IN THE COMPANY OF CITIZENS: THE RHETORIC OF SINGAPORE INC.

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The leaders of Singapore take great pride in the small republic's economic achievements. Given its economic success, prominence in international markets, and cultivation of the world's highest density of millionaires, it is unsurprising that the nation is often referred to as "Singapore Inc.," a metaphor depicting the country as a corporate enterprise. But what happens to the relationship between people and their government when citizens are cast as shareholders and employees, and the government the nation's expert managers? How do these groups talk to each other and what kinds of arguments do they use to negotiate public problems? In this dissertation, I address these questions by exploring the implications of a corporate constitution of the nation for public deliberation. In asking what it means to run a country like a company, I engage with the concept of neoliberalism: the "leakage" of economic rationalities into non-economic spheres. This dissertation is thus a project in examining how neoliberalism affects the conditions of political participation by transforming a political relationship between citizens and their government into an economic one between workers and CEOs. Through an analysis of the annual National Day Rally address delivered by Singapore's Prime Ministers from 1960 to 2014 and two public controversies over immigration and censorship, I show how the government borrows the logic and language of the business world to set the terms of public discourse and how the people respond in ways that alternately resist and reinforce these norms. I conclude that rhetorical scholarship can benefit by drawing on concepts from organizational communication and that Singapore presents a unique case of neoliberalism that blends the liberal focus on individual endeavor with republican notions of sacrifice for a common goal.

Acknowledgements

Seven years ago, I stepped into a graduate seminar titled "Conceptual Criticism in Public Address." I had signed up at the last moment and thus didn't know that readings had been assigned for that first day. However, people were kind – Courtney Travers (then Caudle) shared her printouts with me and I sat in a kind of haze as John Murphy led us patiently through John F. Kennedy's speech at American University. I remember dutifully jotting down notes such as "read Northrop Frye," "check who Northrop Frye is" and "look up chiasmus (sp?)."

Since then, I have been the recipient of many small and large acts of kindness from my colleagues and advisors at Illinois. Chief among them are my dissertation committee, headed by my advisor John Murphy whose steady hand, keen eye, and <u>infinite</u> patience are paralleled only by his warmth, humor, and stellar presidential impressions (we also talked about triadic repetition that first day). Cara Finnegan taught me the importance of engaging with primary texts closely and sensitively, be they photographs, essays on counter-publics, or National Day Rally speeches. As she said in a class on public sphere theory, "What Does The Text Say?" Ned O'Gorman took me on as a research intern when I was very green and gave me a front row seat into how a rhetorician combs through archival records and conceptualizes a large historical project. Dave Tewksbury gave me the chance as his teaching assistant to explore the history of mass media and seems to have discovered an unbeatable formula for how to be both authoritative and affable.

I also thank my friends and family for putting up with *many* anguished discussions about Singapore, neoliberalism, and Midwest weather (No, Nikki Weickum, 50F is not "pleasant"). Marissa Lowe Wallace, Courtney Caudle Travers, and Natalie White have been stalwart supports through long chats and even longer conference presentations. Nikki Weickum is a delight who is equally able to conduct a conversation in person or via post-it notes left on your computer, and is one of the warmest people I am lucky to know. Tania Rozario has been a source of joy, advice, and excellent tea. She's not half bad – for a Malaysian. Ada Fung Platt, my dearest friend, is an editor with a gifted way with words. Her love, counsel, and singular ability with a baking pan kept me going through college and graduate school.

My husband Ben served on the front lines of this dissertation. He has listened to arguments, entered into discussions about the project, talked me back from deleting the whole thing, and humbled me with his kindness and faith in me. He's also quite good with a quiche.

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CHAPTER 1: THE NEOLIBERAL ISLAND

Regimes around the world are under pressure to deliver more and cost less…To make government work in the 21st century requires the same basic "business plan" as in any other failing, but potentially still viable, enterprise.

- *The Atlantic*, May 16, 2013[1]

We market Singapore as a "product." To stay ahead of the competition we have to constantly innovate and enhance the Singapore product.

- Economic Development Board, Singapore, 1994[2]

The hysteria was palpable in the website *Techcrunch*'s 2011 proclamation that "America is gripped by a new red menace and this time, it's not the commies – it's a sea of red ink." [3] Frustrated by reports of "abysmal fiscal neglect" in the United States government, or as the site termed it, the "pseudo-company in which we all essentially own shares," the writers declared that "if politicians reported to voters the way management reports to shareholders, no one would finish out their terms." The contention that business principles should shape government behavior persists not only in the U.S., where Bill Gates admonishes the government for following a "non-optimal path" that a normal business would avoid,[4] but on the other side of the globe, where Singapore's Prime Minister tells the nation that Microsoft is "the kind of business

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1. Eric Schnurer, "Government Should Run Like a Business—but Not in the Way You Think," *The Atlantic,* May 16, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/05/government-should-run-like-a-business-but-not-in-the-way-you-think/275693/?single_page=true.

2. Economic Development Board, *Economic Development Board Yearbook*, Singapore, 1994.

3. Sarah Lacy, "Can America Function More Like a Fiscally Responsible Company? It's up to us, the shareholders." *Techcrunch*, February 24, 2011, http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/24/can-america-function-more-like-a-fiscally-responsible-company-its-up-to-us-the shareholders/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Techcrunch+%28TechCrunch%29.

4. Jessica Meyers, "Bill Gates on D.C.: 'You don't run a business like this'" *Politico*, March 13, 2013, http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/bill-gates-on-dc-you-dont-run-a-business-like-this-88830.html.

which we want to be as Singapore."[5] What remains a point of debate in the U.S. has long been a creed among Singapore's incumbent party: that the government should model itself after the private sector. As the Prime Minister's exhortation for Singapore to *be* Microsoft suggests, Singapore takes this reasoning so far that a private company has become not merely an operational heuristic for government but the basis of the nation's identity.

This dissertation explores the implications of a corporate constitution of the nation for citizenship and public deliberation. Situating my study in Singapore between the years 1960 and 2014, I ask what citizenship -its practice in terms of political engagement and its meaning as a concept and status- becomes when a country is run like a company. In studying what happens when government is organized according to business principles, I engage with the concept of neoliberalism – the "application of the economic grid to social phenomena."[6] To this end, I undertake a rhetorical analysis of 94 addresses by Singapore's Prime Ministers and two controversies over immigration and media regulation to understand how a neoliberal government sets norms of citizenship and public debate and how its people engage with these norms.

Defining Neoliberalism

What does a neoliberal government look like? Part of the challenge in answering this question is that the term neoliberalism is evoked more frequently than it is defined. Hence, as Michel Foucault once fretted, neoliberalism is often made out to be so many things that it ends

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5. Lee Hsien Loong, *National Day Rally*, August 14, 2011, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2011/August/Prime_Minister_Lee_Hsien_Loongs_National_Day_Rally_2011_Speech_in_English.html. Delivered on the second Sunday in August after Singapore's National Day (9 August), the National Day Rally speech is akin to the State of the Union address in the U.S., where the nation's executive leader presents his assessment of the country, identifies key areas of concern and emphasis, and unveils new policy initiatives for the upcoming year.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 239-240.

up being "nothing at all."[7] When Boas and Gans-Morse analyzed 148 political science journal articles about neoliberalism published between 1990 and 2004, they found that not one article defined this term, which they noted is odd for a discipline so careful about delineating other "essentially contested concepts" such as democracy.[8] When it *is* defined, neoliberalism is made out to be any number of things ranging from a "cultural project" to a dominant paradigm,[9] "an ideationally-embedded rationality of market fundamentalism"[10] and "a political orientation hospitable to global free market capitalism and international media conglomeration."[11] On top of this, neoliberalism differs across contexts, such that "although neoliberals across the globe share a common belief in the power of 'self-regulating' free markets to create a better world, their doctrine comes in different hues and multiple variations."[12] Thus, despite its prevalent use –or perhaps because of it—neoliberalism is difficult to pin down.

One of the common renderings of neoliberalism's story begins in the wake of World War II, a time when the Western world sought answers. The US wanted to know how to prevent another collapse of the system that had mired the country in a Great Depression for most of the

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7. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 130.

8. Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, "Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no.2 (June 2009): 137-161.

9. Miguel A. Centeno and Joseph N. Cohen, "The Arc of Neoliberalism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012), 327.

10. Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee, "From California to Michigan: Race, Rationality, and Neoliberal Governmentality," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2010), footnote 24.

11. Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic: Rhetorical Form and Commemorative Politics on September 11, 2002." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 1 (Feb 2006), 8.

12. Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), xi.

1930s. Europe wanted to rebuild and avoid a repeat of the discontents and destruction wrought by World War II. They settled on an economic system underwritten by government regulation and large-scale programs of national spending and welfare designed to guarantee stability. This system gave the US its "New Deal" and "Great Society," and provided nation-wide systems of healthcare and standardized wages in Britain alongside greater labor union power. Standing guard over this world order were the UN, IMF, and World Bank, created to stabilize economies by offering governments loans with which to generate economic growth, while monitoring a global system of fixed exchange rates.[13]

While this regime brought sustained growth for almost two decades, it was not universally popular. To a small group of economists, historians, and philosophers gathered in Switzerland in 1947, this system spelt little less than the collapse of the "essential conditions of human dignity and freedom."[14] For these neoliberals, state intervention in the economy represented an unjustified "extension of arbitrary power" over private property, competitive markets, and above all, the freedom of thought and expression which was "the most precious possession of Western Man."[15] Thus, neoliberalism is both a political and economic phenomenon marrying individual freedom with market freedom, and motivated by a perpetual project of disentangling these freedoms from governmental involvement. Indeed, neoliberalism celebrates not just the inherent right but the superior ability of individuals to direct their affairs better than a government.

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13. It is worth noting that this order was also underpinned by the establishment and projection of American military power around the world.

14. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

15. Harvey, *A Brief History*, 20.

When years of government-led growth began to fail, the US and its European neighbors looked in dismay at the rising unemployment *and* inflation persisting throughout the 1970s as well as the growing government deficits from large-scale spending. In response, they crafted a set of policies hewing to neoliberal precepts. To this day, neoliberal policies decenter the government's role in the economy by dismantling national systems such as welfare and labor unions, reducing the size of state enterprises by selling them to the private sector, and removing governmental restrictions on industries. These policies form part of an orthodoxy referred to as the "Washington Consensus," a set of recommendations created in the 1990s and dispensed to (often imposed on) many nations in the global South. Margaret Thatcher's deregulation of the London stock exchange by lifting restrictions on its trading system and her privatization of British Rail and British Petroleum by selling these state-owned industries to private companies are hallmarks of the kind of economic policies implemented by countries with neoliberal agendas. Today's global networks of Free-Trade Agreements signal countries' commitment to easing the movement of people, capital, and goods across borders, as did India's move in 2013 to liberalize its banking sector by relaxing restrictions on foreign banks.

As this policy record suggests, neoliberalism's goal of a free market with limited state intervention relies, paradoxically, on extensive state action. Governments create the enabling conditions for neoliberalism by providing the institutions and regulations that allow economic competition to thrive, such as a sound legal system, public order, physical infrastructure, an educated work force, and laws which limit monopolies and protect private property. Hence, the invisible hand of neoliberalism is often found curled into the iron fist of government. The co-existence of governmental authority with an espoused commitment to 'rolling back' the government in favor of a competitive market of individual actors is often pointed to as a central

tension in neoliberalism. In critiquing this inconsistency, David Harvey argues that the "supposed distrust of all state power [does not] fit with the need for a strong and if necessary coercive state that will defend the rights of property, individual liberties, and entrepreneurial freedoms."[16] The problem this contradiction poses for a citizen's agency as a political actor in a neoliberal state is a key question this dissertation pursues. For now, the main concept is that for all its championing of self-reliance and freedom from an overweening state, neoliberalism depends very much on active governmental intervention in markets.

Perhaps we should not then be surprised to find the cultivation of competition and entrepreneurship in the economy finding its way into the halls of government, where it becomes the logic upon which a government patterns itself. By "adopting the self-regulating market as the model for proper governance"[17] and the private corporation as the blueprint for public administration, a neoliberal government replaces sociopolitical warrants for decision-making with economic and financial ones.[18] The growth of for-profit institutions of education which treat students as paying customers, the move to evaluate education on the basis of the "value for money" it offers,[19] and the practice of basing promotions in law firms on how much revenue a

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16. Harvey, *A Brief History*, 21.

17. Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 12.

18. An example would be prioritizing systemic stability over the right of individuals in that system to question their leaders or the rules of the system. Another would involve emphasizing profit over, for example, freedom of expression or intellectual growth.

19. Joanna Williams, "Value for money' rhetoric in higher education undermines the value of knowledge in society." *London School of Economics and Political Science*, January 28, 2014, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/01/28/value-for-money-in-higher-education/.

partner brings in[20] demonstrate the reach of neoliberal principles beyond the world of business and the business of government. Thus, neoliberalism has presided over the restructuring of societies in the likeness of two figures: the autonomous liberal acting independently of the government, and his close cousin, *Homo Economicus,* the profit-maximizing individual of economic theory who acts based on rational calculations of those activities which best serve his interest and thus, assumedly, those of society.

Given its effect on governments, grasp across industries and professions, and influence on national economies, we could think of neoliberalism as a global socio-political phenomenon that extends the principles, logic, and language of the corporate boardroom to all facets of life. While we have seen how this phenomenon manifests in both economic policies and modes of governance, this dissertation focuses on the latter. This is not to say that economic policies are unimportant to an understanding of neoliberalism. Rather, in setting out to study a corporate constitution of the nation, I am invested in what happens when economic principles leave the realm of economics to seep into the logic and language of government. It is here, in the way a government administers the nation and characterizes its relationship with the people, that we can discover what a neoliberal regime means for the status and practice of citizenship.

As a phenomenon which "puts the production and exchange of goods at the heart of the human experience,"[21] neoliberalism can be daunting in its omnipresence. *Anything* might be pointed to as bearing its mark: a government cutting welfare benefits to 'encourage personal responsibility,' a production studio turning a slim novel into a three-movie franchise to maximize

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20. Richard Gunderman and Mark Mutz, "The Collapse of Big Law: A Cautionary Tale for Big Med," *The Atlantic*, February 11, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/02/the-collapse-of-big-law-a-cautionary-tale-for-big-med/283736/

21. Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 12.

box office takings, a student demanding a better grade because they pay tuition fees. How is one to study something both so ubiquitous and disparate?

Taking the Rhetorical Road

Uniting neoliberalism's many features and formations is its propagation of a way of speaking and persuading which reasons from free market principles and draws from lexicons of economics and business management. Such an altered communicative landscape makes rhetorical scholarship especially helpful in understanding the implications of allowing "the language and logic of market exchange…to pervade daily discourse and political analysis."[22] Rhetorical work that has picked apart such argumentation and sought to lay bare its reasoning helps us see where this way of speaking is leading us and conceptualize how to resist it. In particular, the rhetorical literature has shown how neoliberalism's focus on individual interest and capitalist priorities weakens public deliberation and the ability to effect social change.

One part of such work interrogates the rhetoric of economics, to borrow Dierdre McCloskey's 1985 book title.[23] Such work looks at the strategies of speaking and arguing relied upon by companies, economists, and other "defenders of the free market."[24] For McCloskey, economics deserves the attention of rhetoricians because the language of economics is heavily rhetorical, involving a widespread use of devices such as narrative, metaphors, and figures of speech.[25] What is important is not just that rhetoric is present in economics, but that studying it

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22. Centeno and Cohen, *Arc of Neoliberalism*, 331.

23. McCloskey, Dierdre N., *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

24. James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 40.

25. For instance, in *If you're so smart: The Narrative of Economic Expertise* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), McCloskey argues that when economists construct graphs of supply and demand, they are in effect

gives one the ability to understand how economists accomplish particular ends through language. "Figures of speech are not mere frills," says McCloskey. "They think for us. Someone who thinks of a market as an 'invisible hand' and the organization of work as a 'production function' and his coefficients as being 'significant' as an economist does, is giving the language a lot of responsibility. It seems a good idea to look hard at this language."[26] Toward that end, McCloskey outlines the "literary character of economic science," "figures of economic speech" and grapples with "the problem of audience in historical economics."[27]

James Arnt Aune and George Cheney prefer to focus on the argumentative strategies employed by economists and corporate entities. In 1983, Cheney used Kenneth Burke's concept of identification to illuminate the persuasive tactics of "corporate house organs" seeking to create a sense of unity across their organization's administrative hierarchy. He found that corporations use techniques such as association, in which management informs employees that the corporation shares their values, and "the assumed or transcendent 'we'" which allows a corporation "to present similarity or commonality among organizational members as a taken-for-granted assumption."[28] Redirecting attention from single organizations toward the broader field of economic analysis, Aune boils down the strategies involved in "selling the free market" to a set of rules such as, "Define any object, person, or relationship as a commodity that can be

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relying on the representational power of a metaphor by using one thing (a set of lines) to stand for and re-present something else (people's willingness to pay a certain price for a particular good).

26. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics*, xvii.

27. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics*, 20, 35, and 74.

28. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and The Study of Organizational Communication." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983), 154.

bought or sold," and "Rely heavily on quasi-logical and quasi-statistical argument to enhance credibility and a sense of disinterested objectivity."[29]

It is difficult to come away thinking Aune is sanguine about the ethicality of economic argumentation. Like Cheney, who ponders whether organizations can uphold democratic values while remaining economically successful, Aune is concerned by the "destructive impact that free-market economics has had on character and community in the United States."[30] To his dismay, the logic of rational choice theory with its self-interested *homo economicus* has turned people into "lonely, utility-maximizing monads"[31] with no sense of or connection to a larger social and political community. Meanwhile, the hard-nosed realist style favored by champions of capitalism who view the world as a perpetual competition has wrought a situation in which "the economic and the social [have] displaced the political dimension of human action."[32] Consequently, Aune indicts the economic realist style for "its reductive sense of rhetoric" and pitiful "inability to engage in democratic discussion and debate."[33]

Aune and Cheney's work speaks to a growing worry about the enervating effect of neoliberalism on public deliberation. Such work takes a critical approach to the modes of persuasion spawned by neoliberalism's spread into public discourse and calls on rhetorical scholars to resist this infection.[34] To that end, Aune takes issue with what he sees as McCloskey's

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29. Aune, *Selling Free Market*, 35-37.

30. Ibid., 3.

31. Ibid., xiv.

32. Ibid., 168.

33. Ibid., 42.

34. Such concerns are not limited to the work of rhetorical scholars, being also a subject of study in the broader field of communication and media studies, where Robert McChesney's work (which Cloud reviewed in the

lenience toward the confluence of rhetoric and economics, arguing that McCloskey does not use rhetorical criticism to its fullest extent – to critique. Instead, it seems to him that McCloskey gives economics a pat on the back for recognizing the importance of language and rhetoric without digging deeper to question economic principles. As Aune observes, "McCloskey is far more willing to let rhetoric trump the scientific pretensions of rational choice theory than to let any doubt be cast on the virtues of the free market."[35]

In contrast, Dana Cloud remains alert to the "class-polarizing economics of capitalism" in which free market arguments empower ruling classes while allowing the "routine exploitation of working people around the world in the production of commodities for profit."[36] Cloud argues that scholars must pay attention to how "words do things with us in systematic, power-laden, and economic ways."[37] When a government takes on the persona of a business by constructing its public as employees and prioritizing efficiency above all else, this relationship matters for public deliberation. After all, employees are rarely allowed a say in the running of a private company. Their prescribed role is one of dutiful productivity rather than active engagement of the CEO and board as they make decisions for the company. Voices like Aune's and Cloud's are part of a clarion call to scrutinize how the free market principles of neoliberal rhetoric affect the ability of citizens to engage their governments meaningfully.[i]

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same essay as Aune's *Selling the Free Market*) has called consistent and emphatic emphasis to the muting effect of media conglomeration on democratic deliberation.

35. Aune, *Selling the Free Market*, 180.

36. Dana Cloud, "Rhetoric and economics: Or, how rhetoricians can get a little class." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, no.3 (2002), 343.

37. Cloud, "Rhetoric and economics," 343.

In response, scholars have traced how the emergence of neoliberal rhetoric in public life

has led to the dangerous downplaying of sociopolitical inequality in the name of a larger good

such as the nation or economy. Bradford Vivian argues that neoliberal rhetoric's focus on

individual endeavors leads to a 'privatization' of citizenship in which the personal pursuit of

consumption and wealth-making is held up as the new standard of citizenship.[38] Consequently,

any effort to participate in public deliberation or critique such as, for example, calling attention

to sociopolitical disparities, is deemed inappropriate. In this vein, Vivian describes the state

eulogies commemorating the first anniversary of September 11 as displays of "neoliberal

epideictic," a form of address which "defines citizens' involvement in partisan affairs and

recognition of sociopolitical difference or inequity as irreverent."[39] Unlike classical epideictic

which gathers citizens to reflect together on public values and assess the state of these values, its

neoliberal breed stays well away from any hint of public debate. Instead, it "excuses [citizens] to

the preoccupations of private life"[40] and redefines citizenship as an act of retreat from the public

sphere. 'Leave politics to the politicians' is the message of neoliberal rhetoric.

Jones and Mukherjee take Vivian's conclusion a step further by illustrating how

neoliberal rhetoric not only mutes discussions about alleviating social disparities, but amplifies

arguments by people seeking to advance their own well-being at the expense of social equality.[41]

Their examination of an anti-affirmative action movement in Michigan reveals how this group

"avoid[ed] racist appeals completely by invoking the neoliberal myth of free, entrepreneurial

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38. Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic."

39. Ibid., 4.

40. Ibid., 15.

41. Jones and Mukherjee, "From California to Michigan."

individuals against a meddling, inefficient, authoritarian state."[42] By relegating issues of social difference such as race to the private sphere, neoliberal rhetoric presents itself as a modern, socially progressive rhetoric which looks beyond labels of color or language. Its notion of equal opportunity and equal treatment for all individuals lends itself neatly to an argument which declares 'we don't see race' (and we don't want to). Neoliberalism renders race a private matter in which a government has no rightful place to intervene with policies of redistribution or affirmative action. Hence, as Jones and Mukherjee point out, neoliberal rhetoric's espousal of individual equality serves as a façade for self-interest over community well-being.

<div align="center">

Genus: *Neoliberalism*; Species: *Singapore*

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Having described the genus *neoliberalism* and its key rhetorical traits, we find ourselves looking at the sample before us: The Republic of Singapore. Where the idea of government-as-corporation is still being debated in other countries, it has long been Singapore's governing idiom. Singapore's instantiation of many of neoliberalism's core features provides scholars with a powerful case study through which to witness this complex phenomenon at work. However, Singapore is also a departure from form, having arrived at neoliberalism by a different path from the one described in traditional narratives. Hence, a study of Singapore not only helps illustrate the implications of neoliberalism for the constitution of citizenship and conduct of public debate, but alters long-held assumptions by presenting an alternative account of neoliberalism's origins.

Singapore as an exemplar of neoliberalism

"Our basic approach to promoting growth has been to stay competitive, upgrade our people, develop new capabilities, and create an outstanding pro-business environment. Then we can rely on free markets, free trade and entrepreneurship to create wealth for individuals and the country."

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42. Ibid., 401.

- S.R. Nathan, President, Singapore[43]

Although policies are not the focus of this dissertation's exploration of citizenship under

neoliberalism, it should be noted that much of Singapore's current economic success is due to a

regime of policies taken from the playbook of neoliberalism.[ii] These policies keep taxes and

trade barriers low and shape employment policies in favor of a competitive marketplace -- there

is no policy of affirmative action in hiring, allowing companies to employ the person they judge

the best for a particular job. Labor unions are relatively docile, having been "restructured to work

as partners with the state and employers."[44] The emphasis on meritocracy over special

allowances in hiring and the lack of union activity illustrate the government's commitment to

removing obstacles in the way of a freely functioning market. Recognizing that one of the

biggest such obstacles is the state itself, the government's Public Sector Divestment Committee

began selling off parts of state-owned enterprises in the 1980s. The paradox of neoliberalism,

that a market free from state intervention needs extensive state action to succeed, is alive in

Singapore. In addition to its labor policies, the government's regulatory frameworks remove

hindrances to foreign investors and assure businesses that their profits are safe.[45] Privatization, a

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43. S.R. Nathan. "Building Our Future: Singapore in an Uncertain World." Address by President S.R. Nathan at the Opening of Parliament, May 18, 2009.

44. Stephen W.K. Chiu, K.C. Ho, and Tao-lok Lui, "Reforming Health: Contrasting Trajectories of Neoliberal Restructuring in the City-States," in *Locating Neoliberalism in East Asia: Neoliberalizing Spaces in Developmental States*, ed. Bae-Gyoon Park, Richard Child Hill, and Asato Saito (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), 226.

45. Foreign investors do not have to enter into joint ventures with local investors and are not required to have a local investor assume management of their business. 2013 Investment Climate Statement – Singapore. Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. (June 2012) *U.S. Department of State*. http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191233.htm. The country's protection of intellectual property (IP) was ranked by the World Economic Forum as conferring the best IP protection in Asia, and the second best in the world. "Building Blocks for New Businesses: Trust" "Future Ready Singapore: Connected." *Economic Development Board*, Singapore. http://www.edb.gov.sg/content/edb/en/why-singapore/about-singapore/values/trust.html.

focus on wealth creation by individuals, pro-business policies, and the creation of regulation to enhance competition certainly check many items off neoliberalism's roster. However, these features merely make Singapore an adopter of neoliberal policies, like many other countries.

What distinguishes this country is its absorption of the principles of market competition into the realm of government. Market competition is such a crucial way of life to Singapore's government– such an important "terministic screen"[46] through which to approach the world— that it is the blueprint upon which the government constructs its institutional and rhetorical persona. From leaders at the top to middle managers in the civil service, the government of Singapore behaves and speaks as though the nation were a private company and its citizens its employees. Private companies are led, of course, by chief executive officers (CEOs), and Singapore is no different. In seeking to attract the brightest and best to the ranks of its leadership, the government offers its ministers pay packages designed explicitly to make a career in public service as lucrative as the job of a CEO. The salary of Singapore's government ministers is pegged to the highest-earning Singaporeans in the private sector, specifically, the top 1,000 earners.[47] The government's move to "pay itself its perceived market worth"[48] signals its belief that the job of government is akin to a career in the private sector. Citizens have been told,

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46. Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 45. Burke uses the idea of terministic screens to express how terms screen – how language choices draw attention to (and thus also deflect from) certain avenues of interpretation and action over others. A related notion is Veblen's concept of "trained incapacity," which Burke describes as "that state of affairs whereby one's very abilities can function as blindnesses" and result in the failure to interpret a situation adequately. Fittingly, Veblen applies the concept to businessmen, who, as Burke explained, "through long training in competitive finance, have so built their scheme of orientation about this kind of effort and ambition that they cannot see serious possibilities in any other system of production and distribution" (*Permanence and Change*, 7).

47. "DPM Teo's full speech on political salaries" *Asiaone*, January 18, 2012. http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120118-322563.html

48. Cherian George, *Singapore The Air-Conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000), 75.

argues veteran Singaporean journalist Cherian George, that "like all organisations, governments get the executives they pay for."[49] The government even refers to the occasional payouts it makes to the people when the nation does well as Growth Dividends[50] and Singapore Shares.[51]

The hand of neoliberalism in re-imagining the Republic of Singapore as Singapore Inc. is especially visible in the communicative behaviors of the civil service – the government's administrative arm. Like the government, the civil service is enamored with vocabulary which depicts it as perpetually positioned toward action, a characteristic feature of a company engaged in constant competition with others.[52] The Civil Service College, whose purpose is to train the nation's public servants, emphasizes the importance of turning officers into business entrepreneurs through seminars such as "Innovation in Government" and "Policy Entrepreneurship."[53] If (oddly) none of these sounds appealing, the nation's bureaucrats can learn how to use "social innovation and behavioural economics" to "harness the capacity of citizens— the "hidden wealth."[54] Amidst this panoply of entrepreneurship and innovation, the citizen is cast

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49. George, *Air-Conditioned Nation*, 75.

50. "Frequently Asked Questions," *Ministry of Finance Singapore*.
http://www.mof.gov.sg/growandshare/FAQs.htm

51. Chiu, et al, "Reforming Health," 235.

52. A look at the website of the Ministry of Finance (MOF) is illustrative. Its "About Us" section lists MOF's mission and vision, as well as its strategic outcomes – three of them, each with multiple bullet pointed sub-headings. Its verb-loaded vision statement, "A *forward looking* MOF that *advances* leading ideas, *drives synergies* across government and ensures fiscal prudence" not only portrays the organization as being positioned toward constant movement as it "advances," "drives," and "ensures," but depicts this movement positively, being something "forward looking" and aimed at "synergies" in government.

53. "Programmes." *Civil Service College Singapore*.
https://www.cscollege.gov.sg/Programmes/Pages/Default.aspx

54. David Halpern, "Applying Behavioral Insights." (April 23, 2013). Lecture at *Civil Service College Singapore*.

as either workhorse or customer. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) provides a sterling example of

the redefinition of citizens as customers in its six-chapter "Corporate Book" which describes the

ministry's "focus on customers in service delivery,"[55] and ponders how it can provide "value-for-

money service to the public."[56] In its adoption of principles of entrepreneurship, and the

'marketization' of government, Singapore exemplifies neoliberalism.

Competition has left a deep imprint in the nation's psyche, most clearly visible in the

government's unrelenting focus on Singapore's performance vis a vis other nations. The annual

National Day address is drenched with assessments of other nations and the need for Singapore

to keep up. On separate occasions in 2013, the President,[57] Senior Minister of State for

Defence,[58] Minister for Health,[59] and Senior Minister of State for Home and Foreign Affairs[60]

issued the oft-invoked reminder for Singapore never to "rest on its laurels" because "being

prepared is a never-ending journey."[61] A key aspect of this national program of perpetual

55. MOF Corporate Book, 44. http://app.mof.gov.sg/corporate_book.aspx

56. MOF Corporate Book, 40.

57. "Speech by President Tony Tan Keng Yam at the Conferment Ceremony of the Great Gold Medal on President Tan at the Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia," November 15, 2013. *The Istana*. Last updated November 27, 2013, http://www.istana.gov.sg/news/speeches/2013/speech-president-tony-tan-keng-yam-the-conferment-ceremony-the-great-gold-medal.

58. "Speech by Senior Minister of State for Defence Mr Chan Chun Sing at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013," March 12, 2013. *Mindef* (Singapore Ministry of Defence). Last updated March 12, 2013. http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2013/12mar13_speech2.html.

59. "Speech by Minister for Health at the Opening Ceremony of the 9th Singapore International Congress of Obstetrics & Gynecology 2013," August 22, 2013. *Ministry of Health, Singapore*. Last updated August 22, 2013. https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/pressRoom/pressRoomItemRelease/2013/speech-by-minister-for-health--mr-gan-kim-yong--at-the-opening-c0.html.

60."Speech by Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs at People's Association Emergency Preparedness Council 'Community Engagement Nite.'" October 26, 2013.

61. Zulkifli, para 3.

renovation is the need to groom citizens for a world of unforgiving competition. Over the years,

the government has implemented a raft of incentives, such as the Skills Upgrading and

Resilience (SPUR)[62] initiative, to exhort workers to "upgrade," "reskill," and "re-tool"

themselves. However, such policies do not mean that the government sees SPUR-ring the people

as its responsibility. Instead, people must seek out opportunities and assume ultimate

responsibility for themselves. For example, in 1982, the government reduced the level of state

provision under the national healthcare system, indicating a shift "from public to private

responsibility."[63] The Second Minister for Health announced that it was time for the government

to stop heavily subsidizing medical treatment and "to make every Singapore save for his own

health as soon as he starts work."[64]

By most markers, Singapore is a classic example of neoliberalism. Its policies combine

market deregulation and privatization of public enterprises with government facilitation of

market competition. Its reduction in national systems of provision expresses neoliberalism's

emphasis on self-sufficiency over governmental 'handouts.' It has re-organized public

administration along the lines of market production and competition. Hence, the public has been

transformed into the private: the government and its officials pay themselves private sector rates,

learn to act as entrepreneurs, and address the public as customers or workers. However, in calling

Singapore an exemplar of neoliberalism, I do not mean there is one form of neoliberalism and

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62. In other instances of the government matching policy names to acronyms: At-risk students are encouraged to stay in school through an initiative with the entirely unwieldy title of "School Social Work to Empower Pupils to Utilise their Potential" – "STEP-UP."

