

# Four Monumental Stories:

## National Monuments in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hanoi and Jakarta

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### Introduction

"Look at any state capital, East and West alike, always you will meet the centre of a nation's greatness in the form of buildings, concrete buildings to be proud of...", said Sukarno in 1963. National monuments are perhaps the crudest and most powerful of symbolic identity expressions. Flags are but dyed cloth, anthems only text and tune. National monuments are complexes of structured stone, wood, metal, plants, visual symbols, text fragments, exhibits, pictures, sculptures, light and sound. Sometimes they even move.

This essay will look at some of the most recently erected national monuments and museums in four Southeast Asian capitals and how they tell the stories of their nation. These stories are told to everyone willing or obliged to see and listen. Although the recipients are mainly schoolchildren and tourists, the monumental messages are addressed to everyone, citizen or non-citizen. By contrast to many religious spaces, the national ones are open to anyone regardless of faith. No one needs to dress properly, take off his shoes or cover her shoulders. Texts are not displayed in sacred, long forgotten scripts, but in the same national language that is taught in public schools. Most often there is also a more or less clumsy translation into the global language (English).

The present essay shall not mainly deal with titular "National Museums". In Southeast Asia, their buildings and collections were generally inherited from the colonial powers, and have only to some extent been changed. The European collectors looked for oddities and beauty rather than national identity, and created local copies of the British Museum, the Musée de l'Homme and the Tropenmuseum. Thus the present day "National Museums" in Jakarta and Singapore, as well as the

Historical Museum in Hanoi, are most noteworthy for their collections of ethnological artifacts and art (such as the magnificent series of Chinese porcelain in Jakarta). Little seems to have been done to "nationalise" the museum in Jakarta, apart from putting "national" in the name. Its collections have been preserved, displayed and supplemented in the good European tradition. In Singapore and Hanoi, a more conspicuous nationalisation has taken place, and in Kuala Lumpur a new building was opened in 1963, but the latter also continues the European tradition and is more ethnologic and academic than historical and national; although it used to have a Historical Gallery. The partial nationalisation of the "National Museums" will be part of the analysis below, but the main targets of the present essay will be monuments and museums constructed entirely by post-colonial regimes. The essay is an attempt to establish a critical archaeology of non-archaic sites.

### **Four Capitals**

"Capital," said the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1771, "in geography, denotes the principal city of a kingdom, province, or state." This was before the age of nationalism. With nationalism came the mergers, splits and transformations of kingdoms, provinces, states and peoples into *sovereign nations*. They were seen by nationalists as a kind of collective individual, with the capital as head. Like human heads, capitals have a brain that uses eyes, ears, mouth, fist and fingers to consume taxes and direct their affairs. This essay is not about these functional aspects, but instead about the make-up of the face, the architectural means that capitals use to visualise their nation's individuality, their ways of presenting themselves to children and foreign visitors. I have chosen as examples four capitals of nations that were recognized as sovereign only some 30–40 years ago.

### **Singapore**

Singapore is a capital which also is a nation, a head without body, with a history of mainly trade, not states and struggles. The island was singled out by Stamford Raffles in 1819 as an ideal place for the construction of a port in the service of the British East India Company. Today's population are descendants of the people invited in by the British, and until the 1950s the word "Singaporean" was an anomaly. If Singapore, in the process of decolonisation, had become a lasting member of the Malaysian Federation, then it would have been the main metropolis of a large multi-national nation, and it would have been hard for Kuala Lumpur to

assert itself as political capital. But in 1965, the Malays decided to leave the Singapore Chinese out in the cold where they have since managed wonderfully on their own. Today's little city state is a proudly pragmatic place. Its main monuments are functional: port, airport, subway, department stores, the renovated Raffles Hotel. The streets of Singapore are clean as the floors of a museum. There are no forests, only parks. Its main symbol being a *merlion* (represented through a shiningly white water-spitting mega-toy in the harbour) the City of Lion is, so to speak, a museum of its own, not of the past, but displaying a radiant scenario of a possible global future. But even a futuristic site like Singapore must have a story of its past it wants to tell. Where?

In books and videos, of course, but apart from that the main parts of the story are related in a new section of the recently renovated National Museum and in the historical section of a new amusement park at Sentosa island—the island of the island. The museum was opened by Queen Victoria in 1887 and restored towards the end of Lee Kuan Yew's formal rule in 1990. The island park was also constructed, in successive sections, under Singapore's first and only statesman: Lee Kuan Yew.

The National Museum started out in 1887 as the "Raffles Library and Museum". During the Japanese occupation it was under the protection of Anglophile Japanese scientists and even served as storage for objects saved from looting elsewhere. In 1969 the Raffles Museum was "nationalised" and became the National Museum. According to the book published for its 100th anniversary, it has since Singapore's independence "steadily divested itself of its colonial past and now reflects the cultural and intellectual interests of our young nation".<sup>1</sup> In the entrance, however, the big portraits are not of national heroes, not of Lee Kuan Yew, but of Sir Stamford Raffles and later British governors, albeit with somewhat critical commentaries. The renovation of the museum in the mid-eighties did not alter its architectural style, but aimed at restoring its "Victorian grandeur" while adding new, more national galleries inside: "the Singapore History Gallery", the "Straits Chinese Gallery", the "Trade Ceramics Gallery" and the "Southeast Asian Ethnology Gallery". A private donation has also given ground for a "Jade Gallery". The national story of Singapore is told in the History Gallery through 20 dioramas featuring Singapore's

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<sup>1</sup> Director Richard K.B. Poh in the foreword to Liu, Gretchen, *One Hundred Years of the National Museum...*

development from the 14th century to 1965, and also through a video produced in 1984 that runs in the museum's theatrette at intervals every day.

The Sentosa Island contains two wax museums with full-size human figures, exhibited objects, texts, videos and lots of noisy sound, to illustrate historical conditions and important episodes: "Pioneers of Singapore" (opened 1984), and "Surrender Chambers" (opened for the 50th anniversary in 1992). The former tells the story of the nation from 1819 to the Second World War. The latter describes the British and Japanese surrenders of 1942 and 1945. At the entrance to the wax museum there is a piece of glass with two quotations from Lee Kuan Yew: "To understand the present and anticipate the future one must know enough of the past, enough to have a sense of the history of a people" (1980), and "Singapore is an immigrant society. Our values are those which ensure survival, security and success" (1981). In the spirit of these quotations, yet another museum has been planned at Sentosa Island: A reconstruction of the old multiethnic city with its Chinatown, Little India and Malay quarters, just as it used to be in the good old times before the office blocs, department stores and traffic machines took over. The name of the reconstruction has already been chosen: "Heritage Museum".

In addition to the National Museum and the Sentosa park the monuments and buildings around the *Padang* (field) in central Singapore tell their part of the national story, but this one is less consciously edited than those you get in the museum and the park. The Padang has retained a British colonial flavour. In one end is the Recreation Club, in the other the Cricket Club. There are plenty of colonial buildings left around the Padang: The Empress Place Museum, the Victoria Theatre and Memorial Hall (with a clock tower), the High Court, St. Andrew's Church, the Parliament House—and the City Hall where Lord Mountbatten took the Japanese surrender on 12 September 1945 and Lee Kuan Yew declared self-government on the same date 14 years later. East and north of the Padang are three war memorials, and behind one of them, on a pier sticking out in the harbour, the white merlion. The first of the war memorials is a cenotaph constructed in the colonial period, with a sepulchre on top of it, and the years of the First and Second World Wars inscribed on the stairs leading up towards it. This cenotaph is dedicated to "our glorious dead" who "died that we could live". The other memorials have been built after the British left to correct or supplement the one they left behind. One is dedicated solely to Lim Bo Seng. He was a Chinese businessman who served in the British Special Operations Executive, and was executed by the Japanese after having been

denounced to them by the leader of the Malayan Communist Party, also a Chinese. The last of the three memorials is a rival cenotaph. Whereas the British cenotaph commemorates the *soldiers* who died in the two world wars, the Singaporean cenotaph of 1967 (War Memorial Park) is dedicated to the *civilian* victims of all four races. It carries inscriptions in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil.

The colonial buildings and war memorials of central Singapore must once have looked imposing. Nowadays the old centre is beleaguered by an army of surrounding scyscrapers, many of which are still under construction. Perhaps, one day, the Padang and its 19th century buildings will also be moved or reconstructed at Sentosa as a "Colonial Heritage Museum".

