however, are the negative repercussions that strongly enforced multiculturalism has had on Singaporean society. As Chua (2003, 2007) highlights, the government's administration of ethnicity is effectively a tool for social control that has institutionalised social difference. This is especially evident in the introduction of the National Registration Identity Card (NRIC), which is a compulsory form of documentation that categorising all Singaporean residents into one of the four main racial groups; Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (CMIO) (Sin 2003). The official "race" recorded for an individual is determined through the paternal line and may or may not reflect a person identification with their own cultural heritage. Yet this racial categorisation with influence the person's place within the socio-political fabric of society (Chua 2003).

The ethnic organisation of society along prescribed racial identity is physically expressed in the Ethnic Integration Policy. The Policy acts as a dispersal system to break up existing communities that had established as ethnic cluster and spatially redistribute people into new areas of the city. This system also prohibits any clusters of a single minority re-forming in any one place (Eng 2009). Not only have communities been broken up and people



Figure 1. Evans, T. Remanent *kampong* house on Pulau Ubin, photo taken 20/12/15

have become spatially isolated throughout the city, but places that once held significance to peoples' lives, such as their previous homes and neighbourhoods have been replaced by featureless structures that aim to inhibit personal expressions of ethnic identity (Eng & Savage 1985). This is especially evident in the clearance of *kampong* (Malay word for village) housing, shown in Figure 1. *Kampongs* and the accompanying lifestyle has been wiped off the mainland entirely, with only a few isolated *kampongs* remaining on islands such as Pulau Ubin (Figure 1).

Rather than creating new places for communities to flourish, the introduction of the Housing Development Board (HDB) housing model has obstructed social connectivity, which is vital for communities to establish bonds of shared experience. Hee and Ooi (2003) have observed that as part of the drive to minimise identification with ethnic identities, the urban environment has undergone profound reconstruction to diminish cultural expressions of difference, rendering the cityscape sterile and homogenous. They assert that:

...the use of structural models by new town planners accordingly created an increasing abstraction of space in a reductive process, displacing it from actual experience and disregarding the previous history of public space development, use and meaning, (Hee & Ooi 2010:96).

By divorcing place from the context of human meaning, which is produced through culturally specific, historically embedded interactions, the redevelopment of the urban environment has exacerbated social fragmentation. The subsequent deconstruction of existing social networks for support created a power vacuum that Singapore's authoritarian government has rushed to fill (Sin 2002c). The politico-historic background of Singapore's shift from colonialism to its current regime will, however, not be the focus on this study. This research focuses on the ethnographic experiences of Singaporean people and given the brevity of this paper, analysis of Singapore as a post-colonial authoritarian state will not be examined.

There is little evidence that the Singaporean government's social engineering has produced anything beyond superficial relationships rather than an authentic connection to new communities or places (Eng 2009, Marranci 2012). It is important to note that tolerance is not synonymous with acceptance or respect, which would be evident in a more cohesive community environment. Sin's (2002a, 2002b & 2003) research on the experience of the Malays and Indians as minority groups demonstrates how the bureaucratisation of race has exacerbated existing socio-economic inequality. This is especially poignant for the Malay people whose marginalisation has become known as the "Malay problem" (Sin 2003). A problem that has the Singaporean government has attempted to "solve" by subjecting

the Malay people to the most targeted redevelopment in an effort to force their adopting of Chinese values. This has also aggravated negative racial stereotypes of the Malays as being inherently lazy and undisciplined (Barr & Low 2005). In this light, any marginalisation experienced by the Malays is presented by the government as their own fault for failing to jettison cultural affiliations that have prevented them joining mainstream, Chinese-dominated society (Sin 2002b).

Project Scope

While a considerable body of research exists describing the profound changes to the urban environment in Singapore since the 1960s, there are still many questions that are left unanswered (Chee 1995, Foo 2001, Hee & Ooi 2010, Henderson 2010). As the paternalistic Singaporean government strongly censors any criticism of itself, much of the literature published from Singapore emphasizes the necessity of housing reforms and the redevelopment of the city. The politico-economic benefits Singapore has experienced is frequently cited as justification for the reforms and little consideration is given to the negative impacts this course of action has caused (Sin 2002a, 2003). As so much of the existing literature avoids any critical commentary of the Singaporean government, it remains unclear how Singapore's nation building policies that manifest through the built environment have affected identification with the city or sense of place in Singapore.

Previous literature on heritage conservation in Singapore has tended to focus on the commodification of traditional culture without examining the ongoing interaction of the community and its cultural roots (Blackburn 2013, Goh 2013b, Henderson 2008, 2010, Ooi 2003, 2010, Saunders 2004). The management of heritage in Singapore is heavily criticised for its prioritisation of the economic benefits of heritage conservation at the expense of the socio-cultural importance of heritage to the community. Rather than preserving heritage for the interest of the local people to connect with their past, heritage has been adapted by the government as a vehicle for the promotion of national economic interests in the global market (Goh 2013b). The government's main priority when assessing whether a heritage item should be conserved is whether it can be used to support the international image that the government has tried to foster. The social value that heritage may have for the community is frequently considered as less important (Saunders 2004). For example, the façade of historic buildings may be preserved but the use of the building is so drastically altered from its original purpose that the sense of connection to place that it offered to the community is lost. The community in Singapore has less opportunity to identify with its

traditional roots as marketing of the national image has been directed externally at the foreign market of globalised capital (Goh 2013a).

The gaps in the existing research will be addressed by considering Singapore from an innovative perspective; I will be focusing on the human experience of these trends rather than limiting my analysis to how the urban environment has been commodified (Augé 1995). My research will show how these changes have alienated people from these places and how this has changed the meaning of the built environment for the community.

My research will address the knowledge gaps of existing academic literature by taking a two-pronged approach. Firstly, I will examine how the loss of connection with cultural heritage has affected people's personal identity and identification with their local environment. In other words, I will connect the emotional experience of the built environment with the collective identity as expressed through the idea of Singapore as a nation. Secondly, I will analyse how the redevelopment of a de-contextualised urban environment limits the opportunity to create a new sense of place as people struggle to engage with the sterile cityscape. Ultimately, the redevelopment has created an environment that exacerbates alienation and disconnection of people from places.

Given the brevity of this research paper, there are some notable exclusions from the scope of this project. My research will not delve into religious identity. Although it is undoubtedly an important element of both ethnic and personal identity, playing a pivotal role in a person's experience of the world, its grandeur may skew my research away from its primary goals (Steiner 2011). Additionally, there is not sufficient space to analyse the nuances of religious identity. I also will not focus on the ethnic categories as enforced by the government. I am surely not the first to notice the artificial values of the ethnic system of Singapore described above. Rather my dissertation will only highlight some essential points of what Goh refers to as the 'racial grid of state multiculturalism' (Goh et al. 2009:217).

Economic factors such as land value and development costs will also fall outside the scope of the research. Given that the economic rationale underpins most, if not all, development initiatives in Singapore this omission may seem like a careless oversight (Latif 2004). However, the goal of this paper is to examine the impact of consistently prioritising economic gains and financial incentives over and above unquantifiable values such as the historic significance of heritage buildings, the contribution of aesthetics design to the cityscape, and the socio-cultural value of retaining spaces for cultural expression and community interactions. Shifting the focus away from economic

considerations, this paper will demonstrate that there is a high cost paid by the community: a considerable loss of sense of identity, a loss of sense of place and a loss of heritage (Saunders 2004).

As the existing literature already focuses on statistical information, I will not reduce my respondents to numbers based on any of their characteristics. While I am aware of the nuances that racial identity have in a person's experience, my research strives to deal with my interviewees as humans first and foremost. In an environment that is regulated to the point that a person's racial background is recorded on their national identity card, institutionalising people's identity has contributed to their sense of alienation. I aim to allow people to explain how they see their own meaning, values and emotional connections rather than reduce them to a government definition on an identity card (Koh 2007).

Methodology

Qualitative research methodologies capture the different layers of human lived experience in the Singaporean cityscape. I have used ethnographic methodologies extensively as this approach is especially well-suited to capturing personal experience (Punch 2012). Cultural and symbolic meaning within the context of everyday behaviour is vital to understanding this personal experience (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Sunstein & Chiser-Strater 2012).

This research considers both peoples' behaviour and the context in which this behaviour has been constructed. If we take culture to be a shared cognitive map of meanings used to understand daily life, cultural knowledge can be viewed as knowledge of this map within a group of people. This cognitive map also extends to the physical environment and influences how people understand the spaces they live in (Clark & Michailova 2004, Punch 2012). The Singaporean built environment will be considered as both a social place consisting of social arrangement and power structures as well as a physical place consisting of built objects and tangible structures. In order to understand the complexities and interrelated nature of people and their environments, this research has made no attempts to abstract people from their environment and will not look at either Singaporeans or the cityscape in isolation from the other. The behaviours and culture of the people living within the city and the physical design of the built environment have been shaped by political processes and relationships of power and authority (Punch 2012). As such, both the built environment and the human experience will be considered within the ideological framework of the political discourses that have shaped the cultural meanings of urban life in Singapore.

Personal meaning, symbolic significance and cultural interpretation of urban life exist on several levels and therefore, multiple research methods were used to capture the different aspects of experience in daily life (Clark & Michailova 2004, Sunstein & Chiser-Strater 2012). A combination of ethnomethodology and ethnography were used to capture diversity of interactions and meanings that exist between people and their environments. The research techniques used have a naturalistic design that aims to study people, things and events within the “natural” setting of the city (Punch 2012). No situations were pre-arranged for research purposes and no contact was made with the people who were observed prior to my undertaking participant observation. People were considered within the context of their everyday lives and were only engaged with in public places (Punch 2012).

Using an ethno-methodological approach (Clark & Michailova 2004), I travelled extensively throughout the city to variety of places, including residential areas, open spaces, shopping malls, hawker centres, community centres, and tourist attractions. People’s behaviours were considered in terms of their verbal interactions with other people and visual behaviour that could be observed. The effects of personal interaction were minimised during observation in an effort to witness the banality of how people interact with the city. As much as possible, conceptualisation of these unobtrusive observations was delayed until the end of field work. The focus of the research centred on the observed human behaviour in the first instance, and then analysed the meaning that people attribute to these situations as the next step (Clark & Michailova 2004).

Randomly selected people were interviewed to gain ethnographic accounts of their experience. This mode of research enabled the discovery of peoples’ meaning of certain situations and behaviours rather than just behaviour itself to add further depth to the information collected. A total of 27 face-to-face interviews were conducted, which ranged from approximately 30 to 90 minutes in duration. Participants were randomly selected Singaporean citizens, both female and male, between the ages of 18 and 90 years of age. No specific strategies were used to select people of certain racial backgrounds however, participants included Singaporean-Chinese, Singaporean-Malay, Singaporean-Indians and people who identified as having Peranakan heritage. Although peoples’ ethnicity was taken into account when analysing the data collected due to the different experiences that they may have experienced in Singapore’s redevelopment, it was not a factor used to target any specific ethnicity for the purposes of this research. Interviews were conducted in public places throughout the city, including residential areas (such as void decks of HDB housing blocks), community centres, tourist attractions, and shopping centres. Note that all interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms.

An ethnographic approach was taken as this method is able to gather participants' views and narrative responses, which can be analysed to demonstrate how people's experiences have created meaning in their everyday life in Singapore (Clark & Michailova 2004, Punch 2012). As much of the experience of daily life is taken for granted, the personal meaning of experience may be unconscious (Punch 2012). The interviews were semi-structured with some pre-determined questions focusing on highlighting banal or mundane aspects of everyday life and bringing them into the person's consciousness. For example, people were asked to reflect on provisions of space for seating or their attitude toward interacting with people in public places, or how they identified with their homes. Depending on the participants' response, ad hoc questions were also asked to gain clarity on their answers and to expand on their narrative experience. Although this technique limited their narrative experience to fragmented experiences, this was a necessary approach to focus the information collected into comparable experiences in order to find shared meanings between people (Punch 2012).