63. Chiu, et al, "Reforming Health," 231.

64. Ibid.

that Singapore stands out for having arrived at "it."[65] Each nation cultivates unique versions of

neoliberalism. Not every nation chooses to be open to global business, adopt the language of

business in public administration, or conceive of itself as a corporation all at once. As subsequent

chapters show, Singapore's neoliberalism extends beyond its policy regime into the arena of

public deliberation where it shapes how the government justifies its policies and addresses its

people. Singapore also offers a new way to think about neoliberalism's origins and founding

ideology.

Singapore's Neoliberalism: A Case of Convergent Evolution

"The case of Singapore is particularly instructive. It has combined neoliberalism in the
marketplace with draconian coercive and authoritative state power, while invoking moral
solidarities based on the nationalist ideals of the beleaguered nation state (after its ejection from
the Malaysian federation), Confucian values, and, most recently, a distinctive form of
cosmopolitan ethic suited to its current position in the world of international trade."
<div align="right">– David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism[66]</div>

"You're talking about Rwanda or Bangladesh, or Cambodia, or the Philippines. They've got
democracy, according to Freedom House. But have you got a civilised life to lead? ...People
want economic development first and foremost. The leaders may talk something else. You take a
poll of any people. What is it they want? The right to write an editorial as you like? They want
homes, medicine, jobs, schools."
<div align="right">- Lee Kuan Yew, first Prime Minister of Singapore[67]</div>

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65. After all, the government is much more dominant in the economy than one would expect under a 'perfect' program of free markets and the retreat of the state. Singapore's government has also instituted programs that, while not "welfare," distribute some wealth to those who need it more, and which create social security savings plans for every worker. However, when neoliberalism is credited with the "retreat of the state," what this really translates to is a receding of federal or central government in favor of local authority. Singapore is too small to support multiple levels of government – there is just one level. Thus, there are no local/state/mayoral authorities to devolve responsibility to. Yet, Singapore remains a germane case of neoliberalism to focus on because the government does try to delegate responsibility where it can to volunteer organizations, grassroots committees and individuals in implementing certain policies (after school tuition, healthcare).

66. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 86.

67. Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew, the Man and His Ideas* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings,1998), 123.

The standard narrative of neoliberalism traces an outward spread from Western institutions into regions like Asia. Singapore was not immune to this advance – how could it be? As a former British shipping port, the small island colony had the currents of international trade tugging at it for decades and was used to responding to shifts in the global economy. When independence arrived abruptly in 1965 after a failed merger with Malaysia, Singapore's leaders looked both inward and outward to determine a way forward for the new nation. Since 1960 they had already been host to a team from the United Nations who, led by Dutch economist Albert Winsemius, charted a long-term development plan that positioned Singapore as a country open to doing business with the world. In addition to helping attract multinational companies to Singapore, Winsemius advised famously that the young Asian country not dismantle its statue of British founder Sir Stamford Raffles lest this cause misgivings by potential (Western) investors about Singapore's openness to their involvement.[68] Such consultations extended to business practitioners, particularly those involved in the New Public Management (NPM) movement of the 1980s which sought to make governments more efficient by borrowing the practices of the private sector.[69]

However, in addition to absorbing Western economic policies and practices, Singapore's neoliberalism took shape by pushing *against* outside influences. In tracing Singapore's economy from its roots to the present-day, we find that its neoliberalism did not arise out of an attempt to renovate earlier systems of classical liberalism (of which there were none) or correct perceived weaknesses in Keynesian-style government spending (which had proved highly successful). Instead, it evolved out of efforts to find middle-ground between capitalism and communism, the

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[68] "Albert Winsemius's First Visit to Singapore, 5th Oct 1960." *HistorySG: An online resource guide.* National Library Board, Singapore. http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/7f1bd547-bb9a-477e-9d14-b733f428a480
[69] Several of the National Day speeches mention these experts by name, explaining that they had been invited to Singapore to teach NPM principles to the civil service.

two dominant economic and political systems in existence at Singapore's moment of independence in 1965. Singapore's desire to be a "democratic alternative to communism"[70] by avoiding the "unadulterated capitalism" and the hedonism of the West's *laissez faire*,[71] laid the roots for a system that moderated the free market of capitalism while leavening some of the authoritarian features of communism. Hence, much of Singapore's orientation to free trade, market competition aided by government, and adoption of business practices in government came about through its interaction with global economic forces and experts.

At the same time, several elements of neoliberalism emerged locally, in response to Singapore's particular geopolitical environment. Evolutionary biologists would describe Singapore's home-grown neoliberalism as a case of convergent evolution: the independent development of similar traits in species with different lineages. In the narrative favored by the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP) government, Singapore found its own way to neoliberalism as the necessary recourse of a small, geopolitically vulnerable nation subject to powers beyond its control. In the course of less than three decades, this nation was abandoned by British colonizers, occupied by Japan until Britain returned, re-abandoned by Britain to be absorbed by Malaysia, and then cast out by Malaysia. Consequently, Singapore's leaders became fixated on the idea that the country could not rely on others for its survival and that, as today's government continues to remind the public, "nobody owes Singapore a living."[72] These seeds of self-reliance did not spring from Lockean notions of the freedom of the individual from

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70. C.V. Devan Nair (ed.) *Socialism That* _Works…The Singapore Way_. (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1976), x.

71. *Socialism that* _Works_, 2 and 9.

72. Tong Dow Ngiam, *A Mandarin and the Making of Public Policy* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2006), 87.

government direction or the liberal view of government as inefficient and the individual as the best-equipped director of his/her affairs. Both these concepts go against the creed that every Singaporean must put the "nation before community and society before self."[73] Rather, the lessons of history and its revolving door of colonizers, occupiers, and would-be partners, convinced many of Singapore's early leaders that Singapore could only depend on itself.

Still, there were some things Singapore could not control. It was (and remains) too small to sustain a domestic market for locally produced goods, too small to resist a military invasion, and too limited in natural resources to weather fluctuations in global prices. Out of these physical limitations arose key features of Singaporean neoliberalism: a focus on global markets and trade agreements, a sensitivity to competition from other countries, and a government which takes on many roles of the private sector. As a shipping node in Britain's empire, Singapore was used to looking outward to consider the business opportunities and threats posed by the rest of the world even before it become an independent republic. Its port was vital to much of its economic growth upon independence, laying the groundwork for policies which facilitated the free movement of goods, people, and capital. As the tides of competition lapped at Singapore's shores, its earliest leaders realized that the economy was too underdeveloped to rely on the nascent private sector to fund large projects. So, the government stepped in. Ngiam Tong Dow, one of the nation's longest-serving civil servants,[74] reflected on the early "entrepreneurs" of the civil service:

> …there were many gaps if the Singapore economy was to successfully develop, and the government at the time had little choice but to try and fill them. No private bank at that time would lend long term to a manufacturing company. Development finance simply was not

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73. Singapore Government (1991) *Shared Values*, Singapore: Singapore National Printers. Quoted in Stephen Ortmann, "Singapore: The Politics of Inventing National Identity," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 28, no. 4 (2009), 31.

74. Ngiam was, over a 40-year career, Permanent Secretary of several ministries including the Ministry of Finance.

available. Therefore, Dr Goh[75] asked Mr Hon [*Sui Sen*] to set up the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) to provide development finance to businesses...Under the entrepreneurial leadership of its first Chairman, Mr Hon Sui Sen, DBS has grown to become a universal bank, able to compete with the best in the world. I am proud to record that DBS has all along been led by Permanent Secretaries…and then…a former cabinet Minister. Whoever said that civil servants cannot run banks? In the beginning, many of us had to take on a role as state entrepreneurs.[76]

From this sliver of history, we glimpse how the privatization of the public sector in Singapore was less about rolling back the state than about transforming it into the private sector. The entrepreneurial identity of the public servant was not imported; it was a home-grown product.

Being a small country means you have a small margin for error as an economy – every person must prove themselves up to the task before them. In such a climate, meritocracy and competition become indispensable ways to identify ability. Making special allowances for race, gender, income, or citizenship risks impeding economic growth in pursuit of other goals like social equality. Hence, the government has elevated meritocracy to the status of a national ethic, arguing that it is wrong to rely on the government to alter your fortunes without making sufficient effort to prove either some inherent ability or a willingness to better yourself. As the first Prime Minister declared:

> The human being is an unequal creature. This is a fact. And we start off with a proposition, all great religions, all great movements, all great political ideologies say, "Let us make the human being as equal as possible." In fact, he *is* not equal. Never will be… I'm not God, I can't change you."[77]

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75. Goh Keng Swee, the Minister for Finance from 1959 to 1965 and 1967 to1970.

76. Ngiam, *A Mandarin and the Making of Public Policy*, 170.

77. "Lee Kuan Yew: Singapore's Founding Father (Part 3)," compiled and subtitled by Daniel Tay. Uploaded Jun 28, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B36xbbE-MyA.

The conviction that people are not born equal *and* that they cannot be made equal offers just two options: give up (since you cannot be made equal) or take the lead in assuming personal responsibility for your future. Thus, Singapore has its own version of the classical and neo-liberal espousal of individual responsibility, and articulates it using a rhetoric which disavows governmental efforts to create equality across disparate groups.

To an extent, Lee's belief in the innate inequality of human beings parallels that of Friedrich Hayek, who acknowledges the differential success people will inevitably experience under capitalism, but argues that the social mobility offered by the free market is nevertheless a powerful incentive for people to participate in it. As Daniel Stedman Jones points out, Hayek believes that "for anyone who lost out [in the free market], their own initiative would give them the opportunity to succeed through repeated attempts."[78] However, the crucial difference between Singapore's neoliberalism and the liberal arguments of Hayek is in the perceived end of individual responsibility. For Hayek, a focus on individual responsibility spurs people to achieve their fullest human selves. His is a project in self-realization in which a free market encourages "respect for the individual man *qua* man" and the belief that "it is desirable that men should develop their own individual gifts and bents."[79] The vision of citizenship offered is of the citizen engaged in a project of self-development enabled by free market competition and liberalism's promise of the ability to author oneself free from state involvement. The chance to as, J.S. Mill puts it, "fram[e] the plan of our life to suit our own character,"[80] acts as an incentive to

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78. Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 63.

79. Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 1944, 1949), 14.

80. J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Penguin Books. First published 1859), 71.

participate in the market as a way to strive toward the goal of becoming a fully realized human being. In the bootstraps-over-apron-strings logic of Asian neoliberalism, the individual's ultimate goal is not his or her improvement but that of the state. One must act individually not to safeguard personal liberty and innovation from being stifled by the state, but to avoid burdening the state. The final goal of human self-enterprise is not the development of "individual gifts and bents" but the service of the state by placing "nation before self." Thus, the vision of citizenship constituted by Singaporean neoliberalism is based on responsibility to the state rather than to oneself.

One of the claims of neoliberalism is that it is rooted in political freedom: a free market is constitutive of a free society, development is an expression of freedom, and economic and political freedoms are intricately connected. These claims draw upon traditions of democracy, particularly in the U.S., to legitimize the extension of free market principles to all parts of life. Singapore's experience shows it is possible –even conducive— to create and sustain neoliberalism without regard for democracy. Indeed, a study of Singapore suggests that it is not so much freedom as *success* that propels logics and arguments of contemporary neoliberalism. The over-riding goal of countries like Singapore who are particularly susceptible to forces beyond their control is security, the kind accorded by economic success. Political freedom can come later, not because it is being built up to or built upon, but because it is secondary, a luxury to anticipate, rather than a necessity.[iii]

Such reasoning, which separates economics from politics and development from democracy, formed the crux of the "Asian Values" arguments of the early 1990s. Faced with growing international criticism of their authoritarian leadership, some Southeast Asian governments responded by asserting that Asia possessed a different set of values from the West,

and should thus be left to pursue its own path to development. Two of the most vehement advocates of Asian Values were Singapore and Malaysia, whose leaders argued that it was unjust to judge the manner in which Asia governed by a universal standard because not all nations had the same priorities or traditions of democracy. As Singapore's Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs argued in a now infamous piece for *Foreign Affairs*, Asia was different because its "consensus-seeking" tradition placed greater value on contributing harmoniously to economic security than on the messy quarrels and conflicts of civil political discourse. In this version of neoliberalism, economic success is a prerequisite to civil political rights.[81] Invoking the instability caused by inter-racial riots in the early part of its history, Singapore's government has maintained the argument that success brings peace and that the nation cannot afford the discord that comes with granting civil political rights before socio-economic needs are met. Thus, while neoliberalism "puts the production and exchange of goods at the heart of the human experience,"[82] Singapore shows that this end can be met through different – even opposite—philosophies: one, which celebrates the free market as an expression of political freedom, and another, which places free markets before free people.

Singapore's neoliberalism has been formed by the interaction of multiple vectors: its physical traits, its colonial and post-colonial history, the rivalry between two predominant global economic systems, indigenous beliefs about Asian Values, and consultations with Western business and development experts. Consequently, Singapore confirms and challenges what we think we know about neoliberalism. As a believer in competition and free market exchange, the country has designed a pro-business framework and set of economic policies that rival that of

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81. Kausikan, Bilahari, "Asia's Different Standard," *Foreign Affairs* no. 92 (Fall 1993): 24-41.

82. Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 12.

any other nation. Its government behaves and communicates using the logic of a private company, its public servants extoll the virtues of entrepreneurship in government, and its citizens are reminded that they, and not the state, bear ultimate responsibility for providing for themselves. Competition, meritocracy, and productivity saturate life in Singapore, making it a vivid representation of key neoliberal tenets. At the same time, Singapore deviates from the standard script by providing an alternative view of neoliberalism's history and underlying motivations. By dissociating neoliberalism from Western contexts, a study of Singapore possesses what Christa Olson calls "the productive possibility of carrying old concepts into new places."[83] Olson contends that "the point of continuing to engage concepts that have long traditions is to see simultaneously what those terms can teach us about a new context and what a new context can teach us about those terms."[84] In this instance, situating a study of neoliberalism in Singapore teaches us how neoliberalism re-configures the relationship between the economy, government, and citizens as one based not on securing freedom, but success.

Method and Chapter Summary

To get at an understanding of this reconfigured relationship, I undertake a rhetorical history of citizenship in Singapore. Kathleen Turner describes rhetorical history as a research approach which "offers the opportunity to see rhetoric as a perpetual and dynamic process of social construction, maintenance, and change rather than as an isolated, static product."[85] This is a useful concept in a project such as this one, which looks at how citizenship in a neoliberal state

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83. Christa J. Olson, "Places to Stand: The Practices and Politics of Writing Histories," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 15, no. 1 (2012), 84.

84. Olson, "Places to Stand," 83.

85. Kathleen J. Turner (ed) *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 4.

is made and remade by the government and its citizens. The dissertation engages with two senses of citizenship: citizenship as practice, which emphasizes the activities and behaviors involved in being a citizen, and citizenship as status, which focuses on identifying the traits of good citizens and determining how people are included or excluded from the identity of citizen.[86] In studying how the status and practice of citizenship emerge across key moments in Singapore's past, I draw on David Zarefsky's notion of rhetorical history as the rhetorical study of historical events. The chapters of this dissertation cohere around his idea of "history as a series of rhetorical problems"[87] by representing moments in Singapore's history when a particular notion of citizenship was the subject of public debate.

There are other ways to trace the implications of neoliberalism than through a focus on citizenship. One could look at 'great thinkers,' taking a biographical route through the life stories of founders and scholars associated with neoliberalism. Others might track neoliberalism's influence on the development of legislation. Or one might tell the story of neoliberalism through a chronological account of an institution – a university, a media outlet—allowing the national context and priorities of neoliberalism to manifest in the fates of the institution in question. I have opted for a reflexive approach that mirrors neoliberalism's focus on the individual by studying how the individual economic actor squares with the identity and behavior of the individual political actor: the citizen.

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86. Margot Canaday outlines these options for studying and conceptualizing citizenship in her book, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

87. David Zarefsky, "Four Senses of Rhetorical History" in Kathleen J. Turner (ed) *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*. (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998.), 30.

One of the most profound ways neoliberalism makes itself felt is in its transformation of citizenship from a political relationship between citizens and governments into an economic one. Equating the citizen with the consumer or laborer immobilizes citizenship by turning it into a thing – a single, solid, unchanging identity much like the consumer whose role is never anything other than to purchase and use a product, or the laborer, who makes this product. However, to borrow Margot Canaday's terminology, citizenship is not a thing, but a process, one that develops and evolves over time.[88] Similarly, Vanessa Beasley explains that citizenship is always being made and remade because it exists in two states: the imagined ideal set out by political leaders and the lived experience of their electorate.[89] It is this fissure between who leaders tell their people they are[90] and how people behave that sets up a continual oscillation between what citizenship is made out to be and what it ends up being. Thus, citizenship is ever-changing, and more crucially, undergoes negotiation as citizens and governments co-create what it means to be a worthy citizen. I center my analysis on the citizen to show how neoliberalism stalls this political exchange by altering citizenship. By turning nations of people into units of production and consumption, by replacing political participation with economic productivity, and by prioritizing individual effort over community welfare, neoliberalism renders private that which ought to remain public: the citizen. This project seeks to illuminate what neoliberalism does to citizenship through a rhetorical history that traces the meanings and experiences of citizenship

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88. Canaday, *The Straight State*, 11.

89. Vanessa B. Beasley, *You, The People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 4.

90. Beasley, *You, The People*, 5.

across visions laid out in government addresses (Chapter 2) and two public policy controversies (Chapters 3 and 4).

We start, in Chapter 2, with the voice of the government. This chapter looks at National Day Rally Addresses and Eve of National Day Messages delivered by the Prime Minister of Singapore between 1960 and 2014. These speeches are traditionally delivered on or near to National Day – the day the nation marks its attainment of political independence. The addresses are often preceded by an "Eve of National Day" message or broadcast, a preview of the Rally Address. Where available, I have included this message in the set of speeches for analysis, bringing the total number of texts to 94.[91] These speeches have been retrieved from a search of three sources: The National Library of Singapore, the National Archives of Singapore, and the website of the Prime Minister's Office. The speeches for 1960-1990 were obtained from a 10 volume compilation of then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's speeches, interviews, and press conferences. The compilation, titled *The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew: Speeches, Interviews and Dialogues*, was put together by the National Archives of Singapore and is available through the website of the National Library of Singapore.[92] Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's National Day speeches from 1991 to 2003 were taken from the online holdings of the National Archives of

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91. Except for 1965, the Prime Minister delivered the National Day Rally Address every year in the stated time frame. In 1965, Singapore was expelled from the Federation of Malaysia and made a fully independent republic (it was previously a colony granted self-rule by Britain in 1959). As this event was unexpected and unsought, it was a bleak day on which there were, understandably, no celebratory National Day addresses. Thus, for this year, I have selected five speeches given in the months following independence to capture the how government imagined the type of nation newly independent Singapore would be, and the kinds of citizens who would make this vision possible.

92. Singapore citizens have an automatic membership to the National Library. Logging onto its website with your NRIC (National Registration Identity Card) number, first name, and birth month and year, will give a user access to the Library's online resources.

Singapore. Incumbent Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speeches from 2004 onward are accessible from the website of the Prime Minister's Office.[93]

A major component of the annual celebration of Singapore's independence, the NDR address (and its preview, the Eve of National Day Message), is a platform for the Prime Minister to assess how Singapore is doing and announce the government's vision for the year ahead. In form and function, the Rally Addresses are similar to the speech genre exemplified by the State of the Union Address. Campbell and Jamieson point out that we can expect such addresses to contain elements of "public meditations on values," "assessments of information and issues," "policy recommendations," and some effort by the speaker to "create and celebrate a national identity."[94] Thus, the National Day speeches are a prime opportunity for the government to identify character traits responsible for the nation's achievements and offer these models of citizenship for emulation. An appreciation of genre is key to this chapter: As Beasley points out, speeches such as state of the union addresses are important precisely because they are so normal – these speeches are not given in response to crises. Rather, they represent rituals of public address which reflect the everyday understanding of citizenship embedded in the speeches' assessments and meditations on the nation.[95] As such, they reveal the well-known and deeply ingrained features of citizenship that have become part of the national canon.

My approach in Chapter 2 is to excavate depictions of the ideal citizen from the National Day speeches to construct an image of citizenship under neoliberalism. I do so by tracing the

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93. *Prime Minister's Office*, Singapore. www.pmo.gov.sg

94. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 139.

95. Beasley, *You, The People*, 7.

characteristics and actions ascribed to the ideal Singapore citizen across Singapore's modern history. This approach follows from previous rhetorical endeavors to study the lifeline of terms as a way to understand how ideology and historical context shape the way a group (like the government) defines and asserts the meaning of a concept (like "citizenship"). Thus, as Celeste Condit and John Lucaites looked at how the concept of equality was used differently throughout American history[96] and Megan Foley uncovered shifting constructions of U.S. citizens in the rhetoric of the U.S.'s 2008 economic crisis,[97] I seek to retrieve the possibilities and parameters of citizenship held up to the Singaporean public in the public addresses of their neoliberal government.

If we take the speeches of Chapter 2 as reflections of what the government imagines citizenship to be, the subsequent chapters offer windows onto the reality of citizenship seen through the people's practices and counter-definitions. Therefore, Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the voices of the people. These chapters consider two controversies in which people resisted the government's proffered models of citizenship through protests and online critique. The approach of Chapters 3 and 4 is similar: each takes as its starting point a controversial policy before moving to analyze a body of texts and events generated in opposition to this policy. The chapter's main difference lies in their subject matter. Chapter 3 focuses on reactions to the government's population and immigration policy, enshrined in a 2013 White Paper on Population. The public opposition to this Paper will be studied through three rallies held in 2013 and blog posts from

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96. Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

97. Megan Foley, "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economy in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 4 (November 2012): 386-410.

some of Singapore's most well-known blogs and bloggers: Kirsten Han,[98] The Online Citizen,

Singapore Armchair Critic, Breakfast Network, and Mr Brown. To collect these texts, I have

searched each of the blogs listed for their coverage of the White Paper and the rallies, and have

saved the relevant articles on this topic. I include in my study of the rallies a series of

photographs taken by *Yahoo! Singapore* as well as newspaper articles from *The Economist* and

The New York Times. Chapter 4 delves into the uproar over a 2013 licensing requirement aimed

at regulating online political commentary. The licensing requirement is the policy in question for

this chapter, while the opposition to it is drawn from the blogs mentioned above and an online

petition seeking to repeal this policy.

Each of these controversies illuminates deeper discontents over the way the government

has constituted citizenship over the years. Chapter 3 shows the people taking issue with the

longstanding construction of Singaporeans as identical worker-units, interchangeable with the

immigrant population the government seeks to attract each year to augment the labor force. Here,

citizens challenge the view of citizenship as a primarily economic duty to the state by staking

political and affective claims to the nation over that of the rent-seeking incentives which bring

people of other nations to Singapore. Similarly, the furor over the licensing requirement at the

heart of Chapter 4 activates a long-standing disagreement in Singapore over the treatment of

citizenship as an apolitical identity. In this rendering of citizenship, private individuals are

deemed to have little role to play in public debate and cannot participate in political critique

unless they place themselves under official scrutiny. It is this aspect of each controversy, in

which the broader contours of citizenship in Singapore emerge, that I hope to unearth by

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98. Named in 2012 by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the 100 women to follow on Twitter (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/19/introducing_the_fpwomeratti?page=0,3), Han is a prominent blogger, journalist, filmmaker and activist. She blogs at http://kirstenhan.me/ and tweets at @kixes.

analyzing the interactions between the government's statements and responses by citizen bloggers and protesters. My approach is thus informed by Goodnight and Hingstman's observation that episodes of controversy are spaces where "communication norms need be revised, social histories rewritten, political boundaries redrawn, *representations contested, and enactments of public identity (re) invented* (emphasis added)."[99] Controversies are opportunities to witness a clash of ideologies and varying performances of public identity: the citizen critic of government policies, the skeptical investigator of government statistics, the satirist mocking a censorship law, the fatalistic protestor carrying a sign predicting the extinction of citizens in the face of immigration. It is by illustrating these different figures that I intend to examine how the people of Singapore resist the images of citizenship advanced by their government.

Taken as a whole, the chapters show how citizenship is conceptualized by a neoliberal government and renegotiated through physical protests and online critique.

Conclusion

By setting out to explore what might be gained from a study of neoliberalism in Singapore, we have made several discoveries. One was from the field of rhetorical studies, where we encountered a lively debate over the threat posed by neoliberal rhetoric to the ability of citizens to engage their governments meaningfully. Such rhetoric, characterized by arguments which focus on economic rationalities of competition, equilibrium and the pursuit of profit, along with the erasure of individual differences in favor of a universal worker, risks impeding social progress through a focus on self-interest. Thus, questions requiring a public response – such as

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99. Thomas G. Goodnight and David B. Hingstman, "Studies in the Public Sphere," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 3 (August 1997), 352.

how to ameliorate racial and economic disparities— are re-classified in neoliberal rhetoric as private matters outside the scope of governmental intervention.

From the example of Singapore, we learned that this nation is the quintessential instantiation of neoliberalism, not just for its policies of deregulation, privatization, and globalization, but for the state's adoption of a private corporation as the persona of government. Concomitant with this corporate identification is the government's organization of pay scales along the same lines as CEOs in the private sector, its construction of civil servants as entrepreneurs, and its casting of citizens as customers or employees. Singapore's experience demonstrates how much of neoliberalism emerges through discourse and argumentation. How a neoliberal government speaks about itself, the style by which it communicates with citizens, and the arguments it uses to justify its actions, constitute particular identities for governments and citizens, and prescribe certain courses of action while limiting others.

At the same time, we found that Singapore's form of neoliberalism is unique not just for how fully realized it is, but for how it has arisen among circumstances different from those usually attributed to the rise of neoliberalism. By untethering it from its roots in Western philosophies of individual liberty, I suggest that neoliberalism is not necessarily based on political freedom, but economic success. As such, this proposed study of Singapore expands upon David Harvey's famous conclusion that the "theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument" has been used to legitimize any action needed to ensure the power of economic elites.[100] Hence, Singapore is a way to explore the troubling implications of neoliberalism, many of which play out in this nation, such as the tussle between asserting governmental prominence and

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100. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 19.

encouraging individual agency, or the practice of promoting economic freedom while suppressing political liberty.

The chapters that follow investigate how these contradictions and tussles emerge in the definition and experience of citizenship under neoliberalism. In its privatization of citizenship, avoidance of social difference, and resistance of government efforts to redress inequalities, neoliberal rhetoric shows its hand as an instrument of maintenance. This kind of rhetoric has no space for systematic critique or challenges to a status quo. Like the economic principles which undergird it, neoliberal rhetoric tends toward equilibrium and *ceterus paribus* – the practice of considering change as an isolated feature of a system in which all other things remain constant. Thus, neoliberal rhetoric threatens to rob political life of its potency and citizens of their capacity to effect change. The question then becomes what space there is for a citizen in such a regime. What are the available roles and definitions of citizenship under a neoliberal government? The next chapter tackles this question by tracing the concepts of citizenship delineated by this government every National Day as it celebrates the nation's political independence by measuring its economic success.

Notes

i. A separate set of scholarship focuses on the images of citizenship, the nation, and the economy which emerge during an economic crisis. In work on the 2008 U.S. financial crisis, Megan Foley traces the "metaphoric transformations" of citizens first cast as irresponsible juveniles taking on loans they could ill afford, becoming "surrogate caretakers" for large financial institutions forced to declare bankruptcy. Where citizens and institutions are the focus of Foley's piece, presidential candidates occupy the center stage in John Murphy's exploration of the 2008 crisis, in which he reveals three differing visions of the economy proffered by Senators McCain, Clinton and Obama. Murphy's discussion of each senator's interpretation of this economic crisis recalls Davis Houck's archival study of Herbert Hoover's efforts to "rekindle public confidence" and "catalyze collective belief" in the economy after the 1929 stock market crash. Foley, Murphy, and Houck's work exemplify what one might call the study of rhetoric about economics.

ii. Singapore operates a duty-free port which charges import duties on just a few items, and none on exports ("Singapore Tax Profile"). Trade barriers are kept low through a network of free trade agreements (FTAs) – the most extensive in Asia (Agreements have been signed with the US,

Japan, Australia, NZ, members of the European Free Trade Association, Jordan, Chile, Peru, ASEAN +3, China, South Korea, India and Panama – "Future Ready Singapore"). It is not just goods which move easily through Singapore, but people as well. The government has maintained a pro-migration policy for decades, welcoming workers from around the world. As "the World's Easiest Place to do Business," (World Bank 2013), Singapore is one of few countries where capital gains -the profits from business and financial transactions- are not taxed. For businesses looking to make money efficiently and keep as much of it as possible, Singapore is a bright prospect.

iii. Sounding like a Singaporean politician, J.S. Mill makes a similar point in *On Liberty*, where he offers the caveat that overweening state regulation "may have been admissible in small republics surrounded by powerful enemies, in constant peril of being subverted by foreign attack or internal commotion, and to which even a short interval of relaxed energy and self-command might so easily be fatal that they could not afford to wait for the salutary permanent effects of freedom" (p. 72). The themes of "constant peril" from all sides are prominent features of the Singapore government's official discourse, which cultivates an atmosphere of imminent danger posed by economic rivals and internal discord.

CHAPTER 2: RALLYING THE NATION:
THE CORPORATE METAPHOR IN NATIONAL DAY RALLY ADDRESSES, 1960-2014.

…a social order wherein economic language…exhaustively describes our world, hence *becomes our world.*

- Turner, "Economic Nature." [1]

On 3 June 1960, Lee Kuan Yew, the freshly-minted Prime Minister of Singapore, addressed the crowds gathered outside City Hall to mark their first National Day. This celebration of the nation's independence was to be an occasion on which "the daily business of life is stopped and men forgather to review their common purposes, their common interests, and chart a common course for the future."[2] Thus was born the National Day Rally address, the most important political speech in Singapore. Since 1960, the address has been delivered by three Prime Ministers possessing distinct speaking styles and governing in different political contexts. It has gone from being broadcast after the fact to streaming live over the Internet, from taking a few minutes to lasting over two hours,[3] and from a simple speech to something the current Prime Minister describes as a "multimedia super show."[4] Throughout these changes, the address has endured as a record of the nation's priorities, an expression of the kind of nation Singapore wants to be, and the citizen who will make this aspiration a reality.

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1. Turner, J. "Economic nature," in. D. Clow & D. Snow (ed.) *Northern lights: A Selection of New Writing from the American West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 121.

2. Lee Kuan Yew, "A Step towards Independence." Speech at the National Day Rally and March-Past, 3 June 1960, in *The Papers of Lee Kuan Yew: Speeches, Interviews and Dialogues*. Vol. 1: 1950-1962. Singapore: Gale Asia, 2012.

3. The Prime Minister delivers the Malay and Mandarin versions of the address before proceeding to the English address. My focus is on the English address, which is the longest of the three and contains the entirety of the government's reflections and recommendations for the year. As the language of government, business, and education, English is also the language most Singaporeans have in common.

4. Lee Hsien Loong, 2008 National Day Rally Address.

In this chapter, I excavate visions of the nation and corresponding images of the ideal citizen from National Day Rally addresses and Messages between 1960 and 2014.[5] These speeches span the tenure of Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew (1959-1990), Goh Chok Tong (1991-2003), and Lee Hsien Loong (2004-present).[6] I find that the speeches present economic growth as the nation's foremost priority. Such growth provides the means by which to design policies, inspire the populace, and frame the relationship between citizens and government. Embedded in the language of economic growth is a metaphor of the nation-as-company that has accreted with time. Sheathed in conventionalized narratives of Singapore's history and vocabulary borrowed from the world of business, this metaphor constitutes the nation as an economic unit with citizens for workers and leaders as experts with unique acumen at running Singapore Inc. The chapter begins by trying to understand the hybrid rhetorical act that is the National Day Rally address, whose resilient form and function strengthen the corporate metaphor with each passing year. Next, I identify three elements of this metaphor that reveal how it constitutes an economic identity for Singapore, activates arguments in which financial gain is an overriding motive, and lends itself to a neoliberal technical mode of public discourse. The conclusion discusses implications of the corporate metaphor.