### **Kuala Lumpur**

Kuala Lumpur, a tin miners city from 1857, relates to Singapore like Budapest to Vienna (or Oslo to Copenhagen). Kuala Lumpur and Singapore are legacies of the same empire, but Singapore was always richer. The urge to acquire centrality through conspicuous construction is therefore even more pronounced in post-colonial Kuala Lumpur than in the more self-confident City of Lion. The Britishness of both cities give them many of the same features. The Padang in Kuala Lumpur has been given the name *Merdeka Square* (Freedom Square), but it looks much the same as its homologue in the South. In Kuala Lumpur the square is not at a sea-side, but close to the point where the Gombak and Kelang rivers join forces. Like in Singapore the square consists mainly of a cricket lawn with a sports club dating back to 1884 (the Selangor Club). Around the square are St Mary's Church in the north, the Old City Hall in the north-east, the Supreme Court in the Sultan Abdul Samad building in the east with its "Big Ben" clock tower on top of a moorish-European mixture-structure, and a number of commercial scyscrapers on the surrounding scyline.

Kuala Lumpur's Merdeka Square has also more recently got its own peculiar features: the "world's tallest flagpole" which rises out of an underground parking lot with shopping-centre plus golf-club, and, next to the flagpole, a huge television screen with powerful loudspeakers playing pop music and disseminating speeches about Malaysia's Vision 2020. The vision of the country's bright future is further enhanced through the construction, in another part of the city centre, of the new KL Tower, which is meant to become the world's third highest. It is located in the former Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve, just opposite the most fashionable of Kuala Lumpur's hotels.

Merdeka Square is the symbolic centre of the Malaysian nation, but Kuala Lumpur's National Monument (*Tugu Peringatan Negara*) is not quite in the centre. Initiated by the then Prime Minister in 1963 it forms together with the National Museum and the Parliament House a second green symbolic centre around the "Lake Gardens" a little west of the central area. Like the park beside the Padang in Singapore, the hill above the Lake Gardens contains two war memorials, one colonial, one post-colonial. The colonial one is a cenotaph dedicated "to our glorious dead" in the years 1914–18, 1939–45 and 1948–60. It was erected after the First World War, and new inscriptions were added each time another war was over. Originally it was located in the central area, near the railway station, but was moved up to the hill when the national monument was built in 1963–66.

The post-colonial "national monument" is also a war memorial, but dedicated entirely to the 1948–60 emergency. It is a sculpture group in black bronze on top of a high plinth. The group consists of five soldiers standing with their feet on top of two dead communists. One of the five heroes carries the Malaysian flag with the star, moon and stripes. Another one is wounded. According to an explanatory poster with text in four languages the sculpture represents "the triumph of the forces of democracy over the forces of evil". If the sculpture had been realistic, three of the heroes would have had British, one Indian and one Malay features, whereas the corpses would have looked Chinese. Instead they all look Caucasian. This was not, probably, intentional; the models put at the sculptor's disposal were ethnic Malays, but the sculptor was the American Felix de Weldon, and his sculpture bears close resemblance to the Iwo Jima monument which he had previously constructed in Washington D.C. De Weldon seems to have been incapable of shaping oriental heroes. Thus Malaysia's foremost national monument looks like a group of American soldiers winning the war in Vietnam. To compensate for the sculpture's Caucasian features, the surroundings are demonstratively Islamic in the same Moorish way that the British used some decades earlier when they set out to exoticise their colony (cf. the railway station and the Sultan Abdul Samad building). The plinth of the national monument is placed in the middle of a wide platform separated from the approach by a long reflecting pool with fountains. The spectators enter the platform through a crescent shaped pavilion, topped with golden domes, with walls of Islamic mosaic,

and the text on the plinth evokes Allah: "Dedicated to the heroic fighters in the cause of peace and freedom. May the blessing of Allah be upon them."<sup>2</sup>

When this monument was set up, the elimination of the Malayan Communist Party seems to have been considered the main purifying event in the birth of independent Malaysia. But where does the post-colonial Malaysian regime tell its national story in more detail? On the wall of the National Museum, there is a mural by the artist Dato Lee Cong Chian, half of which tells a national story. The collections inside the National Museum, however, are predominantly ethnological and zoological. As mentioned, there used to be a Historical Gallery, but it was dissolved in the late 1980s and now only survives in the form of a booklet. A quite detailed account of the national history is given in the Museum of the Armed Forces (*Kompleks Muzium Angkatan Tentara*), which is situated on the Defence compound in the eastern parts of Kuala Lumpur. Then, finally, a new National Historical Museum (*Muzium Sejarah Nasional*) is under construction in a renovated colonial building just south of the flagpole on Merdeka Square. It is planned to open on National Day 31 August 1994.

### **Hanoi**

Historically, Hanoi is but one of three Vietnamese capitals. The others are Hue and Saigon. In the colonial period, Hanoi was capital of two territorial entities: Tonkin and French Indochina, but not of "Vietnam". Saigon was capital of Cochinchina and the main economic centre in French Indochina, but the only city with a pretention to serve as capital of "Vietnam", was Hue—the city of the emperor. Then also it was in Hue that the first independent Vietnamese nation state was proclaimed by emperor Bao Dai under Japanese auspices in March 1945. When Hanoi took over as capital in August 1945, and again in 1954, it was because the north-based section of the Indochinese Communist Party had gained ascendancy in the movement of national liberation during the Second World War, and because its reliance on Chinese and US support served it better than Bao Dai's dependence on Vichy and the Japanese. President Ho Chi Minh's party dominated the creation of the Vietnamese Democratic Republic in August 1945, led it through the period of negotiations with France from January to December 1946 and through the war against France from 1946 to 1954.

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<sup>2</sup> It would probably be a bad idea to invite Saddam Hussein to this monument.

During the war a Vietnamese counter-state was created with French support. It had its capital in Saigon. This state fell in April 1975.

Since 1976, Hanoi has been the capital of the whole of Vietnam. In tourist brochures and the like, the nation's most commonly featured monument is the tower of the Hanoi Citadel under a huge national flag. The tower is a symbol that links post-to pre-colonial Vietnam. It was erected in 1804, long before the rest of Hanoi got its French art deco features. The red flag with the yellow star represents the resurrection of national independence in August 1945 and the takeover of Hanoi from France after Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Just opposite the tower there is a statue of Lenin, linking the nation to the former centre of the international communist movement in Moscow.

The tower of the Citadel is somewhat deficient as symbolic foundation for a communist nation state with Hanoi as capital. The tower was erected under Gia Long (1802–20), the first emperor to build his power partly on French help, and also the enemy of hero emperor Quang Trung (1789–92). The latter, who defeated a Chinese invasion army and based his opposition to the feudal lords and emperors on support from poor peasants, is considered a forerunner of Ho Chi Minh. Furthermore the tower was not built in the centre of Gia Long's Vietnamese state. Since his capital was Hue, the purpose of the Citadel in Hanoi was to safeguard the southern emperor's control of the north. When the tower is still used as Vietnam's foremost national symbol today, it is probably because it is the oldest visible building in the vicinity of Ba Dinh square, the present centre of the nation. The ancient ruins of Thang Long, which was capital of Vietnam in a distant past, are on military grounds inside the Citadel and thus not accessible.

In 1945, the park between the Citadel and the French Governor General's Palace, the "Ba Dinh Gardens", were chosen by the communist insurrectionists as the location for their 2 September Independence celebration. President Ho Chi Minh read out the Declaration of Independence from a balustrade placed on the circular square that the French had constructed next to the garden. On the very spot where the President spoke he rests today, inside a glass box in a massive copy of Moscow's Lenin mausoleum. Between the mausoleum which was opened in August 1975, and the former Governor General's Palace which is now the Presidential Palace, is Ho Chi Minh's little wooden house on stilts, completed in 1958. On the other side of the mausoleum, behind a little yellow pagoda is the huge Ho Chi Minh Museum, built

for the celebration of Ho Chi Minh's 100th anniversary in 1990.<sup>3</sup> At the opposite end of the rectangular grass-covered new Ba Dinh square is the National Assembly building, which has been built where the Ba Dinh gardens used to be. A little further down, just opposite the mausoleum and close to Gia Long's tower, the Vietnamese Army is now manifesting its ascending political power through the construction of a monument to the unknown soldier.