To engage with the experience of the city myself, I participated in daily Singaporean life as much as possible. I endeavoured to gain an empathetic understanding of the experience of urban life through a prolonged visit of approximately eight weeks by integrating as much as possible into the rhythms of Singaporean life. To achieve this I adopted a variety of strategies including travelling through the city on foot and via different means of public transport to understand how people move through space. To mimic daily life, I participated in ordinary activities including eating at Singapore coffee shops, hawker centres and shopping malls. Additionally, I attended a range of events including public celebrations for Singapore's 50th anniversary of national independence, called "SG50," joined meetings of neighbourhood grassroots organisation and assisted in the organisation of their events by accompanying members selling tickets door to door, and joined community events such as neighbourhood Christmas and New Year's celebrations. By immersing myself in these activities, data was collected from "inside" the experience of urban life (Clark & Michailova 2004, Glaser & Strauss 1967).

I further choose qualitative ethnographic research methodologies in response to a trend in existing literature on the built environment in Singapore that uses quantitative research methodology (Chung 2002, Foo 2001, Henderson 2013, Ibrahim & Chung 2002, Ooi 1994, Teo & Huang 1996, Yuen 1995, Yuen, Kong & Briffett 1999). Quantitative studies mainly provide information on broad community opinions such as general public approval for green spaces in the city (Henderson 2013) or statistical analysis of people's overall satisfaction of their quality of life by selecting isolated themes such as housing quality (Chung 2002). The use of close-ended questions and the strict

structure of survey questionnaires of this methodology do not provide scope for gathering data on personal experience of living in the city or the meaning of interactions people have within the context of the built environment. Using a semi-structured, open ended interviewing technique is essential to address the gap in knowledge that has been created by an over-utilisation of quantitative methodologies in past research. Additionally, as my research focuses on socio-cultural values that are difficult to quantify, including heritage value and identification with a sense of place, quantitative research would not be suited to analysing the abstract nature of personal narrative accounts.

Remembering Place: the disconnection of past from present in Singapore's urban heritage

Introduction

A sense of place is founded in the past. The heritage of any place is comprised of meaningful social interactions over time, which forms the foundation of people's group understanding of who they are and where they live (Ho 2009). The past is part of the present as everyday life is built on the foundations of past experience. Elements of the past are physically manifested when the cityscape slowly evolves, creating a collective memory of the built environment (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011). Moreover, this manifestation is a vital component in creating a sense of identity and a sense of belonging between people in a community as people share a common narrative understanding of themselves and their environment (Blackburn 2013).

The narrative understanding of Singaporean built environment is not a single unified story (Loh 2009a). There are several strands to understanding Singapore's development and these different accounts are often at odds with each other. Jim Scott describes the alternate accounts as "hidden transcripts." Scott's concept of hidden transcripts will be used to understand how the official discourse of the ruling elite is juxtaposed with the off-stage dissent of the disempowered society (Scott 1987). The competing accounts of Singapore are further complicated by Lee Kuan Yew's push to reshape history by dividing Singapore's past into its colonial period and the current post-colonial identity (Huang & Hong 2004). The push to develop into a modern global city has had a profound impact on the city as a place for meaningful social interaction. The government has commodified Singaporean culture and re-appropriated the built environment to facilitate foreign investment and international tourism (Li 2003, Smith 1988).

Singapore has been reduced to a functional capitalist environment that often excludes its own people (Chang & Huang 2005, Ooi 2003). Chang & Huang note two main themes to Singapore's redevelopment; "the erasure of urban sociospatial forms *not* keeping with the latest ideological agendas," and "the rebuilding of landscapes that may more accurately reflect an emerging

ideological regime, with a specific agenda as to what bits of the city's memories are to be chronicled," (2005:269). This trend will be demonstrated by examining key sites in Singapore, including; how Singapore's past is selectively conserved through museums and heritage boards throughout the city; the push to create an international image that is disconnected from Singapore's past as demonstrated by the Merlion; and places of meaningful social interaction that have been sacrificed to create themed tourist areas such as Chinatown, Kampong Glam, and Little India. These examples will show how the de-contextualisation of place from human meaning reduces the environment into a functional space for capitalist relationships rather than facilitating socio-cultural interactions between people in the community (Li 2003, Smith 1988, Teo & Huang 1995). This alienation will also be demonstrated in the narrative accounts of Singaporean people who describe their interactions with the built environment.

The role of collective memory and public discourse in understanding place

Collective memory is a shared understanding of the past that is remembered by a group through shared social interactions and events of remembrance (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011, Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li & Qunital 2015, Lewicka 2008). These interactions and shared experiences help create a sense of unity within a group, contributing to the group's sense of identity by tethering present day life to narratives of the past and connecting a group with the heritage of its ancestors. Collective memory is not a singular, static resource that describes an uncontested way of being, nor does collective memory need to be formally "collected" by historical documentation (Lewicka 2008). It is a shared understanding that is kept alive through unofficial exchanges of memory in person to person interactions, dialogues and culturally symbolic gestures that are shared within a group. It is the meaning behind these interactions that forms an important bond within the group, fostering a sense of community from these collective meanings (Teo & Huang 1996). While the heritage that can be found in collective memory is an important touchstone for a group to understand their past, this understanding must be relevant to their present lives to continue to have meaning. As such collective memory is constantly re-remembered through the lens modernity and adapted to become a narrative that explains both their past and present (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011, Teo & Huang 1996).

The cityscape can be seen as a physical expression of people's understanding of their environment, creating a collective memory of the built environment. It is specifically the collective memory of the built environment that will be the focus of theory used for analysis. The built environment is

composed to two indivisible elements; the physical buildings, structures and tangible objects of the city; and non-tangible socio-cultural values that people attach to these structures to create meaning (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011). It is a communally shaped perception of a place's value and meaning that creates the character or *genius loci* of a place (Lewicka 2008). In this way, how people interact or abstain from interaction with the built environment is a crucial element in creating meaning within place (Goh 2013). Underlying socio-political ideologies are woven into the construction of the city. As a young Singaporean woman, Siyuan Zhong, explains how power structures influence her interactions with the city, describing new pedestrian thoroughfares: "what they say is that it's for our own convenience but when they build more tunnels they also build more fences," (Siyuan Zhong, Singaporean-Chinese, early 20s, interview on 13/1/16).

Siyuan Zhong's above assertion illustrates Jim Scott's concept of hidden transcripts (1987). There is simultaneously an official version of events to describe the changing environment. From the above statement there is justification that underpasses are constructed out of benevolent government support for the people. There is also the hidden transcript where people unofficially maintain their own discourse, which rejects the rhetoric of the political elite. The hidden transcript shows people understand that their movement and access is increasingly restricted. Moving in a way contrary to the expectations of the elite becomes a subtle rebellion (Scott 1987, Tilly 1991).

The authoritarian nature of the Singaporean Government makes the official discourse of Singapore especially overt. The government has sought to bolster their authority and control through hegemonic culture where the values of the ruling elite are promoted as Gramscian "common sense." This is often described as simply pragmatism by many Singaporeans (Chong 2010, Gramsci 1997). Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's drive for nation building promoted "Asian values" under the *White Paper on Shared Values*, which promoted Confucian ethics (Barr & Low 2005). Although this was promoted as being "Asian values," the white paper enshrined Chinese cultural values as the key to successful national growth. The social values of minority groups were dismissed and in the case of Malays in particular, not adopting Chinese values was used as justification for their economic and social alienation (Barr & Low 2005, Sin 2003).

Peoples' resistance to the imposed top-down discourse is evident in their resistance through both hidden transcript actions and the more deliberate refusal engage with the government's agenda (Scott 1987). This is observable in how many Singaporeans' interact with the city. For example, where the government may invest and promote places as iconic to Singapore, Singaporeans may abstain from interacting with these parts of the city (Tilly 1991). This disengagement is evident as one Singaporean describes their ambivalence towards places designed to draw visitors, saying:

Personally I've never really been to take pictures of the Merlion. Like I haven't been to Singapore Zoo... I haven't been to the aquarium either. There's Marina Bay Sands that might be alright but I haven't really been there either. It looks weird, like a ship or something, (Damia Tadin, Singaporean-Malay, late 20's, interview on 13/12/16).

The Singaporean peoples' understanding of the built environment often demonstrate the tension between the official public discourse promoted by the ruling elite and the social values that are illustrated in social collective memory (Chong 2005, Tilly 1991). Despite the government's emphasis on certain sites as being iconic, Damia Tadin's description shows that she has a very different attitude towards the importance of these places as she has not found a reason to visit them. As Ardakani & Oloonabadi describe, "when collective memory is valued, actually, it is the identity of the place which has been valued, and it enhances the people's attachment to it," (2008:987). This is especially true for the collective memory of the built environment. Examining the hidden transcript of Singaporeans shows the numerous socio-cultural factors that contribute to heritage and what parts of their environment hold meaning for them (Henderson 2010). Yet the recognition of heritage value can be at odds with the management practices of the government whose agenda includes other factors such as the economic considerations of management costs and marketability as well as political motivations for valorising select elements of national history to support the current regime. Disregarding people's connection with the past and their sense of place alienates people from their own homes (Goldberg, Schwarz, & Porat 2008).

The disconnection of Singaporean heritage from the Singaporean people

The Singaporean Government's attempt to construct a sense of national identity has prioritised the politico-economic needs of Singapore ahead of the socio-cultural needs of the general public (Leong 2001, Lim 2000). The idea that a good life is inextricably linked to economic productivity is the underlying rationale for the much of the Singaporean Government's policies. This has resulted in a prioritisation of economic benefits over considerations for social-cultural factors that affect the people of Singapore as the redevelopment has created an increasing abstraction of space in a reductive process. As a consequence, places have been disconnected from former experiences, uses and meanings (Hee & Ooi 2003). In the pursuit of establishing itself as a global city, the Singaporean Government has attempted to adapt the design of other iconic places from global cities around the world and recreate them domestically. With the *modus operandi* of maximising profits through land use optimisation, redevelopment focuses on rebuilding the built environment as places for

consumption rather than considering the socio-cultural needs of the wider community. The reorientation of the built environment to attract tourists and foreign investors as well as establishing an image of prestige on the global stage has socially alienated the Singaporean people from their cityscapes. Strict government regulation stifles the spontaneity of street life, limiting the opportunity to create spaces for meaningful interaction and local identification. The urban environment of Singapore has become a place accessible for international commerce but not accessible for local community (Chang & Huang 2011).

Redevelopment of the Singapore River

The transformation of Singapore's urban environment is designed to create an international image and as such, is targeting foreign people who have had no previous connection to the place and who come primarily as consumers of the entertainment marketed towards them (Smith 1988). The detrimental effects on local identification with place are particularly evident in the redevelopment of the waterfront along Singapore River, which has been re-orientated to appeal to global market trends ahead of the socio-cultural needs of the local people. Until the late 1970s, the Singapore River was a functional port and social hub with a vibrant street life where local businesses, residents and visitors came together in a vibrant sense of community (Imran 2007). The importance of memory and heritage of this place were acknowledged by the Singaporean Government for its role in the creation of a new national identity, describing the waterfront as:

...telling of a place where past and present, ancient and contemporary, fuse and intermingle in total harmony...where age-old traditions flourish alongside the pursuit of globe-spanning information technology, while a multitude of cultures and histories make up the spiritual and historical bedrock of contemporary Singapore, (in Chang & Huang 2005:270).