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5. The main themes of the live National Day Rally address are typically previewed in a pre-recorded message released on the eve of National Day. Subsequent quotations from the addresses will be cited by their year in in-text parentheses. Quotations from the message will be cited with the word "Message" and the year.

6. Subsequent references will be: "Lee" for Lee Kuan Yew, "Goh" for Goh Chok Tong, "LHL" for Lee Hsien Loong.

The National Day Rally Address: A Rhetorical Hybrid

Like the metaphor at its core, the force of the Rally address comes from combining concepts and contexts to yield a meaning "which is not attainable without their interaction."[7] As the only regular occasion on which the Prime Minister addresses the nation,[8] this address reports the country's achievements, assesses progress toward previous goals, outlines new goals, celebrates political independence and, when appropriate, installs new leaders and bids farewell to outgoing ones. The address is thus what Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell term a "rhetorical hybrid," an artifact which combines elements from different genres to reflect the manifold exigencies of an unusual occasion.[9] Although these "generic blends" have a "transitory character" because of their unique context,[10] some can be more permanent if "sustained by a recurrent situation."[11]

For Singapore, that recurrent situation is National Day, an occasion that is itself a hybrid combining the celebration of political independence with the measurement of national progress. The address resembles a State of the Union in the United States. Campbell and Jamieson point

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7. I.A. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford University Press, 1936), 100.

8. Singapore is a small nation, and like many former colonies in Asia, a young one. There are some kinds of speeches its leaders have never given and others it might never have to give. Given its size, Singapore is unlikely to ever have to make the case for going to war. It is not a Security Council member, nuclear power, or EU nation and as such, will probably never need to make major foreign policy addresses on arms proliferation or climate change. It has, thankfully, never experienced major terrorist attacks. Until March 2015, when Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew passed away, there had never been a eulogy for a head of state. There have, however, been over fifty NDR addresses, making it the most well-developed genre of public address in this nation. It is also the most prominent: since 1971 the NDR has been aired live by local TV channels and radio stations, who suspend regular programming to make way for the speech ("42 years of rallying the nation," *The Straits Times*, August 16, 2008).

9. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusions of Generic Elements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68, no. 2 (1982), 147.

10. Jamieson and Campbell, "Rhetorical Hybrids," 147.

11. Ibid., 154.

out that such addresses contain "public meditations on values," "assessments of information and issues," "policy recommendations," and some effort by the speaker to "create and celebrate a national identity."[12] Similarly, National Day Rally speeches identify problems facing Singapore and the government's plans to address these problems. These challenges and the country's future are discussed in economic terms. Indeed, the administration's emphasis on economic success is so well-established that the Prime Minister opened his 2005 address by saying:

> I will start with the economy because that's how we earn a living for ourselves. In fact, last year I wanted to start with the economy, but my ministers told me, everybody knows you make economic speeches, say something else. But I'm coming back to the economy this year because, in fact, that's the root of how we will solve all our other problems.

It is not unusual for a State of the Union to raise economic issues. People want to know whether their elected government has made it possible to provide for their families, attain meaningful employment, and protect their life savings. However, what is remarkable about Singapore's National Day Rally addresses and messages is the prominence accorded to economic matters. National Day messages typically begin with a statement of economic performance or place this information early on. For decades, it was common for the messages to include lengthy appendices of economic data. Many of the Rally addresses have also led with economic issues and almost all have dedicated significant time to questions of economic growth, living costs, unemployment, or the social impacts of growth and recession.

Not only does this country's one major national speech prioritize economic questions, it does so as part of an event dedicated to celebrating political independence. The NDR is thus more than a State of the Union. It is a State of the Union given on the 4th of July – a national

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12. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 139.

accounting exercise folded into a national anniversary party. In seeking to mark the nation's progress and "chart a common course for the future," the Rally address does not work alone. Instead, it is the oratorical component of a larger nationwide celebration lasting several weeks. While the Prime Minister and his staff polish the National Day address, military commanders pore over details of the National Day Parade, workplaces arrange National Day observation ceremonies, and caterers speed from one end of the island to the other providing food for the numerous dinners held to mark the occasion. The local media both chronicle these events and enter into the action. In 1993, the *Straits Times* organized a National Day essay contest on the theme "My wish for Singapore," giving winners $5,000 and publishing their work in the paper.[13] A few years later, it seized on a happy coincidence made possible by Hollywood: the first 200 readers to dress in the national flag's colors and present their weekend paper at a downtown movie theater would receive a National Day treat: a free viewing of *The Patriot*.[14]

Drawing on almost eight months of preparation "from the first blueprint meeting to the full dress rehearsal,"[15] the National Day Parade is a massive event consisting of a concert with multiple celebrity hosts, aerial fly-bys by fighter jets, march-pasts by civil and military defense forces, separate entrances by the President, Prime Minister, and members of government, performances by school students, souvenirs in goody bags, the display of that year's logo, floats encapsulating the annual theme, the singing of National Day songs, laser displays, a 21 gun salute, and fireworks. Amid this nationalistic bricolage, the songs stand out as an illustration of

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13. "Write about Singapore and you could win $5,000 prize from ST," *Straits Times*, May 5, 1993, Home, 19.

14. "Wear national colours and see The Patriot free," *Straits Times*, July 25, 2000, Home, 34.

15. Lawrence Wai-Teng Leong, "Consuming the Nation: National Day Parades in Singapore," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 2001), 6.

the purpose of these celebrations, namely, to "inculcate a civil religion that directs favour and fervor towards the 'nation.'"[16] Some of the songs marvel at how far the nation has come since independence, reminiscing that "there was a time when people said that Singapore wouldn't make it, but we did."[17] Others call on citizens to "stand up for Singapore"[18] and "give my best and more"[19] because "this is home, truly, where I know I must be."[20] From conception to conclusion, the National Day celebrations aim for a sense of "identification with the nation, pride and loyalty to the country, a sense of what it means to be 'Singaporean.'"[21]

This "co-presence," as I.A. Richards might put it, of economics and patriotism means that the government looks to economic performance for assurances of the country's exceptionalism. Within the pages of the National Day Rally speeches, the dismal science is a cause for joy, giving Singapore a "glow of success" (1970) rendered by growth figures that "sparkle and speak for themselves" (1968). The speeches frequently twin economic performance with strength and political identity. When Lee characterized Singapore's situation in 1960 as one of "political semi-independence and economic subjugation," he began a thread that still runs through the speeches:

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16. Lily Kong, "Music and Cultural Politics: Ideology and Resistance in Singapore," in *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, 20, no. 4 (1995), 448.

17. *We Are Singapore*, 1987. Lyrics and music: Hugh Harrison. Orchestration: Jeremy Monteiro. Commissioned by Cultural Affairs Division, Ministry of Community Development, Singapore. Copyright owners: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the National Arts Council, Singapore.

18. *Stand Up for Singapore*, 1984. Lyrics and music: Hugh Harrison. Commissioned by Ministry of Culture. Copyright owners: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the National Arts Council, Singapore.

19. *Count on Me Singapore*, 1986. Lyrics and music: Hugh Harrison. Commissioned by Ministry of Culture. Copyright owners: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the National Arts Council, Singapore.

20. *Home,* 1998. Lyrics and music: Dick Lee. Performed by Kit Chan.

21. Leong, "Consuming the Nation," 6.

the use of economic performance as a basis of national pride – an appeal to an economic identity to rally the nation.

Thus, the National Day Rally address is a hybrid consisting of a policy speech given on an occasion suffused with patriotism. Carolyn Miller reminds us that appreciating genre goes beyond matching the conventions of a speech to the demands of its situation. Instead, it is the *interaction* of speech and situation that shapes the "social action" a genre undertakes.[22] The National Day celebrations of political sovereignty fuse with the Rally address's report-card measures of national progress, rendering the address a social act which equates economic progress with national pride. By welding national worth with economic value, the address inscribes citizens into an economic identity that undergirds a characterization of the nation as a company.

The Corporate Metaphor: Constituting the National Company

Singapore has accumulated many names over its history: Temasek,[23] the Garden City, the Lion City,[24] Clean and Green City, the Little Red Dot,[25] a Fine City.[26] One that gives particular cause for pause is "Singapore Inc." As the name suggests, this is an image of the nation as a

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22. Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as social action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, no. 2 (1984): 151-167.

23. Temasek is the name Singapore had before it was discovered by a Srivijayan prince at the end of the thirteenth century. Upon coming ashore, he saw a creature – part lion, part fish– dart across the sands and so named the island "Singapura": "singa" meaning lion and "pura" meaning city. 'Singapore' is the Anglicized form of 'Singapura.'

24. A translation of "Singapore" and a reference to its national animal, the Merlion.

25. A phrase attributed to Indonesian President Habibie, who once said that in comparison to the green swathe of Indonesia, Singapore was a little red dot on the map of Southeast Asia.

26. A humorous reference to the numerous fines levied for all manner of infractions ranging from spitting in public places to eating certain fruit on the subway.

company run by its leader-CEO and staffed by citizen-employees. The "news" of Singapore's corporate metaphor is not hot off the press. The government has spoken in the vocabulary of business and looked to companies for inspiration for decades. In academic literature, the story of Singapore's economic development and its business-inflected approach to governance outpaces other topics, prompting scholars like Eric Thompson to note that "writings on Singapore...have overwhelmingly analyzed citizenship through a neoliberal lens."[27] Additionally, Singapore is described just as often, sometimes more, in other terms, such as a home or family.[28] So the corporate metaphor is neither novel, nor does it appear to dominate the National Day Rally addresses. Why then focus on it?

First, the corporate metaphor underpins other common metaphors of Singapore. As Mary McCoy observes in her study of corporatist metaphors in Indonesia, the word "corporate" has the Latin root *corpus*, evoking an entity in which "citizens and state merge into one body headed by a wise leader, generally a father figure."[29] The figures of family and corporation share concepts of hierarchy and unity. As the following analysis demonstrates, the government urges social cohesion to preserve economic growth, revealing the company rather than the family as the driving force behind images of Singapore. The National Day speeches also show that the home metaphor took off in the mid-1990s, while the corporate metaphor began earlier and continues to

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27. Eric C. Thompson, "Immigration, society and modalities of citizenship in Singapore," *Citizenship Studies* 18, no. 3-4 (2014), 317.

28. Singapore is described as a company about 12 times in these 94 speeches. The exact phrase "Singapore Inc." occurs just once in 2007. The "family" metaphor is not far behind with 8 mentions, while the metaphor of nation as "home" outstrips them all: Singapore is referred to as a home in twice as many speeches as it is called a business or company. On several occasions, the word "home" is in the speech title and mentioned multiple times within a single speech, bringing its total iterations to approximately 60.

29. Mary E. McCoy, "Purifying Islam in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: Corporatist Metaphors and the Rise of Religious Intolerance" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 277.

surface. Indeed, the home theme seems to have developed in response to outcomes of the

corporate metaphor, such as the emigration of citizens seeking better careers -and new homes-

elsewhere. Hence, the corporate metaphor animates other figures of the nation.

Second, despite the voluminous literature on Singapore's neoliberal regime, its corporate

metaphor has not been as closely examined,[30] possibly because of the significant work already

done on the nation's economic preoccupations. However, the image of Singapore as a

corporation deserves scrutiny precisely *because* it is so familiar. I join with Andrew Goatly in

positing that metaphors which express conventionalized associations between concepts possess

ideological force because they are used "largely without being noticed."[31] Such metaphors hinder

social change because they "do not unsettle our modes of perception or action…since they have

achieved currency as an acceptable way of constructing, conceptualizing and interacting with

reality."[32] At the same time, a conventional metaphor can mobilize the familiar to question its

assumptions. Hence, Singapore's metaphor of nation-as-company presents obstacles *and*

opportunities to communities who seek to engage each other and their government.

This chapter traces three components of the corporate metaphor across the National Day

Rally addresses and messages from 1960-2014: (i) Economic Performance As Identity; (ii)

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30. Singapore's maritime (boat), geographical (big/small Singapore, island, global city, gateway, conduit), marital (divorce from Malaysia), and botanical (gardening) metaphors tend to receive more attention.

31. Andrew Goatly, *Washing the Brain: Metaphor and Hidden Ideology* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 28-29.

32. Goatly, *Washing the Brain*, 28. Indeed, it is their "currency" that makes economics-based metaphors particularly difficult to unseat because of their embeddedness in the way we speak and think. The tendency to express experiences and relationships in economic terms (save time, spend time, waste time, pay for your deeds, generate interest, place a value) is so engrained that it makes their metaphorical nature "dormant-unto-literality" (Harris 2011, 474). As Randy Harris puts it, "What else *would* one say?" ("Tropical Truth(s): The Epistemology of Metaphor and other Tropes," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 4 (2011), 474.)

Financial Gain As Motive; and (iii) Technical Reason as Rhetorical Standard. I argue that by

constructing citizenship within an economic matrix, the corporate metaphor generates conflicting

views of the ideal citizen while offering a set of discursive norms by which to navigate these

visions of citizenship.

Economic Performance as Identity

And a nation, just like a family or a limited company, the kind of returns that they can give, the output, depends on the capital assets it has got. If all your firm has got are screw drivers and hammers making nails, your total output is going to be negligible.

– Lee Kuan Yew (1972)

Metaphors are interpretive and constitutive devices: they explain and recreate one

concept through the lens of another. To describe a nation as a company is to view that nation

through a company's "domain of experience"[33] and ascribe to it features associated with a

company, such as a focus on profit and growth as a measure of success. Singapore's economic

performance has from the earliest moments of its history been a source of pride and a reflection

of the nation's strength amid adversity. Faced with uncooperative Malaysian industries and

frustrating trade negotiations in the early years of independence, Lee exclaimed that

> If they think they can squat on a people that have got that capacity, they have made the gravest mistake of their lives…They want to slow down our pace so that their society, a medieval feudal society, can survive. Because if we surge forward at the rate we have been doing, in five to ten years there would have been an even greater disparity and contrast between an effective, open society and a closed, traditional society. Here, if you want to stand up or if you don't want to stand up, that is your business. But nobody crawls (17 Oct 1965).

Refusing to persist in a state of economic subjugation, Lee declared that *nobody crawls* in

Singapore and that Malaysia could not *squat* on people who were *surging forward*, lending a

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33. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 117.

physical quality to the nation's economic performance. Indeed, the economy required workers to have "red blood corpuscles" (5 Oct 1965), failing which it would become "arthritic, seize up, collapse" (1997).

This flexing of economic muscle, so important to a country dwarfed in size by its neighbors, accompanied appeals to national pride rooted in the country's economic accomplishments. Singapore's trade, taxation, and production figures told "a story which we have very little to be ashamed of" (1966). This was a story of a people who could "look the world in the eye" and proclaim that "this we have created" (1970). It was the story of a people who took pride in having enough "self-respect to take orders from each other" (1970) and create the orderly conditions that led to their economic success. "It is not worth, you know, trying to do Singapore in," said Lee in 1967. "It is too troublesome." After all, these were not just disciplined workers who knew how to take orders – they were brave people who "dared to achieve" and "dared to excel" (Message 1980). By turning economic accomplishments into acts of courage, Lee suggested that Singapore's economic success reflected the tenacity of the people and their government, whose will to succeed was "matched …by the growth rate" (1968).[34]

The urge to seek inspiration in economic outcomes crystalized into a series of economic visions for the nation. Upon leaving Malaysia, Singapore's leaders fixed on the idea of Singapore as "a centre of orderly growth…in an otherwise troublesome region" (1966). In subsequent decades, the public marched toward the dream of becoming "an industrial society" (1975), "an information and knowledge centre" (1980), a "banking centre and financial supermarket" (1982), and "a regional business centre" (1997). If Singapore was to truly be "a model for Southeast

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34. The inverse of this logic is that economic failure is a national indignity: "In one five-year spending spree, Singapore can be rendered prostrate and bankrupt" (1984).

Asia" (3 Oct 1965), it would need a model of its own to follow and in 1984, future Prime

Minister Goh Chok Tong settled on "Vision 1999." Its aim? For Singapore to attain Switzerland's

standard of living by 1999. Like the images of Singapore as a center for knowledge, business,

and finance, this was an economic goal: to be as wealthy, stable, and prosperous as Switzerland.

Taking on a corporate identity places success within closer reach by altering terms of

comparison. By the time Singapore achieved Vision 1999, it was clear that the country's small

size and skilled workforce made analogies to *companies* stronger than to other countries.

Singapore cannot be Switzerland or Malaysia (whose population is six times that of Singapore),

but it *can* be Microsoft. With a workforce of 3 million, Singapore is a small country, but a large

company. Hence, it makes sense to look to Microsoft which represents, as LHL said in 2011,

"the kind of business which we want to be as Singapore." When the basis of comparison is

knowledge, innovation, and "looking to the future" (2011), success is more attainable for a small

country.

In forming an identity around which to cohere, Singapore Inc. reveals further why it is an

apt metaphor. As a Chinese-majority country surrounded by Muslim-dominated Malaysia and

Indonesia, and peopled primarily by immigrants from China, Malaysia, and India, Singapore is

careful to keep the peace among its different ethnic groups. Despite reasonably successful efforts

to promote racial and religious harmony, an influx of immigrants in the last five years has led to

a resurgence of tensions. However, while nations can split along religious and racial lines,

corporations are much less likely to do so because their basic identifying unit is that of the

employee, not the Muslim local or Indian immigrant. Consequently, the nation-as-corporation

metaphor has become a symbol of unity in whose name everyone should discard their

differences. National Day Rally addresses often remind the public that, "We are a young nation

and if we are to develop and to mature, we have to harness our diverse views and ideas, put aside

our personal interests and forge common goals" (2011). In 2010, LHL congratulated the country

for "com[ing] through the crisis much better and much faster than we expected," attributing this

success to the fact that "everyone contributed, the unions, the workers, employers and the

Government as well did a little bit." Note how the primary markers of identity were those

associated with business and the workplace – the workers, the employers, the unions— and that

it was by uniting around these identities that the nation weathered a recession.

One way to maintain an identity is to present proof of its continued viability. Concerned

about Singapore's long-term survival, the government has adopted the persona and

preoccupations of a company in its emphasis on competition and "key performance indicators"

(2004). After all, "nations lose their competitiveness as companies do" (1993), making it vital to

do everything possible to "keep Singapore open for business" (2013). As Chew points out,

"competition has become bound with everyday life in Singapore and is revealed in the constant

sense of comparison with others in terms of relative advantages or deprivation in

consumption."[35] The speeches reveal an urgent desire for Singapore to "make the grade"[36] and

receive recognition for her economic accomplishments. In his introduction to Axel Honneth's

The Struggle for Recognition, translator Joel Anderson notes that the word "recognition" has two

meanings: "re-identification" and "the granting of a certain status."[37] Thus, one could argue that a

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35. Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew, "Islands and national identity: the metaphors of Singapore," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language,* 143 (2000), 128.

36. 17 Oct 1965, NDR 1966, Message 1967, Message 1968, NDR 1970, NDR 1972, NDR 1975, Message 1982, NDR 1997.

37. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Joel Anderson trans. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), viii - Translator's introduction by Joel Anderson.

bid for recognition is a dual attempt at garnering distinction as well as confirming an existing

identity (such as that of a successful nation-company). Honneth contends that recognition by

others is vital for developing self-identity, a process of mutual recognition by which, explains

Anderson, "one's attitude towards oneself emerges in one's encounter with another's attitude

towards oneself."[38] Honneth presents this as a "double movement of externalization and return"

in which one sees oneself as others do and, in the process, reflects that view back onto oneself.[39]

Many of the NDR speeches report Singapore's rank on indicators such as Gross National

Product, the ease of doing business, competitiveness, and productivity.[40] In these speeches, to be

Singapore is not only to do well but to do better than others,[41] a status both granted and

corroborated by accolades from consultants and world leaders about the superiority of

Singapore's achievements.[42] Through ratings and testimony, Singapore sees itself as others do,

thus reaffirming the nation's view of itself.

Recognition relies on the evaluation of others. When you say you are special because

others see you as special, you are making an argument of quality based on one of quantity. This

creates a duality such as that exemplified by the simultaneous arguments the NDRs make:

Singapore must measure herself against others to demonstrate her superiority, but Singapore also

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38. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, xii.

39. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 31. Honneth's argument evokes George Herbert Mead's concept that identity emerges by seeing oneself through the eyes of the "generalized other" – the larger society to which we belong [Mead, G.H. *Mind Self and Society. From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. ed Charles W. Morris (University of Chicago Press, 1934), 155.]

40. Message 1989, NDR 1989, Message 1990, NDR 1990, NDR 1999, NDR 2001, NDR 2002, NDR 2012.

41. In one of the more memorable comparisons of these speeches, Lee pointed out that everyone attending the 1967 NDR address was given a 6 course dinner while "very few countries can serve you even a three course dinner."

42. NDR 1979, NDR 1999, NDR 2000, NDR 2003, NDR 2009, NDR 2010, NDR 2012, Message 2014.

cannot be held to the same standard as others given her unique national context. Hence, the speeches shift constantly between portraying Singapore's uniqueness as boon and bane: Singapore is small and therefore vulnerable, Singapore is small and therefore flexible; Singapore's ethnic diversity is a source of instability, Singapore's diversity is a selling point; Singapore's success is a source of pride, Singapore's success is a source of anxiety. To be Singaporean is to inhabit a complex persona as a member of a nation that derives worth from the valuation of others while asserting an innate exceptionalism. The next chapter demonstrates how the government's emphasis on recognition, with its attendant internal contradictions, has surfaced in anti-immigration protests. By demanding that the government accord greater benefits to citizens than foreigners, protestors embody the tensions that attend the twinning of self-worth with external valuation, and national identity with economic gain.

The NDR speeches illustrate how economic performance has become the holistic measure of Singapore, reflecting the strength of the people, distinguishing the nation from others, and projecting visions to aspire toward. This political reality provides the grounds to advance certain arguments and justify courses of action. As Kenneth Burke reminds us, motives and their corresponding actions are inherent in language, such that "spontaneous speech is…a system of attitudes, of implicit exhortations."[43] The next section examines this system of attitudes by tracing the role of financial gain as a motive of policies and the citizen-government relationship.

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43. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), 177.

Financial Gain as Motive
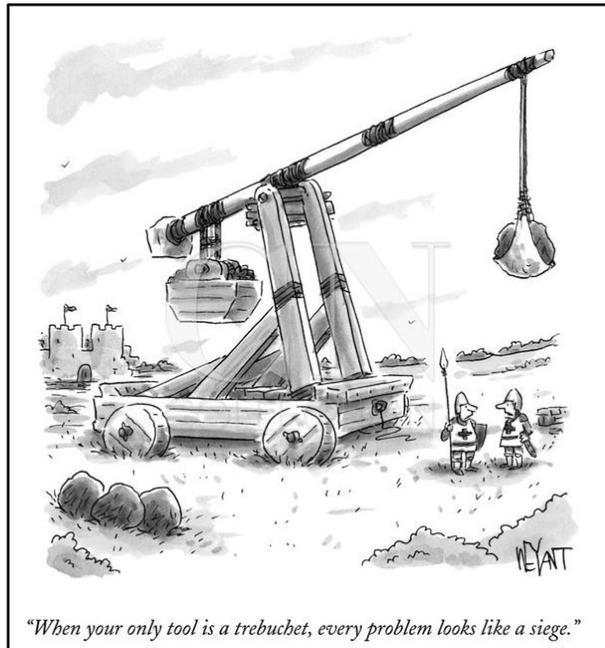
Figure 1: "When your only tool is a trebuchet, every problem looks like a siege"
Artist: Christopher Weyant. *New Yorker*. Published June 8, 2015.

In 1996, Goh defended the high salaries of government ministers by arguing that politicians should be paid commensurate to private sector jobs. Such compensation would reflect the results these leaders could produce for Singapore. "I used to manage a company," he said. "When I recruited a finance manager, I did not hire the cheapest candidate. I looked for the best man available for the price I could afford…As a shareholder, would you choose a marketing director who is paid $100,000 a year and brings in $500,000 of sales, or one who is paid $1 million but produces sales of $10 million?" This choice asked citizens to reason as a company would. By having the nation adopt the identity of a company, the corporate metaphor imparts the motives of a company to the nation and its people. These motives take two forms: In the first, financial gain becomes the primary justification for all public policies. Second, financial incentives form the foundation of the relationship between citizens and their nation.

As the ultimate bottom line, economic growth determines the government's position on such issues as language policy, immigration, employment, race relations, wage rates, religious fundamentalism, maternity leave, income policies, artistic creativity, and political expression. For example, when trying to ameliorate social tensions, the government often cites the economy's health as a reason for everyone to get along.[44] In 2011, LHL touted the benefits of foreign classmates, who would "prepare [local students] better for the global workplaces, expose them to competition and make them, spur them to work harder and give their best" such that "the local and the foreign students will even partner and make new start-ups." Thus, foreigners are good for Singapore's financial success and rejecting foreigners harms Singapore:

> It reflects badly on us, it damages our international reputation. People think that Singapore is anti-foreigner, xenophobic. New York Times carried an article, very powerful headline: "In Singapore, Vitriol Against Chinese Newcomers." Other newspapers carry stories too. Herald Tribune carried the same story, softer headline. Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, even Xinhua carried stories. It does not do us good. But more fundamentally than that, apart from our reputation, it speaks poorly of what sort of people we are. I mean, what sort of people do we want to be? We need to be people who are proud of ourselves, who have a heart, who can feel for other fellow human beings, who will be courteous, respectful and behave with others as we would like others to behave to us (2012).[45]

Again, the primary reason to welcome foreigners is economic – investors must not be scared off by Singapore's "anti-foreigner" reputation. It is only when the economic perils of xenophobia have been established that the Prime Minister makes an ethical point about how Singapore's

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44. NDR 1993: Social cohesion is important for economic progress. It gives a "competitive edge" in attracting investment, and offers "investors and our people" something special. NDR 1997: Foreigners will help realize Singapore's dream of becoming a regional business centre; NDR 2002: we should welcome foreigners because they bring success to Singapore.

45. This anxiety about Singapore's reputation is another example of the emphasis on seeing and evaluating oneself through the eyes of others.

rejection of immigrants reflects poorly on Singaporeans. The structure of this argument reveals much about the priorities of an economic imperative: profits, *then* people.

This focus on economic performance anchors arguments which encourage wealthy Singaporeans to help the poor or which extoll the importance of free choice. In each case, the motive is to protect or enhance growth: help impoverished Singaporeans because "otherwise, they will become disaffected and disenchanted, which will sour the social climate, and disrupt our economic progress" (2001). Allow people to make their own choices because this kind of "non-conformist thinking" is needed as part of a "new economic strategy" in which "wealth is generated by new ideas" (2001).[46] By filtering race, volunteerism, and personal freedom through the logic of financial gain, the corporate metaphor functions as an interpretive device through which the characteristics of a company are brought to bear on the nation.

As Max Black suggests, metaphors assert similarities more than they "formulate some similarity antecedently existing."[47] In creating parallels between the nation and a company, the corporate metaphor directs perspectives to those outlined by the metaphor. This "terministic screen"[48] makes it challenging to envision alternative modes of "exchange" beyond those prescribed by the norms of a company. Consequently, the corporate metaphor structures the relationship between citizens and the nation as a transaction between shareholders and a financial

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46. The pursuit of financial gain is also one of the few ways the government is compelled to change its mind. In the 2004 address, LHL announced a reversal of the government's decades-long opposition to building casinos in Singapore. The reason was simple: Singapore could no longer afford not to have a huge source of economic growth long possessed by competitors like Hong Kong. Similarly, the United States has morphed in these speeches from a country marked by decadent Western individualism to a positive model of innovation and dynamism (NDR 2000).

47. Max Black, "Metaphor," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. N.S. 55 (1954-55), 285.

48. Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*: *Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 45.

institution. For example, when Singapore's economy does well, the government distributes some of the surplus among the population. The initiative, aptly titled the "growth dividend,"[49] evokes the "profit participation and shareholding schemes" of "Starbucks' 'Bean Stock' program, which gives every employee shares in the company."[50] Under the aegis of the corporate metaphor, the citizen's relationship to the nation is expressed in economic terms.

The addresses reveal that the government seeks to generate emotional ties to the nation through the creation of individual wealth. The belief that a financial bond can also be an emotional and political one drives the national savings system (the Central Provident Fund, or CPF), the national housing system (the Housing Development Board, or HDB), and various schemes that acknowledge the contributions of citizens to the nation. CPF balances are affected by the performance of the economy and citizens draw on CPF to purchase homes whose value also depends on the economy. Therefore, the government sees these programs as ways to give people an economic stake in the country (1984). Moreover, these programs are "roots" that make Singapore "who we are: a home-owning society" (1985). The government reasons that by giving Singaporeans a sense of financial ownership of their country, CPF and HDB imbue the people with civic pride and distinguish them from cities like Hong Kong, who lack such policies (1984). Consequently, the corporate metaphor casts Singaporeans as citizen-owners who practice a kind of pecuniary patriotism.

Financial incentives are a staple of policy design as well as the language used to frame policies. Singapore's youngest citizens earn their way into the world with a $6,000 Baby Bonus

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49. LHL referred to these dividends in his 2008 National Day Rally speech. More details of the program are available at http://www.mof.gov.sg/growth/GD.htm

50. Kevin Lane Kelley and Keith Richey, "The importance of corporate brand personality traits to a successful 21st century business," *Brand Management* 14 (Sep-Nov 2006), 77.

given to parents for each child while relief packages for elderly citizens are framed as acts of

gratitude to the "Pioneer Generation" for their contributions to the nation's early successes. Even

something required by citizenship is rewarded monetarily: every Singaporean male who serves

his mandatory two-year military commitment receives $9,000. When introducing a raft of

policies in 2010, LHL assured audiences that "Singaporeans will get *the best deal*," revealing a

tendency to characterize citizenship in terms of financial advantages. Despite its insistence on

self-reliance and avoiding handouts, the government refers habitually to economic incentives as

"bites of the cherry"(2007),[51] "goodies," and "hongbaos"(2007, 2009, 2012, 2013)— red

envelopes of money given to children on Chinese New Year. Such language does more than cast

the government as benefactor to the people's supplicant, granting favors and giving out

"goodies." Calling incentives "hongbaos" also normalizes, and therefore strengthens, the

corporate metaphor by folding it into an existing cultural practice and vocabulary. Thus, the

belief that only material rewards can motivate behavior saturates Singapore's policy regime.

The corporate metaphor renders the nation an entity with primarily financial motivations,

where the prospect of financial gain directs behavior, structures policies, and constitutes ties

between the nation and its people. Using money to organize relationships stretches the concept of

"citizen" in multiple directions: in one, Singaporeans are both fearless pioneers and dependents

to be tempted with goodies; in another, they are citizen-shareholders for whom the country is a

home as well as a business.

Technical Reason as Rhetorical Standard

Just as the corporate metaphor creates an identity, activates arguments, and constructs

relationships, it enables a certain type of rhetorical performance. Specifically, the NDR addresses

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51. A phrase used twice in LHL's 2007 address.

reveal the government's recourse to neoliberal technical reason as a preferred mode of public discourse. Thomas Farrell and G. Thomas Goodnight describe technical reason as "modes of inference that are characteristic of specialized forums, wherein discourse is coded to fit functional demands of particular information fields and evaluated according to an array of state-of-the art techniques."[52] Singapore's government demonstrates its neoliberal technical reason in several ways. It adopts a specialized vocabulary taken from the world of business management, codifies the people into categories in service of the economy, and substantiates arguments with statistics and policy details. Most important, the government presents itself as the standard by which public discourse should proceed.

Audiences of NDR addresses live in persistent uncertainty. After all, in 55 years Singapore has, according to these speeches, reached a critical point no less than sixteen times, each necessitating a turn to leadership to chart the way forward (Table 1). As Johanna Hartelius puts it, people seek expertise for the "illusion of certainty" it offers,[53] and the government presents this expertise as CEOs do in their annual letters: in the form of "carefully worked out plans of the master architect at the top of the company."[54] The rise of New Public Management in the 1980s, "a paradigm of governance premised on a massive import of private sector thinking into the public sector,"[55] fueled the notion that "government needs to give more attention to

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52. Thomas B. Farrell & G. Thomas Goodnight, "Accidental rhetoric: The root metaphors of Three Mile Island," *Communication Monographs* 48, no. 4 (1981), 273.