Ba Dinh square and its buildings are the central national monuments of present day Vietnam. Most of the story that schoolchildren and visitors are told is about Ho Chi Minh, who embodies the national identity of the present regime. Much less is heard of Vietnam's older history. What there is, is mainly found in the Museum of History (*Vien Bao tang Lich su Viet nam*), which is far away from Ba Dinh square, in a colonial building mainly filled with art and artefacts inherited from the French collector Louis Finot. The Louis Finot museum was opened in 1932 and was made into a Historical Museum in 1958. The "nationalisation" of the museum consisted in removing all those artefacts which did not originate from the territory of Vietnam, and in adding the following items: A bust of Ho Chi Minh in the entrance hall; some basic quotations from Ho Chi Minh in golden letters over the doorways between the rooms and at the far end of each exhibition room; five hand-painted maps of Vietnam showing its political borders, psysical features, ethnic groups, fauna and natural resources; accompanying texts to Finot's artefacts telling the nation's glorious history; and two big paintings at the far end of each exhibition room. The paintings display two heroic events in the national history: the victory over the Mongols in 1288 (painted by De Nang Hien), and Independence Day 1945 (painted by Van Tho). An aggrandized copy of the Independence Declaration is also displayed in a monter. Later have been added some photographs displaying the good life and high achievements of Socialist Vietnam. At present it is planned to revert somewhat the nationalisation of the museum by displaying the fine arts that Finot collected from other Asian countries as well, in a special adjoining room. Older history is also represented in the Army Museum, which is located inside the Citadel next to the flagtower, but emphasis here is on the wars against France and the USA. At present this museum is undergoing a major reconstruction.

At Ba Dinh square the main story is told in the Ho Chi Minh Museum, which was designed by the Jewish Russian architect Garon Ixacovich in the form of

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<sup>3</sup> The museum's first Director was Ho Chi Minh's secretary Vu Ky. In 1990 Cu Van Chuoc took over

a big white lotus (*nelumbo*), a symbol widely used in the Buddhist Mahayana tradition.<sup>4</sup> Four criteria were defined before the architectural competition was announced in 1985: The museum should be *national, modern, serious* and *simple*. The lotus flower was thought to be both national and simple; it is used as the basic image throughout the exhibition, which recounts the life journey of Ho Chi Minh. The visitor follows him on his twisted path, from one big lotus structure to the other, with the modernising world to his left and the freedom-seeking Vietnamese nation to his right.

### **Jakarta**

Jakarta is by far the oldest and most populous of the capitals in question. Already in the 1776 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* —before Sir Stamford Raffles resided in the city and much before he founded Singapore—Batavia was characterised as "the capital of all the Dutch colonies and settlements in the East Indies ...[with]... an excellent harbour". Like the three other capitals under study Jakarta also has a centrally located padang, the Freedom Square (*Medan Merdeka*), which in colonial times was called *Koningsplein* and under the Japanese occupation *Ikada*. The Jakarta padang is much larger than the ones in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Ba Dinh square in Hanoi. Medan Merdeka is not only surrounded, but also crossed by diagonal streets. Around the square are a number of stately buildings: the palace of the former Dutch governor which (like in Hanoi) is now the Presidential Palace (*Istana*), the City Hall, the National Museum, the Independence Mosque (*Mesjid Istiqlal*), the State Secretariat, the skyscraper of the Pertamina (state oil company) and, not the least visible, the Bank of America. And in the middle of it all stands "Sukarno's last erection": A high tower with a golden flame at the top and a balustrade from which visitors can look down on all the prominent buildings, or out on the foggy horizon. Sukarno called it the *Tugu Nasional*.

To get into the Tugu the visitor has first to pass a fountain and a statue of the national hero Diponegoro, then walk through a tunnel where the obligatory fee is payed and a ticket received. Before or after kewing up for the lift that takes four persons at a time to the top, the visitor can walk around the tower twice on separate floors with no windows to distract the attention. The first floor has three enormous halls for contemplation of the crucial national symbols: The flags of all provinces,

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<sup>4</sup> Ixacovich also drew the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum.

the national emblem, and the text of the independence declaration hidden behind a golden gate (which is opened only on official occasions and to tourists paying a bribe). On the ground floor the story of the nation is told in a "National History Museum", consisting of 48 dioramas featuring landscapes, seawaves or buildings with "frozen" dramatic events or human conditions.

This is Sukarno's national monument, planned and almost completely erected before his demise in 1965–67, and only with a few alterations made later. Suharto's successor regime has kept its hands off *Padangan Merdeka* and instead built its monuments in other places, encapsulating, so to speak, the revolutionary flame with military and monetary precautions. In a not so central part of Jakarta, one finds the Central Museum of the Armed Forces (*Museum ABRI Satriamandala*). It has been built on the former premises of Dewi, the last and most enchanting of Sukarno's wives. This museum is filled with dioramas featuring mainly the Army's role in the liberation struggle and, later, in suppressing Islamic and ethnic fundamentalism and separatism. East of the capital, at Lubang Buaya (the Crocodile's Well), one finds a commemorative monument to the generals who lost their lives in the aborted communist coup of 1965, the background for the bloody birth of Suharto's regime. This monument includes a museum about communist "unfaithfulness" with dioramas depicting the history of communism in Indonesia. In the vicinity of Lubang Buaya, Mrs. Suharto has presided over the creation of a Miniature Garden of Beautiful Indonesia (*Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*) whose beauty is of a kind that owes more to Walt Disney than to Borobudur and Balinese woodcutting.

### **Common Stories**

All four capitals have a national story to tell. I shall now look at what these stories have in common. In this way I hope to contribute to establishing the main shared characteristics of monumental story-telling in post-colonial Southeast Asia. Perhaps these same characteristics can be found in national monuments elsewhere as well. What follows may be seen as an attempt to establish the quintessence of monumental national story-telling on the basis of four cases in one particular region.

### **Greatness and Main Symbols**

"Our nation in olden times was a three-dimensional nation. ... Because of that our nation built Borobudur, built Prambanan. ... But then we became a two-dimensional nation because we suffered Dutch colonial domination [...] we must become a three-

dimensional nation again, brothers and sisters." Thus spoke the "artist-politician" Sukarno in 1960, urging the building of the *Tugu Nasional*.<sup>5</sup> National monuments are characterised by high towers, massive structures and wide, intimidating spaces. There is little modesty in national monuments. Greatness goes before beauty. Masculine symbols are favoured over the feminine. When women are featured, even they tend to look masculine.

Of the four capitals Singapore is the one that has done least to symbolise its greatness. All national symbols in Singapore look small as compared to the functional greatness of the skyscrapers, the port, the ships waiting to be unloaded, and the Changi airport. Kuala Lumpur is at the other extreme with its attempt to stretch itself directly into the sky, first with the flagpole on Merdeka Square, then with the new, more solid KL Tower. Hanoi does not stretch so high. It intimidates with massive, irremovable boxes instead. Like its model in Moscow, Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum was designed to stay, and the lotus on the drawing board of the Ho Chi Minh Museum's architect was filled with so much concrete that it lost whatever lightness it had had. Sukarno was obsessed with both vertical and horizontal greatness. He wanted a *Tugu* (tower) so high that it would be visible from 100 kilometers. He wanted to build the world's largest mosque. He even intended to build a 22 kilometer bridge from Java to Sumatra. When accused of being a maniac, he answered that he was "not just a maniac but a megalomaniac", but it was not for himself. It was for his country, he said.<sup>6</sup>

The leaders of young aspiring nations do not only reach out for greatness. They also want some little, catchy symbol. All nations have flags, emblems and anthems. But when national monuments are constructed, these standard symbols are not enough. The nation-builders try to find something new that will crystallise their hopes: An easily recognizable sign—a national "logo". A lion in Singapore. An arrow pointing upwards in Kuala Lumpur. A lotus in Hanoi. A flame in Sukarno's Jakarta. A banyan tree in Suharto's Indonesia. The newfound symbols of a nation will often express something its regime badly wants, but does not have, and therefore pretends

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted after McIntyre, "Sukarno as Artist-Politician", p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> McIntyre, "Sukarno as Artist-Politician...", p. 193.

to have. The lion is the symbol of a city state without just a single forest.<sup>7</sup> Its neighbouring regime, which commands plenty of nature, has chosen a bright, artificial arrow taking off from a blue socket surrounded by rings of signal red. The gentle lotus represents the hopes of a nation ravaged by devastating wars. Sukarno's golden flame depicts the revolutionary spirit that even he, despite his oratory, could never keep alive. And the banyan tree of Suharto's Golkar symbolises the sort of voluntary, mutual co-operation (*gotong royong*) that can never grow in a repressive army state. One often hears in Indonesia that under a banyan tree no grass can ever grow.

### **Unity in Diversity**

For a national monument it is an obligation to represent both unity and diversity. All members of the nation must be represented, geographical, ethnic, religious. In Singapore it is not so important to display geographical unity since Sentosa or the outlying districts to the north have not so far displayed much separatism, but ethnic unity is less obvious and therefore all the more necessary to display. The text of the proclamation of Singapore's independence in the National Museum is rendered in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, just as the text on the cenotaph in the War Memorial Park. Some 6–700 year old relics excavated at Fort Canning Hill are said by the National Museum to "include Malay, Indian, and Chinese objects", although the rudimentary locally produced earthenware pottery on display are not easily recognizable as either "Malay" or "Indian" (the Chinese objects are indeed distinctly Chinese). The dioramas in the History Gallery are also dominated by Chinese stories, but have room for the Bugis trading season, the leisurely life of Europeans, and for Indian convicts who all became honest when released after a period of forced labour in Singapore. The Sentosa Island is even more Chinese than the National Museum, but also takes care to include Malays and Indians in its tales.