While the Singaporean Government stated its vision for redevelopment as a heritage and entertainment site, its success in the conservation of heritage elements that would have provided a sense of place to the local community has been tokenistic at best (Teo & Huang 1995). The elements of the past (both built structure and local people) that were incompatible with the government's vision of nationhood have been ruthlessly removed causing social fragmentation and alienation from the sense of place (Chang 1999). Previous distinctive feature of the waterfront such as informal tradespeople and hawkers have been banned from the area entirely while marketable trades that were of interest to tourists, such as traditional tea merchants and herbalists, have been deemed as

authentic culture and been allowed to stay (Saunders 2004). Many previous residents of the area were also evicted as their housing did not meet the aesthetic vision of the redevelopment, while other people who once called the area home stay away due to feelings of loss of connection. This is especially true of the Malay population as redevelopment has made it impossible for them to maintain or develop their preferred mode of existence, which they engaged in before forced assimilation with the Chinese majority. The loss of identity and connection to the community due to onus to conform with the government's image of nationalism is described by a Malay woman, Linqin Chen:

Now we don't have that because we have Singaporean [identity]. We don't have racial kinds of identity. Now the government has control, like when you take a Housing Development Board (HDB) lease. It's not all Chinese but it doesn't matter...overall they have to see the movement of the people. There is control, (Linqin Chen, Singaporean-Malay, early 60s, interview on 10/12/15).

The people who have remained have also experienced a sense of loss from the removal of so many of the previous businesses and residents, saying; "the old and new [people] can work very well together, and if you get rid of too much of the old, then you'll have nothing left... A river is not just about pubs and restaurants. It's about people!" (in Chang & Huang 2005:272). The physical and socio-cultural removal of people from place has increased the sense of de-contextualisation of place from its social meanings and significance (Lee 2003).

The sense of disconnection of people from place is understandable in light of the profound changes to the built environment. The radical changes and widespread reconstruction have removed the human meaning and connection that kinship groups had to specific places. Where once people were part of the socio-cultural environment, community groups have been broken up and forced to relocate (Blackburn 2013). The experiences, interactions and meanings of the waterfront have been sacrificed in a process of creative destruction. The destructive side of this process are observed by Allan Ng, a property owner in the waterfront district that criticised the futility of preserving the façade of heritage building but then "tear up the interior so badly that it's no different to a modern shopping centre," (in Chang & Huang, 2005:272). By maintaining only the façade, the redevelopment fails to preserve the meaning of this past that may have provided some anchor to the past. What has been created through the redevelopment has little to no connection to the place that once existed there (Loh 2002a). Property developer, Vivienne Tan, questioned the efficacy of the redevelopment in creating a new place worthy of international recognition:

You look at all the famous rivers of the world. Why are they famous? ... They have hundreds of years of history which they never destroyed. They just built on it. Whereas in Singapore, we destroy everything. All the go-downs were turned out. The tongkangs (old boats) were just told to go somewhere else and disappear from the scene... So, there's no history, no historical symbols there, (in Chang & Huang 2005:272).

The alienation of local people and the loss of the waterfront's former sense of place is exacerbated by the government's use of foreign artists in commissioning sculptures for the riverbanks (Chang 2014, Imran 2007). The opportunity for self-expression of the past is actively curtailed by corporately funded art projects that fund the installation of sculptures by Western artists such as Henry Moore, Fernando Botero and Salvador Dali (Saunders 2004). These artists may be recognisable on a global scale but their relevance to the Singapore River is dubious. Without a clear connection between the artworks and the local context, many local people felt that they were unable to understand or appreciate these alien sculptures that had been introduced (Henderson 2008). Local artists, however, are often unable to find the space needed to express their identity. Ahmad Ibrahim explains:

They [the government] have specific areas where you can do street art and even if you do that, there's certain things you can't do. Censorship is still a big thing here in Singapore. They need something that will ensure that the younger generation does not question the graphics ...I guess that the local art community has to work within the boundaries the government sets for them but then there's no way for them to challenge these entities without struggling themselves. Struggling financially. Struggling opportunity wise... so they're like, 'it's not worth my time,' and the job goes to someone else, (Ahmad Ibrahim, Singaporean-Malay, early 30s, interview on 23/12/15).

Government control of the rebuilt environment prevents people from making their mark on the city in a very literal sense. Any expression or design that challenges the image of Singapore envisioned by the ruling elite is censored and as a result, Ahmad Ibrahim's point out that people feel disengaged (Chang 2014).

The Merlion

That bloody Merlion. I never talk about it. It's not part of my culture. It's not part of my history. It was invented by a Dutchman in 1964 because the Tourist Board thought that Singapore needed a past. A story. I think it's disgusting but if I say that to another Singaporean then I'll probably be put in jail. It has no relevance. It's purely cosmetic. It spouts water and makes people happy. ... I tell you this so you understand. If I don't tell you this then you swallow the stupid story hook, line and sinker, (Jiao Choi, Singaporean-Chinese, early 50s, interview on 16/12/16).

The use of foreign design in the marketing of Singapore's international image is especially poignant when considering the Merlion, which has been promoted as Singapore's mascot on the international stage (Saunders 2004). By marketing primarily to the international arena, the Singaporean government is targeting foreign people who have no previous connection to the place and who come primarily as consumers of the entertainment marketed towards them (Li 2003). Comments like the above highlight hidden transcript used by the Singaporean people to resist the alienation of the lost genealogy of culture derived from a national identity that the government has chosen to promote as part of the drive to become a modern global city. The Merlion is shown in Figure 2. This mythical half-lion, half-fish sculpture, was designed by British artist Alec Fraser-Brunner (Chang & Huang 2005). As the Merlion is a creature that does not feature in traditional mythology or folklore of any of the main racial groups in Singapore, there is no



Figure 2. Evans, T. The Merlion Statue, photo taken 29/12/15

connection with between this sculpture and the heritage of Singaporean community¹ (Henderson 2010). By inventing the Merlion to artificially create a story for foreign tourists rather than the harnessing existing character and past of the Singaporean people, it is understandable that a local Singaporean feels the Merlion is a superficial ornament that does not represent her sense of identity (Ooi 2003).

The emphasis of the Singapore Tourism Board in creating an icon to promote Singapore to foreign markets has resulted in alienating the Singapore people from its international image (Saunders 2004). As one Singaporean man, Chen Han, explains:

The Merlion is actually fake. Singapore is actually a created nation like the Merlion but somehow we managed to be among some of the top in the world. That's how people have become complacent over the histories and everything. I mean, I have to apologise if my knowledge is not up to your standard. I think I may be a little more knowledgeable for my age group but as I say, knowledge is something that we find out for ourselves, (Chen Han, Singaporean-Chinese, mid 30s, interview on 11/12/16).

Creation a symbol so disconnected from Singaporean heritage has impacted Singaporean's sense of identity. By re-orientated Singapore's identity to appeal to international marketing trends ahead of the socio-cultural needs of the local people, Singaporeans struggle to recognize themselves in this constructed image (Saunders 2004). Both these comments show that Singaporeans see the Merlion as fake and irrelevant to their heritage and consequentially find it difficult these people to identify with as it further estranges them from their heritage rather than uniting them under a unified national image (Tilly 1991).

The disconnection between the state manufactured image of the Merlion and the collective memory of the built environment that people have is evident in these comments. Both people note that their perception of the Merlion is not congruent with the story created by the government. Both people point out the need to learn about the context and artificial creation of the Merlion to be able to understand gap between hidden transcript of the Merlion within Singapore and the image of the Merlion promoted internationally. The need for Singaporean people to voice their own understanding of Singapore's heritage is clear as neither person's comments reflect any sense of identification with the Merlion and demonstrate that their sense of heritage is not attached to the faux-iconography employed by the government (Smith 1988).

¹ Although there is a traditional Malay story of a Sumatran Hindu Prince who was sailing past Singapore who thought he saw a lion, it is important to note that the traditional story specifically refers to a lion, not a Merlion.

The spatial de-contextualisation of heritage in the built environment

Museums

Attempts by the government to re-assert local heritage has, in some ways, exacerbated the loss of connection between the community and its heritage. In a climate of face-paced development and integration into international markets, the government has endeavored to offset the loss of local identity through the establishment of local museums and galleries (Henderson 2003). By salvaging relics of forgotten cultures, the government has attempted to reify cultural identity as the impetus for a process of place creation with the dual purpose of promoting the image that the Singaporean Government would like the world to associate with the country and fostering national mythology to influence how Singaporeans see themselves (Ooi 2003).

The relegation of cultural heritage to museums and galleries can damage the collective memory of the built environment due to the spatial separation and de-contextualisation of heritage items from people. Geographically, these buildings are isolated from the everyday life of the community and may only be seldom visited, if at all, by local Singaporeans who are therefore unlikely to engage with the information and heritage these institutions may contain (Henderson 2010). Even during visits to museums and galleries can have limited scope for allowing Singaporeans to participate in their cultural legacy as the items and artworks are presented as isolated objects behind glass or lines marked on the floor that visitors are not permitted to cross. The presentation of artifacts is de-contextualised from the original settings and use that they once had as their cultural meaning becomes now limited to the brief description listed in the adjacent captions. These circumstances severely restrict the opportunities for people to interact with their own cultural heritage (Ooi 2003).

This is especially evident in an interaction observed at the Peranakan Museum that commemorates the culture of people with mix ethnic backgrounds that arose during Singapore's past as a hub for sea trade. Peranakan refers to an ethnic identity of people with mixed heritage such as the descendants of male Chinese trades that married Malay women and settled in Malayan Straits. While the majority of Peranakan where from unions between Chinese and Malay people, there were also Chitty Peranakans that were a mix of Indian Hindu and Malay, as well as Arab/Indian Muslim Peranakans who were known as Jawi Peranakan, and Eurasian Peranakans who had a mixture of Christian Portuguese and Asian ancestry (Henderson 2003).

During a tour guided by a French volunteer, an elderly Peranakan man sitting nearby commented to the guide, "you know more about these things than me and I am Peranakan!" (Heng Yuen, late 60s,

interview on 11/12/15). The alienation of cultural heritage from the Singaporean people is abundantly clear in this interaction as a foreign person is explaining cultural legacies to the very people whose heritage it is. When this encounter was later discussed with a Singaporean tour guide, Lin Fei, she related that on past tours she had had Peranakan people who were visiting from Penang and Malacca where there is more traditional Peranakan culture intact (Henderson 2003). On numerous occasions Lin Fei had been told by visiting Peranakan people that some of the information in the museum about cultural practices was either inaccurate or totally incorrect. When Lin Fei had raised these concerns with management at the museum, the comments were dismissed as the visiting Peranakan were viewed by management as being insufficiently qualified to make such remarks. As it is highly dubious that there is an institution that can certify a person's knowledge and experience of their own culture, it is questionable how such a qualification could even exist to satisfy the museum management. Lin Fei related that she often felt awkward reciting the scripted material for guided tours when there were Peranakan in her group, feeling obliged to follow the approved script yet unsure how to respond when it was contradicted by Peranakan people (Lin Fei, Singaporean-Chinese, 50s, interview on 14/12/15). In an environment where Peranakan input is dismissed and Peranakan attendance to a museum can cause uncomfortable conflict with staff, the lack of space for people to engage with culture in this setting is clear (Henderson 2003).