53. E. Johanna Hartelius, *The Rhetoric of Expertise* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 2.

54. Amernic, J., Craig, R., & Tourish, D., "The transformational leader as pedagogue, physician, architect, commander, and saint: Five root metaphors in Jack Welch's letters to stockholders of General Electric," *Human Relations*, 60, no. 12 (2007), 1851.

55. Hans Krause Hansen and Dorte Salskov-Iverson, "Managerialised patterns of political authority: partners, peddlers and entrepreneurial people," *Critical Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2002), 9.

achieving effective management, often through the adoption of management procedures or arrangements resembling those of business firms."[56] For Steger and Roy, this "employment of governmental technologies that are taken from the world of business and commerce" is a central feature of neoliberalism. It involves the "mandatory development of 'strategic plans' and 'risk-management' schemes oriented toward the creation of 'surpluses'; cost benefit analyses and other efficiency calculations;…the setting of quantitative targets; the close monitoring of outcomes."[57]

Singapore's government has long spoken the language of corporate performance. Some of the most frequently used concepts in the Rally speeches are terms associated with Fortune 500 companies and Silicon Valley start-ups, such as "value-add,"[58] "innovation,"[59] and "entrepreneur."[60] As a new member of the Malaysian Federation, Singapore used the occasion of National Day to "take stock", "define the targets" and "assess contributions" the state had made to Malaysia (1964). About 30 years later, the government was still taking stock and assessing – this time, tracking Singapore's progress toward reaching Switzerland's standard of living (1992). Throughout its tenure, the PAP government has designed plans for success and measured their

56. "Section 1: Public Management: Old and New," *Handbook of Public Administration* (Sage Publications, 2003) eds B. Guy Peters & Jon Pierre, 11.

57. Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

58. Mentioned 17 times in 11 speeches/ messages. In "The Origins of Office Speak," Emma Green explains that "the term value-add comes directly from the idea of shareholder value," and the concern over whether a given action will add to the profits of a company's owners (April 24, 2014, *The Atlantic*).

59. 56 times across 16 speeches/messages.

60. 52 times across 22 speeches/messages.

results, focusing on the creation of "strategies,"[61] the setting of "targets"[62] and "objectives,"[63] and the "assess"[64]-ment of progress toward these goals.

C.W. Mills reminds us that "by acquiring the categories of a language, we acquire the structured "ways" of a group."[65] Hence, the Singapore government's use of business terminology suggests that along with the language of a business, the government has adopted its "structured ways," including its perspectives on the world. Seen in this light, the emphasis on setting targets and measuring outcomes implies, to use an old management favorite, a "helicopter view" – the perception of patterns from on high, allowing one to make plans on a broad scale and for the long-term. This view grants authority and agency to the people in charge of a system – those making the plans – while casting those who carry out the plans as parts of the system, widgets more acted upon than acting. Here we may discern a second feature of the government's neoliberal technical reason: conceptualizing people as factors of production.

James Arnt Aune explicates six rhetorical strategies of economic analysis. At the top of the list i: "Strategy 1: Define any object, person, or relationship as a commodity that can be bought and sold."[66] Applied to Singapore, this might read: "Define any person as an object, resource, or commodity that can be produced, categorized, and capitalized upon." Over the years,

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61. 79 times across 36 speeches and messages.

62. 50 times across 27 speeches and messages.

63. 39 times across 28 speeches and messages.

64. 30 times across 28 speeches and messages.

65. C.W. Mills, "Language. Logic and culture," *American Sociological Review* 5 (1939), 677.

66. James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 36-37.

Singaporeans have been talked about as scrap material to be "recycled back into employment" (Message 1970) and "salvaged" with training (1982). They have heard themselves described as animals ("you can tell the promise in a man as in a race horse"- 1983), crops from a "bumper harvest" (1983) and layers of a "talent pyramid" (1979). In 1997, Goh wondered how to "expand [the] inflow" of talent to "top up" Singapore's workforce, and LHL spoke in 2009 of workers in some industries as a "surplus" population. Nevertheless, the award for the most objectifying image must go to Lee, who proclaimed that if lower-educated mothers continued to bear children at a rate faster than others, the "net result" would be a population of "half-skimmed milk" (1986).

When not depicted as resource heaps or factors of (re)production, Singaporeans are sorted into statistical categories. The Prime Ministers segment the nation into components, preferring to talk about people by race, social standing, education, income, house-type, marital status, or career. It is common for the Rally speeches to discuss Singaporeans as labels: "the elites", "the average" (1987), "the A-level girls" (1988), "one-roomers" (1990), "anti-social elements" (1994), "the upgraders" (1994). As the nation's statisticians, the government packs its speeches with examples, data, observations on regional and global trends, and domestic policy details. Often delivered alongside PowerPoint slides, the speeches sometimes read like lectures. Some survey the intricacies of global politics, citing books by title, author, press, and publication date (1987, 1988) while others have charts, appendices, excerpts from business reports, and arguments organized by signposted sub-sections. The speeches thus project an image of the government as disinterested strategists calculating and allocating resources for maximum benefit.

Crucially, the government presents this manner of speaking and reasoning as a model for others. When arguing for workers to pause and consider their employer's position before demanding a raise, Lee performed the rational deliberation he sought from audiences by musing

aloud, saying "let us examine the merits of this argument" (1985). On the topic of political participation, the government urges voters to "consider issues rationally, coolly, detached, think through decisions which affect your future and make a considered judgment" (2008). Its penchant for classifying and quantifying is further evidence of the measured attitude it portrays and expects. In particular, people must not submit to emotional reactions which cloud rational thinking (2000). "Participate actively by all means," said LHL in 2008, "but don't get swept away and please don't catch mad cow madness."[67] For its part, the government displays the desired characteristics, announcing that it will "allow free speech *step by step* in an *orderly* way" and when deciding important matters, will "take the situation as a whole" and make "a considered assessment" (2006). The government therefore acts as its own rhetorical proof by exhorting citizens to behave a certain way and offering itself as an embodiment of that behavior.

In doing so, the NDRs set norms of public discourse that emphasize rationality, accountability, and the substantiation of arguments with statistical evidence. This offers citizens a rhetorical resource with which to engage the government. Chapter 3 shows how Singaporeans contest the image of citizens as passive categories by using the government's argumentative strategies against them and critiquing the soundness of the government's research and reasoning. The corporate metaphor's emphases on growth as a measure of national worth and financial incentives as a basis of relationships lend themselves to a way of speaking and arguing grounded in cost-benefit analyses and numerical data. This essay concludes by discussing the implications of characterizing citizenship along purely economic lines.

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67. LHL was referring to a comment by South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak that anonymous and inaccurate on-line information about mad cow disease had propagated like an "info-demic."

Conclusion

…the politics and policies of the men in charge will affect your nett worth. No amount of political education, or discussion, or agitation can politicise you more than you having such big personal stakes. From the politics of poverty in the 1950s and 1960s, we have moved to the politics of progress; from the politics of desperation, to the politics of hope; from the politics of squatters, to the politics of owners.

– Lee Kuan Yew (NDR 1984)

The National Day Rally address does not culminate in a fireworks display. It involves neither parachutists nor pop stars. It does not even feature rap songs about the nation's shared values of harmony, nation, and family.[68] However, it is a vessel of an important feature of the nation's identity: the metaphor of nation-as-company. This chapter has traced three components of the corporate metaphor across Singapore's National Day Rally speeches and messages from 1960 to 2014. First, the government locates the nation's identity in its economic performance, structuring a political reality in which economic success is the seat of national pride. Whether aiming for Switzerland's standard of living or Microsoft's business model, the government maintains this identity through constant comparisons to other countries and appeals for the people to keep working together in pursuit of shared economic goals. Second, a reality based on the primacy of economic growth activates arguments in which financial gain is the central motivation of human behavior. Here, the government appeals to the prospect of financial gain (or loss) to justify policies and encourage desirable behavior. Importantly, the government uses financial incentives and "shares" to recognize citizenship, making financial gain the basis of a citizen's relationship to the nation. Finally, the government's neoliberal technical reason enables

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68. Chong Chee Kin, "He has shared values all rapped up." *The Straits Times*, July 24, 1998.

a mode of public discourse that prizes statistical rigor and cost-benefit calculations. Together, these components form the overarching metaphor of nation as company.

The corporate metaphor has become conventionalized with time, sewn into narratives of Singapore's history, facts of its geopolitical position, and its cultural practices. It is rendered additionally powerful by its basis in free market principles of efficiency and the pursuit of growth which, like the tenets of neoliberalism, are invoked "almost without question, as if they were the very standard of reason and rationality."[69] Luke Winslow's observation that "neoliberalism has become a kind of logic, a rationale so deeply ingrained…that it largely vanishes from sight"[70] echoes Aune's concern over the insidiously persuasive quality of free market rhetoric due to a ""realist style" that denies its own discursiveness."[71] Like the free market principles that animate it, the corporate metaphor persuades without appearing to do so.

However, there are points of tension in the metaphor that ruffle the consciousness and draw attention to its implications for citizenship. As members of a nation whose government locates its identity in economic performance and reasons in the voice of a company, citizens of Singapore are laborers, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators, holders of government assets, co-owners of the nation, shareholders of Singapore Inc., generators of constructive feedback, units of production, and statistical categories. These identities often clash: citizens must be both disciplined workers *and* risk-taking entrepreneurs, deferent employees *and* independent innovators, self-reliant capitalists *and* community-minded family members, and shareholders

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69. Luke Winslow, "The Undeserving Professor: Neoliberalism and the Reinvention of Higher Education," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2015), 206.

70. Winslow, "The Undeserving Professor," 206.

71. Aune, *Selling the Free Market*, 10-11.

with financial investments in the nation while also patriots with emotional investments in Singapore. What unites this kaleidoscope of identities is that it paints the citizen as a reflection of the changing needs of the economy. This is a figure defined by economic priorities, fueled by economic incentives, and persuaded by economic reasoning. To be a citizen is to be an economic unit striving to avoid obsolescence and replacement by more talented parts. To be a citizen is to be an employee whose first allegiance is to a company, not a country (a line blurred by the image of Singapore Inc.). To be a citizen is to view the holding of assets, not opinions, as the primary means of engaging your government.

What does it mean to see citizenship through an economic lens? What rhetorical resources does the neoliberal citizen use, then, to interact with political leaders and fellow citizens? The chapters that follow address these questions through two case studies in which Singaporeans have engaged with the axioms of citizenship constructed by the corporate metaphor. In the next chapter, I explore the controversy generated by the government's release of a White Paper on Population in January 2013. The Paper estimated that Singapore's population would reach 6.9 million by 2030, with citizens making up just over half this total. In the face of declining citizen birth rates, the government emphasized the need to absorb immigrants at a pace that would replenish the labor force and keep the economy growing. By studying responses to the Paper, I show how Singaporeans have refuted some aspects of the corporate metaphor – such as its prioritization of economic growth— while perpetuating others, such as the use of financial incentives to indicate the value of citizenship. Hence, the corporate metaphor illustrates how citizens and their government co-create the meaning of citizenship as they go back and forth proposing, dismissing, and shaping features of the ideal Singaporean.

CHAPTER 3: CONTESTING THE CORPORATE METAPHOR:
AUTHENTICITY IN IMMIGRATION DEBATES

…the persistence of institutions lies in the establishment of their own authenticity.
- Paul Freathy and Iris Thomas, "Marketplace Metaphors"[72]

What could be more authentic than local origins?
- Sharon Zukin, "Consuming Authenticity"[73]

Singapore marked 50 years of independence in August 2015 with SG50, a celebration

over a year in the making. For Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, SG50 was "not just a birthday

bash" but a chance to reflect on "[the] principles [that] have made us special."[74] Among these

principles were familiar features of the nation's corporate metaphor such as the image of citizens

as economic units making up the "best workforce in the world" and of national worth derived

from global business rankings. The central theme however, was unity. "Team Singapore"[75] had

succeeded due to the unique harmony of its multi-racial society and the "special concord

between the people and their government." Thus, Lee proclaimed that because "there are no

segregated ghettoes" and all had "kept faith between the Government and the people," all of

Singapore was celebrating "because every community [had] progressed with the nation."

The Prime Minister's portrait of a cohesive society took shape with confident

brushstrokes, save for a moment of hesitation on "immigrations [*sic*] and foreigners." Here, it

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72. Paul Freathy and Iris Thomas, "Marketplace metaphors: Communicating authenticity through visual imagery," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 18, no. 2 (2015), 180.

73. Sharon Zukin, "Consuming authenticity: From outposts of difference to means of exclusion," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5(2008), 736.

74. Lee Hsien Loong (23 August 2015) National Day Rally 2015 Speech, hereafter "NDR 2015."

75. The word "team" occurred 19 times in this 22-page speech – almost once on every page.

became apparent that the push to create the world's best workforce had jeopardized the cherished

picture of a nation secure in its multicultural identity. Working through the issue aloud, Lee said:

> If we close our doors to foreign workers, our economy will tank. Companies would not have enough workers. Some will close down and our own people working in these companies will lose their jobs. Also we need foreign workers to build our homes and schools, to meet our daily needs, we need foreign domestic help. So we cannot close our doors completely. On the other hand, if we let in too many foreign workers, our society will come undone. Singaporeans will be crowded out, workplaces will feel foreign, our identity will be diluted…[76]

Controversies over immigration offer a way to examine the relationship between

economic and political membership in a nation. Participation in a nation's workforce has often

been used as a criterion of "complete" or desirable citizenship. Consequently, the right to

contribute to the formal economy has been withheld at various points from anyone not deemed to

be a full or rightful citizen because of their gender, race, prior incarceration, and national origin.

As a result, the composition of a nation's workforce often becomes a proxy for that nation's ideal

identity: those welcomed into the workforce are the desirable faces of the nation.[77] Hence,

changes in that workforce, such as through immigration, prompt questions about changes to that

nation's identity.

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76. NDR 2015.

77. However economic inclusion alone does not guarantee full political or cultural acceptance because such acceptance is linked to the kind of work that person does. Hence, like Turkish guest workers in post-World War II West Germany, Singapore's lower-income Foreign Domestic Workers (housekeepers) and construction workers fill many of the occupations without which the country could not function, but are typically granted only temporary work permits, and are thus denied a path to full political citizenship. This is despite the fact that such workers tend to be closer in cultural background to many Singaporeans than expatriates from the US or Australia who occupy higher status occupations. Indeed, a key feature of Singapore's immigration context is the ethnic similarity between many immigrants and locals. Like Singaporeans, many immigrants and temporary workers come from China, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, which share religions, languages, and cuisines with Singapore. Where immigrants are of a different race – such as Anglo-Saxons from America and Britain- they tend to occupy a higher socio-economic class, and find that, despite some expressions of resentment by locals, have their customs and habits more readily accepted than that of poorer immigrants from the region. Thus, anti-immigrant sentiments in Singapore are motivated by a hybrid of ethnic and economic factors, with races different from the majority often receiving better treatment (at least publicly) than those less well-off but closer in ethnicity to locals.

In the United States, such questions have centered on illegality and criminality, ethnic differences, burdens on social and physical infrastructure, and competition for jobs.[78] These anxieties are underpinned by a fear about the threat immigrants pose to the "family" that is the nation. As Stacy Takacs explains, as with families, one does not choose to be born in a given nation. Thus, the ties of nationhood are deemed purer because they represent an inherent identity rather than the one adopted by immigrants hoping to join the national family. This "rhetoric of filiation"[79] imagines the US as a homogenous nation to which "the entry of non-white bodies"[80] will cause irreversible change in the definition of "American."

Singaporeans also worry about changes to the meaning of "Singaporean." Here, where the nation has been conceptualized more as a company than a family, and where the tie between the figure of "worker" and "citizen" is especially strong, the entry of workers – and potential new citizens— from other countries accords the chance to examine the implications of building citizenship upon an almost exclusively economic foundation. If the key identity of a populace is "workforce," how much does national origin matter? A national identity built on economic achievement threatens to render passports less meaningful than employment passes -- a Singaporean becomes interchangeable with a willing worker from any other nation. Hence, Singapore's immigration controversy generates debates about the value of formal citizenship in

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78. In a chapter titled "The Proliferation of Enemies to the National Body," Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop categorize three themes in discussions of the "threats" posed by immigrants: that immigrants bring criminality and immorality to their new country, they drain resources, and they spread disease to the general population. *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

79. Stacy Takacs, "Alien-nation: Immigration, national identity and transnationalism," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 4 (1999), 594.

80. Takacs, "Alien-nation," 598.

the face of economic priorities: Does it matter more that you are a *Singaporean* worker or a Singaporean *worker*?

Another key difference from the U.S. is the state-sanctioned nature of immigration in Singapore. There, groups protest immigration not because of the illegal status of entrants but because of their very legality, their presence having been facilitated by a decades-long immigration push by the government. Hence, Singapore affords the chance to scrutinize a well-known issue by reversing a common precept: legality, not illegality as a source of contention. As I will show, this situation has led to arguments directed more at the government than foreigners, in which locally-born citizens dissociate their "real" citizenship from the contractual arrangements by which immigrants secure employment and a path to citizenship.

In addressing the relationship between economics and citizenship, a significant body of rhetorical literature has focused on citizens as consumers engaging in boycotts and protests against consumer goods, or bailing out financial institutions.[81] Where people are not consumers, they are labor activists engaging in strikes and negotiations[82] or political candidates appealing to their business acumen.[83] What unites these studies is their focus on individuals using economic levers to protect their status, whether as laborers, consumers, or political leaders.

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81. Kathryn M. Olson & G. Thomas Goodnight, "Entanglements of consumption, cruelty, privacy, and fashion: The social controversy over fur," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, no.3 (1994): 249-276; Megan Foley "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economic in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 4 (2012): 386-410.

82. The chapter on economic citizenship in the 2002 *Sage Handbook of Citizenship Studies* focuses exclusively on patterns of labor rights (Anthony Woodiwiss, "Economic Citizenship: Variations and the Threat of Globalisation," 53-88); Michael J. Steudeman, "Indeterminacy, Incipiency, and Attitudes: Materialist Oscillation in the 2012 Chicago Teachers' Strike," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 10, no. 3 (2015): 509-533.

83. David G. Levasseur & Lisa M. Gring-Pemble, "Not All Capitalist Stories are Created Equal: Mitt Romney's Bain Capital Narrative and the Deep Divide in American Economic Rhetoric," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 18, no.1 (2015): 1-38.

This chapter looks instead at how individuals dissociate economic considerations from their status as citizens.[84] Through the study of an immigration controversy, I examine rhetorical attempts to identify the constitutive qualities of an ideal citizen by sundering the ties between "worker" and "citizen." In the process, I reveal how Singaporeans engage with the tenets of the corporate metaphor etched into the national bedrock: the link between economic performance and national pride, the view of citizens as economic units motivated by financial incentives, and the recourse to neoliberal technical reason as a standard for public discourse. In doing so, I contribute to ongoing discussions about the impact of economic imperatives on citizenship.

The controversy in question centers on Singapore's 2013 White Paper on Population, in which the government outlined a set of population and immigration policies. I examine opposition to the Paper mounted in three outdoor rallies in February, May, and October 2013, articles by Singaporean blogger Kirsten Han, and posts on two websites, *The Online Citizen* and *Singapore Armchair Critic.* Kirsten Han, who is a prominent blogger, journalist, filmmaker, and activist, was named in 2012 by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the 100 women to follow on Twitter.[85] She publishes in outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Online Citizen*, *Medium.com*,

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84. In doing so, I contribute to discussions such as critiques of corporate personhood, of structuring institutions like schools and prisons along corporate lines, and the effect of neoliberal imperatives on seeking and attaining social justice for minority groups. See: A. Freya Thimsen, "The People Against Corporate Personhood: Doxa and Dissensual Democracy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:3 (2015): 485-508, Stephen John Hartnett, "The Annihilating Public Policies of the Prison-Industrial Complex; or, Crime, Violence, and Punishment in an Age of Neoliberalism," *Rhetoric and Public* Affairs, 11:3 (2008): 491-515; Luke Winslow, "The Undeserving Professor: Neoliberalism and the Reinvention of Higher Education," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 18:2 (2015): 201-246; Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee, "From California to Michigan: Race, Rationality, and Neoliberal Governmentality," *Communication and Critical/Cultural* Studies, 7:4 (2010): 410-422.

85. Alessandra N. Ram, "The FP Twitterati 100: A Who's Who of the Foreign Policy Twitterverse in 2012." *Foreign Policy*, June 15, 2012. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/19/introducing_the_fpwomeratti?page=0,3

Newsweek, and *Al Jazeera English*,[86] and is an editor of *The Online Citizen.* Founded in 2006,

The Online Citizen describes itself as Singapore's "longest-running independent online media

platform." It aims to "provide readers with alternative perspectives and to cover stories ignored

or under-reported by traditional media."[87] During the 2011 general election, *The Online Citizen*'s

readership reached a peak of 1 million page views a month,[88] a significant number in a nation of

5 million. As a site that depends on articles contributed by volunteers as well as its own panel of

experts from academia, the arts, and business, it offers a fairly wide spectrum of views on current

affairs in Singapore. *Singapore Armchair Critic* is the creation of an anonymous writer. I have

included this site because *The Critic* favors data, statistics, and references, making it possible to

verify many of the claims made in its posts on the White Paper. Finally, I look at the rallies

because they were the most visible protests lodged against the White Paper.[89] I also include the

rallies because in addition to speeches, they featured elements such as protestors wearing face

paint, holding signs, and performing rituals such as reciting the national pledge and singing the

national anthem, allowing the opportunity to study both the discursive and non-discursive

elements of this controversy.

     I contend that these responses to the White Paper constituted a politics of authenticity.

Specifically, I argue that opponents of the Paper sought to identify the traits of an authentic

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86. From the "About" section on http://kirstenhan.me/

87. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/theonlinecitizen-team/

88. Tan Tarn How, "The normalisation of the political cyberspace since the 2011 GE," *Today*, August 26, 2015.

89. *Bloomberg* described the February event as "Singapore's biggest political protest" since Speakers' Corner –the open park area designated for such events – was created in 2000" (Shamim Adam, "Singapore Protest Exposes Voter Worries about Immigration," *Bloomberg*, February 18, 2013).

citizen and contrasted these to inauthentic foreigners and the government who welcomed them.

In turn, these arguments and criteria for authenticity supported and contested Singapore's

dominant corporate metaphor and the neoliberalism behind it. This chapter begins with an

overview of Singapore's population policies, focusing on the impact of immigration and

meritocracy on the relationship between citizens and the government. Next, I outline the key

proposals of the 2013 White Paper on Population before analyzing public opposition to the

Paper. Here, I show how the public's assertions of indigenous superiority and critiques of the

government's integrity constructed a politics of authenticity that corroborated and refuted the

corporate metaphor. I conclude by considering the relationship between authenticity,

neoliberalism, and economic metaphors of the nation.

Singapore's Population Policy: Migrants and Meritocracy

To consider people as interchangeable, to fail to see what makes the particular quality of their
personality, is to lower them.
<div align="right">– Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca[90]</div>

Central to Singapore's population policy is the need to sustain economic growth. With a

land area of approximately 280 square miles and a population of 5.5 million in 2014,[91]

Singapore's diminutive size has meant that drivers of growth available to other countries, such as

agriculture, mining, or large industry, are closed off.[92] Instead, Singapore's economy hinges on

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90. Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. "Locus of Quality," *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (trans.) (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 90.

91. "Population and Land Area 2014," *Department of Statistics, Singapore*. http://www.singstat.gov.sg/statistics/latest-data#14, accessed 9/6/2015.

92. Singapore is so pressed for space that the government has embarked on a decades-long program of land reclamation that has expanded its land area by almost 25% and made access to sand so important it has become "the key currency in a new geopolitics of risk." (Joshua Comaroff, "Built on Sand: Singapore and the New State of

its location along a major global shipping strait and its government's investments in the

education, housing, and training of its people. As often happens on the path to development,

Singapore's population growth slowed as economic growth quickened. In response, the

government encouraged immigration through a liberal system of work visas and motivated

citizens to procreate by offering financial help with housing, fertility treatments, and cash

payouts for every child born.[93] While the latter policy has not been effective, the emphasis on

immigration has yielded marked results. The proportion of Singapore's workforce made up of

foreigners quintupled from 7.4% in 1980[94] to 34.7% in 2010[95] – the highest proportion in Asia[96]–

and citizenships granted to foreigners tripled from 6,500 in 2001[97] to 20,153 in 2008.[98]

The immigration push brought into keener focus the government's belief in meritocracy

as the primary criterion by which to determine employment. When the incumbent government of

the People's Action Party (PAP) came to power in 1959, it constructed an image of the ideal

Risk," *Harvard Design Magazine* no. 30, http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/39/built-on-sand-singapore-and-the-new-state-of-risk, accessed 1/22/2015)

93. In 2013, this policy's "Baby Bonus Cash Gift" paid $6,000 per child for the first two births and $8,000 per third and fourth births. ("A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper" January 2013, *National Population and Talent Division*, Ministry of National Development, Singapore, 22). Subsequent changes to this policy extended the cash gift beyond the fourth child to all children.

94. Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqian Lin, "Rapid Growth in Singapore's Immigrant Population Brings Policy Challenges," *Migration Information*, April 2012. http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=887

95. Yeoh and Lin, "Rapid Growth."

96. Mariko Oi. "Singapore's tough balancing act on immigration," *BBC News*, August 26, 2010. www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11100813 [Accessed December 12, 2012]

97. Wong Kan Seng (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in charge of Population Issues), interview by Channel News Asia, August 23, 2006.

98. Yeoh and Lin, "Rapid Growth."

citizen as a productive economic unit who contributes to the nation's success by advancing

through talent, effort, and constant self-improvement. The annual National Day Rally address

reinforces this view through a corporate metaphor which, by painting the nation as a company,

depicts the citizen as a worker. For 55 years, the speeches have maintained that, just like the

nation, citizens must rely on themselves rather than expect special treatment from others[99] and

that hard work and success are valued above all other aspects of a person's identity. In 2012,

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reminded attendees at a school award ceremony that "we make

sure that whatever your family background, whatever your circumstances, you may be poor, you

may be from a single-parent family, you may be having some learning disabilities, but if you

work hard, you can succeed."[100] Proven merit, not inherited wealth or political connections,

would get a person ahead.

However, Singapore advocates individual effort not to celebrate self-determination or

protect individuals from governmental intrusion, but to assure the nation's success by having the

most capable person fill each position. As Lee stated, "It does not matter what your background

is. We make sure we identify you, we give you the opportunities and also the resources and the

support so that if you succeed, *you can do well for Singapore* (emphasis mine)."[101] Hence,

although framed as a philosophy focused on the individual, Singapore's meritocracy is curiously

impersonal, especially when explained by Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew:

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99. It is not unreasonable to trace part of this emphasis to Singapore's short merger with Malaysia, whose affirmative action policies in favor of its ethnic Malay majority were opposed strenuously by Singapore's Chinese majority.

100. Toh Yong Chuan, "PM: Meritocracy goes beyond grades," *The Sunday Times*, January 6, 2013. Available at Ministry of Education site, Section "Education in the News": http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/news/2013/01/pm-meritocracy-goes-beyond-gra.php [Accessed 12/4/2013].

101. Toh Yong Chuan, "PM: Meritocracy goes beyond grades."

I do not accept that there are disadvantages to meritocracy... There's no better way to run a country than the best man for the post…you have to decide whether you accept the foreign talent to increase your megabytes and increase your computer capacity or you reject that, and have a slow working computer. That's the choice.[102]

By such logic, everyone is equal because every person is measured on the basis of effort and outcome without regard for the advantages or disadvantages of different contexts and upbringing. Such 'perfect' equality implies interchangeability and the swapping of less effective parts for better pieces chosen for their ability to perform in the moment. The message that 'your past does not matter' is an act of untethering a person from their background, with the dual effect of setting a person free *and* adrift. The logic that all people should be treated similarly nullifies racial signifiers like "Chinese" or "Indian" and national identities like "Singaporean" or "Indonesian." If all that matters is whether the tree provides shade or whether its wood makes strong lumber, then the type of tree and the depth of its roots – its past and the repository of its identity—are irrelevant. The idea that "what you can do" is more important than "who you are" renders a person's point of origin inconsequential, making Singaporean workers (and citizens) interchangeable with those from other nations. What does it matter where you are from if you contribute to the nation's megabytes?

The emphasis on meritocracy means that Singapore's citizens are accorded few privileges in obtaining employment. Neither does it help that the government rarely shies away from urging Singaporeans to pull up their socks in the face of foreign competition. Despite years of being told to 'upgrade' and 'retool' themselves, Singaporeans, it seemed, could not make the cut in the expanding Professional-Managerial-Executives-Technicians (PMET) sectors, where only 4 in 10

102. "Lee Kuan Yew: There are no disadvantages to meritocracy." South Asian Diaspora Convention: Dialogue with Lee Kuan Yew. YouTube video, 5:34. Posted by SPHRazorTV, Jul 25, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYQ6ePqgiss

people hired in 2007 were locals.[103] Amid the uproar over the White Paper, *The Straits Times,* the pro-government broadsheet, ran a lead story suggesting that Singaporeans were at fault, with the headline: "PMET: Pampered, Mediocre, Expensive, Timid? Are these fair descriptions of the new Singaporean worker?"[104] The story inside argued that the answer was "yes."

The absorption of immigrants and lack of meaningful employment assistance for citizens fueled displeasure over the government's perceived preference, if not precisely for foreigners, certainly for the best *employee* over the citizen. In the 2011 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged the anxieties of Singaporeans competing for space and jobs:

> Our infrastructure programmes could not quite catch up, there was a shortage in our housing programme, and people became very anxious over their HDB flats. Our public transport became a bit more crowded than it should be and people noticed.…they ask themselves, why has my cost of living gone up? Can I or my children afford to buy homes for ourselves? What about my healthcare costs as I grow old? In short, Singapore may be progressing, the country may be moving forward, but am I part of this progress, am I part of this story?…But we are tackling these problems, building more flats, improving our public transport, managing the inflow of foreign workers and immigrants.

Hence, unemployment among locals, increasing immigration, and the jostling for space in homes and on public transport were key features of the context in which the White Paper emerged.

Titled "A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore," the January 2013 White Paper on Population was probably not expected to ruffle as many feathers as it did. The 78-page document was released after a year-long public consultation exercise called "Our Singapore Conversation," that aimed to incorporate citizens' views on policies. From its executive summary to the two appendices and stock images of carefully assembled multi-ethnic children, the paper's plans to create a "High Quality Living Environment" did not seem to tell readers anything new.

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103. Keith Lin, "S'poreans losing out in job boom? Not so: MOM" *Straits Times*, March 1, 2008.

104. Robin Chan, "PMET," *The Straits Times*, July 13, 2013. Section D: 2-3.

Even its three pillars of "heart," "hope," and "home" reiterated the themes of the National Day

Rally Address from the previous year.

What caught readers' attention were the Paper's population forecasts. The Paper predicted

that Singapore would experience "an unprecedented age shift between [2013] and 2030" in which

"more than a quarter of the current citizen population [would] enter their silver years"[105] such that

by 2020, "the number of working-age citizens will decline."[106] Not only would the citizen

workforce shrink, but after 2025, the citizen population would decline, "if we do not take in any

new immigrants."[107] The Paper emphasized the government's commitment to addressing the

diminishing citizen population through policies that would "maintain a strong Singaporean

core."[108] Guided as ever by the corporate metaphor's focus on economic outcomes, the

government argued that if no new immigrants were brought in, the citizen population would

shrink, dragging economic growth with it. However, admitting too many immigrants would

"weaken our national identity and sense of belonging," making citizens "feel crowded out of our

own home."[109] The way to protect economic growth and national identity was to increase the

number of citizens – by birth and naturalization—and make sure there was space for everyone.

To this end, the Paper proposed increasing financial incentives for young and growing families,

granting 15,000 to 25,000 new citizenships and 30,000 new PRs (Permanent Resident) each

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105. "A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper," National Population and Talent Division, *Prime Minister's Office*, Singapore. January 2013, 9.