In the Malaysian National Museum of Kuala Lumpur, the balance is the inverse. In its huge Cultural Gallery, Malay customs are displayed in the centre and on two sides, while the Chinese "Baba" and "Nonyas" have a smaller section in the

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<sup>7</sup> According to the *Malay Annals*, a Hindu prince named Sri Sri Buana, who descended from Alexander the Great, arrived in Temasek island some time in the 14th century. He noticed a strange animal with a red body, black head and a white breast, and decided it was a lion. This prompted the prince to give the new city he founded on the island the name of Singapore, City of Lion.

back and the Indians even less space on the left hand side. At the national monument, there are explanatory texts in four languages, but in the field of religion Malaysia emphasises Islam; it does little to represent other religious groups.

In the Ho Chi Minh museum the unity of diverse Vietnam is depicted in several ways. The building itself consists of stones and wood from many of Vietnam's provinces. Great care is shown in exhibiting how Uncle Ho communicated with people from all parts of the country, of all religious faiths and from the most various ethnic groups. The struggle for national unification figures prominently. The victory of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 is symbolised by a half roof, the total victory in 1975 by a whole roof. Still it must be said that Vietnam's national unification in 1975–76 has not been fully implemented or manifested in the museal and monumental domain. The main monuments of the Nguyen dynasty 1802–1945 are in Hue and are not incorporated in the stories that are told in Hanoi. Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) has its own Historical Museum, Museum of Revolution and Ho Chi Minh Museum with exhibits doubling the ones in Hanoi. The south-based ethnic groups have an ethnological museum in the South whereas the north-based groups have a museum in the North. Vietnam still has to struggle with the division of labour between its "three capitals".

Indonesia differs from Malaysia in that Catholicism, Protestantism and Buddhism are consistently presented alongside Islam as recognised religions. Hinduism, however, whose monoteism is more questionable, features a little less prominently, although one of the dioramas in Sukarno's *Tugu Nasional* features as recommendable the syncretic blending of Shivaism and Buddhism in 13th century Java. In later dioramas Islam is treated only on an equal footing with Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism.

Unity in diversity is indeed the *idée force* behind Mrs. Suharto's Beautiful Indonesia, which in many ways resembles the planned Heritage Museum on Singapore's Sentosa Island. A three-dimensional map of the whole of Indonesia has been constructed in the form of little islands in a lake, and around the lake each province has its quarters where local buildings, art and customs are displayed. The leading role of the capital is thus manifested through the placing of a copy of the whole national territory in its vicinity. Jakarta also has its own quarter inside the mini-nation, with its own mini-model of the city itself; a number of famous buildings from many parts of the capital are concentrated here around the *Medan Merdeka*. The

result is a concentrated mini-capital in the concentrated mini-nation just outside the real capital. Unity in diversity with a strong centre.

### **Chronology**

National stories are normally told as chronological sequences of memorable moments and conditions. History is seen as a continuous film with the nation as family and its heroes and enemies as main characters. Museal dioramas are images taken out of the film. Their designers choose the best moments and represent them in the form of modelled landscapes with frozen human action. Some attempt to display social conditions, moral values or technological achievements of a *longue durée*, but most of the historical stories are *événementielles*. Events are organized in a strictly chronological manner, beginning from the left and ending at the right—before an arrow with an exit sign.

It must be emphasized that there is nothing obvious in telling stories this way. The endless chronology of collectives moving forwards in a shared, simultaneous time is a peculiar genre for the nationalist period.<sup>8</sup> The stories of the Buddhist temples Borobudur and Angkor Wat, the Hinduist Prambanan and the Confucian Forbidden City in Hue are not chronological in the same collective and endless way. They tell legends, deeds and virtues of gods and kings. The story of each Nguyen king's reign in the mausoleums of Hue is chronological, but each of them is one finite story with a beginning and an end.<sup>9</sup> What the national monuments seem to do is to put the whole nation in the emperor's (or dynasty's) place, trace its beginning as far back as possible and end the story with a momentous event as closely as possible to the present, sometimes adding a hopeful, or worried, glance at the future. A nation never dies; thus the story never really ends.

In the National Museum of Singapore the 20 dioramas in the history section takes that little nation's story up to 1965 wherefrom a video takes over. The first two dioramas are used to show pre-modern Singapore, but the third diorama shows the beginning of the nation's "modern history": Raffles' arrival on 29 January 1819.

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 22–36.

<sup>9</sup> The altars to the Nguyen emperor's in Hue are not organized in accordance with chronology, but with the founder of the dynasty, Gia Long, in the middle and the later emperors on each side, placed in accordance with their importance.

Then we (and the schoolchildren) walk from one carefully dated moment to the other. Dioramas 4–13 display typical social sceneries of each decade from the 1820s to the 1920s: Trading seasons, plantation work, a commercial square, construction work, the mediation of a dispute, etc. We get to the 1930s before the carefully selected dates take over: 14 February 1938 (the opening of the British Naval Base Dock—*the Bastion of British Might*); 16 February 1942 (the Japanese victory parade); and so on until diorama no. 20, which represents the first meeting of independent Singapore’s parliament on 8 December 1965.

The mural on the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur deviates from the normal in that it moves from right to left. At the far right is a 7–10th century goddess (*Avalokiteswara*) from the Hindu-Buddhist Srivijaya civilization and a group of Chinese junks representing the maritime trade route to China. Then follows a group of visitors from the Emperor of China bringing gifts to the first Sultan of Melaka in 1409. After this comes a dragon festival, and then the mythical warrior Hang Tuah fighting his friend Hang Kasturi with his *kris* (long knife). The year that the mural sets for this event is 1475. In 1511, Sultan Mahmud is seated on a caparisoned elephant, awaiting the onslaught of the Portuguese; this defeat marks the European conquest of Melaka and the end of the Malayan golden age. 1720 has a group armed with guns representing the Bugis conquering Johor, and 1840 a boat arriving with a coffee tree. Then a group sits around a table in 1874, working out the Pangkor treaty which established the first British protectorate over Perak. 1886 is represented by a locomotive, 1900 by the planting of rubber trees, 1941 with a couple of Japanese soldiers marching on top of two deeply inclined locals. Then the mural jumps directly to the conclusion: Tunku Abdul Rahman takes the oath as the first president of independent Malaya on 31 August 1957.

The Ho Chi Minh museum starts with 19 May 1890, the date that in 1946 was decided to be Ho Chi Minh’s birthday. In the museum this date is represented by a bamboo house in the central Vietnamese village of Kim Lien, where Ho Chi Minh supposedly was born. It stands in the middle of a huge lotus flower. This is meant to show that Ho had his roots right in the middle of the nation, and with a father who taught him to read and write; the father’s portable bookshelf and other utensils are exhibited. Apart from 1890 six other years in Ho Chi Minh’s lifespan are considered crucial: 1917 (the October Revolution), 1930 (the Foundation of Our Party), 1945 (the August Revolution and National Independence), 1954 (the victory of Dien Bien Phu), 1969 (Ho Chi Minh’s Death), and 1975 (Total Victory and National

Unification). Each of these years has its own lotus-formed sculpture in the museum beside Ho Chi Minh's thorny path. That the museum is not just biographical, but a *national* museum is emphasised by the fact that Ho Chi Minh's story does not end with his death in 1969, but with national reunification in 1975. The nation's present and future is also represented at the end of the path by a vision of Ho Chi Minh's hopes represented by a white table with big fruits on it, and a door that opens on a fertile garden, but also with dark clouds of pollution on the wall. This is accompanied by a quotation from Ho Chi Minh: "We have to plant trees for each decade, we have to plant people for each century." In the Ho Chi Minh museum, the national past, present and future are linked beautifully together through the biography of a person whose myth embodies the national experience.

Indonesia is the country par excellence of chronologically organised dioramas and reliefs. No schoolchild in Indonesia can avoid being led through rows of dioramas times and times again. The 48 dioramas in the *Tugu Nasional* are exemplary in that they are not much hampered by respect for historical scholarship. They tell their national story in the way that best generates the most desirable form of identity. The temple of Borobudur, for instance, was not built by slaves. It was constructed by virtue of the same organising principle that Sukarno claimed was the essence of Indonesian culture: mutual cooperation of the people (*gotong-royong*). This principle, as presented in Sukarno's *Pancasila* speech in June 1945, remains the ideological cornerstone also of the Suharto regime. The dioramas inside the Tugu were in the main conceived under Sukarno, but some were added after his demise to ensure mythological continuity: One features the abortive communist coup in October 1965, another the People's demand for a ban against the Communist Party (PKI) and a third shows Suharto lying in his bed where he receives Sukarno's mandate to reinstate government authority.