The diminishing role of the community in the reproduction of collective memory of the built environment is demonstrated by the views of Singaporean people who note the dominant role of the state in determining national mythology (Gurler & Ozler 2013). When asked how a younger Singaporean connected to their past, they replied: "Well that's why they're [the government] trying to conserve those old buildings and try to have museums to tell you hey, this is our culture," (Harshini Singh, Singaporean-Indian, interview on 30s 5/1/16). Similarly, another young Singaporean responded: "With some of the old people, they know the history. With the heritage itself, the National Museum of Singapore will tell the story of what kind of place it was," (Sarifah Lee, Singaporean-Malay-Chinese, late 20s, interview on 22/12/15). These comments highlight the perception the government selects what is worth preserving and then disseminate the approved message in a top-down approach. The loss of ownership over the past is notable as history is seen as something lost to all but some the older generation who experienced it rather than an important feature of everyday life (Lewicka 2008).

Sarifah Lee's above comments also highlight the role of museums as a tool of the government's propaganda (Chong 2010, Kong 2012). Cultural heritage and art are subordinate to the ideologies and values of the People's Action Party's (PAP) cultural policy. As such, cultural institutions such as

art galleries and museums are used as a tool for the PAP's nation-building agenda. This is especially true of the National Museum of Singapore, which presents the official version of Singapore's development (Henderson 2010, Ooi 2003). Chan (in Chong 2010:133) asserts that to create the new national identity of united "Singaporeans" the government sought to remove all previous connection to Malaysian values in order to make way for the new ideologies of the PAP's agenda. This agenda is reflected in the National Museum's presentation of Singapore's development as it champions traditional Chinese values as being the key to the economic success of the city-state (Chong 2010, Ooi 2010).

Heritage Boards

The government sanctioned messages about heritage have limited potential to participate in the creation of new collective memories within the community. This is large due to the inability of government sanctioned narrative of heritage boards to integrate into the daily experience people have with a place. Rather than add to peoples' experience of place, these installations exist in their own separate, enclosed place, isolated from the collective memory of the built environment (Li 2003). As heritage boards recite the official, sanitised narrative that the government choses to promote rather than expressing the memory of the people, contradictory accounts of place emerge; the official public discourse and the hidden transcripts (Gurler & Ozer 2013, Scott 1987).

Creating a separate story for Singaporean Government's own agenda rather than aiming to facilitate expressing peoples' existing understanding of place is characteristic of the top-down approach to promoting marketing Singapore's past. These heritage boards are described by two Singaporeans, saying:

Sometimes in MRT [train stations] they will also put the words to show the history. That's how I know Hougang used to be a fishing village because I saw this advertisement; they [the government] were promoting the history of the purple line station, (Shenal Jahshan, Singaporean-Indian, mid 20's, interview on 15/12/16).

If you can find the heritage board then you will get all the information from there. That's how we get the connection. The natural connection goes with the older generation ... it gets passed down but it will definitely die off at some stage, be broken. A lot of messages, a lot of

historical happenings get passed around until people forget, (Viren Parikh, Singaporean-Indian, mid 20's, interview on 15/12/16).

These heritage boards, erected like tombstones throughout the city, eulogise the heritage of the area that has since been destroyed to open new spaces for development. As these places are redeveloped and the older people from that area move on, the previous connection between place and past is broken (Smith 1988). It is highly dubious, however, that heritage boards can bridge the gap created between people and the redeveloped place. These heritage boards quickly become invisible to the people who are in frequent contact with a place. This severely limits the potential of heritage boards to become part of people's interaction and experience of a place (Gurler & Ozer 2013). Moreover, the inauthenticity of the messages compounds peoples' struggle to engage with the government's narrative. Characterised as "advertisements" by the above interviewee, Shenal Jashshan, the commercial nature of the government's strategy is apparent, as is the artificial nature of this style of remembering the past as it is contrasted against the "natural connection" of older Singaporeans. The fact that Singaporeans view these story boards as having "all the information" shows that people's understanding of the past has been significantly reduced. How can the vibrant, multifaceted experience of past *kampong* life in Hougang can be accurately condensed into a few short paragraphs? Especially when that narrative has been edited by the government to glorify selects elements of past to promote while censoring less palatable history. As such, these static installations have little hope of making an impact on the complex, dynamic nature of collective memory of the built environment or provide any real opportunity to reconnect with the past (Gurler & Ozer 2013).

The alienating effects of cultural commercialisation

Singapore's preservation of the past has not been motivated through the government's interest in connecting the Singaporean people to the places they live, work and interact within (Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li & Qunital 2015). Singaporean heritage conservation has instead been characterised by the commercialisation of its history and socio-cultural assets to create a marketable image that will attract foreign tourists (Henderson 2010, Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li & Qunital 2015). This outward focus to the foreign market has profoundly affected the authenticity of the so-called heritage areas (Smith 1988). If authenticity is considered in terms of having significant meaning for people, which belongs to history and tradition, the conservation program adopted by the Singaporean Government has

eroded any authenticity that remained in historic buildings that have been retained as for heritage value (Cohen 1988, Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li & Qunital 2015).

Places with social-cultural value have been repackaged by the Singaporean government into themed tourist attractions (Chang & Yeoh 1999). Areas such as Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Bugis Street and Little India have all undergone redevelopment in an attempt to make the areas more marketable to tourism. However, to re-cast these places to fit the image that the government wants to portray, much of the meaning and values people once found in these places has been lost. As Chang and Yeoh (1999:102) describe this top-down attempt to create culture is a “reduction of the complexity and richness of the urban heritage to a few simple recognizable and marketable characteristics.” The conservation initiatives in Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Bugis Street and Little India have been redesigned to promote selective features of their past to create a new identity to suit the future direction that the government wants for Singapore. The foundation these places have in the past has been sacrificed as a result (Teo & Huang 1995).

The radical changes and widespread reconstruction has removed the human meaning from the sense of place and the people that were once part of the socio-cultural environment. The experiences, interactions and meanings of the places within the city have been sacrificed in a process of creative destruction and what has been created through the redevelopment has little to no connection to the place that once existed there (Chang & Huang 2005).

Chinatown and Kampong Glam

The unique character and lifestyle that existed prior to conservation programs has been sacrificed in the drive to redevelop old places into modern tourist destinations. The area that is now known as Chinatown was one characterised by street markets and a variety of trades that catered to the residents. Street life was rich in spontaneity where people constantly engaged with each other by night and day as people came together to eat, talk and linger (Lee 2014). However, daily life in Chinatown has entirely changed, and with it, the previous character of place has become diminished (Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li & Qunital 2015). In a report from the government appointed Tourism Task Force, which examined the touristic perception of heritage areas, the loss of identity in the built environment was described: “...in our effort to build up a modern metropolis, we have removed aspects of our Oriental mystique and charm which are best symbolised in old buildings, traditional activities and bustling roadside activities...” (in Smith 1988:251). Street vendors and hawkers are no

longer a feature of street life as the government has established purpose built hawker centres.

Western cuisine, pubs and nightclubs have become a common feature to appeal to the tourists visiting the area. Rising property value has pushed the majority of existing residents out of the area and non-traditional uses such as office space have become increasingly prevalent (Lee 2014). As shown in Figure 3, the building façades have been white-washed and manicured to remove all signs of wear daily life had marked on these former homes, wiping out the traces of authenticity that these structures once had (Li 2003).

The destruction of the sense of place demonstrated here is not isolated to Chinatown alone. Similar examples can be drawn from other parts of the city that have been redeveloped for cultural tourism. When asked where to go to appreciate Singaporean culture, one Singaporean replied:

Well, people will tell you to go to Chinatown but nothing's there. Arab Street [which is located in Kampong Glam], which is not really Singapore culture. Kampong Glam, maybe, a little bit here and there. But yeah, there's no particular place you can go to appreciate culture because, well, yeah, that's just how it is, (Ahmad Ibrahim, Singaporean-Malay, early 30s, interview on 23/12/15).

Although Chinatown and Kampong Glam have both been designated as conservation areas in an attempt to preserve heritage, the limited success of this preservation is demonstrated in the above comments as the respondent struggles to identify any places that represent Singaporean culture (Smith 1988). It is especially poignant to note that while some old shop house buildings have undergone some level of conservation, the area is nevertheless described above as having “nothing there,” which reflects that much of the meaning and socio-cultural value of this place has been lost.



Figure 3. Evans, T. Renovated Shophouses in Chinatown, photo taken 18/12/15

These remarks show instead a pragmatic acceptance of the loss of cultural identification that once characterised these areas of the city (Smith 1988).

This lack of connection between the cultural roots of place and current use of the area is especially poignant in Kampong Glam. Singapore's Malay population has been especially affected by government's drive to homogenise culture with traditional Malay areas being targeted for redevelopment (Imran 2007). Historically Kampong Glam was a key place along the journey to Mecca and as such was a place of spiritual meaning for Malays (Yeoh & Huang 1996). Although the area is promoted by the government for the cultural heritage of the Muslim Malay population that once characterised the neighbourhood, the redevelopment process has destroyed much of the connections to the area's heritage by removing the previous residents and reoriented the focus on the area to foreign tourism (Smith 1988). This is explained by a Singaporean woman, Jiao Choi, saying:

The original business here catered to the pilgrim trade so you've got rug makers and hat makers and sandal makers. That was it. They all got turfed out anyway and there's nothing left here that's original. You're looking at a Singapore Government tourist trap. There's even a pub here. There was some objection because the pub is so near the mosque. ... but as I said, once migration ceases so does the function of a place. So I can tell you everything is from the past but it doesn't make sense to you because you've not seen it. They [local residents] think to conserve is bad news because they get kicked out. You don't get to stay because it is too commercial and it is too important. That's why I say there's no true conservation, it is all for money, (Jiao Choi, Singaporean-Chinese, early 50s, interview on 7/1/16).

The transformation of Kampong Glam is designed to help create an international image of Singapore and as such, is targeting foreign people who have had no previous connection to the ebbs and flows of daily life that once characterised the place. Additionally, the tourist's interaction with the area is primarily in the role of consumers that are attracted by the backpacker accommodation and the entertainment marketed towards them (Li 2003). The shift in economic function has changed the market value of the land and render the real estate too expensive for the existing residents and many Malay land owners have been forcibly evicted (Imran 2007). The detrimental effects on local connection with place are particularly evident in the inclusion of a pub serving alcoholic beverages in an area that was previous oriented to Muslims preparing for pilgrimage to Mecca. This change in form re-orientates Kampong Glam away from its traditional meaning to the Malay people to cater to consumerism of the tourist trade, thereby prioritising marketable experience ahead of the socio-cultural and spiritual needs of the local people (Li 2003).

Bugis Street

While the Singaporean Government stated its vision for redevelopment as a heritage and entertainment site, its success in the conservation of heritage elements that would have provided a sense of place to the local community has been tokenistic at best (Henderson 2003). The elements of the past (both built structure and local people) that were incompatible with the government's vision of nationhood have been ruthlessly removed causing social fragmentation and alienation from the sense of place (Chang 2014, Imran 2007). Previous distinctive features of Bugis Street culture, such as prostitutes and transvestites, have been banned from the area entirely to create a sanitised, family friendly shopping hub. Many previous residents of the area were also evicted as their housing did not meet the aesthetic vision of the redevelopment, while other people who once called the area home stay away due to feelings of loss of connection. The physical and socio-cultural removal of people from place has increased the sense of de-contextualisation of place from its social meanings and significance (Teo & Huang 1995).