106. Ibid., 15.

107. Ibid., Executive Summary.

108. Ibid., 15.

109. Ibid., 64.

year,[110] and allocating $135 million toward optimizing land use to make it possible to accommodate more people. If these strategies worked, Singapore's population would reach 6.9 million in 2030, with citizens comprising 3.8 million.[111]

The reaction by Singapore's citizens to a future in which they would number barely over half the total population was swift and negative. Their responses fell into two broad camps. One agonized over the circumscribed status of citizens in this bleak future, as seen by this fatalistic banner at one rally: "Singaporeans Extinct in YR 2030."[112] The other camp directed its ire at the government, criticizing its "social media pages, the love-heart filled website and the dialogue sessions"[113] as facades of a decision-making process that had ignored most concerns raised by Singaporeans. I find that these responses, one set focusing on *Genuine Locals* and the other on *Disingenuous Leaders*, constituted a two-fold politics of authenticity that reinforced and resisted Singapore's corporate metaphor.

Genuine Locals

In the first sense of authenticity, citizens asserted nativist claims to Singapore's land, culture, and opportunities. By separating "false" from "real" citizens, protestors argued that people born in Singapore were irreplaceable and thus worthy of recognition as more than

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110. The Paper notes that "Permanent residence is an intermediate status through which foreigners take up citizenship."

111. Of the remaining 3.1 million (or so) people, about 0.6 million would be permanent residents and 2.5 million would be made up of "non-residents" (White Paper, 48). In 2012, Singapore's non-residents were: Work Permit Holders (46%), Foreign Domestic Workers (13%), Employment pass holders (12%), S Pass holders (9%), dependents of citizens/PRs/ Work pass holders (15%), and students (6%) (*Population White Paper*, 47-48).

112. May 2013 rally, Speakers' Corner.

113. Kirsten Han, "Singapore's Population Debate Grows Heated," *The Diplomat*, February 18, 2013. http://thediplomat.com/2013/02/singapores-population-debate-grows-heated/.

interchangeable economic units. Their arguments recalled Theo Van Leeuwen's notion of authenticity as a concept based in physical originality.[114] A person's ability to trace their provenance to a particular and unchanging source was proof of their authenticity as a "product" of that source (Singapore) as opposed to people brought in from overseas. Hence, the *Genuine Locals* sought to dissociate authentic from counterfeit citizens through the criteria of being able to trace one's roots to Singapore, the concept of a rightful place in which "real" citizens had an exclusive right to occupy Singapore's material and symbolic spaces, and recognition for the unique contributions of "true" citizens.

One of the most frequent contentions against the White Paper was that Singapore's survival depended on prioritizing people who originated from Singapore instead of turning newcomers into citizens. This argument hinged on the understanding that there were degrees of citizen-ness. The White Paper spawned what Kirsten Han called a "hugely problematic calculus" that sorted people into categories such as ""Singaporean," "not Singaporean," "not Singaporean but possibly acceptable," and "not Singaporean and not acceptable.""[115] For instance, professing to be "greatly perturbed by the missing definition of a "Singaporean core, "" the *Singapore Armchair Critic* combed through the White Paper to calculate the number of "true blue Singaporeans, i.e., those who are born and raised in Singapore."[116] These "die-hard Singaporean

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114. Theo Van Leeuwen, "What is authenticity?" *Discourse Studies* 3 (2001), 392.

115. Kirsten Han, "Let's make Spore a more inclusive place for all, regardless of their 'original' nationality," *Mothership.sg*, Aug 2014. http://mothership.sg/2014/08/lets-make-spore-a-more-inclusive-place-for-all-regardless-of-their-original-nationality/

116. "A Singaporean Core? What Defines a Singaporean? (II)" *Singapore Armchair Critic*, February 11, 2013. http://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/a-singaporean-core-what-defines-a-singaporean-ii/

warriors," as Gilbert Goh, who organized the rallies put it,[117] were to be distinguished from pretenders such as "foreign-born citizens," "instant citizens," and "transient citizens."[118]

Miguel de Oliver observes that the impetus to create a multi-pronged system of classification is strong among anti-immigration voices, who believe in the necessity of "identifying and constructing the 'other' who is to be excluded."[119] As the *Critic*'s focus on "those who are born and raised in Singapore" indicates, a key basis of exclusion is a person's roots. Like entelechy, which defines the essence of something in terms of how it ends or comes to fruition,[120] roots connote identity through a single defining point, in this case, a beginning. Deep roots, argues Lionel Trilling, trace a "downward movement through all the cultural superstructures to some place when all movement ends and begins."[121] It is this "place" that contains the authenticity of a thing, what Walter Benjamin describes as "the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on."[122] For protesters and bloggers, this point of origin was Singapore. When dissociating themselves from their converted brethren, local-born citizens

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117. Gilbert Goh, "Why I Organised the Labour Day Sequel Protest – For A Better Singapore," *Transitioning.org*, 18 Mar 2013. http://www.transitioning.org/2013/03/18/why-i-organised-the-labour-day-sequel-protest-for-a-better-singapore/

118. *"*A Singaporean Core?" *Singapore Armchair Critic*

119. Miguel de Oliver, "Nativism and the Obsolescence of Grand Narrative: Comprehending the Quandary of Anti-Immigration Groups in the Neoliberal Era," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 7 (August 2011), 978.

120. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 13-14. Burke cites Aristotle's entelechy, which "classifies a thing by conceiving of its kind according to the perfection (that is, finishedness) of which that kind is capable,"14.

121. Lionel, Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973),12.

122. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008), 22.

depicted themselves as embodiments of Singapore who possessed an irreproducible essence

cultivated through their birth there. People who were granted citizenship rather than born with it

did not possess the right priorities or ties to Singapore of an authentic citizen.[123] Instead, their

allegiances lay with their own nations or companies.[124]

For the White Paper's opponents, the deeper problem posed by immigrants was not only

one of divided loyalties, but the propagation of an enervated form of citizenship. Trilling points

out that "the belief that the organic is the chief criterion of what is authentic in art and life

continues…to have great force with us."[125] By this logic, an organic and self-grown citizenship is

more authentic than that bestowed by an immigration officer. Some of this logic took physical

form in the bodies of protesters at Speakers' Corner. Sitting astride the shoulders of one attendee

at the February rally was his son carrying a sign that read "100% ORIGINALLY & LOCALLY

PRODUCED!! MADE A S'POREAN NOT MAKE (*sic*) TO BE A S'POREAN!!!" This father

echoed other participants' signs proclaiming to be "Made in Singapore."[126] These categories did

more than reflect features of the corporate metaphor, such as a proclivity for classifying people,

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123. An oft-cited example is National Service (NS) a 2-year stint in the armed forces or police, compulsory for all male citizens and second-generation permanent residents (PRs). It is a sore point among those who see themselves as "true" citizens that some PRs give up permanent residence before their sons turn 18 to avoid NS. In 2012, Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies conducted a survey which found that 69% of Singapore-born citizens saw NS as an important yardstick qualifying immigrants as Singaporeans, while just 43% of foreign-born citizens thought so (Leong Chan-Hoong, "Social Markers of Integration: What Matters Most of Singaporeans?" Presentation at Conference on Integration, May 21, 2012, Slide 24.). The reluctance of non-native citizens to see NS as a crucial act of citizenship has been interpreted by some as a mark separating rooted citizens from transplanted imposters.

124. Summarizing Leslie Sklair's 1991 book, *Sociology of the Global System*, Takacs explains that "the transnational capitalist class (TCC) consists of a cosmopolitan elite whose loyalties to nation are generally superseded by their loyalties to the corporation, and who generally identify with the interests of capitalism above nation even though they may hold positions of governance within state bureaucracies" ("Alien-nation," 612).

125. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 127.

126. February 2013 rally, Speakers' Corner.

going so far as to stamp people with the same mark used to indicate the origin of manufactured goods. In a larger sense, these classifications acted as credentials aiming to prove the distinctiveness of "true" citizens and refute the view of Singaporeans as interchangeable workers.

By dissociating "real" from "false" citizens by their country of origin, protestors asserted a sense of authenticity grounded in claims to a specific place. Opponents of the White Paper made strenuous efforts to demonstrate their links to Singapore and thus their exclusive right to occupy certain spaces in the country and be seen in those spaces. Visibility is central to immigration controversies because the people who are seen in public make up the acceptable portrait of the nation, its desirable public face. Thus, Takacs comments that undocumented immigrants [in the U.S.] experience tremendous pressure to remain invisible" because "visibility risks disturbing the dominant fictions of national identity."[127] Through the act of assembling at Speakers' Corner, protestors asserted their unique right to be present and visible because only citizens are allowed to speak at or participate in activities there. [128] These rallies hence took the form of what Endres and Senda-Cook call arguments about "place-as-rhetoric" in which participants build on the "pre-existing meaning of a place to help make their point."[129] Having built on Speakers' Corner's pre-existing meaning as a location only for citizens, protesters reinforced the space as their own by reciting the national pledge, singing the national anthem,

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127. Takacs, "Alien-nation," 608.

128. Ministry of National Development, National Parks Board, *Conditions Under the Public Entertainments and Meetings (Speakers' Corner) (Exemption) Order 2008 For Public Speaking, Performances, Exhibitions and Demonstrations at Speakers' Corner, Hong Lim Park*, para. 8, 8(a). If foreigners or permanent residents wish to take part, they must obtain a police permit.

129. Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, "Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (August 2011), 259.

and raising their identity cards (Fig. 2)[130] to emphasize that they were citizens and thus uniquely

permitted to be there. In doing so, they displayed the common urge of anti-immigration groups to

"reconstitute the nation as an ethno-culturally homogeneous and therefore harmonious

collectivity by restricting access to the socio-symbolic, and increasingly the material, spaces of

the nation."[131]

Figure 2: Attendees at a May 2013 immigration rally in Speaker's Corner brandish their pink ICs after the organizer asks the audience to prove they are not foreigners. (Credits: Yahoo! Newsroom, Photo by Yusuf Muhammad)

The assertion of a right to a certain place is also an argument against being *dis*placed.

This quality of constancy in place is central to authenticity. Benjamin observes that the key

feature of something original is its immobility. Its endurance in the "here and now" and its

"unique existence in a particular place" mark a thing as an original.[132] In a similar vein, White

Paper opponents appealed to their enduring and "unique existence" in Speakers' Corner, and by

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130. One of the most emblematic symbols of Singaporean citizenship, the National Registration Identity Card, or IC, displays its holder's photograph, unique IC number, blood type, address, and the national coat of arms. The card is color-coded by the holder's status, with a pink IC indicating that the holder is a Singaporean citizen.

131. Takacs, "Alien-nation," 602.

132. Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 21.

extension, Singapore. Displacing citizens with foreigners would change their "particular place" –

Singapore– irrevocably.[133]

For some, this transformation had already occurred because the nation they saw bore little

actual relation to Singapore. "I Miss Singapore" mourned protestors at the February rally,

dismayed at the new face grafted onto the nation they had once known. Striking a concordant

note of frustration was a homemade sign, reading "I welcome foreigners but when I'm home *I*

want to feel I'm in Singapore and not in China, India, Vietnam, Philippines or anywhere else"

(emphasis added). By making citizens feel like "a minority in [their] own country," foreigners

may "end up changing our cultural norms and rewrite our future and our Singapore identity,"

panicked one contributor to *The Online Citizen*.[134] Continuing to "import foreigners by the

planeload"[135] would weaken Singapore's identity by "squeeze[ing] out"[136] locals. "We welcome

immigrants," began one rally attendee, before adding, "but not so many that it affects the social

fabric of my Sing--our Singapore."[137] One blogger pointed to a chart by local newspaper *The*

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133. In *Cities Without Citizens*, Eduardo Cadava and Aaron Levy advance the proposition that there have never been cities without citizens, namely, "that there is a relation between the identity of a city and that of its citizens"(xvi). Thus, if the composition of citizens changes, so too the city's identity.

134. "Rape of our nation – Whither Singaporeans, *"The Online* Citizen, February 3, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/rape-of-our-nation-whither-singaporeans/. First published on *Jentrified Citizen* blog at www.jentrifiedcitizen.wordpress.com

135. Ibid; Speakers at the May 2013, such as Jeanette Chong-Aruldoss, a lawyer and member of the Singapore People's Party, an opposition party, reiterated the image of hordes of foreigners "imported into our country to make up for the shortfall in our workforce."

136. Statement by Gilbert Goh, reproduced in Terry Xu, "A protest against "6.9 million by 2030" at Hong Lim Park," *The Online Citizen*, February 14, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/protest-against-6-9-million-2030-hong-lim-park/

137. "Singaporeans say 'no' to foreign influx," *Al Jazeera*, February 18, 2013. https://storify.com/public/templates/slideshow/index.html?src=//storify.com/ajstream/singapore-white-paper#11' [Author transcribed comments by protest attendees featured in the videos at this link. The quotation above is taken from this transcript.]

New Paper depicting the White Paper's forecasts (Fig. 3) and exclaimed that it showed "us

Singaporeans being encircled and squeezed into a smaller and smaller corner to the point where

we are becoming the minority!"[138]
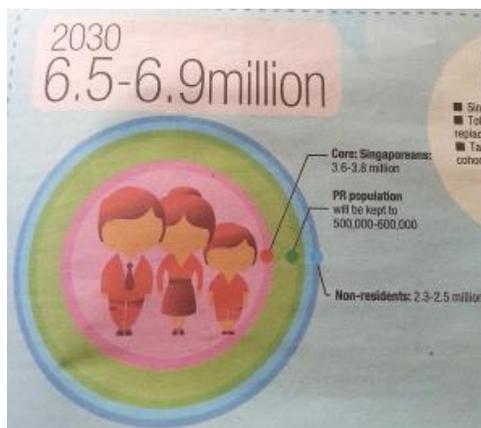
Figure 3: "Population 2030" (February 8, 2013) *The New Paper*

It is telling that protestors expressed their fears about immigration using physical and

spatial metaphors: the nation's social fabric could not *stretch* to accommodate newcomers,

adding more people would *squeeze out* locals, and Singaporeans were being *encircled* into a

smaller and smaller corner. These metaphors constituted a place-based argument[139] grounded

not in the specific location of the protests but a broader problem in which immigrants took up

finite physical space on public transport and in places of employment. In the process, they

threatened the nation's fragile cultural space by rewriting identities and altering cultural norms.[140]

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138. "Rape of our nation."

139. It's also a space-based argument: Endres and Senda-Cook discuss the relationship between place and space, 260.

140. These physical metaphors revealed a rigid vision of Singapore in much the same way anti-immigration groups in other countries portray their nation as "fixed, bounded, and static," such that "the cultural differences of immigrants pose a danger to its continuance" [Leo Chavez, *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* (University of California Press, 2001), 50-51, 17].

Given as it was to breakage in the face of change, Singapore's identity was precarious indeed. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca remind us that events and subjects characterized by their status as "the unique, the precarious, and the irremediable"[141] ground arguments based on the locus of quality. Such arguments appeal to uniqueness, rarity, and a higher order of truth as a way to ascribe value and urgency.[142] Lacking the force of numbers, these arguments rely instead on a kind of endangered exceptionalism. "Real" Singaporeans are important *and* imperiled because their unique culture is being forced to change, and to change something singular is to destroy it. Thus, arguments based on the locus of quality are also arguments about authenticity, which focuses on "the true essence of something, its distinctive quality which is unified, constant, internalized, never compromised on."[143] If compromised, that which is unique, such as Singapore's identity, loses its authenticity and cannot be restored.[144]

Although deployed against the government's population policies, the language choices of these Singaporeans betrayed a logic mirroring that of the government. By arguing that Singapore's identity depended on its consistency and that any departure from this established identity spelt ruin, protestors applied to the nation's cultural identity the same logic the government used to characterize the economy: that as a carefully managed system, any unplanned or unsought exogenous change would cause a total collapse. Just as the National Day Rally addresses depicted Singapore as a self-contained body with precise goals and limited

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141. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 92.

142. Ibid., 89.

143. Van Leeuwen, "What is Authenticity?" 393.

144. The locus of the irreparable (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 92), a type of locus of quality, is also at work here, as things of unique quality gain further value by being irrecoverable.

resources to be maximized with expert calibration, the protests at Speakers' Corner projected an image of Singapore as a fixed system of inputs and outputs. This was a system into which foreigners were *imported by the planeload* like cargo, recalling earlier characterizations in the National Day Rally addresses of Singaporeans as heaps of raw materials lining factory floors. In opposing the government's "relentless economic pursuit"[145] in which citizens were units of growth, protestors depicted immigrants in a similarly objectifying manner as factors of production brought in to supplement growth. Despite demands for the government to "stop running the nation like a corporation,"[146] protestors recreated the corporate metaphor's division of people into categories to be ranked and tabulated, even branding themselves with the same type of seal used to indicate the source of manufactured products. Therefore, although attempting to sound a radical alarm, this group of actors ultimately struck a conservative note that echoed the government's views of Singapore and its inhabitants. This alignment with precepts of the corporate metaphor became even more apparent when citizens demanded recognition for services to the state.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor argues that "our identity requires recognition by others."[147] It is not enough to declare oneself authentic – others must also see us as such. Crucially, Taylor notes that when people seek recognition, they seek the recognition of their difference from, and thus, equal standing with, others. "It is this acknowledgement of equal

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145. Speech by National Solidarity Party member Ravi Philemon, quoted in "4,000 turn up at Speakers' Corner for population White Paper protest" *Yahoo!* February 16, 2013.

146. Feb 2013 rally, Speakers' Corner.

147. Charles. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992), 45.

value," explains Taylor, "that a politics of identity-recognition requires."[148] However, although the White Paper protestors sought recognition of their difference from foreigners, they did so to assert superior value rather than make a bid for equal treatment.

These protestors turned their status as authentic citizens into a badge to command the attention of the government and justify the dispensation of special benefits. De Oliver hypothesizes that in the neoliberal world economy, where individuals find themselves constituted as undifferentiated universal workers, "simple territorial citizenship is emerging as a last bastion of discrete exceptionality upon which citizens…can readily assert claims of privilege."[149] Singaporeans opposing the White Paper were in a similar situation albeit with an important difference: their administrative status as citizens was not enough to secure the distinctions they felt they deserved because newcomers holding the same formal citizenship received similar benefits without incurring the sacrifices made by native born citizens.

Marked by a pervasive sense of comparison and a desire to get something out of all they had put into Singapore, protestors at Speakers' Corner espoused a view of citizenship as an investment that ought to guarantee certain dividends. As a participant at the May rally noted bitterly, Singapore offered citizens poor terms of trade: there were "Jobs and Uni[versity] places for FT [Foreign Talent]; NS for Singaporeans."[150] That Singaporeans had endured "24 months of National Slavery[151] for 2.4 million Foreigners"[152] with little to show for it threw more fat on a

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148. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 51.

149. Miguel de Oliver, "Nativism and the Obsolescence of Grand Narrative," 991-992.

150. Sign at the May 2013 rally, Speakers' Corner.

151. A pun on National Service.

152. May 2013 rally, Speakers' Corner.

fire already fueled by unhappiness at earning less than foreign colleagues[153] and having made

sacrifices new citizens had not. With barely suppressed indignation, a member of the crowd at

the February rally exclaimed that "my generation built this country. We paid a lot in taxes, we

got *very little* freebies, and right now it's an *insult* to us not to acknowledge it."[154]

What kind of acknowledgement did citizens seek? In the main, they wanted greater

recognition of all they had put into Singapore and the burdens attendant to citizenship.

One key request in the public consultation exercise preceding the White Paper was for the

government to create "Greater differentiation in benefits for Singaporeans, commensurate with

National Service obligations."[155] It is not unreasonable for citizens to expect certain assurances

from their government. However, the clearest assurances associated with NS are financial. In

2010, the government announced a National Service Recognition Award of $9,000 to $10,500

"to provide sustained recognition for Singapore citizens who serve National Service."[156] Recruits

also receive cash incentives for passing their required Individual Physical Proficiency Tests –

they receive more the better they do.

NS is emblematic of a citizen-government relationship defined by and based on the

exchange of money. In their calls for more benefits, protestors tied the recognition of their

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153. "Speaking for the "Singaporeans First" Hiring Policy" *Singapore Armchair Critic*, October 28, 2013. https://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/10/28/speaking-for-the-singaporeans-first-hiring-policy/#more-2594

154. "Singaporeans say 'no' to foreign influx," *Al Jazeera*, February 18, 2013. https://storify.com/public/templates/slideshow/index.html?src=//storify.com/ajstream/singapore-white-paper#11' [Author transcribed comments by protest attendees featured in the videos at this link. The quotation above is taken from this transcript.]

155.. National Talent and Population Division, *Summary of Feedback and Key Suggestions on Immigration*. 2012. http://population.sg/whitepaper/summary-of-feedback/immigration/#.Up-LG6wlh8E

156. "National Service Recognition Award for Singapore Citizens" http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/faqs/faqNSRA.html

citizen status to programs associated with financial payouts –such as having fulfilled NS— or financial costs such as having paid taxes or receiving "very little freebies."[157] These Singaporeans revealed a transactional view of citizenship modeled on the citizen-government relationship constructed by the corporate metaphor, in which financial incentives and reasoning are the key basis of engagement between people and their leaders. In linking citizenship to financial compensation, they undermined their own arguments about their irreplaceable quality by forgetting that "that which is unique cannot be priced, and its value is increased by the very fact that it cannot be estimated."[158]

Arguments about Genuine Locals crafted a politics of authenticity that dissociated real citizens from false counterparts and the government who welcomed them in the name of economic growth. This dissociation proceeded via the criteria of roots, rightful place, and recognition. True citizens were rooted in Singapore while "transplanted" citizens had roots and allegiances elsewhere. True citizens were concrete embodiments of Singapore's identity, evidenced by their unique right to occupy certain public spaces. Rooted citizens, who traced their points of origin to Singapore, deserved recognition of the sacrifices they had made for the country. A government which granted this recognition possessed genuine social authority, while a government which denied such privileges was a false one. Although framed as criticisms, these responses largely confirmed the corporate metaphor, reiterating its tenets such as a focus on financial incentives as the basis of the citizen-government relationship, and a view of people (both "genuine" Singaporean products and "imported" immigrants) as economic objects.

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157. In fact, the White Paper protests did not focus on immigration and labor policies alone. Several placards and speeches also critiqued the administration of the national savings scheme and the government's control over citizens' access to this money.

158. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 90

Disingenuous Leaders

While the theme of Genuine Locals saw Singaporeans presenting themselves as the

definitive models of citizenship, protestors of Disingenuous Leaders were more interested in

figures of leadership. By casting doubt on the government's sincerity and capability, this group

called the authenticity and hence, authority, [159] of the government into question, even arrogating

this authority to themselves.[160] The theme of Disingenuous Leaders emerged in two ways. First,

bloggers and protestors argued that the government's policies lacked validity because the White

Paper was based on poor research, an irresponsible use of data, and an insufficient understanding

of economic policy. These critiques revealed the falsehood of the government's carefully

cultivated image as the nation's foremost technical experts, a central precept of the corporate

metaphor. Second, opponents argued that they had been misled by a government that had

promised to consider citizens' concerns when formulating the White Paper but created policies

that seemed to disregard these concerns. Together, the emergent picture of Singapore's leaders as

false experts who reneged on their promises revealed a "discrepancy between avowal and

actuality" that is the hallmark of inauthenticity.[161]

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159. The words authenticity and author-ity are linked, "the authenticity of a document being regarded as guaranteed by its author." From: "authentic, adj. and n." – OED Online December 2015 Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy2. Library.illinois.edu/view/Entry/13314?rskey=dvEcK8&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed January 13, 2016).

160. When Van Leeuwen says that "authenticity could be considered to be a special kind of modality," he reminds readers that authenticity is more than an intrinsic quality of truth or realness. It is also a kind of social force --- for Van Leeuwen, it is the force of validity, the "moral or artistic authority" exerted by something or someone claiming to be authentic (396). Hence, when the government of a Southeast Asian nation asserts its credibility and sincerity as policy maker and representative of the people, it seeks to project a kind of authority based in authenticity. It is this relationship between authenticity and authority that underlies the theme of *Disingenuous Leaders*.

161. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 107.

Although the government had long asserted it expertise in the design of public policies,[162] the theme of Disingenuous Leaders saw bloggers and academics claiming such expertise for themselves by revealing gaps in the government's policy approach. A key shortcoming of this approach was its fixation on GDP growth as a national priority, a focus which these critics said redirected policy efforts from the real problems facing Singapore. In an editorial released the month after the White Paper's release, *The Online Citizen* argued that the government "could have just focused on the biggest problem that Singapore is currently facing —that of excessive immigration and our over-reliance on the foreign workforce—and proposed ways to tackle that situation."[163] Instead the government remained fixated on achieving a particular GDP growth target and reverse-engineering levers of productivity and population growth needed to meet this target. "Who does this type of immigration-fueled GDP growth benefit?" inquired the editorial: "ordinary Singaporeans, or...the richer and higher-income Singaporeans and foreigners?" As an opening salvo, the critique of the focus on GDP growth went to the heart of the corporate metaphor, which located the nation's defining characteristic in its economic achievements.

The focus on economic growth was not only wrong because it yielded disproportionate benefits. It also revealed a fundamental misunderstanding about the relationship between economic growth and demographic shifts. Here, opponents of the White Paper pointed out that

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162. Like its predecessors, the 2015 NDR address reinforced the impression of the government as a model of integrity, and capability. From its three-point description of Singapore's defining traits to its triad of reasons for the nation's success, its three neatly ordered subsections, and its inclusion of policy details, this speech exuded competence and accountability. Its final moments checked off promises the government had made and kept. "We said we would build more beautiful homes that Singaporeans could afford," said the Prime Minister, "and we did…We said we would strengthen our safety nets, and we did…We said that we would transform our city, and we did."

163. "Population White Paper: Still not listening to us," *The Online Citizen*, February 4, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/population-white-paper-still-not-listening-to-us

the government's efforts to boost economic growth by increasing the size of the workforce were unsustainable because the population could not grow indefinitely. A group of academics and policy makers at the Institute for Policy Studies published a piece on "Economic Myths in the Great Population Debate" in which they argued that despite evidence discrediting such ideas, the government continued to rely on outmoded notions about economic growth.[164] Citing the work of demographer Joseph Chamie, Kirsten Han explained that population growth for economic gain was a kind of "Ponzi demography"[165] bound to fail in the long term, and thus very much at odds with the persona of the far-sighted national planners-in-chief cultivated by the corporate metaphor.

Indeed, the government's critics portrayed themselves as being more adept at economic analysis than the government. By using the government's own standard of technical expertise against it, these activists drew on the argumentative norms established by the corporate metaphor to diminish the authority of its principal actor. In particular, they questioned the version of reality presented in the government's research. Numbers and scientific evidence, argues Deirdre McCloskey in *The Rhetoric of Economics*, enable economists to "pretend that Nature speaks directly, thereby effacing the evidence that they, the scientists are responsible for the assertions."[166] Hence, scientific data become a kind of "represented reality" in which larger

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164. Donald Low, Yeoh Kam Leong, Tan Kim Song, Manu Bhaskaran, "Economic Myths in The Great Population Debate" *IPS Commons*, February 8, 2013. Institute of Policy Studies, http://www.ipscommons.sg/economics-myths-in-the-great-population-debate/

165. Kirsten Han, "Singapore is trying to fix a population problem it doesn't have," *Quartz*, February 5, 2013. http://qz.com/50658/singapores-government-wants-the-population-to-increase-by-almost-1-5-million-people-to-sustain-economic-growth/

166. Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 10.

forces – such as the economy— are seen to act independently of scientists, who are assumed to merely depict reality rather than having had any hand in shaping it.

It was this conceit of reliability and competence that came under scrutiny. In contrast to the appearance of rigor and expertise projected by the copious examples, detailed explanations, and policy details of National Day Rallies, the White Paper seemed "amateurish."[167] Donald Low, an associate dean at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, commented in a piece for the *Today* newspaper that there

> …wasn't even a References section to show what research the writers of the paper had done, what social science theories they relied on, what competing theories/frameworks they looked at…There was also a surprising lack of rigorous comparison with other countries that have gone through, or are going through, a similar demographic transition.[168]

While these weaknesses suggested that the government's research was inadequate, others went further to argue that the data were also presented in an intentionally misleading manner.

Here, bloggers detected a trend of dishonesty in the government's claims about the need for certain immigration policies by pointing out the statistical, logical, and semantic maneuvers at work in the White Paper. When debating the Paper in Parliament, the Deputy Prime Minister noted that the proposal to maintain new Permanent Residencies at 30,000 per year was a significant drop from the 79,000 new PRs granted in 2008. Echoing the public desire for greater clarity in immigration statistics, the *Singapore Armchair Critic* commented that the 2008 number was a "staggering" peak and that "choosing the highest point and saying that the influx has been

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167. Gordon Lee, "Population growth: Losing the debate with an unsubstantiated case," *The Online Citizen*, February 8, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/population-growth-losing-debate-unsubstantiated-case

168. http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/experts-weigh-population-projections, cited in Gordon Lee "Population growth: Losing the debate."

reduced from there is trying to pull wool over our eyes."[169] The *Critic* was "perplexed" by the government's use of terms like "manage" and "calibrate" to describe steps taken to address the number of foreigners entering Singapore. Somehow, pointed out the *Critic*, despite assurances that foreign worker entries had been "calibrated," 100,000 foreign workers entered Singapore in 2012. What then did "calibrate" mean? It seemed that the government had used statistics selectively and employed ambiguous language to obscure the true situation.

If the government would not adhere to standards of rationality and accuracy, its critics would. *The Online Citizen* and *Singapore Armchair Critic* undertook to teach readers the technical criteria the government had failed to meet, and then presented themselves as able to reach those yardsticks. *The Online Citizen* published two series of essays explaining economic concepts to help readers evaluate Singapore's policies. One series explained what Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was in order to illustrate why higher GDP growth was not a sensible rationale for increasing the population.[170] The *Singapore Armchair Critic* took a more didactic approach by teaching readers how to tell good data from bad.[171] Crucial to these pedagogical acts were demonstrations of the bloggers' own authority and with it, their superior understanding of the issues at hand. Posts on the *Singapore Armchair Critic* site provided graphs, charts,

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169. "White Paper or White Elephant?" *Singapore Armchair Critic* (blog) January 31, 2013, http://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/01/31/white-paper-or-white-elephant/

170. Ng E-Jay, "The population crisis: A closer look at GDP growth and our carrying capacity," *The Online Citizen*, February 1, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/the-population-crisis-a-closer-look-at-gdp-growth-and-our-carrying-capacity/.

171. "Good Surveys, Bad Surveys: How to Tell the Difference," *Singapore Armchair Critic*, October 13, 2013. https://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/10/13/good-surveys-bad-surveys-how-to-tell-the-difference/#more-2584.

footnotes, and reference lists, and cited academics such as Benedict Anderson, Donald Low, and fellow Lee Kuan Yew School professor Kenneth Paul Tan.[172] In doing so, bloggers mirrored the National Day Rally's scrupulous attention to detail and reliance on the testimony of experts in a way that asserted their reliability and honesty over that of the government. Specifically, they claimed that the government's data did not represent reality, based as they were on less-than-credible research and insufficient understandings of economic concepts. Hence, critics drew on the argumentative norms of technical rationality established by the corporate metaphor to illustrate the weaknesses in government policies.

The inconsistency between the government's data and Singapore's actual problems was not merely a case of technical inadequacy, although it was troubling that a government which portrayed itself as uniquely skilled at running the nation lacked the skills it claimed to possess. What compounded the government's claims to authority and sincerity was the discrepancy between what the government had promised and what it eventually did when formulating the Paper. Despite the Prime Minister's promise to "listen carefully to different voices,"[173] "Singaporeans were hardly/never consulted"[174] on the White Paper's policies. Kirsten Han gave voice to the broad desire among Singaporeans to have their views taken seriously as part of a

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172. See "A Singaporean Core? What Defines a Singaporean (II)," *Singapore Armchair Critic*, February 11, 2013. http://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/a-singaporean-core-what-defines-a-singaporean-ii/; "How Meritocracy Entrenches Inequality" (September 9, 2013) https://singaporearmchaircritic.wordpress.com/2013/09/09/how-meritocracy-entrenches-inequality/#more-2539.

173. "Population White Paper: Still not listening to us."

174. Philip Ang, "Open letter to Minister Lim Swee Say," *The Online Citizen*, February 3, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/open-letter-to-minister-lim-swee-say/

"real national conversation."[175] The government's promises had not matched their actions, and anger at this betrayal was given full vent at Speakers' Corner, where people demanded to be "heard, not herded,"[176] and in *The Online Citizen*, which was filled with articles expressing unhappiness at being ignored.