### **Ancient Origins and Glorious Pasts**

Even a nation that consists entirely of fairly recent immigrants can trace its origin to a distant and glorious past. This has been proved in Singapore. There are two main ways of doing it: The archaeological and the mythological. The first diorama in the Historical Gallery of the National Museum does not show Stamford Raffles. He comes into the story only in diorama no. 3; then he "arrives" in Singapore, where he is "welcomed" by the local ruler, Temenggong Abdul Rahman. The first of the dioramas displays the ruins of an ancient settlement on Fort Canning Hill, uncovered

in 1823, but systematically excavated by the Singapore National Museum only in 1984. This diorama follows after a room displaying the 600–700 year old archaeological "relics of life in Ancient Singapore" that were mentioned above. The accompanying text establishes an identity between the visiting Singaporean schoolchild and the people who lived on the island in the 13th and 14th centuries by calling the latter *Singaporeans* and noting that they shared the values cherished by Singaporeans today: The relics "show us some of the things Singaporeans used in their daily lives in ancient times, that they were wealthy and had a wide range of commercial connections." The text accompanying the diorama quotes a Chinese geography book from the 14th century describing a settlement "made up of Malays and Chinese who lived on terraces cut into the hill". But the text does not quote the page in this Chinese account where it says that "everything the inhabitants possess is a product of their plundering of Chinese junks".<sup>10</sup> The text furthermore contends that the Malay Annals describe the 14th century as "Singapore's first Golden Age". Thus the text links the archaeological to the mythological approach. It renders the famous story of Prince Sri Tri Buana who came from Sumatra and "founded Singapore in 1299" (thus Singapore can celebrate its 700 hundred years anniversary just before the turn of the century). The mythological approach to Singapore's distant past is further accentuated in a little book which was published in 1993 and is now being sold in the museum shops: *Legends from Old Singapore*. This book simply appropriates some parts of the *Malay Annals* and popularises them as recounting "the embellished exploits of our very own native heroes" during "the Sri Vijayan era (1299 A.D. to 1391 A.D.) of the ancient Singapore".<sup>11</sup> A third way of tracing ancient roots is outright forgery. That is the method used at Sentosa on the ancient map of Asia which introduces the "Pioneers of Singapore". The original map contains many lands with many names, but not the name "Singapore", at least not for the island now carrying this name. This problem has been solved by simply inserting "Singapore" with big letters on the reproduction.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> The preface of the publisher (David Pok) in Noel Chia, *The Legends of Old Singapore*.

<sup>12</sup> In all honesty it must be conceded that the name has been added with such an ugly handwriting that anyone can see it is a forgery.

In publications from the National Museum of Malaysia, the nation's history is also traced back to prehistoric times through archaeological finds, but the historical model for the current Malaysian nation, the state that engenders the most pride, is the Islamic Melaka Sultanate which lasted only some 100 years until the Portuguese conquest in 1511. Then the royal family fled and eventually settled in Johor.

In the same way as the others the Museum of History in Hanoi traces human life on the national territory back many thousand years, and its historical story of the nation begins with the mythical *Hung kings*, known from ancient Chinese scripts and said to have reigned as far ago as 4,000 years. The Ho Chi Minh Museum of course targets the 20th century, but the full size copper statue of Uncle Ho greeting the visitor in the central hall is flanked by two ancient myths. On the right hand side one sees the foundation of the nation: A dragon breaking out of an egg. On the left hand side is a golden horse that carries a mythical warrior to the struggle for the country's independence. In the national story of the Vietnamese communist regime there is no particularly golden age, but there are 1,000 "dark years" when present-day Vietnam was part of the Chinese empire, and many glorious episodes such as the victory against the Mongols in 1288, and the revolt of the south-based Tay Son brothers in the late 18th century. The Tay Son rebellion brought both "national unification" and victory over a Chinese invasion army. In some sections of the Ho Chi Minh Museum ancient heroes are featured as inspirers of the President and his people.

For Indonesia it is a bit harder than for Vietnam to lay claim on an ancient origin and a glorious past, but the National History Museum in Sukarno's *Tugu Nasional* has in fact fewer qualms with projecting the present Indonesian state into a distant past than the former Musée Finot. Diorama no. 1 in Jakarta features a "prehistoric Indonesian society 3000–2000 B.C.", and diorama no. 2 brings us directly into the first glorious age: the kingdom of Srivijaya. It was based in southern Sumatra from the 8th to 13th century. The next age of glory is that of the 14–15th century Majapahit Kingdom. No less than three dioramas feature this kingdom which is said to have "united" *Nusantara*, which equals "the Indonesian Archipelago". The "sovereignty" of the Majapahit kingdom, the visitor is told, was recognized by the Chinese emperor.

### **Suffering**

The classical stories of the European nations are filled with bloody battles, military victories and—above all—defeats and suffering: "In national memories, griefs are

more valuable than triumphs; for the griefs impose duties; they call for a common effort," wrote Ernest Renan with the French defeat of 1871 in mind.<sup>13</sup> How is suffering displayed and remembered in contemporary Southeast Asia?

In Singapore, the history of suffering only really starts in 1942. The dioramas of the National Museum and the wax figures at Sentosa do show the living conditions of 18th century Chinese coolies, and they are admitted to have been deplorable: "Disease and malnutrition were rife, housing dreadful, and roaming tigers added to the misery."<sup>14</sup> But this is not in any way constitutive for the most favoured national memory. No one is *blamed* for the misery of the coolies. February 1942, which is represented in the National Museum by two dioramas, is the single most important month in the story of Singaporean suffering. One of the dioramas shows a prison camp with inmates of a hardly discernible race, guarded by four brutal and decidedly Japanese soldiers. "Thousands of ... people ... ended up in lorries going to their deaths: They were lined up in front of machine-guns and massacred," says the text. The cenotaph to the civilian victims of the Japanese occupation in the War Memorial Park carries the following inscription: "In deep and lasting sorrow this memorial is dedicated in memory of those of our civilians who were killed between February 15, 1942 and August 16, 1945, when the Japanese armed forces occupied Singapore." I shall return later to the question of who was to blame.

In Kuala Lumpur there is not so much talk of suffering. Although there is some mention of British repression of anti-colonial revolts, there is not really any idea of Malaysians having particularly suffered under British rule. Nor is Japanese cruelty any more eagerly evoked. After all it was mainly the Chinese who suffered under the Japanese. The museum of the Armed Forces openly and without apparent shame displays collaboration between the Malay royalty and the Japanese occupants. The suffering in Malaysia that really counts took place during the emergency 1948–60. In the national monument, one of the five heroic soldiers is wounded and about to die. He represents the suffering caused by the communist insurgents. The Museum of the Armed Forces has a well documented and highly interesting emergency section, which makes an intriguing distinction between *dead communists*

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<sup>13</sup>"En fait de souvenirs nationaux, les deuils valent mieux que les triomphes; car ils imposent des devoirs; ils commandent l'effort en commun." Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, 1882, quoted after Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Teo Marianne, *Dioramas*, p. 14.

and *lost lives*: "After 12 years of fighting, which saw the death of 6,710 communists and a loss of 4,338 lives, the nation finally achieved independence."

In the tales of the present regime in Vietnam, suffering is not as much accentuated as one might expect. It is present everywhere, but perhaps it is too obvious to need demonstrative exposure. When everyone has suffered, one does not need museums for it, except perhaps to show the next generation, but so far the Vietnamese seem rather to want to forget. During the American war the suffering was of course a major issue in the propaganda for international support, but with victory in 1975 this changed. The Vietnamese regime has seen no need to stir up further animosity against France or the United States. There have also been other reasons for not making more out of the suffering. So much of it was caused by civil war. To take up this aspect would be to open old wounds. Also the regime has needed soldiers in Cambodia and at the Chinese border who were prepared to sacrifice themselves. Yet another reason for avoiding the issue is the question that the regime and its loyal historians have feared the most and tried not to ask: "Was it worth it?" The first to ask this burning question in the open were, as always, the novelists and poets. Their questions are too painful to be asked in a museum.