Figure 4. Evans, T. Bugis Junction: the new Bugis Street, photo taken 13/12/16

As Lefebvre asserts that appropriate space resembles a work of art in that it expresses the community's rhythms of time and life (in Goh 2013:21). The destruction of existing places and the redevelopment that does not synchronise with the use and flow of the community is especially evident in the sanitation of the former red light district on Bugis Street. The extensive

redevelopment levelled the existing structures and the rebuilt the façade of the streetscape shown in Figure 4 aims to hint at previous urban design while repurposing the interior as a modern shopping centre (Chang & Huang 2005). However, the leap from an iconic red light district to a family friendly shopping centre is simply incompatible and as such, the redeveloped Bugis Street has lost much of its connection to its past character. The loss of the sense of place is described by a local resident, saying:

...they just try to get the looks of it but in terms of the feel, it might not fulfil that part. So for the looks of it you might think yeah this is olden days' shop houses but for the feel of it? It's just, ok, you've tried to recreate it, (Damia Tadin, Singaporean-Malay, late 20's, interview on 13/12/16).

The superficial focus on the façade of shop houses has been insufficient to retain the connection to the rich sense of street life that was once vibrant in the area. Through the attempt to modernise the area, the previous character and community of Bugis Street have now become estranged from one another (Chang, Milne, Fallon & Pohlman 1996).

The effects of the sanitised redevelopment is lamented by Albert Hong, a Singaporean who, when asked about the former reputation of the red light district, communicates a sense of loss, saying:

... but then it had character and charm. Now all the streets there got consumed by the shopping mall. If you ask me it's got no more history in it. It's gone. It's run by a Japanese developer and the attraction to it was that it's entirely air conditioned. That's why I always laugh when Singapore claims to be eco-friendly when you have these massive consumers of air con. And cold at that! Very cold. We all walk about like its winter, (Albert Hong, Singaporean-Chinese, mid 40s, interview 9/1/16).

Not only is the sterile shopping area disconnected from the disreputable heritage of the area but it has been further removed from the realities of life in a tropical climate as a glass ceiling that stretched over the complex allows the faux-streets to be experienced in air-conditioned comfort (Koolhaas 1998).

The Indian Heritage Centre

The lack of consideration between new urban design and the traditional multi-racial heritage of Singapore is further illustrated in the design of the Indian Heritage Centre building. Located amidst low-rise shop houses of Little India, the multi-story build has a glass façade that shows the internal stairwells that connect the floors of the museum. The focus of the stairwells was the key factor in the Singaporean Government's decision to use this design as the stairwells referred to wells that featured in traditional Indian mythology. This may initially seem like the government has found a modern design that unites traditional heritage with the modern built environment yet this is not the case (Henderson 2008). As a Singaporean woman, Lien Pung, explains:

They [the government] liked the stairwell concept. But if you ask me the Gujrat wells have nothing to do with the wells here. In fact, we'd never heard of them till I came here and they told us about the wells but so what? None of the Indians ever cared because most of the Indians here are south Indians and not from Gujrat. There are a number from Gujrat but the majority are still Tamil. ... The government controls it. What are you going to do? (Lien Pung, Singaporean-Chinese, early 50s, interview 13/12/15).

The mythology about the stairwells is traditional to communities in northern India whereas the majority of the Indian population that migrated to Singapore was from southern India. Culturally these two groups define themselves as different cultures and consequently the Tamils from the south of India do not have a cultural connection to the mythology about wells. As the majority of Singaporean-Indians did not have past connection to this mythology, the new design is unable to tie in with the cultural identity of past Indian community in Little India (Chang 2014).

Conclusion

Collective memory of the built environment plays an important role in the creation of a sense of identity and a sense of place. The shared experiences, interactions and cultural symbols that give meaning to a group's identity and infuse meaning to the places are integral elements in contextualising both people and places (Lewicka 2008). However, the narrative understandings that people have may be suppressed under the pressure of an authoritarian regime. Analysis of the

descriptions Singaporeans use to understand places and how they have changed over time demonstrate a hidden transcript that often conflicts with the official public discourse promoted by the government (Scott 1987). The hidden transcripts are also acted out through Singaporean peoples' disengagement with the city, as seen in examples of people refusing to visit government sanctioned national icons like the Merlion (Tilly 1991).

The community bonds of collective memory that tie people to places of historic cultural meaning have been severely damaged in Singapore. Wide scale redevelopment has resulted in the progressive removal of past meanings and practices associated with place. In turn, the sense of place becomes lost from its connection with human meaning (Henderson 2003). This has been especially evident in the conservation practices used by museums and heritage boards. Objects that were once part of everyday life are now physically removed and restricted behind glass. Narrative accounts that were once part of everyday understanding are now reduced to a few officially sanctioned paragraphs on heritage boards, which remain isolated from the practices of daily life (Gurler & Ozer 2013).

The push to simplify culture into consumable touristic commodities has had a profound impact on traditional ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, Kampong Glam, and Little India. Where these places once staged meaningful social interactions for Singaporeans, they have been reduced to a stage for the functions of capitalist exchange (Teo & Huang 1995). The reorientation of these place towards the foreign tourist market ahead of the needs of the people living there has damaged these areas' ability to be engaging places for meaningful social interaction. Without the provision of space where people can interact freely to develop new meanings, places are rendered sterile and inauthentic while the people occupying them experience a reduced sense of belong and identity, leaving only the alienation of consumer interactions to character both people and place (Koolhaas 1998).

Non-places in Singapore's built environment: spaces of alienation

Introduction

What sort of place has been constructed in the wake of wide spread reconstruction of the Singaporean built environment? The Singaporean Government's focus on economic growth and integration with the global market have undoubtedly launched the nation into the developed world as a financial success story (Clammer 2010). The focus on quantifiable profit margins and tangible development in the built environment has, however, created a blind spot on the social value of the modern cityscape (Henderson 2008). In Singapore's quest to develop it has sacrificed the heritage and social meaning that once made the country unique, rendering the built environment a generic space that lacks the foundation of an established identity (Yuen 2005). Koolhaas describes the modern metropolis as being "nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability. It is the city without history... If it gets old it just self-destructs and renews. It is equally exciting – or unexciting – everywhere. It is 'superficial' – like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning," (Koolhaas 1998:1250).

The contemporary built environment in Singapore will be considered using the theory of Marc Augé and Rem Koolhaas to determine what instils a sense of place. Both theorists agree that identity, meaningful social interactions and a foundation built in history are vital elements in any place (Augé 1995, Koolhaas 1998). These are key ingredients for space to facilitate the lived experience needed for people to create meaning, identify with the environment and attach a sense of place to space. The absence of this alchemy produces non-places, or places devoid of lived experience, that people cannot engage with (Augé 1995). This chapter will explore development practices that disconnect the past from the present day, the scope for meaningful social interaction in the built environment and effects of regulation on identity. This examination will attempt to deduce whether Singapore has successfully redefined itself as a socially integrated city or if the Singaporean built environment should be considered a collection of isolated non-places.

The conversion of place to non-place

Marc Augé posits that place is created through three main characteristics; identity, social relationships and history (Augé 1995). As Augé explains:

The organisation of space and the founding of places inside a given social group comprises one of the stakes and one of the modalities of collective and individual practice. Collectivises (or those who direct them), like their individual members, need to think simultaneously about identity and relations; and to this end, they need to symbolize the components of shared identity (of a given group or individual in relation to others) and singular identity (what makes the individual or group of individuals different from any other), (Augé 1995:51).

From this statement we can deduce the key elements of place. The city's spatial arrangement must reflect the group's identity to create a sense of place in the built environment. People must be able to recognise themselves in their home environments to establish a connection between themselves and place. Through recognising themselves in a built environment, people are able to identify with place and recognise the meaning places have for themselves as an individual and their social group (Augé 1995).

This meaning is shaped by the interaction of people within the place. As discussed in the previous chapter, this meaning is not made, but rather, it is lived. It is the collective experience and understanding of the group that attaches meaning to place. As meaning shaped through lived experience, it is dynamic in nature. It is the collective memory of people that is being constantly written and rewritten in the minds of group but also inscribed on the built environment itself (Goldberg, Schwarz & Porat 2008). There is meaning in the signs, symbols, and markings that daily life has etched into the built environment in countless ways. This can include actual writing as well as non-literate markers such as images and the shape of design in the city. In this sense the city itself becomes a text that is uniquely intelligible to groups who live there (Augé 1995).

Time is a crucial element to understanding place and identity. The meaning and group experiences of place are accumulated over time as collective memory (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011). It is important to note that in this instance history does not refer to objective historical fact. Augé refers to history as being a group narrative that brings the spirit of place together with the identity of the people, describing it as "a useful and necessary image; not a lie but a myth, roughly inscribed on the soil...subject to possible readjustment," (Augé 1995:47). In this sense, history is synonymous to collective memory as it is the ever-evolving historical narrative of a group, which provides the

foundation of understanding for individual identity, group identity and meaning of place (Goldberg, Schwarz & Porat 2008, Lewicka 2008).

If place can be determined through identity, social relations and collective memory then it follows that a non-place is devoid of these essential elements. Augé theorizes that non-places are a growing feature within an increasingly globalised world as modern cities are becoming scattered with more and more sites that do not integrate with the earlier place that existed before development (Augé 1995). This lack of integration with the previous place is not only problematic as it breaks the continuity of the place's historical roots. It further complicates social engagement as non-places exacerbate alienation. People experience alienation through the production of an environment that inhibits social relationships, which in turn limits the non-place's capacity to ever become realised as a place (Augé 1995). Augé primarily looks at transitory places such as highways, airports and hotels as non-places, arguing that they do not have sufficient social significance to be places. These examples are not places that people can live in but rather pass through. Given the individual's temporary and impersonal experiences in these highly regulated contexts, Augé highlights that a person's identity cannot be empowered. The individual is reduced to being categorised into a function such as a licensed driver on the highway, a registered passenger on a plane, or a hotel guest that has booked in (Augé 1995).

Although Augé limits his study to these key sites, Augé's definition on non-place can be applied to other contexts within the built environment. Rem Koolhaas extends this hypothesis to the city as a whole, arguing that when identity and the historic roots of a place are stripped away, the Generic City is all that remains (Koolhaas 1997). Koolhaas writes that "the serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm. ... The urban plane now only accommodates necessary movement," (Koolhaas 1998:1251). Similar to Augé, Koolhaas sees the increasingly transitory nature of the modern city as alienating to people and destructive to the collective memory of place (Koolhaas 1998).

The destruction of place and the proliferation of non-place provides an apt theoretical lens to understand the transformation of the built environment in Singapore. The process of disconnecting people and place is evident throughout the city. Koolhaas (1997) specifically singles out Singapore as an example of this trend, referring to Singapore as a "Potemkin Metropolis," meaning a fake city that tries to convince you that it is better than it actually is. Singapore's systematic removal of its connections to the past by demolishing the majority of the built environment has robbed the city of its authenticity. Authenticity in this context refers to the traditional social meaning that a community has for its culture and environment. There is instead shallow approximation that is geared to tourists

who are largely ignorant to the genuine cultural meaning, which MacCannell (in Cohen 1988:372) refers to as “stage authenticity.” Fake authenticity is proliferated in the drive to create exotic spectacles to entertain visitors without regard for the hollow experience it offers to the local people who once believed in its cultural significance (Cohen 1988, Koolhaas 1998).

Applying Augé’s theory of non-place and Koolhaas’ idea of the Generic City will demonstrate how Singapore has become a transitory environment that lacks authenticity. This will be considered in terms of practices that have removed connections between past and present, the reduction of public spaces to facilitate meaningful social interactions and the regulated nature of non-places that diminish peoples’ sense of identity.

The discontinuity of breaking the past from the present

Untethering place from the foundations of identity and collective memory results in a non-place as it becomes devoid of authenticity (Koolhaas 1998). The rich fabric of meaning of any place is founded on the cumulative history that a social group has experienced. It binds people to that place as they can recognise themselves in that environment and the environment has, in turn, been shaped by the people living there (Ho 2009).