The problem was two-fold: first, the government had not consulted people in a meaningful manner – this showed a lack of sincerity. Second, because they had not consulted citizens and incorporated their views, their policies bore little resemblance to people's lives, representing a "purely academic understanding of reality."[177] "Ministers do not experience the daily issues faced by 83 per cent of heartlanders," argued a writer to *The Online Citizen*, and ought to "subject themselves to the same set of policies which have created a lot of stress and hardship for tens of thousands of Singaporeans."[178] As a policymaker, the government was thus too academic *and* not academic enough. On both grounds, the government had played people falsely. By reneging on promises to consult the people, the government was unable to create policies that truly addressed voters' priorities. By relying on substandard research and misleading language, the government gave the lie to its personae of technical expert and honest leader.

These strands of incompetence and duplicity combined to create a politics of authenticity – or in this case, *in*authenticity. The government did not mean what it said, neither did it possess the expertise it claimed. This was a government that "continue[d] to consider it legitimate to

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175. Kirsten Han "Dismayed by White Paper, uncertain about future," *InSing*, February 9, 2013.

176. February 2013 protest, Speakers' Corner.

177. Philip Ang, "Open letter to Minister Lim Swee Say."

178. Philip Ang, "Open letter to Wong Kan Seng," *The Online Citizen*, February 10, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/open-letter-wong-kan-seng/

peddle assertions without attempting justification, to claim economic literacy without academic backing, and to dictate measures without genuine consultation."[179] By questioning the emphasis on economic attainment as the nation's defining feature and top national priority, opponents refuted a core assumption of the corporate metaphor. They mounted the greatest challenge when using the norms of engagement offered by the corporate metaphor: showing how the government had fallen short of its own standards of technical expertise.

Conclusion

"Robin Hood Singapore Inc. Version 2.0: Rob from the poor, Help the Rich get RICHER." These bitter words from a May 2013 rally sign encapsulate the crux of the public opposition to Singapore's White Paper on Population: the belief that the government had shortchanged its people in several ways, and that this had something to do with Singapore Inc., the metaphor of nation-as-company prevalent in the government's discourse. Over time, this metaphor has constituted the nation as a body which locates its identity and pride in economic success, its citizens as worker units motivated by financial incentives, and the government as the arbiter of a neoliberal technical reason that sets objectivity, rationality, and technical expertise as the standard of public discourse. Singapore citizens have found that their identity as economic units prized for their productivity rather than national allegiance has rendered them interchangeable with the immigrants entering Singapore to find work. I contend that that their responses to the immigration policy outlined in the White Paper generated a debate over authenticity that supported and challenged the corporate metaphor.

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179. Gordon Lee, "Population growth: Losing the debate with an unsubstantiated case," *The Online Citizen,* February 8, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/02/population-growth-losing-debate-unsubstantiated-case

One side of this debate focused on Genuine Locals who argued that, unlike immigrants, they were rooted to the country, had the right to occupy spaces others did not, and deserved special recognition for their sacrifices to the nation. In differentiating themselves from newcomers, these citizens resorted to arguments that framed immigrants and themselves as objects, an image that echoed the corporate metaphor's classification of people into categories and factors of production. In particular, their attestations of authenticity depicted citizens as products of a particular place able to be stamped and verified through proof such as the possession of identity cards and the presentation of their native-born children as evidence of "locally manufactured" Singaporeans. Their desire to be acknowledged as more than economic units resisted the corporate metaphor's focus on economic achievement as the basis of national identity. However, by tending to define the recognition they sought in financial terms, they reinforced the metaphor's view of citizens as motivated by financial incentives.

In the other corner were critics of Disingenuous Leaders, who found that the government had fallen short of the yardsticks of skill and sincerity. This group revealed inconsistencies in the government's stated competence at policy design and commitment to incorporating the public's views. Like Genuine Locals who offered themselves as proof of their own arguments, opponents of Disingenuous Leaders performed the behavior they sought from the government by modeling the credible research practices and grasp of policy issues the government lacked. In the hands of these protestors, the corporate metaphor was a source of both criticism and invention: while they took issue with the metaphor's assumption of the primacy of economic growth, they drew on its entailment of technical expertise to refute government policy.

The camps lobbed hits at each other. Gilbert Goh, quintessential symbol of the Genuine Locals and organizer of the March and May rallies, spoke disparagingly of Singaporeans who

"rant behind the moniker of their Facebook page or socio-political websites."[180] For its part, *The Online Citizen* released a civil society statement on racism and xenophobia urging readers to realize that the economic hardships felt by Singaporeans were caused by policies which "were not instituted by migrants and will not automatically disappear if the migrant population decreases."[181] The statement's signees were disturbed by how "some elevate pink identity cards or National Service to sacred emblems of belonging and entitlement," hampering constructive discussions.[182] Instead, argued *The Online Citizen*, "each of us must be responsible for the impact of our own contributions to Singapore's social climate and political conversation."[183] Hence, where Genuine Locals saw citizenship as the taking of accounts -- a status and an exchange of services--, critics of Disingenuous Leaders viewed citizenship as an exercise in accountability-- seeking responsible government and modelling corresponding behavior.

What united these groups was their search for authenticity in the government. Even Genuine Locals, who made so much effort to distinguish themselves from foreigners, did so to send a message to a government that had brought people into the country without regard for the Singaporean "core." By embracing immigrants, failing to reward true Singaporeans, and presenting a misleading impression of its abilities and intentions, the government had failed the test of authenticity.

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180. Goh, "Why I Organised the Labour Day Sequel Protest."

181. "Civil society statement on racism and zenophobia," *The Online Citizen*, May 28, 2014. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2014/05/civil-society-statement-on-racism-and-xenophobia/

182. It is worth noting that several attendees did express discomfort at the rallies' anti-foreigner tone. Some included Singapore Democratic Party member Vincent Vijeysingha, who beseeched attendees to stop "direct[ing] our anger at our foreign brothers and sisters" and avoid "reduc[ing] our rightful anger to xenophobia" (Feb 2013).

183. "Civil society statement."

Why the recourse to authenticity? One possibility suggested by this chapter is that authenticity contests the neoliberalism behind Singapore's corporate metaphor. Neoliberalism's emphasis on free market logic and business management principles shapes a view of human beings as motivated by economic imperatives and evaluated by their quantifiable output. Consequently, neoliberalism effects an abstraction from what makes a person unique, such as their national origin, in favor of what they can produce or achieve, making the people of one nation interchangeable with those of another. Authenticity, which "mobilizes the distinctiveness of an original source,"[184] counters this image of the interchangeable worker with the irreplaceable individual by asserting the value of difference, uniqueness, and singular quality. Thus, a search for authenticity is an effort to make concrete, unique, and real that which has been rendered abstract, interchangeable, and distant from lived experience.

Saskia Sassen observes that citizenship is "partly produced by the practices of the excluded."[185] This chapter has examined the arguments and forms of citizenship that emerge when people feel edged out of the physical and symbolic spaces of the nation as well as the process of policy deliberation. In effect, the emphasis on citizens as economic units has diminished the political and cultural aspects of citizenship by excluding citizens from meaningful involvement in policy formulation and due recognition as embodiments of the nation's cultural essence. Like Chapter 3, Chapter 4 examines a controversy that reveals the political exclusions effected by an economic construction of the nation. This time, the controversy surrounds the government's decision in 2013 to require news sites to apply for a license that would bring them

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184. Zukin, "Consuming Authenticity," 738.

185. "Towards Post-National and Denationalized Citizenship," in Engin F. Isin & Bryan S. Turner (eds) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 277-292

under the government's scrutiny. This chapter explores how the government explained and defended this policy using an argumentative technique – borrowed from the business world— that created an information asymmetry between itself and citizens, making it difficult for citizens to participate meaningfully in the ensuing debate over the new license. At its core, this chapter asks what happens when the citizen is defined not as a public actor with a legitimate role in debates about public policy, but a private one – a worker, a customer, an entrepreneur- whose priority is to add to the national accounts rather than seek accountability from the government.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?
STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY IN PUBLIC POLICY

…a free market in business does not automatically equate to a free market in politics or in ideas and information.

– Garry Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia* [1]

[Singapore]'s exercise of illiberal controls to maintain ownership of the public sphere adds up to a heavy tax on thinking socially and acting politically. The public has been privatized.

- Cherian George, *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation* [2]

In May 2013, Singapore's Media Development Authority (MDA) announced a licensing regime for news sites. Under this framework, news sites which "report an average of at least one article per week on Singapore's news and current affairs" and "are visited by at least 50,000 unique IP addresses from Singapore each month" would have to obtain a license. The license required sites to pay $50,000 to maintain their online presence and to "comply within 24 hours to MDA's directions to remove content that is found to be in breach of content standards."[3]

The unveiling of this limit on public expression catalyzed Singapore's online community to organize a "Free My Internet" movement (Figure 4) that involved a protest at Speakers' Corner, a petition calling for "the immediate withdrawal of the Licensing Regime,"[4] and a concerted Internet blackout to demonstrate the effect of the new regulation. Reactions streamed

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1. Garry Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 178.

2. Cherian George, *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control*. (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000), 207-208.

3. Media Development Authority, "Fact Sheet – Online news sites to be placed on a more consistent licensing framework as traditional news platforms." *Media Development Authority*, *Press Releases 2013*. http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2013/Pages/28052013.aspx

4. "Petition for the immediate withdrawal of the Licensing Regime," http://www.petitions24.com/petition_for_the_immediate_withdrawal_of_the_licensing_regime

in from bloggers who saw in the ruling a step toward further censorship of an already stifled public sphere. "Expressed, Depressed, Repressed," proclaimed an article by *The Breakfast Network*, which wanted to know "why we need more, rather than fewer, rules to govern what we say."[5] *Publichouse.sg* declared that the new rules illustrated how the "Gov't continues to be out of touch"[6] with the people's need for expression while *Simisai Also License* turned to satire, suggesting other transgressions which ought to merit licenses. Among these was a photograph of the Prime Minister with his wife, who was clad in a traditional batik-print shirt and golden-colored pants. Mimicking the new rule about sites with more than 50,000 visitors, *Simisai* declared that "Ministers' wives who wear Batik with Gold Pants more than 500 times are required to apply for My Eyes They Burn Licence."[7]

Greater than its sartorial offenses were the government's unsatisfactory responses when pressed about the ruling's purpose and implementation criteria. Not only had MDA announced the license unexpectedly, it outlined a censorship approach that was both too narrow and too wide, combining onerous restrictions with an overly broad definition of liable sites. To those at the forefront of the opposition to the new regulation, it seemed the more people sought clarifications, the more the government retreated to the vague definitions and unclear parameters that had sparked inquiry in the first place.

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5. Bertha Henson, "Expressed, Depressed, Repressed," *Breakfast Network: An Eye on the News*, May 29, 2013. http://www.breakfastnetwork.sg/?p=4858%22%20\t%20%22_blank

6. "Gov't continues to be out of touch" *Publichouse.sg*, May 29, 2013.

7. *Simisai Also Licence*, May 30, 2013. http://simisaialsolicence.tumblr.com/

Figure 4: An image posted on June 7, 2013 by the blog *publichouse.sg* on the "Free My Internet" Facebook page.

Like the immigration debate of Chapter 3, MDA's ruling generated a controversy that affords an opportunity to examine the norms of rhetorical engagement between a neoliberal government and its citizens. However, where Chapter 3 focused on a topic pertaining directly to the workforce and thus, the economy, Chapter 4 asks how neoliberal rationalities influence *non-economic* facets of life. In particular, I seek to understand how Singapore's neoliberal government engages its people in deliberation over public policy on speech and censorship. In doing so, I intervene in conversations about the spread of neoliberal reason beyond the world of business and economics. Thus far, such work has concentrated on the marketization of arenas such as education, law, and government administration to align with the neoliberal approach to individuals as customers and institutions as providers of business services. Others have looked at how a focus on economic priorities and the interests of corporations has magnified the agency of corporations as political actors while diminishing that of ordinary citizens. I extend this work to study how neoliberalism affects modes of deliberation between citizens and their government, or, how neoliberal reason colonizes public reason. By emphasizing the pursuit of economic success and the support of institutions (like corporations and governments) that enable such success,

neoliberalism's construction of citizens as consumers, entrepreneurs, and workers diminishes

political facets of citizenship. Key among these features of citizenship is the ability of citizens

and their government to reason together on matters of public policy and the common good.

From Rawls to Rousseau, Madison to Mill, and Habermas to Sen (they can't *all* alliterate

after all), scholars have offered differing views on the role of deliberation and public reason in a

democracy. What they generally agree on is that decisions should improve upon deliberation and

that improvement is most likely when people interact as equals. Thus, communities create better

solutions through what Madison called a "general intercourse of sentiments"[8] between parties

willing to engage each other by presenting arguments that are both clear and acceptable to

others.[9] To that effect, John Rawls argues that the process of coming to superior decisions

through discussion involves a willingness to acknowledge all participants as equals and thus

worthy of frank and open disclosure of each side's reasons for adopting a certain viewpoint. This

transparency[10] forms a common ground on which parties can engage each other from comparable

positions of strength. Crucially, such common ground enables rhetorical action because

participants can select the argument most likely to appeal to them as well as their opponents. As

Charles Larmore explains in his writing on Rawls, "we honor public reason when we bring our

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8. James Madison," Public Opinion" (19 December, 1791) *The Founders' Constitution* Volume 1, Chapter 2 "Popular Basis of Political Authority," Document 26, http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch2s26.html[Accessed 03/09/16], 74.

9. Neither is this view of democracy as a process of public reasoning a solely Western concept. Amartya Sen, for example, cites historical examples from India and Africa to show that "there is an extensive history of the cultivation of tolerance, pluralism, and public deliberation in other societies" besides the ancient Greeks [Amartya Sen, "Democracy and Its Global Roots" *The New Republic* no. 14 (October 6, 2003), 30].

10. Drawing on Rawl's work, Charles Larmore refers to such openness among participants as a "transparency in which people can acknowledge before one another the basis of their common life." [Charles Larmore, "Public Reason," *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). Published online as *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 376].

own reason into accord with the reason of others, espousing a common point of view for settling

the terms of our political life."[11] Hence, Robert Rowland posits that Barack Obama's 2009

healthcare address to the U.S. Congress was an attempt to "reinvigorate public reason"[12] because

the President sought to reach a better overall policy outcome by equipping audiences with the

information they would need to enable rational discussion. By describing in detail the state of

healthcare in the U.S. and explaining the features of the Affordable Care Act, Obama

"embrace[d] a process of authentic deliberation based on "the best ideas" of all sides" by treating

the public "as citizens capable of rational deliberation."[13] In doing so, he "built a case for the

ability of the community to use public reason to design policies that would improve life."[14]

In this chapter, I argue that neoliberalism's depoliticization of citizenship has undermined

public deliberation in Singapore by privileging the government's institutional authority and

political expertise, marking the public sphere as its exclusive domain. This dynamic has created

uneven terms of public discussion in which the government uses ambiguous and selectively

transparent reasoning that hinders citizens' ability to participate as equals. In this way, Singapore

departs from the norms of reciprocity, openness, and shared responsibility for shaping public

policy that underpin the role of public reason in a democracy.

I undertake this study by analyzing three sets of materials. The first is MDA's policy

announcement, which formed the core of the ensuing controversy over the regulation of speech

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11. Larmore, "Public Reason," 368.

12. Robert C. Rowland, "Barack Obama and the Revitalization of Public Reason," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 4 (2011), 708.

13. Rowland, "Barack Obama," 712 and 713.

14. Ibid., 708.

on the Internet. The second is a transcript I produced of an episode of a local current affairs

television program called *Talking Point* which aired on 4 June 2013. The 49-minute episode

focused on reactions to MDA's announcement and the government's responses to criticisms of

this policy. The program consisted of a roundtable discussion among Arun Mahiznan, a senior

researcher from Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies, Bertha Henson, the editor of a (now

defunct) well-known blog, *The Breakfast Network*, and Tan Chuan-Jin, the Acting Minister of

Manpower.[15] The program also conducted a live poll asking audiences to vote on whether the

new license would restrict online content, and fielded questions from callers. Finally, I

incorporate some of the backlash from the online community by drawing on articles from

websites such as *The Online Citizen* and *The Breakfast Network*, as well as the petition and

media blackout organized by the FreeMyInternet movement.

This chapter begins with an overview of speech and censorship in Singapore, showing

how political expression is characterized by an emphasis on selective transparency and

"constructive" comments that contribute to economic success and a stable polity. Next, I provide

context on MDA's role in media regulation before moving to analyze the controversy. Here, I

argue that MDA's announcement and the government's responses to critiques of the new ruling

relied on a language of ambiguity. This ambiguity enacted a selective transparency in which the

government kept its reasoning opaque while requiring full disclosure from others. I contend that

this ambiguity enabled the government to position itself as experts in the public sphere and

citizens as private actors. The conclusion considers the relationship between neoliberalism,

ambiguity, and the consequent ability of citizens to participate in public deliberation.

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15. The fact that the Minister in charge of this issue – Yaacob Ibrahim, the Minister of Communications and Information— was not present, is an important part of this controversy and is taken up in the analysis.

The (Sometimes) Invisible Hand: Singapore's Regulations on Political Commentary

The rules of citizens' involvement in Singapore's political sphere are shaped in two ways by the priorities of its economy. First, reflecting what Wendy Brown calls neoliberalism's "leakage" of rationalities from the economic realm to others,[16] Singapore applies to political expression the same selective transparency it practices in economic matters. One of the key reasons cited for the domino-style collapse of economies in the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis was a lack of transparency by Southeast Asian governments and financial institutions. Keen to differentiate themselves from the accusations of crony capitalism and shady dealings levied at neighbors like Indonesia and Malaysia, the Singapore government undertook reforms aimed at "improving the range of quality of information available to investors."[17] However, Garry Rodan is careful to point out that this campaign actually involved "a limited and selective notion of transparency." The PAP's "transparency offensive" was selective because the push for greater information disclosure focused on private commercial firms while excluding government linked companies, "ensur[ing] authorities retain[ed] a significant degree of discretionary control over information"; it was limited because it was restricted to the economic sphere, with the government "careful to distance its reforms from ideas about media freedom, political accountability and citizens' right to information."[18]

In the political sphere, the government's selective approach to transparency requires full disclosure by all except the government, which reserves the right to operate by unclear and often

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16. Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (Dec 2006), 693.

17. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, 49

18. Ibid.

opaque criteria. Any person who wishes to comment on policy, critique the government, or engage others in collective action such as a public protest or – as in the controversy at the center of this chapter—a news site reporting on Singapore, must declare themselves. People who want to submit feedback on public policy via the government's online feedback portal must grant the portal access to their Facebook public profile and email address before posting a comment.[19] The Societies Act of 1968 "limits engagement in politics to groups that are formally registered with the Registrar of Societies for that specific purpose."[20] Hence, "interest group politics, as well as less organised individual and collective political expressions outside party politics, are thus rendered highly problematic and vulnerable to prosecution."[21] Newspapers and other printed media must obtain annual permits from the government, and any group that the government chooses to gazette as a political association cannot accept donations from "impermissible or foreign sources" and must report any large donations received, regardless of source.[22] When *The Breakfast Network* was gazetted in 2013, the site's owner was required to declare not only her sources of funding, but the names of contributing writers and editors. Public assembly is illegal without a permit from the Commissioner of Police.[23] The exception is Speakers' Corner, where citizens may gather and hold events without a permit – but they must provide the government

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19. "Guide to Join REACH Discussion Forum." https://www.reach.gov.sg/about-us/faqs/guide-to-join-reach-discussion-forum

20. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule,* 84.

21. Ibid.

22. "TOC gazetted as a political association," *AsiaOne*, January 11, 2011. http://www.news.asiaone.com/print/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110111-257728.html

23. Public Order Act (Chapter 257A) Revised Edition 2012 (31 May 2012) Part II: "Assemblies and Processions", Section 5: "Regulation of public assemblies and public processions." *The Statutes of the Republic of Singapore*.

with their name, residential address, phone number, email address, and proposed topic.[24] At the

heart of these requirements for disclosure is the government's espoused belief that anonymity and

unclear motives impede democracy. As George Yeo, the Minister for Information and the Arts

said in a 1999 interview:

> Invisible *dalang*s (puppeteers) pull strings and make things happen on the *wayang*
> (theater) stage. If this is the way politics is conducted in Singapore, we will never
> achieve democracy because the real protagonists do not show their hands or identify
> themselves … What we have done over many years now is to make it clear that if you
> wish to involve yourself in political activism, declare it, come forward and appear on the
> stage, for everyone to see, such as in a political party.[25]

The government's use of a stage metaphor depicts politics as a performance by those

skilled in the art of negotiating between that which is revealed and that which remains hidden.

Crucially, it is the government and those who have declared themselves as politicians who are

best suited to tread the public boards; anyone who does not embrace the spotlight is a shady and

invisible puppeteer. However, although protagonists on the public stage are required to "show

their hands," the government plays its own hand close to the chest when setting the rules for

public performances. While the government is clear on the broad topics deemed unacceptable for

public airing – defamation of leaders, threats to public safety, incitement of racial or religious

hostility[26]—, what is murkier is the logic that deems specific cases seditious, inflammatory, or

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24. "Registration for Speakers' Corner at Hong Lim Park" https://www.nparks.gov.sg/speakers-corner-registration-form

25. "Minister Yeo on OB markers and Internet" *Straits Times*, May 29, 1999.

26. Incendiary speech is regulated by the Sedition Act, which "outlaws seditious speech, the distribution of seditious materials and acts with 'seditious tendency" while the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act forbids entertainment carried out "in a manner that is indecent, immoral, offensive, subversive, or improper" (http://www.mha.gov.sg/basic_content.aspx?pageid=65). The Internal Security Act (ISA), a piece of colonial-era legislation resurrected in 1960, provides for the detention without trial of suspected threats to national security and empowers the government to "prohibit the printing, publication and sale…of subversive publications" (Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, 20).

defamatory. Such judgments are often made according to the 'OB marker.' A reference to the out-of-bounds marker of a golf course beyond which a ball may not stray without penalty, the OB marker is the most powerful concept governing public expression in Singapore. OB markers are unwritten– they represent "boundaries of political acceptability that do not appear in formal regulations, but loom large in the calculations of anyone engaged in sustained public communication in Singapore."[27] Consequently, explains Cheong Yip Seng, a former editor-in-chief at Singapore Press Holdings, "disputes over how broad the fairways should be are a permanent bone of contention" because, as in golf, the boundaries defining the fairways of acceptable debate are "not fixed, and shift constantly."[28] In 1999, Minister Yeo articulated the government's view that "OB markers cannot be defined all at once" because "there are new things which the human mind is capable of inventing which you have to respond to."[29] The government's decision to keep OB markers fluid means that navigating a safe terrain for public debate is often an exercise in guessing at or feeling out the unseen limits on such debate. By requiring complete openness from participants in the public sphere but blurring the parameters within which they operate, the government draws on a competitive sports metaphor to frame the limits of speech, practicing "a certain degree of meta-censorship: censorship of information about the exercise of censorship."[30]

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27. Cherian George, *Freedom from The Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), 48.

28. Stephanie Garcia, "Singapore: Would Western Values Really Have Worked?" *The New Asia Media*, August 23, 2012. http://asiamedia.lmu.edu/2012/08/23/why-western-media-values-would-have-failed-asia/

29. "Minister Yeo on OB markers and Internet."

30. George, *Freedom from the Press*, 155.

While the rules for what to avoid saying remain nebulous, the government is clearer about what one *can* say. Political expression in Singapore is meant to aid the government in running the nation, maintaining stability, and achieving economic progress. This is the second way the political sphere indexes the priorities and patterns of the economic sphere. When Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong described Singaporeans' strong political values in the 1994 National Day Rally address, he noted proudly that these values were "good for our development" because they included such principles as "the society's rejection of corrupt practices and demand for a clean government and civil service." These, he said, were the sort of values that ensured a country would "develop progressively and win the respect of other nations." Therefore, rather than allowing room for deliberation or critique, the Singapore government frames "political values" within a narrative of economic development that supports its administration of the nation.

Even when addressing the importance of "vigorous debate" and "a full airing of these views" which so concerned citizens in the 2011 General Election that the ruling party saw an unprecedented drop in their share of parliamentary seats, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted the "cogent, thoughtful presentations" made by those who had written in to their representatives. "I think that people like this give hope that Singaporeans want the country *to progress* and prove that there are people who are *prepared to come forward* and to *make our system work better* (emphasis added)." Thus, he welcomed the involvement of citizens who would "help to strengthen the constructive climate of opinion so that your government can do right for you and do right for Singapore."[31] As Rodan explains, the government's view of "active citizenship" does not involve citizens taking direct political action. Instead, "the essence of 'active citizenship' is

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31. Lee Hsien Loong, National Day Rally Address, 2011.

the idea that civic groups combine in a 'positive and co-operative way' with the private and public sectors to assist in the improvement and implementation of public policy."[32] The government also frames active citizenship as a private affair – the administration's official portal soliciting views on public policies is, tellingly, named REACH: Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry At Home.

By claiming that the aim of public commentary is to strengthen the government to "make the system work better," the government constructs citizenship as a kind of managerialism focused on facilitating the efficient functioning of the government as it seeks to help Singapore progress. Academic and former journalist Cherian George refers to this as a "suggestion scheme"[33] mode of citizenship in which the government solicits feedback and input in a one-way exchange of ideas akin to how employees interact with upper management, or consumers with service providers. Speech in this setting is a way to increase productivity and enhance performance rather than engage in the messy and fractious process of back-and-forth argument; it is a way to make processes more efficient, rather than to enable a true clash of views. Hence, political expression in Singapore takes place within a context of selective transparency and a view of public engagement as a means to strengthen the status quo and support the government's decisions. This is an environment that limits the scope and manner of collective action as well as the perceived role of the citizen in public affairs.

As in many countries, the Internet offers Singaporeans a space within which to air views that do not necessarily support the government or aid the nation's progress. Here, citizens can be anonymous, unhelpful, sarcastic, satirical, and critical, buoyed by the government's avowal to

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32. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarianism,* 84.

33. George, *The Air-Conditioned Nation,* 46.

adopt a "light touch"[34] when it comes to regulating the Internet. Hence, George notes that for

those critical of the government, "the Internet was not a hiding place but a stage on which to

perform their acts of impertinence against the *status quo*. They ventured into uncharted political

territory, probing shadowy areas in regulations and reporting the results to the public."[35] While

thus far the government has focused on regulating the traditional press and individuals deemed to

have crossed certain lines for acceptable expression, it is turning its eye to the Internet, a move

exemplified by MDA's 2013 announcement of a licensing regime for news sites.

It's Just Business: MDA's Role in Media Regulation

MDA is a statutory board – a subsidiary of the government's Ministry of

Communications and Information modeled on the lines of a private firm. It is helmed by a

Chairman and a Chief Executive Officer, and describes its key role as being to "promote and

regulate the media sector, so as to contribute towards economic growth and help foster a

cohesive and inclusive society in Singapore."[36] MDA's primary goal is "to build a competitive

and sustainable media industry," an effort in which it is guided by the "Singapore Media Fusion

Plan" to help it create "the best environment in Singapore for media businesses." Next is

"Regulation and Licensing," the focus of this chapter. Here, MDA sees its role as one in which it

> fosters a conducive *business* environment through regulatory policies that encourage
> *investment and innovation*, while providing more content choices for
> *consumers*. Through a dual approach of co-regulation and consultation, MDA lowers the
> barriers for *commercial entry and industry growth*, and ensures that Singaporeans
> continue to have access to *quality local content* (emphasis added).

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34. "Content Standards and Classification: Internet" *Media Development Authority*.
http://www.mda.gov.sg/RegulationsAndLicensing/ContentStandardsAndClassification/Pages/Internet.aspx

35. George, *Freedom from The Press*, 192.

36. http://www.mda.gov.sg/AboutMDA/Pages/OverviewRolesAndOutcomes.aspx

Finally, it works with government, businesses, and citizen-based groups to "promote a safe, secure, and civil media environment for all." Hence, MDA aims mainly to serve businesses and investors. As George observes, the government has always "framed the Internet first and foremost as an economic opportunity and only secondarily as a political risk," moving its administration and regulation from the Ministry of Finance, where it began, to Education, then Trade & Industry, until it finally settled in the Communications ministry.[37] Where the public enters the picture for MDA, they are depicted as consumers seeking access to "quality content" and partners in creating a "safe, secure, and civil media environment" for all. MDA's business orientation and its view that the defining feature of media environments should be that they are "safe, secure, and civil" are central to understanding how the government announced and defended the new ruling, as well as its reception by the online community.

The MDA Controversy: A Site of Ambiguity

…what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise.*

– Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*[38]

The controversy over MDA's ruling revolved around the target of the new license, the way the license would work, and its stated purpose. Specifically, MDA's overly broad definition of sites eligible for a license, its inconsistent implementation criteria, and the disparate reasons it offered for the ruling constituted a language of ambiguity that thwarted citizens' attempts to obtain clear answers and engage the government in meaningful deliberation.

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37. George, *Freedom from The Press*, 163.

38. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), xviii.

An Overly Broad Definition

MDA released its ruling in a neat and businesslike "Fact Sheet."[39] Comprised of four

brief numbered paragraphs, an endnote, and an annex,[40] the sheet announced that in four days'

time, "online news sites that report regularly on issues relating to Singapore" could no longer

rely on the existing class license under which websites were covered automatically. Instead, to

place news sites "on a more consistent regulatory framework" with print and broadcast news

outlets who were individually licensed, certain sites identified by MDA would have to obtain an

individual license. Qualifying sites were those visited by 50,000 or more viewers from Singapore

each month and which reported at least 1 article a week on Singapore's news and current affairs.

The license required such sites to pay a $50,000 performance bond and remove any content

deemed unacceptable by MDA within 24 hours. The announcement ended with a description of

MDA's goals of promoting globally competitive media industries and regulating media "to

safeguard the interests of consumers."

Not, then, the stuff of bestsellers. However, Robert Asen reminds us that in policy

debates, "mundane statements are often more influential than exceptional rhetorical

performances."[41] A closer look at the factsheet reveals interconnected strands of ambiguity and

selective transparency tucked away in the neat statements about regulatory frameworks and

viewership thresholds. The announcement took special care to emphasize the motives of

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39.
http://www.mda.gov.sg/AboutMDA/NewsReleasesSpeechesAndAnnouncements/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?news=4

40. The annex provided a list of 10 sites that were to be licensed under the new scheme. 9 were affiliated with the government and mainstream media while the 10th was Yahoo! Singapore.

41. Robert Asen, "Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2010), 133.

transparency fueling this policy. The new ruling provided *greater clarity* on the Internet Code of Practice and *explain[ed]* what MDA considered acceptable content (emphasis added). MDA also *made it clear* that news sites were to comply swiftly with the agency's requirements, and that the ruling was part of a regular effort to *review* policies to ensure their relevance (emphasis added). However, these claims of clarity rang hollow because key information was excluded from the body of the announcement. Although critics were vocal about what they saw as the license's arbitrary viewership thresholds, onerous performance bond, and censorious take-down requirement, they realized quickly that its retinue of restrictions hinged on what MDA chose to define as a news site. Nevertheless, despite its centrality to the ruling, this information was relegated to an endnote rendered in font almost half the size of the main text (Fig. 5). Hence, the announcement undermined its claims of openness by practicing a partial disclosure that made some pieces of information prominent while obscuring others.

Once a reader squinted their way through the endnote, two other troubling features emerged. The first was that MDA excluded content "produced by or on behalf of the Government" from the licensing scheme, exemplifying the selective accountability the government practiced when regulating what could be said or written for public consumption, and by whom. Any content attributable to the Government was exempt from oversight while others were required to submit themselves to scrutiny. Hence, the Government was a free participant in public commentary while others faced higher barriers to participation. In addition to the differential access accorded to the government, the ruling's definition of a news site came under particular fire. MDA stated that it would require licenses of sites containing

> any news, intelligence, report of occurrence, or any matter of public interest, about any social, economic, political, cultural, artistic, sporting, scientific or any other aspect of Singapore in any language (whether paid or free and whether at regular interval or

otherwise) but does not include any programme produced by or on behalf of the Government.