Apart from one episode in October 1965 there is not much suffering in Jakarta's nation-building stories either. One wonders why and finds a number of possible explanations. Perhaps suffering is more important to numerically small nations than to the large ones. In a populous nation suffering will tend to be self-inflicted, and this makes it less useful as a source of common identity. Civil wars are wounds, not sources of pride. What suffering could Jakarta have found to exploit from its history? The forced cultivation system that was practised by the Dutch in the 19th century is presented in one of the Tugu's dioramas, showing "how cruelly the people are forced to work under psysical torture and other punishment". But this can be but a minor theme in a 20th century myth. Japanese forced labour 1942–45 has also got its diorama. Th deaths it caused are closer in time, but not really suitable either for a national myth since the Japanese were in the main a positive force in the struggle for Indonesia's independence. Suffering inflicted by the Dutch in the years 1945–49 is also no good because that was mainly the age of heroism, leading to victory. Then of course there is one major reason why death and suffering cannot be central to the national identity of the present Indonesian regime: The worst massacre was caused by that regime itself. The vast killings of 1965 are still tabou in Indonesia, although Suharto's regime has spun a major myth around the episode that

unleashed the wave of violence: The capture, mutilation and killing by communist insurgents of seven Army officers who eventually were dropped into the well at Lubang Buaya. The myth of the seven martyrs has become a major legitimating device for Suharto's military rule. Around the well a whole complex of monuments and museums have been built to prop up the present regime. I shall return to Lubang Buaya.

### **Heroism**

Heroes are at least as essential as suffering to the story of a nation. If suffering calls for a joint effort, the hero represents the ideal to emulate or follow. But heroes must be carefully selected to prevent factionalism. The most useful heroes belong to a distant past, or they died so young that they were never controversial. Who are Southeast Asia's heroes, and how are they worshipped?

Singapore has only one hero with his own monument. That is Lim Bo Seng, the young Chinese businessman who served British intelligence and was executed by the Japanese in 1944. Lee Kuan Yew cannot be called a hero. He is a practical rather than a symbolic leader, and even after his retirement has not become a hero in the proper sense of the word. He may or may not become a hero at a later stage. Singapore's older heroes are revered at Sentosa, where a special room is dedicated to items owned by the great pioneers. In this room four named ones are represented, and one anonymous. No British are there, not even Raffles. How could they be emulated by Singaporeans today? Of the four named pioneers, one is Arab (Syed Shaik bin Abdul Rahman, 1852–88) and three Chinese (Hoo Ah Kang 1816–80, Lim Boon Keng 1869–1959 and En Tong Sen 1877–1959). Who then is the fifth and unnamed pioneer? An anonymous soldier? An anonymous Indian or Malay? Neither. She is the anonymous Chinese woman (*Nonya*).

Malaysia is not a very heroic nation. The best known historical figures are the great tragic ones of the *Malay Annals*, and their main achievements were to demonstrate loyalty to their Sultan. In 20th century Malaysia there are three main candidates for heroism: Dato Onn bin Jaafar, who founded the ruling UMNO Party, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first president, and Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, Malaysia's leader since 1981. But the Tunku outmanoeuvred the Dato, Dr. M. is no great admirer of the Tunku, and the Doctor himself resembles Lee Kuan Yew in that he is more of a practical and future-oriented leader than an actual hero. Thus none of the candidates have got any monuments or museums dedicated to themselves.

Vietnam, by contrast, is probably the most "heroic" of all the nations studied here. "Vietnam has never lacked heroes", said Nguyen Trai in the early 15th century. That quote has remained with the nation. Ho Chi Minh used it, and when publishing his long poem "Our history" in 1942 he enclosed a series of drawings of heroes from centuries of independence struggles. In the Ho Chi Minh Museum there are several allegorical references to these same heroes. Since the Second World War the communist cadres who were executed, or died in French prisons, during their youth have also been subject to worship. If one considers a map of a Vietnamese town, one will find that the street names fall mainly in two groups: ancient heroes from wars against the Chinese, and 20th century communist cadres. In August 1945, the two main leaders of the revolution in southern Vietnam were Tran Van Giau and Pham Ngoc Thach. In the 1980s, when Giau was finally allowed by the party to move back to his native Saigon, he was given a house in the Pham Ngoc Thach street. Ho Chi Minh, of course, is the hero above all.

"Only a people who respects its heroes is a great people," said Sukarno. In his time the two main national heroes were Diponegoro and himself. In front of Sukarno's *Tugu Nasional* was placed an Italian-made statue of Diponegoro, the prince who fought against the Dutch in the Java War 1825–30. Inside the Tugu, a diorama shows Diponegoro, his assistants and "other heroes" defeat Dutch troops in a battle. Diponegoro never lost militarily, it is emphasised, but was lured into captivity by the Dutch who pretended that they were willing to negotiate. Sukarno encouraged Indonesian as well as foreign artists to also make symbolic, anonymous heroes. Their sculptures were placed in Jakarta's parks and intersections. They make dramatic gestures such as breaking chains, and back this up with burning eyes. Since Sukarno was deposed, Indonesian hero-worshipping has been less energetic. Or to be more exact, it has been bureaucratized. In the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, the Army is a kind of collective hero. Only dead members are allowed some degree of individual cult in this museum's "Hall of Heroes" which has two big ones in the middle and 22 lesser ones along the walls. The two big ones are General Sudirman and General Urip. Sudirman was the first Commander-in-chief of the Army, who led it in the fight against the Dutch while suffering from tuberculosis. He died from the illness soon enough to not become controversial. General Urip Sumohardjo won his status as hero through his modesty. Before the Second World War he was the highest ranking native officer in the Dutch colonial army, but when he joined the Indonesian Army after the war, he accepted to serve under Sudirman although the latter was his

junior. Among the Army's more well-known heroes are also the seven martyrs who were dropped into the Crocodile's well in October 1965. The museum at Lubang Buaya exhibits their personal belongings. It is noteworthy that in the Museum of the Armed Forces there is no worship of General Suharto. The text of the diorama displaying his election in 1973 makes it abundantly clear to whom he owes his power: "A Son of the Army is Elected President" (*Seorang Putera ABRI dipilih Sebagai Presiden RI*).

### **National Liberation**

The main or conclusive story of all the monuments under scrutiny, apart from those dedicated to 1965 in Suharto's Indonesia, is the story of national liberation from European colonialism.

In Singapore the story of national liberation is presented already in the entrance hall of the National Museum, but here it is told as decolonization, not national liberation. Among the governors whose portraits are on the walls, Sir John Nicoll (1952–55) is said to have governed during "a period of decolonization in the Malay world", but his response to the "broad-based anti-colonial movement in Singapore" was "slow", so it was "left to Nicoll's successor to complete the decolonization process." Prominently placed to the right of the entrance are monters displaying the proclamation of the Malaysian Federation (including Singapore) in 1963 and the proclamation of Singapore as an "Independent Nation State" in 1965. The last two dioramas in the History Gallery are dedicated to the referendum on merger with Malaya on 31 August 1962 and the opening of the first Singaporean parliament on 8 December 1965. The accompanying text is marked by well-balanced historical scholarship. There is no attempt to hide the reality that Singapore became independent despite of itself: "Singapore was not prepared for independence alone. Only three years before, Singapore had officially stated that the island was *"not viable by itself"*. However ... Singapore had to get out of Malaysia for the sake of peace. The break was described by Lee Kuan Yew as a *"moment of agony"* ... A Singaporean identity had to be forged from the diverse racial groups ... Singapore was set to build up the newest nation in the world."<sup>15</sup> Here the video in the theatre takes over. It starts in 1965 when "Singapore set to work", and then makes a summary of world history, with Singapore at its centre, from the Srivijaya period up

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<sup>15</sup> Teo Marianne, *Dioramas*, p. 47.

to 1965. The main focus is on developments in China and India, and the decline of British power. After 1945 there was irritation at British aloofness. In the late 1950s, the British "had to take the hint", and the People's Action Party (PAP) found a "winning formula" (this sentence is accompanied by happy, harmonious music). The video then displays the great achievements of independent Singapore.

The last sections of the former Historical Gallery in the Malaysian National Museum used to tell the story of how Malays defeated the British Malayan Union scheme 1946–48, won the emergency 1948–60 with British help, gained independence in 1957, and formed the Malaysian Federation in 1963. The text in the printed guide is matter-of-fact and with little potential for provoking strong national feelings. It finds some pride in stating that "Malaya's progress towards independence, not to mention its subsequent economic progress, was the most rapid of any of the dependent territories in the post-war world", but that is all. In Adi Haji Taha's text to the guide there is no anti-Britishness involved. Whereas the museums in Singapore present their country's independence as having been achieved after a period of "irritation" with the British, the Malaysian National Museum says the British High Commissioner "announced" that there was no longer any obstacle to Malaya's advance towards self-government. Altogether the Historical Gallery was perhaps a bit too academic and unbiased to serve as national identifier. No wonder therefore that the Gallery has been removed and the exhibits spread out in the country. In 1987 an attempt was made by the Museum's Association of Malaysia to produce a publication (*30 Years of Nationhood*) that would contribute more significantly "to engender a greater love for the nation".<sup>16</sup> One major difference between this and earlier publications is its emphasis on opposition to colonial rule and British repression, but the language of the author is also hampered by concern for objectivity. He writes in a detached way that leaves moral judgment to the reader. The process towards national independence in 1957 is described in great detail, but without excitement: "Malaya became a nation on 31 August 1957".<sup>17</sup> Neither Dato Onn bin Jaafar nor Tunku Abdul Rahman are revered as heroes.