The ability to recognise oneself and attach meaning to the built environment can be severely damaged through redevelopment if the work does not integrate into the existing *genius loci*. The influences of globalisation can introduce new designs and lifestyles that have no foundation in the collective understanding people have of the places they live. The removal of peoples’ connection to the past takes away the crucial historical reference points needed to understand new features. It is for this reason that the Malays have been most severely impacted by redevelopment in Singapore. As the indigenous population, the Malays were once the majority land owner and have now become a minority group on the social and economic periphery (Imran 2007, Sin 2003). The resulting sense of disconnection can then be exacerbated if the newly introduced elements do not compliment their existing way of life, such as through the forced adoption of Chinese values. This makes it increasingly difficult to attach meaning to the new environment as external influences may be in direct conflict with the existing historical narrative of place (Loh 2009a). As a local Singaporean, Bodh Singh, explains:

Here it's nothing to do with the land, it's the building and what it represents... it is about the meaning that the [building] has and how close it was to their working environments. It's about memory... There's nothing sacred about the land but it's the memories, (Bodh Singh, Singaporean-Indian, early 30s, interview on 26/12/15)

These comments highlight the importance of collective memory of the built environment in establishing meaning and social value in Singapore. Through daily interaction with the built environment, lived experience shapes the value and authenticity of the city (Imran 2007).

Exhuming the dead in Singapore's cemeteries

The sense of place in much of Singapore's built environment has been lost through the inability to connect the modern city to the nation's historic foundations (Yuen 2005). Singapore's wide scale redevelopment has profoundly changed the cityscape over the last 50 years, rendering the modern city unrecognisable in comparison to the built environment of 1965. This has effectively wiped out the connection people had to the past by demolishing the places that once had meaning (Loh 2009a, 2009b). As Koolhaas (1998:1253) describes the process "all Generic Cities issue from the tabula rasa; if there was nothing, now they are there; if there was something, they have replaced it. They must, otherwise they would be historic." The destruction of history breaks the identification people once had by removing all markers, symbols and structures to which collective memory once attached meaning (Blackburn 2013, Lewicka 2008).

In creating a clean slate for redevelopment, Singapore has dug up its roots in a very literal sense by exhuming the dead from burial sites across the city. The presence of history, such as cemeteries, is seen as an uneconomical obstruction to the process of modern lifestyle and therefore, as an impediment to be removed (Koolhaas 1998). It has been common practice to exhume the bodies of people buried throughout the country to make way for redevelopment. Housing, commercial shopping centres, parks and transport infrastructure have all been constructed on ex-cemetery sites (Yeoh & Tan 1995).

Although there has been criticism from the public of this practice, former Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew justified the exhumations by citing that the need of space for the living outweighed the needs of the dead (Yeoh & Tan 1995). This has created a polarised public discourse where Singaporeans now

feel they must choose between either heritage conservation or progress. One critic of the destruction of Bukit Brown cemetery described this mindset, saying:

I think that people usually think that for the purpose of development, they have to give up something. That is a line that they have been feed and that they have been conditioned to accept. So even if there are any changes in government policy, I think that many people would still think that we have no choice but to develop the country. We must move forward, we will develop and give up things. There is [a sense of loss] but like I said, people think, well some people think we will have to sacrifice something for the country to move forward,
(Albert Hong, Singaporean-Chinese, mid 40s, interview on 9/1/16, emphasis in the original)

Casting the discussion of redeveloping into two opposing binaries of heritage or progress inhibits the scope of people to consider wider socio-cultural implications of exhuming the dead. Although cemeteries are both a place for the dead and also an important place for the living; they act as a spatial expression of this continuity between the living and dead (Kong 2012). Practices of ancestor worship preformed in these places are an important cultural bridge between past and present in many cultures, particularly the Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese culture, physical death did not equate to the death of the soul. The spirit of their ancestors was believed to maintain a relationship with their decedents after death and the cemetery was a place for the living and dead to interact (Yeoh & Tan 1995). Figure 5 shows that burial sites were designed with an area in front of the tombstone for family to use when visiting the deceased. This interaction fosters a sense of connection and belonging to the person's kinship group as well as a sense of historic connection to place (Kong 2012, Yeoh & Tan 1995). The socio-cultural importance of engaging in acts of remembrance and connection with ancestors is explained by a Singaporean man, Bodh Singh, saying:

In Chinese culture, a tomb is a place for interaction. I feel that it is also a space for interaction because the living bring their offerings with the expectation that the dead would give them something back and the dead are accepting all these food items and all these paper offerings as well. So you've got to look at a Chinese tomb on that level where it's a space for interaction between the living and the dead. If you've been to Bukit Brown you'll see that it isn't just a tomb but they have a very nice courtyard in front of it, a beautifully tiled space where we'd bring our offerings, our flowers, food, (Bodh Singh, Singaporean-Indian, early 30s, interview on 26/12/15).

Regarding cemeteries as dead space rather than a place for both the dead and the living limits the understanding of the value cemeteries have in everyday life. Disrupting the places where the living

engage with their pasts
creates a symbolic break
from heritage and kinship
ties (Kong 2012, Yeoh & Tan
1995). This is further evident
in the emerging practices
observed in Singapore for the
relocation of the ashes of the
exhumed to niches in the
public columbarium.

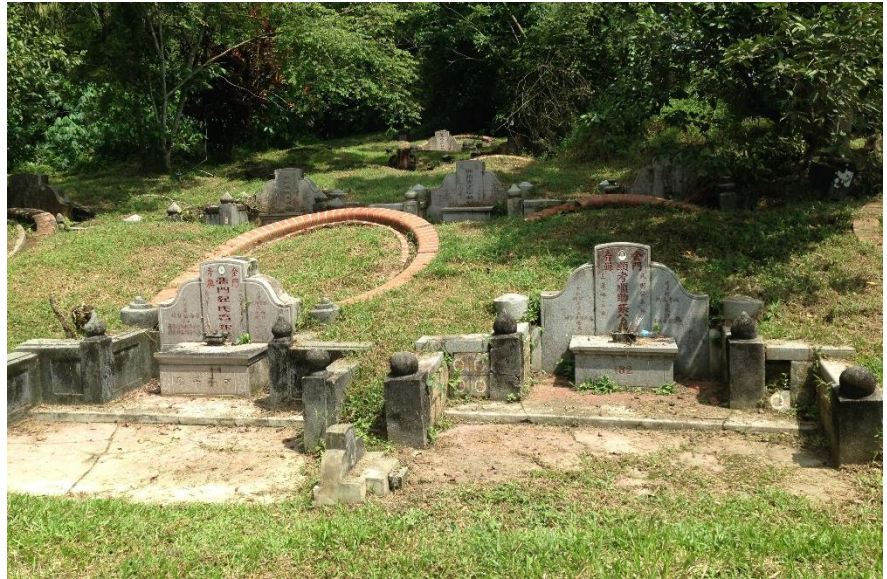


Figure 5. Evans, T. Burial sites at Bukit Brown Cemetery, photo taken 19/12/15

Relocation to the
columbarium means that the deceased is now resting with strangers rather than remaining together
with their family members. To overcome this spatial disconnection of kinship ties, contemporary
Singaporeans have begun introducing the remains of their ancestors to those interred round them,
asking them to be friends (Kong 2012). This demonstrates the importance of spatial arrangements
for the spiritual and social cultural needs of Singaporeans and reinforces that cemeteries are places
for mutual exchange between ancestors and decedents, which creates meaning for present day
Singaporeans (Kong 2012).

Discontinuity through constant rebuilding

The disconnection of the modern Singaporean cityscape from historical contextualisation is an
ongoing issue that inhibits peoples' ability to create new lived experience. Over time, it is possible
that people could adapt to the new cityscape and through sustained interaction, established new
understanding and meaning within the modern metropolis. The destruction of the built
environment, however, has not been a singular event where the traditional *kampongs* were cleared
and the contemporary built environment was constructed (Teo & Huang 1996). Constant demolition
and redevelopment of the built environment has become an accepted norm, producing an unstable
cityscape subject to continual change. The different stages of redevelopment are illustrated in Figure
6 below. The fast paced rebuilding severely limits peoples' ability to forge new attachments to the
built environment as places of lived experience, such as schools, parks and homes, are frequently
demolished to make way for new development (Yuen 2005).

The experience of living in an ever-changing cityscape is described by Yejin Huyngh, a young Singaporean woman, saying:

You don't remember much. There were a lot of buildings from when I was a kid that are no longer around anymore. Everything keeps getting built, new malls getting built, like in 2010 I went away for six months and when I came back there were three new shopping malls on Orchard Road and a hotel had got a face lift. You get used to it, I guess, get used to your heritage just being wiped away, (Yejin Huyngh, Peranakan-Chinese, mid 20s, interview on 22/12/15)

Memory itself is affected by the lack of stable markers in the built environment (Augé 1995). The lived experience of peoples' past happened within specific places and as these places are routinely

destroyed, there is no physical link to which their memories can be tethered. A new sense of place cannot be established without the longevity of an ongoing environment for people to interact with and create meaningful experience (Koolhaas 1998).



Figure 6. Evans, T. The demolition and construction of housing in Singapore, photo taken 14/12/15

The demolition of places that housed social-cultural value and collective memory severs the link between past and present. This creates an environment that exists only in the present moment to fulfil a current need (Koolhaas 1998). This changes the function of the cityscape profoundly as it re-orientates the purposes of the urban environment away from the providing a place for social interaction and lived experience. The new space primarily functions to facilitating commercial relationships and free flow of capital (Chang & Huang 2005, Henderson 2008). Although the reorientation of Singapore to increase its accessibility

to the global market has undoubtedly assisted economic growth, it has come at the cost of national heritage and identity (Chee 1995). This is demonstrated by the remarks of Jiao Choi, a Singaporean woman that described the prioritisation of the present economic growth:

I can tell you everything is from the past and but it doesn't make sense to you because you've not seen it. But people here don't care. They just care about the present and the future. We had a group of people in government that began this mantra. It went something like this; if you want to progress you have to look forward and cannot stay rooted to one spot. That's why you have this generation of kids that know not and don't care. When everything is going forward you can't afford to stay in the past. They say it for the common good then so be it, it's for the common good. We have progressed and that's very good. We've got new buildings and the new financial centre. We're becoming the biggest and the best and number one in whatever other bloody thing you can think off. See? I'm supposed to say things like that. If I say anything to the contrary then I'm a bad Singaporean, (Jiao Choi, Singaporean-Chinese, early 50s, interview on 16/12/15)

These remarks highlight the conflict faced by Singaporeans who have experienced the loss of their heritage. On one side, people see the value in the development that has occurred but conversely, there is also a feeling of bitter resentment and regret for what is lost expressed through their hidden transcript above (Koh 2007). Also, similar to the above discussion on Bukit Brown cemetery, the influence of government rhetoric on public discourse is again clear. Where collective memory and the places that were meaningful to people were once the foundation of identity, government has attempted to mould Singapore into its idealised national image. By questioning whether progress for the sake of progress is worth the loss of heritage, Jiao Choi acknowledges she is publicly perceived as a “bad” Singaporean and later noted that others often advise her to censor her strong views. There is no longer any place to be a “good” Singaporean and remain attachment to past identity (Koh 2007).