Figure 5: MDA Fact Sheet: "Online news sites to be placed on a more consistent licensing framework as traditional news platforms." 28 May 2013

The ambiguity at work here stems from the fact that this definition is simultaneously closed and open. It is closed because it relies on the tautology of defining a term by repeating it: A Singapore news program contains news about Singapore. This act of doubling back closes the meaning of "news" on itself and offers no illumination. At the same time, the definition is wide open: *The Online Citizen* pointed out tersely that the definition was "so broad as to be completely

ridiculous," with the clause 'any other aspect of Singapore' bringing under its purview content covering "literally everything to do with Singapore."[42]

Breadth is a key characteristic of ambiguous messages, which feature prominently in organizational communication – it should not be surprising to see it at work here given MDA's business orientation. Eric Eisenberg suggests in a seminal essay that ambiguity is essential to organizing because it aids communication and identification. When organizations present broad goals or vaguely-worded messages, they create room for multiple interpretations. A broad policy direction allows an organization flexibility and "the freedom to alter operations which have become maladaptive over time."[43] In a similar vein, vague mission statements promote identification with an organization through a "unified diversity" in which each person sees themselves as having the same overall goal, but within that is able to apply viewpoints and perspectives unique to them.[44] Hence, organizations often create intentionally ambiguous slogans and goals because these "allow divergent interpretations to coexist" and help resolve conflict by making it easier for diverse groups of people to co-operate.[45]

Polysemy and the ability to accommodate multiple interpretations is also central to rhetorical studies on ambiguity. As Timothy Sellnow and Robert Ulmer observe, ambiguous

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42. Choo Zheng Xi, "MDA's licensing regime: why YOU should care," *The Online Citizen*, May 30, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/05/mdas-licensing-regime-why-you-should-care/.

43. Eric Eisenberg, "Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984), 233.

44. Eisenberg, "Ambiguity as strategy, 231.

45. E.M. Eisenberg and M.G. Witten, "Reconsidering openness in organizational communication," *Academy of Management Review* 12, no. 3 (1987), 422.

statements compel listeners to fall back on their own resources for interpreting a message,[46] allowing authors and audiences the leeway to impart and take away a meaning of their choice. Leah Ceccarelli describes this dynamic as the strategic ambiguity induced by an author, and the resistive reading of audiences, respectively.[47] In a similar vein, Sonja Foss locates the persuasive appeal of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in its ambiguity. This ambiguity is rooted in the breadth of meanings the memorial enables as well as its departure from form, which compels viewers to "bring to it something out of our own individual experiences,"[48] since it does not prescribe a single meaning. At the same time, these diverse interpretations are united in their desire to memorialize the same historical event. Therefore, the "*resources* of ambiguity,"[49] as Burke puts it, lie in the multiplicity of meanings ambiguity makes available, which allows people to create their own interpretations while identifying with a larger purpose.

When transposed to policy making, such ambiguity serves institutions far more than it does audiences because the only interpretation that matters ultimately is that of the institutional authors whose intentions are shrouded by an overly broad policy scope. This breadth renders the creators of such messages, like MDA, both omnipresent and invisible. By being nowhere –by offering no specific characteristics defining a news site—, MDA is also everywhere because anything that passes through its line of vision could be a news site. When commenting over

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46. Timothy Sellnow and Robert Ulmer, "Ambiguous argument as advocacy in organizational crisis communication," *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 31, no. 3 (1995): 138-150.

47. Leah Ceccarelli, "Polysemy: Multiple meanings in rhetorical criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, no. 4 (1998): 395-415.

48. Sonja K. Foss, "Ambiguity as persuasion: The Vietnam Veterans memorial," *Communication Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1986), 333.

49. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, xix.

twenty years later on his landmark essay on strategic ambiguities, Eisenberg rued that in his "youthful desire to edify and explore the more mysterious and less rational aspects of human communication," such as the desire for ambiguity over clarity, he "paid little attention to other dynamics, such as how ambiguity can mask and sustain abuses of power."[50] Striking a similar note, Jacqueline Best argues that ambiguities do not only allow organizations to remain flexible in the face of change, but are also "a source of power for certain institutional actors which can reinforce existing asymmetries."[51]

MDA's ambiguous definition created an information loop within which only the authors of the ruling had sight of its meaning and how it would be implemented. When pressed for a more specific definition of a news site, the government's responses obfuscated the issue further by providing what was ultimately a selective transparency. In the main, this worked by offering a piece of clarifying information but then retreating to the definition and its murky internal logic. In response to multiple queries on this point, MDA stated[52] that personal blogs were excluded from the new requirement – unless, that is, they evolved into news sites. However, MDA was conspicuously absent when the inevitable question arose about the line between a blog and a news site. MDA's Chief Executive Officer withdrew unexpectedly from the *Talking Point* episode where representatives from government, academia, and the online community discussed

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50. Eric M. Eisenberg, *Strategic Ambiguities: Essays on Communication, Organization, and Identity*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 3.

51. Best, Jacqueline, "Bureaucratic ambiguity," *Economy and Society* 41, no.1 (2012), 87.

52. Facebook Note, Media Development Authority, Singapore (May 31, 2013) https://www.facebook.com/MDASingapore/posts/477728388976557/ It is significant that the MDA announced this point in a Facebook post, something critics were concerned about because such clarifications were missing from the official regulation and were offered piecemeal as queries arose. When asked twice on *Talking Point* about whether this Facebook post would make its way to the wording of the ruling, Minister Tan Chuan-Jin offered no specific confirmation, merely responding each time by saying "that's something we need to look at" ("Talking Point: Licensing News Sites, Will It Work? - 04Jun2013" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE-H_HCX7rA).

the ruling. Instead, Tan Chuan-Jin spoke for the government, a bewildering choice because he was the Acting Minister of Manpower, responsible for labor policy rather than speech and communication. This might explain his efforts to edify viewers on the policy's definition. Upon being asked when a blog would be considered to have become a news site, Tan responded with "Um, I think when it actually aims at reporting on a regular basis news in Singapore."[53] At the FreeMyInternet protest, Choo Zheng Xi from *The Online Citizen* drew laughter and applause when he referred to Tan's reply, saying "even the ministers don't know [how the policy will work]…The more [Tan] talked and the more he tried to explain things, the less people understood! Who makes these things up?"[54] The government appeared to offer openness – posting clarifications, speaking on television about the ruling – but essentially remained opaque by withholding comments from the relevant authorities and returning repeatedly to a circular definition that was problematic for how little it revealed. In Goodnight's words, this government "substitute[d] the semblance of deliberative discourse for actual deliberation, thereby diminishing public life."[55]

An Inconsistent Implementation Process

To compound matters, MDA did not apply its definition in a clear manner. Of the 10 sites identified as requiring a license,[56] none included Singapore's numerous independent news sites

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53. "Talking Point: Licensing News Sites, Will It Work? - 04Jun2013" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE-H_HCX7rA; 46:50-46:56.

54. "2013 06 08 #FreeMyInternet Protest @ Hong Lim Park, Choo Zheng Xi" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6gygXCmAx4

55. G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 18 (1982): 214-227. This quotation is taken from the reprint in *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 48 (2012), 199.

56. 9 of the 10 sites were run by government-affiliated companies which aligned their reporting to the government's objectives. The tenth site was Yahoo! Singapore, *leading the former general counsel for Yahoo!*

although several met MDA's criteria. The largest of these sites, *The Online Citizen*, stated in a

post that their viewership statistics, as well as rate of reporting and the content of their coverage,

met all of MDA's criteria, and asked whether the ruling would extend to them.[57] MDA's response

was that "TOC does not fall within the online licensing framework. If it did, it would be among

the sites listed in MDA's statement. Should MDA determine later that it ought to be individually

licensed, it will be notified."[58] This response, which again, offered clarification –*The Online

Citizen* would not need a license—without explanation, reinforced the selective transparency in

the government's approach to this issue. This selectivity was underscored by the fact that the

government implemented policies according to an unseen logic and set unclear definitions for

news sites while online actors, whose names were largely unknown and their faces

unrecognizable, had to declare themselves through licenses or by revealing their names.[59]

    The Online Citizen was especially dissatisfied at the open-ended nature of MDA's reply,

which "fail[ed] to explain why the requirements do not apply to TOC at present, while hinting

obliquely that they could apply to the website in the future."[60] Indeed, the ruling's arbitrary

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Southeast Asia, to warn of speculation that "this regulatory action is aimed directly at Yahoo!, with the goal of ensuring that the government has direct or indirect control or influence over all major online news outlets in Singapore." Siew Kum Hong, "Why Singapore's crackdown on online news reporting is a mistake," *mUmBRELLA* (blog) May 30, 2013. http://mumbrella.asia/2013/05/why-the-singapore-governments-crack-down-on-news-reporting-is-wrong/

    57. Choo Zheng Xi, Terry Xu, Howard Lee, Lee Song Kwang, "TOC's Further Response to MDA's Licensing Regime," *The Online Citizen*, May 29, 2013.

    58. Tessa Wong, "Licence Scheme: MDA starts with 10 sites; If more need apply for a licence, they will have one month to comply," *The Straits Times*, May 29, 2013.

    59. Prior to MDA's ruling, the government ordered *The Online Citizen* "to register as a political association and reveal the identities of its staff," claiming that " political registration was necessary to limit foreign involvement in politics, something that was crucial because *The Online Citizen* was a political participant and not an observer." http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/singapore

    60. Choo, et al "TOC's Further Response."

application left many confused and angry that MDA had "chosen to dangle the sword of regulation over our heads while being as vague as possible about when they will use it."[61] And what would happen if MDA finally decided to turn its licensing eye to these sites? They would either have to pay a performance bond so large it was beyond the reach of most bloggers, or, as Bertha Henson mused, "my fellow members on *Breakfast Network* and I would have to think about how NOT to make ourselves so popular that we would breach the 50,000 threshold."[62] The definitional parameters for news sites were elusive yet omnipresent, creating a pool of self-censoring citizens groping in the dark for the boundaries of public debate.

Singapore's online community attempted to reverse this asymmetry by showing themselves capable of the openness and clarity they sought from the government. Hence, *The Online Citizen* countered MDA's response that the site did not meet the requirements for a news site by posting a detailed infographic of their viewership statistics to prove that they had received 171,601 unique visitors in May 2013 – far above MDA's 50,000 threshold.[63] The FreeMyInternet movement's petition against the licensing regime urged readers not to "sign blind" and to "make sure you're fully aware of what the Licensing Regime is about."[64] These efforts to clarify what the license was about and to lift the veil of ambiguity surrounding it took place alongside a

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61. Choo, "MDA's licensing regime."

62. Henson, "Expressed, Depressed, Repressed." A few months later, the *Breakfast Network* was forced to shut down when its webmaster declared herself unable to fulfil MDA's numerous disclosure requirements for sites with foreign funding. When she requested an extension because the forms were complex, MDA refused, saying that the forms were perfectly clear. Although not an application of this chapter's particular ruling, it demonstrated a similar requirement of total transparency on the part of the online community, without reciprocal behavior by the government.

63. Choo, et al, "TOC's Further Response."

64. "Petition for the immediate withdrawal of the licensing scheme." http://www.petitions24.com/petition_for_the_immediate_withdrawal_of_the_licensing_regime; Accessed 01/31/16.

voluntary media blackout in which over 130 sites[65] replaced their front pages with a blank screen directing readers to the upcoming protest at Speakers' Corner. Rather than an exercise in opacity by the very people protesting such behavior, the blackout critiqued opacity by showing "what it feels like if you are not able to read or know."[66]

By relying on a broad definition applied in an inconsistent manner and defended with a mix of openness and opacity, the government's ambiguous language gave it the flexibility to interpret this policy as it saw fit, according to a logic that was clear to it alone. In contrast, such flexibility was a disadvantage to potential targets of the policy, who were subject to its requirements without being privy to its reasoning. Although MDA might have found the reasons they gave perfectly sufficient, Joshua Cohen contends that "the mere fact of having a preference, conviction, or ideal does not by itself provide a reason in support of a proposal."[67] Instead, "deliberation under conditions of pluralism requires that I find reasons that make the proposal acceptable to others who cannot be expected to regard my preferences as sufficient reasons for agreeing."[68] Hence, those protesting MDA's ruling were placed at a disadvantage because the government offered justifications that were not adapted to their critics' concerns.

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65. Singapore bloggers black out sites in protest of MDA licensing scheme, *Yahoo!* June 6, 2013. https://sg.news.yahoo.com/singapore-bloggers-black-out-sites-in-protest-of-mda-licensing-scheme-042044959.html

66. www.freemyinternet.com

67. Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in James Bohman and William Rehg (ed.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1997), 76.

68. Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," 76.

Multiple Policy Justifications

Really at the end of the day, what we want to do here is to protect the interest of the ordinary Singaporean. As long as they go onto online news sites to read the news, I think it's important for us to make sure that they read the right thing in so far as what has transpired yesterday, if there's an event, if it's reported accurately this was said by so and so and what have you basically…

- Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister of Communications and Information, Singapore[69]

It was raised just now that Minister Yaacob was saying that in the interview with the BBC, that we should be given the right news, specifically the right news. So, who is going to determine the right news? I find it somewhat objectionable in some ways that somebody has to determine for *me* what the right news is. Shouldn't I be the one to determine what the right news is? If I don't like something, if I don't like a blog, I should just avoid it! If I like something, I should just continue to look at it. Why should there be any licensing scheme to tell *me* what to do? I find that very, very uncomfortable.

- "Francis" (caller to *Talking Point* television program)[70]

The unwieldy breadth of MDA's definition of news sites and its inconsistent application

were exacerbated by the multiple reasons provided for this policy. In the days following the

announcement, three different reasons emerged. The ruling itself framed the decision as a

bureaucratic move motivated by a desire for consistency between regulations on offline versus

online news media. Media policy was, in this conception, the product of a rational calculation

that sought to maximize the efficiency and uniformity of media regulation. Already unpopular

for how it "equate[d] our freedom of speech with regulatory matters like traffic fines...and

smoking in public places,"[71] this justification engendered nothing close to the negative reactions

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69. BBC News "New regulations hit Singapore's online press." Uploaded by Sailaja Rao on May 30, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtMYHCUIv4M

70. From transcript of *Talking Point* television episode, aired on 4 June 2013. Italicized text indicates that the speaker placed emphasis on that word. Transcript of *Talking Point*, Mediacorp Singapore [TV program], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE-H_HCX7rA

71. "2013 06 08 #FreeMyInternet Protest @ Hong Lim Park, Choo Zheng Xi" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6gygXCmAx4.

to the second reason the government proffered. Yaacob Ibrahim, the Minister for Communications and Information, told the *BBC* that the ruling would allow the government to ensure that people "read the right thing," placing air quotes around the words 'the right thing' as he spoke.[72] Even on its own, this was an ambiguous phrase because the word "right" could be interpreted in a multitude of ways – as it was. To most, it sounded as though the government's goal, rather than to achieve administrative efficiency, was to impose a normative judgment on what was appropriate for Internet readers. For others who noted that the Minister's words had been taken out of context, his full statement revealed that the government sought to ensure the factual accuracy of Internet reporting – reporting that was, quite literally, "right" or "wrong."[73] Either way, this was a different set of motivations from the one in MDA's announcement and muddled an already unclear situation. Finally, in the *Talking Point* episode, the Acting Minister for Manpower justified the ruling as a way to protect Internet users from cyber-bullying, inflammatory speech, and other irresponsible uses of the Internet, reframing the ruling as an act not of efficiency, morality, or accuracy, but of public safety.

MDA's disparate justifications occluded the true purpose of the ruling, compelling audiences to come to their own conclusions. Like visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Singapore's Internet community made sense of the ambiguity before them by bringing to it "something out of [their] own individual experiences."[74] Given that policies draw on existing meanings and contexts, Robert Asen observes that "policymaking does not inaugurate

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72. Sharanjit Leyl, "New regulations hit Singapore's online press," *BBC*, May 30, 2013. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22725863.

73. Bertha Henson pointed this out in the *Talking Point* episode.

74. Foss, "Ambiguity as Persuasion," 333.

unprecedented meanings as much as it intervenes in an ongoing symbolic field."[75] Thus, the

Singapore public drew on their own knowledge of the government's existing attitudes toward

public expression to sift through the mixed messages to make sense of MDA's ruling.

Consequently, they interpreted the ruling as a move to censor a sphere hitherto spared from the

restrictions placed on traditional media.

Focusing their criticism on Ibrahim's eminently quotable soundbite about reading "the

right thing," opponents argued that the government's ambiguity on all fronts – the vague

definition, unclear implementation framework, and assortment of policy objectives— appeared

designed to keep the public in the dark. This impression was strengthened by the fact that the

government had not consulted the public beforehand. As Henson pointed out on *Talking Point*,

> Well, I think the problem is the *way* the government has proceeded to launch this
> licensing scheme. In the first place, it is seen as a constraint on Internet space because the
> Internet community hasn't been consulted on it prior to it. So it makes a little monkey out
> of the whole transparency and public engagement exercise the government is so hot
> about. If you can't even engage the most vocal parts of the community, you know, and
> you proceed to just throw this down on them, of course they will look at it as an attempt
> to clamp down on freedom of expression.[76]

That MDA had formalized this ruling without consultation and couched it in ambiguous

terminology suggested to protestors that the government did not believe it was important to keep

the public in the know because such decisions were ultimately not their province. Furthermore,

when Ibrahim declared that the government had acted "to protect the interests of the ordinary

Singaporean" to "make sure they read the 'right' things,"[77] he cast the "ordinary Singaporean" as

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75. Asen, "Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy," 130.

76. From transcript of *Talking Point* television episode, aired on 4 June 2013. Italicized text indicates that the speaker placed emphasis on that word. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE-H_HCX7rA

77. Leyl, "New regulations hit Singapore's online press."

dependent on the government's judgment. In doing so, he confirmed the government's

longstanding view of itself as better equipped to navigate the uncertainties of the Internet

because it possessed expertise and insight the public did not. Why then, should it take the time to

craft and explain legislation in a manner obvious to anyone other than the in-group of experts

who would be carrying it out?[78] The government thus limited the role of a citizen to that of a

spectator with whom one may adopt language that obstructs a clear view of issues and impedes

meaningful participation in public deliberation.

    A language of ambiguity is a key characteristic of public debate in a neoliberal

environment. By creating an asymmetry between the people and their political leaders, it

constricts the citizen's involvement in public affairs in favor of the ostensibly superior wisdom of

the authorities. In considering the process of meaning making and interpretation in organizations,

Eisenberg contends that such imbalances of power make limited participation a fact of life,

because "acknowledging expertise implies a willingness to forgo full participation in a particular

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78. At this juncture, one must consider whether I am giving the government short shrift in this portrayal. After all, MDA's definition of a news site might well have been born out of mundane routine rather than sinister motives. When asked about the definition's clunky wording, Tan Chuan-Jin said that MDA had merely replicated the wording of existing regulations for broadcast media – indeed, this could explain why the endnote defining a news site refers to it as a "news programme," a term used more commonly for television and radio content. Tan explained that, consistent with the announcement, MDA saw the ruling as an act of "refreshing existing regulations" rather than a major change, which was why MDA had not consulted the public. He even pointed out that a separate law – the Broadcasting Act– was up for significant review the next year and would therefore involve both public consultation and parliamentary debate. Hence, while one onlooker might read evasiveness and intentional obfuscation in how the government crafted and justified this ruling, another could just as easily attribute the government's piecemeal information and repetitive responses to it being unprepared for this much pushback to what it saw as little more than an administrative update. However, how much do the intentions of the institutional actor in this controversy matter? Perhaps what is more significant is that the government did not appear to perceive the lack of clarity in their own ruling – that even if they did not *mean* to be ambiguous, this is how their ruling came across, this is how they conducted public debate on the matter, and, when faced with resistance, they reiterated their original language rather than adapt it. Ultimately, MDA's institutional habits lent themselves to a language of ambiguity which the public could not penetrate. Hence, the outcome was the same: the government possessed a clear view of the policy while the people did not.

area."[79] As self-appointed experts, Singapore's government claims the role of principal actor on the public stage. George calls this dynamic the First Law of Singapore Politics: "the government abhors a political vacuum. It wants to fill every space and control every agenda."[80] If the government fills every political space, none is left for citizens. This 'privatization' of citizenship limits citizens' ability to share in determining public policy and setting the norms of public debate. Instead, engagement between citizens is relegated to topics of essentially personal interest. For example, *The Online Citizen* noted that if people wished to express themselves freely without being subject to licensing, MDA's all-encompassing definition of 'news' limited them to non-controversial and superficial topics such as "facial cream or...pet dogs."[81]

Pablo Alejandro Leal describes this reduction in the scope of the citizen as an act of modifying, sanitizing, and depoliticizing participation in the public sphere.[82] Once "purged of all the threatening elements," participation becomes, argues Leal, "an instrument that [can] play a role *within* the *status quo*, rather than one that defie[s] it."[83] By granting the government the freedom to interpret and implement policy, ambiguity limits the ability of citizens to understand this process and to critique the status quo. Instead, as Bradford Vivian notes of

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79. Eric Eisenberg, "Meaning and Interpretation in Organizations," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72 (1986): 88-97. Reproduced in *Strategic Ambiguities: Essays on Communication, Organization, and Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 29-30.

80. George, *The Air Conditioned Nation*, 127.

81. Terry Xu, "Singapore's Public Spheres – Between Keyboard Warriors and V for Vendetta in Hong Lim Park," *The Online Citizen*, June 3, 2013. http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/06/singapores-public-spheres-between-keyboard-warriors-and-v-for-vendetta-in-hong-lim-park

82. Pablo Alejandro Leal, "Participation: The Ascendancy of a Buzzword in the Neo-Liberal Era," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4/5 (Aug., 2007), 543.

83. Leal, "Participation," 543.

neoliberal epideictic, ambiguity in public deliberation sets a norm for public engagement that "praises as a public virtue the nominally apolitical decision to refrain from questioning inherited institutional wisdom."[84] Such ambiguity depends on a selective transparency that offers information while denying comprehension, and which requires full disclosure by some while granting others the right to be opaque and inscrutable.

Conclusion

…laws have to be applied equally whether you are a prince or pauper, whether you are a minister or hawker. Legislation must be clear so that people know these laws will apply equally, not just to the ordinary Singaporean but equally to those in power. And this simple principle is a principle that these regulations completely flout….

- Choo Zheng Xi, FreeMyInternet protest, Speakers' Corner[85]

…the mere fact of talking together about politics is not the central intrinsic concern; what is of central importance is that individuals have *equality* in the cognitive conditions of democratic decision making.

- Thomas Christiano, "The Significance of Public Deliberation"[86]

The controversy over MDA's 2013 licensing regime for news sites revealed an important feature of the way a neoliberal government presents and debates public policy with its people. This chapter's analysis has found that Singapore's government spoke using a language of strategic ambiguity that relied on overly broad definitions, inconsistent implementation procedures, multiple policy justifications, and the partial disclosure of information. This

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84. Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic: Rhetorical Form and Commemorative Politics on September 11, 2002," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 1 (2006), 19.

85. "2013 06 08 #FreeMyInternet Protest @ Hong Lim Park, Choo Zheng Xi" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6gygXCmAx4

86. Thomas Christiano, "The Significance of Public Deliberation, "in James Bohman and William Rehg (ed.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1997), 253.

ambiguity constituted a selective transparency in which the government required full disclosure by news sites but exempted itself from such regulation, and where it possessed insight into the policy's purpose and implementation but offered the public little in the way of helpful clarifications. Such ambiguity created an asymmetry of information which excluded the public from understanding MDA's policy. Hence, instead of being able to engage their government on an equal footing in discussions of this policy, the public was told to rely on the government's (hidden) judgment about the definition of news, the suitability of Internet content, and the best way to regulate this sphere. Consequently, Singapore departs from the model of public reason as "an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens"[87] because citizens in this controversy were addressed as dependents on the state's expertise.

By excluding citizens from meaningful participation on this public issue, the Singapore government turned citizenship inward and "excused[d] [citizens] to the preoccupations of private life."[88] Its language of ambiguity reinforced the neoliberal emphasis on the private sphere as the appropriate playing field for individuals, who were encouraged to think of themselves as consumers, entrepreneurs, and workers engaged in the pursuit of individual satisfaction, success, and self-improvement. Meanwhile, the government and institutions of authority were the skilled gladiators of the public arena, crowding out the field of action for citizens and limiting avenues of institutional critique. This chapter thus demonstrates how neoliberalism enables the

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87. John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 766.

88. Vivian, "Neoliberal epideictic," 15.

ascendancy of "an imperialist technical reason" which "claims ever more aspects of shared social

life as the special province of experts who presumably know better than ordinary folks."[89]

David Harvey notes that for all its valorization of individual endeavor free from

institutional intervention, neoliberalism depends heavily on the power of strong institutions like

governments to maintain the systemic stability and regulations which enable economic success.[90]

Hence, the role of the neoliberal citizen is to pursue success while avoiding upsets to the status

quo such as by engaging in collective advocacy to critique systems or undertaking actions which

undermine the authority of institutions.[91] Ambiguity, whether exercised by a company,

government, or government-as-company, creates an imbalance of power between citizens and

institutions by impeding meaningful deliberation between these groups.

As this chapter closes, let us consider the role that clarity plays in facilitating deliberation

in a neoliberal society such as Singapore. This case study has shown that clarity, particularly

when it comes to the rules governing certain policies, comes in two forms: visibility, and

comprehensibility— can we see the rules and can we make sense of them? Singapore's rules of

political expression rarely meet these thresholds simultaneously. The reasons and broad outlines

of OB markers are clear, but the specific ways in which they apply remain unwritten and thus

invisible. Similarly, MDA's license rules, while mostly visible (we must not forget that miniscule

yet all important endnote in the announcement), operate by an unseen logic that makes the rules

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89. Asen, "Critical Engagement,"137.

90. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21.

91. By such logic, tenured professors are fired for voicing critiques that display "disloyalty" to their institution (Eugene Volokh, "Mount St. Mary's University (Maryland) professors fired, apparently for opposing university president," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/02/10/mount-st-marys-university-maryland-professors-fired-apparently-for-opposing-university-president).

difficult to understand. In general, explicit rules and firm boundaries for discussion are seen as impediments to equal engagement because they hinder a person's capacity to interact with others in their own way. Thus, literature on ambiguity and polysemy, whether from organizational communication or rhetorical studies, has argued that keeping rules flexible and offering the scope for multiple interpretations, empowers audiences and citizens by allowing them to make their own meanings and come to their own conclusions.

However, as this chapter has shown, ambiguity harms deliberation between governments and citizens because such a setting requires clear rules and reasoning. In this vein, Mari Boor Tonn discusses how the informality and fluidity of informal conversations undermines democratic deliberation, which works according to visible and agreed upon rules.[92] Citing the work of Jo Freeman, Tonn argues that formal rules equalize power relations because, in Freeman's words, "for everyone to have the opportunity to be involved . . . and to participate . . . the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can only happen if they are formalized."[93]

When the rules of public policy creation and political expression are vague, deliberation suffers and power imbalances between citizens and institutional authorities are reinforced. As this case study has shown, by using ambiguity, neoliberalism as a discourse creates a state of

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92. Mari Boor Tonn, "Taking Conversation, Dialogue, and Therapy Public" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2005): 405-430.

93. Tonn, "Taking Conversation, Dialogue, and Therapy Public," 411. Quoting Jo Freeman [aka "Joreen"] (1970) "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Ann Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 283–99, and http://www,hartfordhwp.com/archives/45/112.html; http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm.

perpetual anxiety: how is a news site to know if it is about to be licensed? How is a blogger to know if their site will eventually be counted as a news site? How is a writer to know if the content they produce has crossed the line to become political news? This social anxiety becomes part of a larger atmosphere of uncertainty in which people work constantly because success, like the rules, is elusive and slippery. Hence, the ambiguity of success (and the ever-looming threat of failure) leads to a constant whir of activity, a hum of industry fueled by the buzz of uncertainty.

The uncertainty and ambiguity in this case study expose a tension in the process of deliberation and policy creation in neoliberal Singapore, whose government prides itself on its precision, clarity, and the kind of public engagement that instills *calm* rather than anxiety. After all, social instability is not good for business. Hence, OB markers and the MDA license aim to quell threats to public safety and harmony, and the Prime Minister and his government urge constructive comments that build solid policy, rather than those that disrupt the peace or do not offer clear solutions. After an unexpected drop in vote share in the 2011 elections, the government launched a public consultation exercise called "Our Singapore Conversation" to elicit the people's views on public policy. By framing this exercise as a conversation aimed at generating fruitful and non-confrontational viewpoints, the government entrenched a set of deliberative norms, which avoided the tough questions and "disagreement –even pain" that marks democratic deliberation.[94] Thus, the norms of public deliberation in Singapore, although presented as aiming for stability, openness, and certainty, ultimately generate a sense of constant anxiety based in ambiguity.

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94. Tonn, 406.

It here that one can discern the weakness of neoliberalism's claims to its ideological roots in classical liberalism. Fareed Zakaria argues that "the tension between constitutional liberalism and procedural democracy centers on the scope of governmental authority," with liberalism focused on the limitation of governmental power, and democracy on its accumulation.[95] Liberals look to rules, checks and balances, and clarity to ensure that no single power can dominate, to shield the individual from the government, and insulate states from centralized control. Nicholas Lemann reminds *The New Yorker*'s readers that Madison and other framers of the Constitution "created a political system that institutionalized provincial mistrust of centralized political power"[96] through a detailed blueprint delineating the boundaries of power between state and national governments, the three branches of government, and the two houses of the legislative branch. Liberalism's focus on maintaining a balance of power through clear rules and parameters is a world away from neoliberalism's use of ambiguity and anxiety to fortify power asymmetries between people and their government, websites and regulators, and those who make the rules and those who must live by them.

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95. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 1997), 30.

96. Nicholas Lemann, "Notorious BIG: Why the spectre of size has always haunted American politics," *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2016.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Neoliberalism, like all capitalist regimes, requires constant rhetorical work to secure its place in the public belief system.

- Joshua S. Hanan & Catherine Chaput [1]

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2010 that corporate donations to political candidates constituted an expression of free speech, it described corporations as "associations of citizens."[2] In doing so, the Court clothed corporations in the same language used to describe voter groups, state legislatures, cities, and nations. In the Citizens United ruling, this has meant that the political rights granted to individual citizens now extend to business entities and other "corporate persons." But what happens more broadly when the figures of nation and corporation come together? After all, if we choose to treat the speech of corporations as we do that of citizens, we concede a degree of equivalence between these groups. Hence, we must also confront the inverse of this logic: if corporations are considered groups of citizens, what happens when we constitute groups of citizens as though they were corporations? What happens when you run a country as though it were a company?

This dissertation has taken up this question by studying the implications of governing a nation along the blueprint of a business entity. At its core, this project has been concerned with the political and rhetorical impacts of neoliberalism, a phenomenon in which economic and business imperatives spread beyond their traditional realm of the free market. Wendy Brown

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1. Joshua S. Hanan, and Catherine Chaput, "Stating the Exception: Rhetoric and Neoliberal Governance During the Creation and Passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 50, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 18-33.

2. Ellen L. Weintraub, "Taking on Citizens United," *New York Times,* March 30, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/30/opinion/taking-n-citizens-united.html?emc=edit_th_20160330&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=44320630&_r=0.

characterizes this migration of economic rationality as an "economization" of "heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities,"[3] a process which "transforms the state into a manager of the nation on the model of a firm."[4] Through a series of case studies situated in the Republic of Singapore, I have examined how Singapore's incumbent political party has adopted the figure of a corporation as a governing metaphor, leading it to prioritize economic growth as the ultimate bottom line and to reason with its citizens in ways that parallel an organization's interaction with its employees.

Work on neoliberalism tends to fall into two categories. The first looks at how neoliberalism restructures social institutions according to market incentives and technical criteria. As Brown puts it, neoliberalism is a form of reason that burrows, "in capillary fashion into the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourse, and above all, the subject."[5] In this vein, scholars such as Luke Winslow have examined how the Texas Public Policy Foundation uses neoliberal arguments to reinvent higher education by instituting a metric that evaluates faculty according to quantitative measures of their student rankings and reports attesting to the value of their research.[6] Similarly, Jill McMillan and George Cheney argue that the metaphor of students as consumers turns education from a learning process into a marketable product, compelling professors to resort to an

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3. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 17.

4. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 35.

5. Ibid., 35-6.

6. Luke Winslow. "The Undeserving Professor: Neoliberalism and the Reinvention of Higher Education." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 201-245.