In Hanoi, the wars between 1945 and 1975 are of course important parts of the national story, but the greatest event of all remains the August Revolution and

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<sup>16</sup> Foreword by Dato' Shahrum Bin Yub, President of the Museum's Association of Malaysia, in Khoo Kay Kim, *30 Years of Nationhood. A Historical Perspective*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

Independence Day, when Ho Chi Minh read out his declaration to an enormous gathering in Hanoi. This is one of the two events which feature most prominently on the walls of the History Museum. This is also the central event in the Ho Chi Minh Museum and the event that decided where his mausoleum was built. The quotation from Ho Chi Minh that one hears repeated most often in Vietnam is the following: "Nothing is as precious as independence and freedom" (the Party leadership are said to have asked Ho Chi Minh to add "socialism", but Ho Chi Minh apparently refused).

The way the winning of national independence is represented monumentally in Jakarta is particularly interesting.<sup>18</sup> By contrast to Hanoi, the declaration of Indonesia's independence was made rather inauspiciously outside Sukarno's private house and in front of only a small gathering. Later story-tellers have tried to make it bigger. There has been a whole industry of trying to find out new details about the event. On the basis of the direction of the shadows on the two photographs that were taken at the time, researchers have for instance tried to calculate the exact minute that the proclamation took place. One year after the event, the first little monument was erected by the government of Sutan Sjahrir on the place in Jakarta where the declaration was made: A small obelisk with an inscription and a map of Indonesia, and a tower with a lightning at the top. Sukarno was not in Jakarta at the time and never really accepted this monument. Once he was safely in power he unceremoniously tore down his old home in order to set up the new "Blueprint Building". He wanted a much greater monument and thus initiated the *Tugu Nasional*, which he placed in the middle of the Medan Merdeka, the former Ikada square. This is the place where Sukarno no doubt would have made a major independence speech if he had been allowed to carry out the plans he laid in the summer of 1945. They were interrupted by the sudden Japanese surrender. After Sukarno's final resignation in 1967, Suharto repeated what Sjahrir had done and built a medium-size monument at the place where the declaration was originally made, featuring Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta standing side by side, with a tower and a flame behind them. The independence declaration and its fulfillment through the war against the Dutch is the climax of the stories that are told in many of Indonesia's museums, not the least in the National History Museum inside the *Tugu Nasional*. Six dioramas are about the "national revival", revolts and growth of consciousness up to the "Youth Pledge" in 1928. The Second World War is featured in two dioramas.

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed treatment, see Hans Antlöv's paper to this conference.

Then follow four dioramas about the momentous events in 1945 and three about the struggle for "defending our independence" 1945–49.

### **An Ideal Type National Monument**

Based on the above we may attempt the following description of an ideal type complex of national monuments and museums: They are located around or in the middle of a square in the centre of the national capital. The most important office buildings of the state are nearby. The main monuments form a vast structure stretching high up and with lots of empty space. The standard national symbols (flag and emblem) figure prominently, and much care is given to assuring symbolic representation of all geographic regions within the national territory, as well as all ethnic and religious groups: *Unity in diversity*. One way or another the monument contains a museal presentation of national history, told with pictures and accompanying text in the national language as well as the global one (English). It visualises a chronologically organized sequence of great moments, starting with an ancient origin, passing through a golden age, depicting a number of battles involving suffering under foreign attacks or domination, and finally proceeding to the main story which is that of national liberation. The climax of the story is the declaration of national independence, leading to international recognition. One of the monuments within the structure is located at the place where this declaration was made.

### **Singular Stories**

After this attempt to establish the ideal type national monument structure I shall look more closely at the four cases and try to arrive at a crystallized description of the most singular and characteristic features of each national story. Real history seldom fits the national ideal, and national monuments have to establish some kind of compromise between the desired myth and the known historical reality. It is our hunch that a closer study of how the national monuments make up this compromise will reveal some "national defects". The way these defects are compensated for, or glossed over, in the monuments may help us discern the self-image of each of the present regimes and provide a basis for reflecting on the viability of its monuments as well as the over-all political cohesion of the nation in question.

Let me start by pointing at the two most general threats to the national identity of all four states: First, there is the lack of generally recognized contemporary heroes. Men long dead can be recognised by most, but those alive or

only recently dead, remain controversial. They do not belong to everybody. One way of coming around this problem has been to play down the role of the main leaders of the national liberation, and instead erect sculptures to the unknown soldier, or someone who died in a sufficiently early stage of the struggle for national liberation to not become part of the post-revolutionary rivalries.

Second, there is the lack of confluence between a record of heroic national liberation struggles and a record of economic performance. Those nations with the least struggles to be proud of have had the most to boast economically. Unheroic decolonization payed off whereas bloody liberations cost dearly. This dilemma is present in all four states in question. Vietnam lacks dollars. Singapore and Malaysia lack battles. In Indonesia the battles and the dollars belong to the pre-1965 and post-1965 regime respectively. To some extent the economic performers have supplemented their national monuments with monuments of economic performance: airports, skyscrapers and amusement parks. The relationship between these monuments and the more traditional national ones will be part of the discussion below.

### **The British Surrender**

The late Winston S. Churchill deserves credit for having laid the foundation for separate national identities in the eastern part of the British Empire. He did it through the greatest of his mistakes. Churchill started this work with Gallipoli, the main constitutive defeat in the national identities of Australia and New Zealand. The ones who bravely bled to death for the sake of controlling the Dardanelles were the blossom of the youth in these far away British colonies. Before the First World War, they had been forcefully jingoist, they positively identified themselves with British imperial values. This did not apply for the post-Gallipoli generation. Gallipoli was the ideal defeat for their formation of a separate national consciousness, since it involved an enormous amount of bravery and suffering, and could be blamed on someone else: Churchill and the British government. The Turks were not to blame. They just did their job. All the guilt was in London. Britain forfeited its right at Gallipoli to lead Australians and New Zealanders. They were called upon by the dead to forge their own identities through a common effort, and manage henceforth on their own.

In 1942 the same thing happened in Singapore. The main aim of national story-telling in Lee Kuan Yew's little state is to denigrate the British for their

irresponsibility. This is best done by telling over and over again the tale of British folly in 1941–42, and the suffering it brought upon the Singaporeans. The perpetrators were Japanese—they went about their job in their own brutal fashion—but the guilt was British. A video produced in 1988 describes the change of mood in Singapore that resulted from the British surrender: "It was a different Singapore to which the British returned in 1945. They were welcomed back with genuine relief, but the old loyalty and unquestioned trust in British protection had been shattered. A political awakening had taken place ... In another ten years the leaders of a new generation would emerge ... who would challenge the British right to rule."<sup>19</sup>

In the History Gallery of the Singapore National Museum there are two dioramas from 1942 (the year of suffering), but not one from 1945 (the year of British victory). There is a strange gap between 1942 and the City Day celebrations of 1951 which, apparently, are considered more important than Admiral Mountbatten's victory parade. The History Gallery contains one television set. It plays over and over again a video about the 1942 surrender. There is no end to the attention given to this surrender. The tourist bureaus in Singapore offer a specially designed surrender tour, organised for the 50th anniversary in 1992, with a combination of sightseeing, viewing a video inside the bus, and locating the main events on a map with a meticulous explanatory text. No comparable "victory tour" is likely to be organised in 1995.

The place where the denigration of the British is done most perfidiously, is at Sentosa. The "Pioneers of Singapore" exhibition reduces to less than a minimum the role that the British ever played. It starts with the first wax-model, where Sir Stamford Raffles is but one of five signatories to the 1819 treaty. This is the accompanying text: "On February 6th, Sultan Hussein Shah, his eldest son Tengku Ali, Stamford Raffles, Colonel Farquhar and Temenggong Abdul Rahman were all present in the ceding of Singapore to the British for the setting up of a trading settlement." (Raffles is the only lacking a title).<sup>20</sup> From then on, Raffles and the British are almost completely ignored. You see a lot of Chinese wax-figures, from all

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<sup>19</sup> Chua, *Diary of a Nation*.