The diminishing space for meaningful social interaction

The reduction of public space

Effective public space provides a backdrop for everyday life that supports the social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of the community (Amin 2006, Goh 2013a, Karuppannan & Sivam 2013). It is the theatre in which everyday life is played out, where meaningful experiences can occur and

collective memories of the built environment are formed (Augé 1995). Public space is the very framework in which shared life is experienced. It knits together the structural elements of the city, such as buildings, offices, shops and schools, to provide a structure for the activities of daily life. It also knits together the social fabric of a community by providing a stable reference point for all people to be seen and interact with others. This is an important element in creating an urban environment that people can recognise themselves (Augé 1995, Thrift 1994). A failure to provide public space that connects these diverse elements renders the city as a fragmented collection of islands instead of a cohesive whole (Augé 1995, Thrift 2012). Public space is thus reduced from a connective fabric that binds together intangible social aspect of the city with the concrete infrastructure and buildings, and is limited to act only as transitory void for people to navigate through rather than a place for them to engage with (Harvey 1990).

For this reason, Augé's theory of non-place is especially apt to understand the contemporary environment of Singapore. As Augé argues transitory places like airports, motorways and hotels lack the social meaning to be considered as places in their own right, the increasingly transitory experience within the built environment must also be considered in light of what social meaning they now have (Augé 1995). If effective public space provides a place for people to linger, interact and create meaningful experience then it follows that a public arena devoid of engagement with either the environment or other people should also be considered a non-place (Augé 1995, Yuen 2005).

The reduction of place to non-place is evident throughout Singapore where places that people once enjoyed lingering to interact with others has now become a restricted environment where they no longer feel welcome (Mele, Ng & Chim 2015). This can be observed at the former Bird Singing Corner in Tiong Bahru. This place once attracted people to gather with their pet birds in cages, hanging them on racks and whistling together with their fellow neighbours while enjoying a coffee and snack. This practice, however, has long since been abandoned. Figure 7 shows that all that remains of this place today is a rack with number tags hanging from it and nearby is a bird mural on adjacent wall to hint at the former meaning of this area. Two elderly Singaporean women describe the lost Bird Singing Corner, saying:

No more bird corner. Nobody hang the birds there anymore. After they make into a hotel, no more. In the days when my husband still alive I go there. This is now turned into hotel, now I cannot sit. I live up there so when I pass by before I just sit but now I cannot [sic], (Mei Su, Singaporean-Chinese, early 60s, interview on 10/12/15).

The minute they put the hotel there the birds all went? No, the people went because they destroyed the coffee shop where the people met. You see the key was the coffee shop. I think that the building is still there, they just turned it into a hotel but the place where they hung the hooks was the coffee shop. Since it was destroyed there's no point going there. There's no place to enjoy a cup of coffee and hang up the birds, (Soo Min Han, Singaporean-Chinese, late 50s, interview on 23/12/15).

From both these accounts the importance of the coffee shop as a meeting place is clear. It provided a place for people to stop, interact and engage with the place. By removing the incentive to linger there removes the sense of place as it is no longer seen as a destination. It is, at best, a place to

pass by as it has become an area exclusive to the temporary patronage of hotel guests and the public are unable to sit there (Kong, Yeo & Teo 1996, Koolhaas 1998).

The restrictive regulation of this newly created non-place also has important repercussions on peoples' sense of identity (Mele, Ng & Chim 2015). The Bird Singing Corner was previously a place accessible to all to gather and enjoy the spontaneous social interaction there. People could be either anonymous or known as an acquaintance established through prolonged patronage of the coffee shop (Koolhaas 1998, Ooi 1994). The hotel, however, has recast peoples' interactions as a contractual relationship. Anonymous patronage is now forbidden and only hotel guests who have had their identity checked in and confirmed are permitted to linger. A person entering this site is now reduced to an expression of their action; they are a registered hotel guest, they are a customer, they are a tourist (Augé 1995). They are no longer a friend whose lived experience has been related



Figure 7. Evans, T. The former Bird Singing Corner at Tiong Bahru, photo taken 10/12/15

to their acquaintance over their years of visiting the Bird Singing Corner. This unverifiable identity does not conform with the new regulations of the hotel and as such is now prohibited (Augé 1995, Loh 2009a).

The growing prevalence of solitary, isolating urban design

Social disengagement is especially evident in the residential areas of Singapore's built environment (Sin 2002a, Sim, Yu & Han 2003). Although the spatial distribution of people is becoming increasingly dense, people are becoming increasingly socially isolated (Sin 2003, Teo & Huang 1996). Both Augé and Koolhaas note the paradox; social isolation is on the rise in urban environments that are progressively more interconnected with the rest of the city and the globalised world (Augé 1995, Koolhaas 1998). The built environment has, in some ways, become far more accessible with improved transport infrastructure and digital communication making it easier than ever to contact other people. Spatially, people are also living closer together with the proliferation of high rise dwelling resulting in ever higher density across Singapore, which results in more person to person contact given this proximity (Latif 2004). Yet paradoxically, people are more separated than ever (Augé 1995).

This isolation can be observed in the design of residential high rise buildings in Singapore (Teo & Huang 1996). As Koolhaas describes this phenomenon: "the towers no longer stand together, they are spaced so that they don't interact. Density in isolation is the ideal," (Koolhaas 1998:1253). Space has become a collection of singularities where people prefer to exist in their own separate islands rather than being in contact with their neighbours (Goh 2013b). This sentiment is related by an older Singaporean woman, Linqin Chen, who explains:

Your neighbour is so close to you. Maybe you open your door and there's your neighbour already. Don't want. Too congested. If you have all the people there, you can get a kind of smell. It's suffocating. So stuffy. You walk the corridor like a tunnel, here a door, there another door, another door, another unit. And then you know people do not want to invite a friend to come in to my house and now you see I stay here. People already feel that, [sic] (Linqin Chen, Singaporean-Malay, early 60s, interview on 10/12/15).

The more contact people have with other people in the contemporary built environment, the more people seek their own private space away from the rest of society (Koolhaas 1997). Even people that

they do have a connection with, such as friends, are not necessarily welcome within a person's home. The environment is described above in imagery that emphasises the lack of inviting emotional engagement that high rise living has; with tunnel-like corridors and generic repetition as you pass through. Any sense of warm sentiment to characterise going home is absent, as shown in the homogenous design in Figure 8 (Alhasbshi 2010).



Figure 8. Evans, T. New apartments under construction near Punggol, photo taken 15/12/15

This sense of alienation is also expressed by a young Singaporean who expresses the isolation of residential design as being packed away in a box, saying: "It's very much cosmopolitan living. You live in your box, you leave your box to go to work, you have your friends and family, then you go back to your box," (Yejin Huyngh, Peranakan-Chinese, mid 20s, interview on 22/12/15). These statements show the lack of place for meaningful engagement with sterile design of Singapore's residential high rise. Friends, family and work are all described as separate entities that do not necessarily involve each other. They are distinct and seen as divided from the home. Yet without the meaningful social interaction with others, can a "box" have the emotional connection to be considered a home as opposed to a place to sleep at night? (Teo & Huang 1996).

Forced social contact through the Singaporean Government's Ethnic Integration Policy

Social isolation in residential areas seems to be at odds with the Singaporean government's original nation-building objectives in relocating people from traditional *kampongs* to Housing Development Board (HDB) high rise dwellings (Loh 2009a, Sin 2002a, Sim, Yu & Han 2003). Government rhetoric in the 1960s when HDB accommodation was introduced cited that the new integrated style of living in HDB buildings would facilitate national unity (Sin 2002a, 2003). Through the Ethnic Integration Policy, HDB blocks have been spatially organised so that the buildings are populated by a mix of

people with Chinese, Malay, Indian and other heritage in order to prevent any ethnic enclave forming (Sin 2002a). In theory, the spatial proximity with people of different racial heritage would provide an environment where positive social interaction would foster a cohesive community (Loh 2009, Sin 2002b).

Augé's observation of non-place reducing the identity of individuals to their functional roles is especially poignant for the spatial organisation of HDB accommodation. As people are categorised according to the radical identity prescribed by the government via their National Registration Identity Card (NRIC) and then disperse according to the government's formula for integration, all in the name of national harmony (Sin 2003). Chua (2003) highlights that "harmony" is a repressive tool used by the government to eliminate any challenge to the existing social hierarchy. This experience is described by Bodh Singh, a Singaporean man who reflected on what space he has to express his sense of identity:

It's [culture] either watered down or it's tamed. I think that has to do with politics but I know all of this happened after we gained independence. That's when this whole being vision of seeing yourself as a Singaporean came about. The political leaders decided to go for the whole unification theory in the sense where quotas came in and that you should have a mosque in a Chinese neighbourhood. It's fine to have different houses of worship in different estates. So all that came into play and it all had to do with their long term vision of not only being tolerant but being accepting of other people. So individuality has taken a back seat for most Singaporeans, (Bodh Singh, Singaporean-Indian, early 30s, interview on 26/12/15).

The enforced spatial proximity has produced a superficial recognition between different racial groups rather than integration (Chua 2003, 2007). People of different ethnic backgrounds may live side-by-side with one another but cultural boundaries are never crossed. As this shallow tolerance facilitates a productive economy for the majority, it has been euphemistically described as "harmony" by the government to gloss over underlying tensions and inequalities (Chua 2003).

Spatial proximity alone is insufficient impetus for establishing increased social interaction. The environment itself must provide a place where people can come together (Clammer 2011, Sin 2002a, 2003). Linqin Chen demonstrates this in her explanation of why she prefers to go to a church in the city rather than the local church, saying "distance doesn't matter. The heart is already there at the church so the body will follow. It's about people and your ties to them," (Linqin Chen

Singaporean-Malay, early 60s, interview on 10/12/15)². Spatially proximity does not equate to emotional connection for Linqin Chen but rather the value in the city church is established through meaningful social connection. She chooses to travel further to go to the same church that her friends attend (Yuen 2005).

If the Singaporean Government's intention was to foster a cohesive community through spatially re-ordering society via HDB dwellings then it follows that the design of these buildings would need to provide places for meaningful social interaction (Hee & Ooi 2003). Yet, the changing trend of HDB design is evolving to provide less space where people can come in contact with each other. The main areas within HDB that people meet each other are the lifts, corridors and void decks (void decks being an open space on the first floor of apartment blocks) (Hee & Ooi 2003). To encourage social interaction then the logical step would be to improve the design of these spaces to facilitate increased contact. In practise these spaces are actually becoming smaller and less inviting as design evolves over time (Koolhaas 1998).

The increasingly isolating design is especially evident in the seating provisions for HDB void decks. Older HDB void decks were commonly designed with round tables that had seats evenly spaced around the whole table. It was also common for a chess board to be part of the design to provide a source of entertainment that could be shared between people. Over time, tables have become more rectangular with seats that face opposite each other rather than the more egalitarian circular design and the chess boards no longer feature. The more modern HDB void decks often do not provide a table at all and position seats in isolation from each other that make it difficult for groups to congregate (Hee & Ooi 2003, Teo & Huang 1996).

This changing design has important implications for social meaning of void decks. Where once these void decks could provide a space for meaningful interaction, they are progressively becoming non-places that people cannot engage with. As Singaporean woman, Sam Gao, explains the social value of void decks:

Every HDB is getting so small. It's just so small that I can't find any space there. How can people hang out? I can't find any space like that. It was ok for my generation, but what about my kids' generation and my kids' kids' generation. When we were young we would play, running, catching, hiding, the whole block was the playground... As we get older we smoke there, we drink there secretly [laughs]. There is not one time where the void deck is not in our memory. ...Void decks are diminishing and the spaces are becoming less friendly. So if you

² Please note that Linqin Chen identified herself as both Malay and a church goer, despite the majority of Malays being Muslim.

notice now the new HDB do not have void decks and do even have playgrounds. ... This was a staple but now if you ask children if you play in the void deck they don't do it, (Sam Gao, Singaporean-Chinese, mid 30s, interview on 5/1/16).