"entertainment model" of teaching to best 'sell' their services to student-consumers.[7] Indeed, in noting that "no major institution has escaped [neoliberalism's] effects," the authors point to churches in California that offer members a money back guarantee if they feel that their spiritual expectations have not been met.[8]

A second, related, set of literature exposes the weaknesses of neoliberal arguments by illustrating how they work against the public interest by focusing on private entrepreneurial pursuits and technical solutions rather than the root causes of public problems. For example, Joshua Hanan and Catherine Chaput contend that both supporters and opponents of the measures taken to address the 2008 U.S. economic crisis hewed to neoliberal arguments that focused on technical details rather than questioning the basic precepts of the financial system that caused the crisis.[9] Bradford Vivian's discussion of George Bush's neoliberal epideictic after the September 11, 2001 attacks detects a similar tendency to urge individuals to adhere to existing structures and uphold a problematic status quo rather than come together to critique it.[10] For Vivian as well as for Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee, a key problem of neoliberalism is its focus on the individual acting in a private capacity rather than engaging in the collective action needed to effect systemic change. In particular, Jones and Mukherjee observe that neoliberalism's focus on individual endeavor places the *what* and the *how much* of a person over the *who*: by claiming to

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7. Jill McMillan and George Cheney. "The Student as Consumer: Implications and Limitations of a Metaphor." *Communication Education* 45 (1996): 1-15.

8. R. N. Bellah, R. Madsen, W. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and, S. Tipton. *The good society*. (New York: Knopf, 1991), 93-94, cited in McMillan and Cheney, "The Student as Consumer," 3.

9. Hanan and Chaput. "Stating the Exception."

10. Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic: Rhetorical Form and Commemorative Politics on September 11, 2002." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (Feb 2006) Vol 92, No. 1.

serve fairness, even a kind of freedom, in judging a person based on measurable merit alone, neoliberalism dismisses the importance of recognizing socioeconomic and racial disparities between individuals and thus impedes collective action to address these disparities.[11] Even public figures who seek to alleviate inequalities and include those who are marginalized can fall prey to arguments that reinforce barriers and confirm a view of people as primarily economic beings. Hence, David Cisneros found that Barack Obama's immigration discourse, although seeking to assimilate newcomers, actually enacted a neoliberal logic that idealized and incorporated entrepreneurial immigrants into the American Dream while excluding those with less to offer the economy.[12] Thus, one conversation about neoliberalism focuses on its renovation of institutions along the lines of an economic enterprise while another critiques the obstacles that neoliberalism poses to establishing communities and enacting change in the interest of these communities.

This dissertation participates in both conversations by asking how neoliberalism's restructuring of government has affected deliberation between Singapore's government and its citizens on matters of public concern. Through an analysis of 94 public addresses and two policy controversies, I show how neoliberalism shapes the argumentative norms by which Singapore's government constructs national identity and justifies public policies, as well as its impact on the ways citizens engage with these norms. In the process, I uncover the contours of an alternative model of neoliberalism that melds the liberal focus on the individual with republican notions of sacrifice for the common good and faith in the wisdom of centralized authority.

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11. Bradley Jones and Roopali Mukherjee, "From California to Michigan: Race, Rationality, and Neoliberal Governmentality," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2010).

12. J. David Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants and a Nation of Laws: Race, Multiculturalism, and Neoliberal Exception in Barack Obama's Immigration Discourse." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, no.3 (2015): 356-375.

Constructing and Contesting a Singaporean Neoliberal Rhetoric

Singapore's particular form of neoliberalism manifests rhetorically in the government's use of a metaphor that portrays the nation as a company, as well as its recourse to argumentative techniques mirroring those used in the corporate world. My analysis reveals that in engaging with the norms of public deliberation set by the government, Singaporeans alternately resist and reinforce the conceptualization of the neoliberal citizen as a commodity in service of the economy and an essentially private actor with a minimal role in public and political life.

The first case study (Chapter 2) analyzed the Prime Minister's annual National Day Rally address and eve of National Day Message for each year from 1960 to 2014. This chapter uncovered how the neoliberal motivations of Singapore's government have taken shape in a metaphor of nation-as-corporation that has accreted in governmental discourse over time. This metaphor advances three arguments by which the government constructs an identity for the nation and a view of its ideal citizen: first, as a company focused on the bottom line, the nation derives its worth and patriotic pride from economic achievements; second, the government uses financial incentives to justify policies, secure the people's cooperation on contentious issues, and forge relationships between the people and the nation; finally, the government's adoption of the logic and language of business means that it reasons using a technical discourse that favors quantifiable outcomes, casts people as economic categories, and presents itself as the nation's technical experts in creating and deciding public policy. Together, these three entailments of the corporate metaphor depict the ideal citizen as a resource in service of the economy, acting always as a worker, entrepreneur, and shareholder of Singapore Inc.

Chapter 3 examined how Singaporeans alternately contest and reinforce the corporate metaphor's portrayal of citizens as economic units and the government as the nation's technical

experts. The chapter centered on the controversy over a policy paper released in 2013 which stated that Singapore needed to keep absorbing immigrants in order to maintain economic growth and that citizens would soon make up just half the total population. Although the camps protesting the paper made different arguments and disagreed with each other frequently, they both engaged in a politics of authenticity that by turns, supported and resisted the corporate metaphor. The *Genuine Locals* dissociated "real" from "imported" citizens while opponents of the *Disingenuous Government* critiqued the falsehood of the government's self-styled persona as policy expert. The former refuted the corporate metaphor's construction of citizens as economic units by asserting the superior worth of "true blue" Singaporeans and calling for due recognition as valuable members of the "Singaporean core." However, despite their desire to be acknowledged as more than worker units, these 'authentic' Singaporeans ultimately echoed the language and logic of the corporate metaphor by describing people in economic terms – the "imports" versus the "locally manufactured" citizens– and by embracing financial rewards to differentiate them from foreigners and indicate the value of Singaporean citizenship. In contrast, critics of *Disingenuous Leaders* showed how the government had proven themselves false leaders by creating policies based on weak reasoning and inadequate research. This group took aim at the metaphor's construction of the government as technical experts by presenting their own data and counter-points to demonstrate the shortcomings in the government's work.

The arguments of both groups reveal several things about the deliberative norms of a neoliberal environment. First, it is telling that in trying to break the corporate metaphor's image of citizens as units valued only for their economic contributions, the *Genuine Locals* recirculated the metaphor's representations of people as economic categories. This reflects the potency of neoliberal logic, which like an embedded metaphor, can take on an unquestionable authority

because it so established that it appears self-evident. Hence, when seeking to upend such logic, speakers often perpetuate it instead because they draw from a store of arguments and vocabulary entrenched in the public culture. For example, protestors appealed to their difference from foreigners as a way to garner recognition and thus, step outside the neoliberal categorization of people as economic units. However, because they based their difference in economic terms – Singaporeans were "locally produced," they had made financial sacrifices for the nation— they ultimately reinforced the corporate metaphor.

Second, Chapter 3 suggested that arguments grounded in authenticity are often held up as a counter-point to neoliberal logic. The *homo economicus* idealized by neoliberalism is fueled by economic imperatives and judged by quantifiable output. Thus, neoliberalism subsumes unique traits such as race or national origin to the "difference-blind" calculus of what one person can produce or achieve. Arguments about authenticity are a way to counter the figure of the interchangeable global worker with that of the irreplaceable local individual by asserting the value of difference, uniqueness, and singular quality. While the approach of the *Genuine Locals* indicates that such arguments tend to be counter-productive when used to distinguish oneself from other individuals, opponents of the *Disingenuous Government* demonstrated that arguments about authenticity might work better when used to interrogate neoliberal *institutions* instead of individuals. This group's efforts to embody the competence and integrity they found lacking in their government exemplified, in Robert Asen's words, "the ways that laypeople have challenged the unquestioned authority of expertise to exert greater agency in their lives."[13] Hence, this case

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13. Robert Asen. "Critical Engagement through Public Sphere Scholarship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no. 1 (Feb 2015), 137.

study of deliberation in a neoliberal environment found that neoliberalism is grounded more in the authority of institutions than the efforts of individuals.

Chapter 4 also turned to a contentious policy to illuminate the norms of rhetorical engagement between a neoliberal government and its citizens. This chapter focused on a non-economic issue – the censorship of online speech—, and thus offered an opportunity to explore how argumentative practices from the business world shape public engagement outside of the market and workforce. Here, the policy in question was a licensing regime for news sites reporting on Singapore. The license mandated a $50,000 fee and the removal of any content the government deemed unsuitable for public consumption. The chapter revealed that when presenting and justifying public policy, Singapore's government speaks in a language of strategic ambiguity echoing that favored by organizations. In the case of the new license, this ambiguity took the form of multiple justifications for the license, a broad definition of what constituted a news site, and an implementation process that exempted from regulation sites which appeared to fall under license's purview.

In organizational communication, the use of devices such as broad definitions and vague parameters is seen as a way to foster identification between employees and an organization. Broad definitions and mission statements, for example, secure the allegiance of a wide range of employees by allowing enough scope for each to impute their own meaning to the organization's goals and to define for themselves the part they play in realizing those goals. Similarly, vague policy parameters allow managers the flexibility to adjust practices along the way without needing to overhaul entire policies to suit specific circumstances.

However, when the technique of strategic ambiguity spreads beyond organizational communication to a government's communication with its citizens, its outcomes are less

salubrious. The space for multiple interpretations and flexibility in setting boundaries that can be

a strength in firms creates an imbalance of power when transposed to deliberation on public

matters. Here, only institutional authorities – such as policymakers in government- have a clear

understanding of what certain policies aim to do and how they work, while citizens are left in the

dark by open-ended definitions and ambiguous parameters. Such was the case with the new

license, which generated a constant sense of anxiety among the internet community: they were

never sure whether their site fulfilled the definition of a news site because the definition was so

broad that it covered almost everything on the internet. Additionally, when sites did seem to fall

clearly under the new law, they were not subjected to its regulations, making the actual process

for implementing the policy unclear. In addition, the government engaged in a selective

transparency in which policymakers provided partial explanations in responses to queries, while

requiring full disclosure from internet content creators.

Ultimately, the government's use of a manner of communication common to firms

created an information asymmetry that compelled the public to rely on the government's (hidden)

judgment about the definition of 'news,' the suitability of internet content, and the best way to

regulate this sphere. The government's language of ambiguity discouraged citizens from

meaningful participation in the public sphere by constructing multiple obstacles to such

participation. Instead, the government's engagement – or rather, non-engagement— of its

citizens on this matter reinforced the neoliberal emphasis on the *private* sphere as the only

rightful arena of activity for individuals, whose primary roles are as entrepreneurs and workers

undertaking a perpetual pursuit of individual satisfaction, success, and self-improvement.

Meanwhile, the government and institutions of authority are the expert players in the public

sphere, crowding out the field of action for citizens and limiting avenues of institutional critique.

We also see the third feature of the corporate metaphor – its construction of the government as experts— at work here as it excludes citizens' involvement in public affairs by "privatizing" it.

Together, the three case studies traced the implications of neoliberalism on public deliberation and political citizenship. Where Chapter 2 laid out the contours of the ideal neoliberal citizen subject, Chapters 3 and 4 showed different versions of the responsible neoliberal citizen-subject in action. In the immigration controversy of Chapter 3, the government's emphasis on meritocracy places the responsibility of securing employment and success on the individual. Each citizen must compete on the same playing field as all others, they must upgrade their job skills as needed, and if they don't, they are also responsible for realizing that someone else, even if not a citizen, is justified in getting that spot. In Chapter 4, the individual internet content creator and user is responsible for interpreting the ambiguous laws of political expression online; the government is not responsible for clarifying them. Hence, Chapter 3 showed how neoliberalism excludes citizens from anything other than an economic relationship to their country while Chapter 4 illustrated how it excludes them from meaningful political participation.

Rhetorical and Theoretical Implications

Intersections with organizational communication

A rhetorical history of neoliberalism in Singapore offers several conclusions. First, it highlights the ways in which work from organizational communication can inform and enrich rhetorical projects. For decades, organizational scholars have used rhetorical concepts to illuminate the dynamics of employee-worker relationships and identity creation by firms. Such

scholars make the case for studying organizations rhetorically,[14] a call answered by some who analyze the leadership styles of CEOs through the personae they portray in their annual letters to stockholders,[15] while others describe how the choice of certain metaphors (like that of war or seduction) in the language of corporate takeovers signals particular expectations of the parties involved.[16]

This dissertation shows how concepts can also travel in the opposite direction from organizational communication to rhetorical studies. For example, Chapter 4 drew on the organizational communication concept of strategic ambiguity to reveal the power asymmetry perpetuated by neoliberal rhetoric in structuring the relationship between a government and its citizens. If, as Andy King predicts, the future of rhetorical scholarship lies in the study of economic power,[17] it makes sense to consider how concepts from organizational communication, which often center on economic institutions such as businesses, can inform rhetorical efforts to understand the symbols and arguments by which identities are created, communities established, and debate conducted in corporations, nations, and nations run as corporations.

Second, this project demonstrates the value of doing rhetorical work on regions and countries different from those typically studied. In Chapter 1, I pointed to Christa Olson's work

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14. Jill J. McMillan, "In Search of the Organizational Persona: A Rationale for Studying Organizations, Rhetorically," in *Organization-Communication: Emerging Perspectives II*, ed. Lee Thayer (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987), 21-45.

15. Joel Amernic, Russell Craig and Dennis Tourish, "The transformational leader as pedagogue, physician, architect, commander, and saint: Five root metaphors in Jack Welch's letters to stockholders of General Electric" *Human Relations* 60, no. 12 (2007): 1839-1872.

16. Paul M. Hirsch and John A. Y. Andrews, "Ambushes, Shootouts, and Knights of the Roundtable: The Language of Corporate Takeovers," in *Organizational Symbolism*, (ed) Louis R. Pondy, Peter J. Frost, Gareth Morgan, and Thomas C. Dandrige (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1983).

17. Andrew King, "Scholarship Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no.1 (2015): 127-131, DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2015.999984.

on constitutions in Ecuador[18] and her argument that there is a value to situating rhetorical

projects and testing familiar concepts in unfamiliar terrain. As Olson puts it, there is a

"productive possibility" to studying old terms in new contexts.[19] Having arrived at the final

chapter of this project, what can one say has been the productive possibility of studying

neoliberal rhetoric in Singapore?

Singapore's Unique Brand of Neoliberalism

I contend that this dissertation enriches what we know about the deliberative and

rhetorical dimensions of neoliberalism by examining a unique case of neoliberalism. At initial

glance, Singapore's experience as a country led by efficient "CEO-leaders" and governed

according to a corporate metaphor is not singular. Argentina, for example, is noteworthy for the

"managerial ethos"[20] of its current administration, one filled with "veterans of the corporate

world" such as former executives, CEOs, presidents, and regional directors from JPMorgan

Chase, Shell Argentina, Telecom Argentina, and General Motors who are part of a move to make

the government more efficient by including more businesspeople in politics. In Southeast Asia,

Thailand's economic boom of the 1980s led some to outline a vision of "Thailand Inc.," a set of

policies seeking to replicate the economic success of Thailand's East Asian "tiger" neighbors by

providing government support for big businesses. The larger intention, according to one

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18. Christa J. Olson, "Places to Stand: The Practices and Politics of Writing Histories," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 15, no. 1 (2012): 77-100.

19. Olson, "Places to Stand," 84.

20. Graciela Mochkofsky, "What's Next for Mauricio Macri, Argentina's New President?" *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2015. Mochkofsky was quoting Gabriel Vommaro, a sociologist from Buenos Aires's National University of General Sarmiento.

parliamentarian, was that "we should run the country like a business firm."[21] However, "Thailand Inc." became a system where business firms ran the country instead. By "deliver[ing] the political system into the hands of businesses," Thailand Inc. came to stand for pork barrel politics, vote buying, and moneyed interests swaying the outcomes of elections and legislation to support the interests of business enterprises.[22] Businessman Thaksin Shinawatra resurrected the vision of Thailand Inc. when he became Prime Minister in 2001, presenting himself as "a man who could get things done, like a business manager."[23] As Pasuk Phongpaichit, professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University observed in 2004:

…the most prominent element of Thaksin's image is that he is a successful businessman at the head of a party of businessmen. He calls himself a "CEO premier" and aims to convert other officials into "CEO provincial governors" and "CEO diplomats". He lectures his Cabinet and the public on the superiority of business management practices over classical bureaucracy. He is both a business capitalist and an ideologue for business capitalism. He said: "A company is a country. A country is a company. They're the same. The management is the same."[24]

Hence, Singapore is not the only country to align its leadership structure and approach with that of a business enterprise.

However, the modeling of government and nation along the lines of a corporation is far more entrenched in Singapore's political culture than elsewhere. Argentina's new cabinet of 21st century CEOs echoes the People's Action Party's view of government service as akin to the job of a CEO. Since 1994, the salary of Singapore's cabinet ministers has been pegged to the top

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21. Yos Santasombat. 1985. "Power and personality: an anthropological study of the Thai political elite." PhD thesis, University of California Berkeley, 196. Quoted in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Christopher John Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2004), 12.

22. Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics*, 13-14.

23. Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Thailand under Thaksin: a regional and international perspective," Core University Project, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 6–8 September 2004, 3.

24. Phongpaichit, "Thailand under Thaksin," 6.

bracket of citizen income earners in the private sector.[25] The government's move to "pay itself its perceived market worth"[26] signals its belief, argues Cherian George, that "like all organisations, governments get the executives they pay for."[27] Singapore's construction of government as a private enterprise thus predates that of Argentina's by several decades. Similarly, when Thailand's leaders were eyeing the blueprints for Thailand Inc. in the 1980s, Singapore's Prime Ministers were already 20 years into their constitution of the nation as an economic entity, having begun to link national pride to economic success since the National Day Rally addresses of the 1960s. A study of Singapore therefore makes it possible to engage with neoliberalism in a setting where it has a thicker history and deeper ideological roots than other Asian countries.

In particular, the long shelf-life of Singapore's neoliberalism affords the chance to investigate the absorption of neoliberal logic into the larger social fabric, shaping not only how the government speaks about itself and the nation, but the way citizens reciprocate and resist such discourse. Indeed, Singapore's neoliberalism is noteworthy primarily for its rhetorical quality and the degree to which it has infiltrated political speech and public deliberation. As Chapters 2-4 demonstrate, the metaphor of nation as company plays both an instrumental and constitutive role in Singapore, motivating the people toward specific goals as well as providing a vision of the ideal citizen to aspire toward. Hence, a key outcome of this project has been a

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25. The 2012 revision of ministerial pay uses as a benchmark "the median income of the top 1,000 earners who are Singapore citizens, with a 40% discount to reflect the ethos of public service" ("DPM Teo's full speech on political salaries" [Speech by Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs Teo Chee Hean at the Parliamentary debate on political salaries on Jan 16, 2012.] *AsiaOne*, January 18, 2012).

26. George, *Air-Conditioned Nation*, 75.

27. Ibid.

deeper understanding of the features of neoliberal rhetoric and how they can be wielded to differential success by governments and citizens.

For example, the events of Chapter 3 (the immigration controversy) suggest a self-spawning quality to neoliberal rhetoric such that the moment we use neoliberal arguments against neoliberalism, we risk catching ourselves in its vocabulary and logic. The Genuine Locals who spoke of their nation as a fixed system of inputs and outputs, who ranked and measured themselves against foreign "imports," and who sought financial benefits that would prove their worth as citizens perpetuated the very situation they sought to contest, namely, a state of affairs in which people were seen as economic units driven by economic imperatives. Singapore's experience with this controversy is echoed in other contexts where neoliberal arguments marshalled for the benefit of one group work against that group and the larger community. For example, when people argue that the U.S. women's soccer team ought to receive the same pay as the men's team because they bring in just as much – in fact more—revenue,[28] they subvert what ought to be a policy based on social equality with a neoliberal evaluation of worth according to profitability. Additionally, if this issue were ever to be decided in favor of the women's team on the basis of their revenue generation, its implications would harm rather than help female athletes. Not only would it base the "worth" of female soccer players on their profitability rather than their inalienable equality, it would hurt female athletes in *other* sports, such as tennis, where some argue that female players should be paid less to reflect the lower

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28. "U.S. women's team files wage-discrimination action vs U.S. Soccer," *ESPN*, April 1, 2016. http://espn.go.com/espnw/sports/article/15102506/women-national-team-files-wage-discrimination-action-vs-us-soccer-federation . The article notes right in the beginning that "despite the women's team generating nearly $20 million more revenue last year than the U.S. men's team, the women are paid about a quarter of what the men earn."

spectatorship and revenue totals they command.[29] A case study of Singaporean neoliberalism

thus presents a window into the pitfalls of enlisting neoliberal arguments – such as those based in

the commodification of people— against neoliberalism.

This dissertation's examination of speech and protest in Singapore also offers theoretical

insight into an alternative form of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism's playbill typically lists as its

central actor the citizen who "aspires to be self-actualizing and self-fulfilling"[30] and who realizes

this goal by pursuing private profit and capitalist endeavors free from government intervention.

Hence, the free market becomes a path to freedom, a way for the individual to realize his or her

unique identity free from institutional authority and obligations to larger groups. Critics are less

enthused, arguing that neoliberalism's focus on individual attainment and freedom comes at the

cost of communal welfare.[31] These opponents call instead for communities to cohere around a

collective identity and shared set of goals as a way to counter the individualism and stratification

of people inherent to neoliberal ideology. Hence, neoliberalism is often depicted as a standoff

between individualism and collective life.

The case of Singapore is instructive for how it reconciles this standoff by prioritizing

individual effort while directing this effort toward a collective goal such as the economic success

of a globalized and competitive capitalist nation like Singapore. In this setting, individual

freedom is more about individual responsibility – the government urges people to depend on

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29. "Novak Djokovic questions equal prize money in tennis," *BBC*, 21 March 2016. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35859791

30. Inda, J. X. *Targeting immigrants: Government, technology, and ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 13. Quoted in Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants," 359.

31. James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), xiv and 42.

themselves, pull up their socks, upgrade their skills, and improve their chances in a meritocratic job market. At the same time, this entrepreneurship of the self is framed as being in service of a larger community by contributing toward economic growth and adding to the state's resources rather than drawing from them through large-scale social support programs. Your self-reliance is thus in service of yourself *and* the state. In the Singapore variant of neoliberalism, individuals are encouraged to see themselves as both the primary determinant of their affairs and a constituent of the larger economy. This is a version of neoliberalism in which "we are human capital not just for ourselves, but also for the firm, state, or postnational constellation of which we are members… the subject is at once in charge of itself, responsible for itself, yet an instrumentalizable and potentially dispensable element of the whole."[32]

Consequently, Singapore renders the link between classical liberalism and its neo-cousin tenuous by demonstrating that the supposedly atomistic neoliberal individual can be an individual in service of a collective such as the household, firm, nation, or indeed, the nation-as-corporation. Indeed, Singapore's experience reveals that, other than an emphasis on individual autonomy, there is little that is necessarily liberal about neoliberalism. Instead, it may be more accurate to consider neoliberalism an offshoot of *republican* rather than liberal precepts. In this configuration, neoliberalism's variation upon classical republicanism is that the whole being sacrificed for takes an economic rather than political form – it is a firm, or a nation focused on maintaining economic competitiveness.

By melding a political identity –the nation— with an economic one –the corporation— Singaporean neoliberalism couples economic self-reliance with political dependence on the state. In doing so, it represents an alternative form of neoliberalism in which entrepreneurialism and

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32. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 37-8.

personal endeavor do not correspond to political freedom from government interference and direction. Instead, while urged to be financially independent and rely on their own efforts to secure a job and remain productive, people are encouraged to depend on the government's expertise in areas such as immigration policy and the boundaries of online speech. Singapore therefore illustrates how neoliberal rhetoric does not so much advance the freedom of the individual as secure the authority of institutions like the government.

Thus, the central tension of neoliberalism may not be that between the sanctity of the individual and the needs of the whole but rather the specific form taken by this whole. The case studies contained herein show that it is not enough to critique neoliberalism for weakening the creation and maintenance of communities. Instead, it also matters just what this community is, what kinds of metaphors we have allowed to shape its form, and what authority we grant that collectivity. It matters whether a nation is cast as a family, a shining city on a hill, or a company, because these are the images which establish the norms of public deliberation, policy design, and political relationships between people, their government, and each other. By engendering loyalty to the country-as-company, Singapore's leaders have created a resilient form of neoliberal discourse not only espoused by the government, but reinforced frequently by the people. This discourse is rendered all the stronger by its incorporation of republican elements and existing cultural values of making sacrifices in the name of larger goals set by a strong centralized authority. In this telling of the neoliberal tale, capitalism, the self-directed individual, solidarity with a collective goal, and authoritarianism can and do coexist.

The question as we close is whether this version of neoliberalism is a legitimate alternative for other countries or whether it is so specific to Singapore that it must stand alone either as beacon or warning. In Chapter 1, I argued that Singapore represents a uniquely Asian

form of neoliberalism, one born out of its interdependent geographic, political, and historical characteristics. Its succession of colonial rulers and unsuccessful merger with Malaysia led the ruling party to espouse an ideology of national self-reliance and resilience, one from which each citizen was to take their lead. Here then, are some of the seeds of an ideology that presses individual effort into the service of a national project. The government's desire to avoid the stifling quality of China's communism and the hedonism of the United States' free-wheeling capitalism had it looking for a middle path that combined the free market with a strong central government. Here we see the roots the kind of 'managed freedom' of Singaporean neoliberalism in which entrepreneurialism and private activity exist alongside strong state apparatuses. As a strategic shipping port, Singapore was from an early point in its history exposed to the forces of free trade, with its concomitant pressures of economic competition laying the ground for a national emphasis on competitiveness and economic achievement.

Perhaps most of all – and something not explored fully in this dissertation—is the role played by Singapore's size in shaping its particular brand of neoliberalism. With a workforce of three million, it is a small country but an impressive company, rendering it just the right size to sustain a national metaphor of nation as company. It is large enough to compete with other economies and beat them in international rankings and economic achievements, making the goal of economic success a viable national ideal. At the same time, it is small enough to govern in a manner that supports centralized decision-making and frequent policy changes with minimal pushback from a populace that is too small and too regulated to mount an effective resistance. In particular, a country of Singapore's size has less physical – and political— space for a clear demarcation between an individual's sphere of action, the needs of the community, and the boundaries of governmental authority. While different levels of authority exist, such as mayoral

districts versus the central Cabinet convening in Parliament House or government ministries versus local community centers, the reality is that without even trying, any government in Singapore would be a big government because there is little room for separation between the reach of government policies and the scope of individual behavior. This setting lends itself naturally to a kind of neoliberalism that twins the self-governing individual with prominent governmental intervention.

Is it possible for other countries to adopt the brand of neoliberalism that Singapore epitomizes? Perhaps. Although Singapore's blend of individual pursuits alongside collective obligations and appeals to economic success as a means to motivate people is a consequence of its specific place in the world and history, it might be possible to recreate some of these features elsewhere. To an extent, this has already occurred. In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama attempted to protect collective welfare programs such as Medicare and marshal support for policies to raise the minimum wage by arguing that doing so would improve people's employment prospects and make them better able to contribute to economic growth.[33] His appeal to economic success and competitiveness as a way to motivate change echoed the PAP's justification of policies based on their ability to enhance the nation's economic standing. However, it is doubtful whether these kinds of appeals, while viable, would be sustainable in any country that does not share some combination of Singapore's size, history, culture, geographic location, and government. What then does this study of the neoliberal island do for observers?

I contend that Singapore represents neoliberalism under its "ideal" conditions taken to their logical conclusion. The administration is largely regarded as efficient, strong, and honest. The economy is open to international trade and the government is pro-business in its speech and

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33. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 24-25.

policies. The populace is small, easy to govern, and well-educated. Indeed, Singapore was once called the perfect policy laboratory by its own Prime Minister.[34] The country therefore offers some insight into the ultimate impact of neoliberalism on the relationship between people and their government. Singapore illuminates how, despite its purported focus on the individual, neoliberalism renders the individual absent in the service of larger collective goals. Neoliberal rhetoric effects this erasure in several ways, each taken up in one of this dissertation's case studies. The corporate metaphor of Chapter 2 showed that by structuring public deliberation around norms that prize economic success, financial incentives as a means to motivate people, and the technical expertise of the government, neoliberalism elevates the authority of institutions and the imperatives of economic growth over individual goals. Chapter 3 demonstrated how the norms of the corporate metaphor, particularly its focus on economic growth as national identity, renders citizens invisible by making them economic commodities who are interchangeable with workers from other countries. Chapter 4 showed how a neoliberal government that employs the strategic ambiguity favored by organizations creates an information asymmetry between itself and the public that excludes citizens from meaningful participation in public debates.

An examination of Singapore's neoliberalism affords an opportunity to recognize the features of neoliberal rhetoric at work, whether in the form of the corporate metaphor or a recourse to strategic ambiguity and selective transparency in public deliberation. In doing so, the

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34. Low and Vadaketh note that "Singapore's Prime Minister once described the country's civil servants as "practis[ing] public administration in laboratory conditions," referring to the environment that supports "Singapore's ability to take a longer view, pursue rational policies, put in place the fundamentals which the country needs, and systematically change policies that are outdated or obsolete." Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at 2005 Admin Service Dinner, 24 Mar. 2005, http://app.psd.gov.sg/data/SpeechatAdminServiceDinner2005final.pdf, in Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh, *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), 3.

hope is that citizens and rhetorical critics will be better placed to critique and resist such arguments. For example, the immigration controversy of Chapter 3 showed how certain characteristics of neoliberal rhetoric, such as its valorization of technical expertise, present an avenue for critics to expose the weaknesses of institutions and authorities by embodying the skills they lack. At the same time, the fact that some citizens reiterated and thus inadvertently strengthened the government's construction of people as commodities shows that the power asymmetries and depoliticization of the citizen inherent to neoliberalism will not come undone all at once, so embedded is such language in public vocabularies and ways of thinking.

Instead, we must pick patiently at the metaphors, arguments, and images of the citizen and nation that drive neoliberalism and remain alert to its tendency to depict the citizen as an economic commodity rather than a political actor. Singapore's Prime Minister once told his people that they had reaped "a Singapore dividend" by belonging to a "different and exceptional" nation that had a "high quality of government." "Your value in the world has gone up," he said as he addressed the nation's human resources. "You're in demand, people want to hire you."[35] If we are looking for a way to understand how the logic and language of business affects the relationship between people, their government, and their nation, we are in good company with Singapore Inc.

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35. "PM Lee's Full Speech on Ministers' Pay," *AsiaOne*, January 18, 2012. http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120118-322591/7.html#sthash.1sDsIhut.dpuf

APPENDIX A

MARKING CHANGE AND TURNING POINTS IN SINGAPORE'S NATIONAL DAY
RALLY ADDRESSES, 1960-2014

No.	Year	Speech Title/Key Themes
1	1964	Message: Marking a *break from the past*: old issues no longer relevant.
2	1966	"*Shifting of Gears* for the 2nd year of independence"
3	1972	Message: "Aiming *Now* for Quality, Not Quantity" Speech: "Pride, as Singapore Marks a *Turning Point*"
4	1977	"Urging a 'Rational Thinking Population' To Adjust to *New Realities*"
5	1979	"From Talent Pyramid to Expertise Pyramid and *Improving It*"
6	1980	Message: Must *move* to high value industries, every employer must *upgrade and increase* worker productivity; must *upgrade* our construction workers; *move* to "brain services", computing; Speech: must *move* upwards or be left behind.
7	1985	Message: "*Sounding the Alert* on High Costs in Singapore"; must act quickly to face this challenge (turning point, locus of irreparable, cannot "fail this test"); Speech: keep striving, keep going
8	2000	"*Transforming* Singapore"
9	2001	"*New* Singapore"
10	2002	"*Remaking* Singapore, *Changing* Mindsets"
11	2004	"at a *crossroads*"; "need a *fresh*, bold approach"
12	2005	Need a "mindset *change*"; "*remaking* Singapore" a major theme
13	2006	"Singapore's future in a *rapidly changing* world. The world *is changing* faster than ever. Singapore's *changing* rapidly too and we have to *adapt*."
14	2007	Speech: "we will *remake* the whole city…eventually, the whole country will be *transformed*."
15	2011	Message: Turning point
16	2013	"must make a strategy *shift* in our approach to nation building", "*new* way forward"

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