Changing the design of void decks and removing them entirely has impacted the social value of space. Void decks once provided a place where spontaneous lived experience could occur and meaningful memories were made. The new disengaging design has changed peoples' relationship with this space and consequentially diminished the social value of void decks, rendering them a non-place (Augé 1995).

The progressive removal of free spaces is symptomatic of the government's push for functionality and productivity (Clammer 2010). Singapore credits its economic success to embracing Chinese-values of dedicated hard work and stereotypes Malay's economic marginalisation as being product of their inherent laziness (Barr & Low 2005, Chua 2003). Void decks in particular are becoming increasingly at odds with the government's push for efficiency because, as the very term "void deck" suggests, there is empty, unproductive space. Although void decks do not produce anything for economic gains, they do produce the spontaneous behaviour remembered fondly by Sam Gao above; plays games as children and more rebellious activities as young adults. Effectively designed void decks provide a place for *otium*, for unstructured leisure, for sheer enjoyment of social interaction (Harvey 1990). This is perceived by the authoritarian government as having the potential to cause public disruption. The anxiety of the government is further discernible in prohibition large social gatherings lest they lead to any sort of political movement that may challenge public discourse (Chua 2003).

The new non-place environment is further alienating as it is characterised by regulation (Koolhaas 1998). Augé defines non-places as mediating relations to create solitary contracts rather than organic social relationships (Augé 1995). This is observable in the corridors of HDB buildings. The regulation of everyday life is described by Damia Tadin, a Singaporean woman who relates:

For us, we do the laundry in the corridor with bamboo poles. From one window to another window, that is my area there so I can put everything there. You can't actually block the whole corridor though and the government does the rounds to check. My family got a notice once, a warning, because I have plants on one side and then on laundry day, I fill it up. I have six family members so it takes up the space and we put it on the other side so it's usually a bit squished and not very easy to walk through. But the new houses are definitely more squeezey and it's really hard for bicycles to do a proper turn and my neighbours have

strollers also. The new houses are like that, (Damia Tadin, Singaporean-Malay, late 20's, interview on 13/12/16).

This narrative account shows the prescriptive isolation of space as there is a set area that can be used by the family. The regulation of this space is also evident as the family is warned by the government that encroachment outside this area will be penalised. The lack of suitability of this space for its intended purpose is also clear as people can struggle to traverse the corridor with anything that requires room for a turning circle such as a bicycle or pram. This regulation compounds the problem of disengaging design; people are no longer in a relationship with simply the place or with other people. Peoples' behaviour becomes a relationship with the government that controls the place and restricts its uses (Augé 1995).

Conclusion

Sense of place in the modern cityscape in Singapore has become increasingly difficult to find. As development continues, more areas of the city fit Marc Augé's theory of non-places (Augé 1995, Koolhaas 1998). Historical attachment is eroded through practices such as exhuming the dead, causing the break in a person's spiritual connection to their ancestral roots both socially and spatially through the destruction of cemeteries as places for engagement (Kong 2012, Yeo & Tan 1995). The opportunity to establish new collective memory within the modern built environment is also impeded through constant demolition and redevelopment removing places of lived experience to the Singaporean people (Loh 2009a). This is aptly described by Koolhaas (1998) who notes that the Generic City issues forth from the tabula rasa. The constant redevelopment of the built environment continually wipes out the connection that the city may have once had to people, rendering the modern cityscape increasingly impersonal and inauthentic.

The transitory nature of the Singaporean cityscape is also consistent with Augé's theory of non-place. Public space is increasingly reduced through regulation that alienates people from places that once held meaning for them, as was observed in the now deserted Bird Singing Corner of Tiong Bahru. The hotel has introduced privileged space where only those in a contractual relationship with the hotel, such as registered guests, are allowed to visit. The people who once lingered and engaged in meaningful interaction are now simply pass by or avoid the site entirely (Kong, Yeoh & Teo 1996). Even peoples' homes have become spaces that discourage social interaction and emotional

connection to place. Generic, sterile design make identification with place difficult. It can even result in a negative perception of one's home as people do not want friends to know about the unpleasant environment they live in. Rather than addressing this trend by developing more aesthetically pleasing design, the architecture of HDB buildings is exacerbating the transitory nature of this non-place. HDB buildings are evolving to promote isolation between people through the elimination of places like void decks that once encouraged social interaction. Eliminating these places reduces the opportunity for meaningful social integration that may have created a sense of place (Augé 1995, Harvey 1990).

Government regulation compounds social isolation by restricting the scope for spontaneous social interaction and attachment to place (Eng 2009). Ethnic heritage is reduced to a categorisation for the government to file people into racially diverse accommodation (Chua 2003). People are then obliged to act in accordance with their contractual relationship with the non-place or risk penalty for stepping outstep government regulation (Augé 1995). Individual identity and spontaneous social interaction are repressed in the name of social "harmony" (Chua 2003, 2007).

Without the connection to the past or scope to connect with other people, it is difficult to discern what (if any) meaningful experience people find in the modern Singaporean built environment. On this basis Augé's definition of non-places is an apt description for the cityscape of Singapore (Augé 1995).

Conclusion

The Singaporean cityscape has undergone profound change, which has had significant implications for peoples' connection to the built environment and the sense of place. This has been illustrated through analysis of Singaporean peoples' collective memory of the built environment. Expressed as hidden transcripts, there is a clear distinction between the personal understanding that people have of the changing cityscape and the official national image promoted by the government (Ardakani & Oloonabadi 2011, Lewicka 2008, Scott 1987). People simultaneously know what is expected of them to say, such as the official script for tour guides at museums or noting that development has been for the public's benefit, but people also communicate their own understanding of the cityscape, as seen by describing the Merlion as fake and quietly criticising the shortcomings of urban renewal projects. This demonstrates a gap between the experience of the cityscape and imagined identity that the Singaporean government has sought to construct (Li 2003, Smith 1988, Tilly 1991).

The alienation of the Singaporean people from the built environment has been a common theme in peoples' narrative accounts. Spatial alienation is observable from people who have been physically evicted from their former homes and places of work, described as part of the redeveloped Singapore River, Chinatown and Kampong Glam (Imran 2007, Lee 2003). It is further evident in the de-contextualisation of their heritage through ineffective conservation practices. Museums in particular de-contextualise heritage by removing objects with socio-cultural significance and relocating them to exhibits that separate these objects from people through glass partitions. Rather than preserving these objects' connection to peoples' heritage, this relocation breaks Singaporeans' cultural connection by removing it from the social meanings that are created through lived experience (Henderson 2010). This de-contextualisation is also true of the heritage boards installed through the city. Heritage boards stand in isolation from the daily life that occurs around them. The government sanctioned messages inscribed on them remains separate from the understanding of the cityscape that comes through lived experience. The very existence of contradictory hidden transcripts testifies to the ineffectiveness of heritage boards to integrate into the collective memory of the built environment (Gurler & Ozer 2013).

The alienation of Singaporeans from the built environment is compounded by the commercialisation of places that have cultural significance. This is especially true of places that were predominantly

populated by Malays like Bugis Street or Kampong Glam, which was once an important stopping point for Muslim Malays on pilgrimages to Mecca (Chang & Yeoh 1999). The remaining Malay heritage in the area has been undermined by the government's redevelopment of the area to rebrand it as a tourist destination. The commercial viability of attracting tourists has been prioritised over the spiritual meaning this place has to Malays by opening bars close to the Mosque. Bugis Street has also had its previous uses stripped away. The former street has been completely demolished and rebuilt with faux building façades in an urban renewal project to restore the grandeur that the area never previously had. The use has also been sanitised, replacing a notorious red light district with family friendly entertainment. This has eroded the authenticity of these places to create a superficial identity that the government attempts to impose on the nation (Imran 2007, Koolhaas 1998).

The sense of place in Singapore is vanishing, leaving transitory non-places in their wake. Marc Augé's defines non-places as space that lacks history, identity and social relationships (Augé 1995). The absence of history and identity are also important factors to Rem Koolhaas' concept of the Generic City (Koolhaas 1998). The concepts of both theorists are important tools to understand the effects of redevelopment in Singapore. Augé and Koolhaas take complimentary approaches to describing the built environment as they agree that sense of place comes from uniqueness and authenticity that is developed through a history of lived experience, and by stripping these elements away, only the generic non-place remains (Augé 1995, Koolhaas 1998).

Augé's three defining aspects of non-place are clearly discernible in the Singaporean cityscape. Firstly, history has been actively erased from the built environment through practices such as exhuming the dead and constant redevelopment work. Exhuming the dead has had significant impacts on Singaporean peoples' connection to the past as removing their ancestors' remains damages kinship linkages. Relocating the bodies of their ancestors removes the dead from the family plot and reinterns them among strangers (Augé 1995, Kong 2012). The destruction of the cemetery itself exacerbates the spatial disconnection as it eradicates the place that people would use to interact with the dead. This is also similar to the constant destruction and redevelopment that occurs throughout the city. Frequent demolition of places that one had lived experience prevents any new roots being established between people and the new built environment (Ho 2009, Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff 1983).

The second trait that non-places lack under Augé's theory is social relationships that create meaningful interactions between people. The changing cityscape is characterised by an increasing number of transitory spaces that discourage people from lingering. Engaging public space provide

people with a stage for social interaction and unstructured recreation where people are free to linger (Harvey 1990, Sime 1986). The newly developed public spaces in Singapore, however, have become disengaging. This has been demonstrated using the example of the Bird Singing Corner at Tiong Bahru, where the conversion of the old café into a private hotel has eradicated the place where people could freely engage with both the place itself and other people. The regulation of the area by the hotel now prohibits any other people except registered hotel guests from enjoying the space. People who previously visited the site now pass through without pause or no longer visit at all (Kong, Yeo & Teo 1996, Yuen 2005).

The lack of place for meaningful social interaction is also exacerbated through modern urban design. As seen in the descriptions of modern residential accommodation by Singaporean people in Chapter Two, people view these buildings as alienating. Using terms like “box” and “tunnel” demonstrate the lack of emotional engagement people have with these residential buildings (Koolhaas 1998). The architectural design is also changing to reduce the scope for social interaction. This has been seen through the re-design and disappearance of void decks in HDB apartment blocks. The repositioning and ultimate removal of seating undermines the void decks ability to provide a place for unstructured leisure time, including play time for children and congregating adults (Goh 2013b, Latif 2004).

The third element that defines a non-place is lack of identity. This is most evident in the Singaporean Government’s Ethnic Integration Policy, which reduces people into prescribed racial groups in order to promote the image of “harmony” (Chua 2003, Yuen 2005) Through the bureaucratisation of race, the government reduces culture into a function of state policy as the spatial distribution of people throughout the city is managed like an efficient administrative system. Social integration is publicly championed through the government’s rhetoric yet underlying this discourse, the Policy creates racial stereotypes that actually distance people of other cultures. The categorisation of people into these racial groups, regardless of whether the person identifies with the culture or not, locks them into a contractual relationship with the government (Augé 1995, Chua 2003).

From the above, the alienating experience of the Singaporean cityscape is evident. Places that once had historic or cultural value are either reduced to themed tourist attractions that parody lost social meaning, or are completely demolished thereby eliminating the place entirely (Augé 1995, Smith 1988). The new built environment prioritises the government’s imagined vision of Singapore rather than building on the legacies of the past. In the drive for economic growth and productivity, the city has become a transitory environment that facilitates the free flow of the global market (Chang &

Huang 2005). This is reflected in the cityscape that has become more a space to pass through rather than to engage with, reducing it more into a non-place than a place (Koolhaas 1998).

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