<sup>20</sup> There is also an accompanying piece of music, presumably meant to convey some of the atmosphere of 1819. The piece is from Verdi's *Aida*, which was composed for the celebration in 1871 of the opening of the Suez canal.

social classes. There are Indians, Arabs and Malays as well, representing various phases and aspects of the historical development of Singapore. But apart from Raffles' first successor as Resident and a British manager of a rubber plantation, the British are absent until we reach the 1930s. Then they reenter the story in a sarcastic video called "Life in Prewar Malaya". This innocent title conceals a diatribe against the British: Japanese power was mounting, but the British did not care. The British enjoyed themselves with whisky drinking, waning away their time in their exclusive clubs which the locals could not join. Civil defence was poorly organised in the 11th hour, and when the first bombs fell, the city was fully lit; the one who kept the key to the master switch had taken it with him to his shelter.

Then follow the "Surrender Chambers" which start out by quoting Churchill from 1941: "The political situation in the Far East does not seem to require ... the maintenance of large forces in the Far East at this time." The museum does not blame Japan for the war. Japan was under pressure. Negotiations failed, and "the Japanese were left with two options—fight or surrender". The two Japanese pilots who sunk the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* are featured on the wall almost as heroes, and General Yamashita's victory is called the victory of "an Asian power". Singaporean businessmen had started to learn already during the slump in the 1930s that they could not rely on European capital; in 1941–42 the unreliability of Europeans was revealed to all who could see. The surrender ceremony where the deeply shattered General Percival signs the unconditional surrender is featured in a room with full-size wax figures of all those present. The triumphant Yamashita sits in the middle. General Itagaki's surrender to Admiral Mountbatten on 12 September 1945, I must concede, is presented in the same way. The Surrender Chambers do not ignore the Allied victory in the way of the National Museum, but in the Chambers the British role in the Allied victory is belittled in a subtle, but effective way: In the first two third of the chambers there is a loudspeaker in every room with a voice describing British aloofness and unpreparedness with a polished Oxbridge accent. When we get to 1944 and the Allies get the upper hand in the war, another speaker takes over, with a broad accent from the other side of the Atlantic.

### **The Tallest Flagpole**

Like Singapore, Malaysia was a major benefactor of American benevolence during the Cold War, and for the last couple of decades, Malaysia has been a nation striving eagerly upwards. The Islamic-American National Monument described in the

beginning does not, however, present the views of the present regime. That monument reflects the vision of the former generation who contributed to the defeat of the local communists and the establishment of the Malaysian Federation. The new generation who started to take over in 1970 and got fully in charge when Dr. Mahathir Mohammed formed his government in 1981, are future-oriented nationalists. Dr. Mahathir's *Vision 2020* is a programme for rapid and joint modernisation to compensate for a divided, interrupted and less than energetic past. What Dr. M. has set out to create is what the anthropologist Shamsul A.B. has described as a "nation of intent".<sup>21</sup>

Malaysia's way of telling its past has for a long time been intimidated by its reliance on British scholarship. This has led to good history, but not good stories. Ideologically Malaysia's perception of its past has been less than inspiring. Even the mural on the National Museum is of little help here. Not that it is academic, but it is too esthetic, too pleasant to look at to inspire the kind of pride and energetic will that form the purpose of a national monument. Malaysia has had few heroes to hail and few enemies to hate. In Malaysia, British colonialists were not until recently considered enemies at all. The museums of Kuala Lumpur do not accentuate Churchill's failure the way it is done in Singapore. The former Historical Gallery of the Malaysian National Museum just briefly informed its visitors that the Japanese attack "came as a surprise to Malaya", but did not dig deeper into British shame.<sup>22</sup> The Museum of the Malaysian Armed Forces has an exhibition that resembles the one at Sentosa Island, but the attitude is quite different. In Kuala Lumpur, Japan is presented as the enemy while the British defeat is deplored. The Museum even shows understanding for Churchill's reluctance to send more forces to the East: "...the request for additional defence forces was not fully met by the Service Chiefs in London, partly due to their forces' commitment in Europe."<sup>23</sup>

What then about the communists? They were enemies, and the national monument that was completed in 1966 made a feast of their defeat. But the communists were an internal enemy, both ideological and ethnic. The modern Malaysian state has an obligation to inspire its Chinese citizens as much as the

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<sup>21</sup> Shamsul A.B., *Malaysia in 2020, one State many Nations?*

<sup>22</sup> Adi Haji Taha, *Guide to the Historical Gallery*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Text on the wall of the Museum of the Armed Forces, Kuala Lumpur.

Malays and Indians. Furthermore the Chinese communists were defeated by the British rather than the Malays themselves; despite the suffering inflicted by the communists on the population, the fight against them is therefore not an ideal source of independent pride. The conclusion of Dr. Mahathir's post-1980 regime seems to have been to ignore the past and view towards the future: build high, earn money, achieve loyalty of all ethnic groups through a general rise in prosperity. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1987, all member states were invited to contribute a sculpture to the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur. Whereas Singapore contributed an artwork called "Towards *Peace*", Brunei an ASEAN *Dance*, Indonesia a *Gate of Harmony*, the Philippines a symbol of indigenous *Tradition*—Malaysia's own sculpture symbolises *Growth*: "The twenty slabs [in marble on reinforced concrete] arranged in a curving movement, from a low profile to the 'tumpang' shape pointing upwards, symbolise the dynamic growth of the ASEAN region during the first twenty years."<sup>24</sup> Out of this same ambition grew the world's tallest flagpole and the KL Tower. Whereas Sukarno's *Tugu Nasional* has a historical museum at its base, Dr. Mahathir's flagpole grows out of a shopping centre and parking lot. The KL Tower is still under construction, but apparently it too is meant to have a purely contemporary foundation. In 1993, when Malaysia became the first country in the world to have built a skyscraper that tipped over because the foundation was not sufficiently solid, it struck at the heart of the national pride.

The present stage of affairs must form a challenge to the national historians, and also to the staff of the new Museum of National History which is now being set up right in the shadow of the flagpole.

### **The Forged Will**

Ho Chi Minh (1890/94–1969) spent the last third of his life performing the mythical role of national leader which he had masterfully designed for himself. In his youth Nguyen That Thanh (as he was called then) was the bitter son of a mandarin who was relegated because he had abused of his powers. Thanh's mother had died when he was a boy. In the 1920s Thanh converted to leninism and in the 1930s became the feared and admired Comintern organiser Nguyen Ai Quoc. But during the Second

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<sup>24</sup> Explanatory text in the park. The only other country to make a similar emphasis was Thailand, with a sculpture of *Progress* in stainless steel.

World War he returned to his native land and turned himself into Ho Chi Minh, the frail Uncle of the nation, the poet, the unmarried smoker with the white beard who loved children and was revered by all in return. He spoke to people in a soft and patient voice, and charmed whoever he met. He kept secret his wives and daughters and showed due respect for the memory of his father.

On 2 September 1945, when for the first time he appeared before the public to read his independence declaration, he wore a simple, worn out dress to mark him out from his ministers who had all dressed up for the occasion. While leading the war against France, Ho Chi Minh wrote or dictated a nice little hagiography of himself and published it under yet another pseudonym: Tran Dan Tien. After his return to Hanoi in 1954, he instructed his architect to set up for him a simple wooden house in the garden outside the Presidential Palace. The house was built in the style of the Nung ethnic group with whom he had lived during his time as guerrilla leader. And during the war against the United States, Ho Chi Minh wrote his testament with clear and beautiful instructions for how his myth should be preserved and utilised in a continuation of the nation-building project he had embodied while staying alive:

I request that my remains be *incinerated*, in other words "cremated."... Let my *ashes* be divided into three parts, to be put in three ceramic boxes: one for the North, one for the Centre, and one for the South.

In each part of the country, let the box of ashes be buried on a hill. Let no stone stele and bronze statue be erected on the grave. Instead there should be a simply-designed spacious, solidly-built, and cool house, where visitors could rest.

A plan should be worked out to plant trees on and around the hills. Let visitors plant memorial trees. With the passage of time, the trees will form forests which will benefit the landscape and *agriculture*. Care for the trees should be entrusted to local old people.

On National Day 1969, Ho Chi Minh died. Under Secretary General Le Duan's leadership the politburo delayed the announcement until the next day, 3 September, so that people should not have to mourn and rejoice on the same day. Perhaps it was also felt that the President's death on national day would be seen as a bad omen. The politburo not only falsified the date of the President's death. It also erased substantial parts of his testament before it was published. And then the Party leadership commissioned Russian experts to embalm the body and make their Uncle into a Leninist God, solidly guarded inside a massive structure of stone in the centre of the

northern capital. The only resemblance between the mausoleum and the spacious houses that the deceased had fancied on his hills is the temperature inside. It is ironical that the very same party and regime whose national legitimacy had been so deeply enhanced by the Ho Chi Minh myth should have respected its genius so little or understood it so badly. Instead of invigorating the myth in the way its actor and initiator had prescribed the party enclosed it in a box of foreign design.

Le Duan died in 1986, four years before the Uncle's 100th anniversary. In preparation of the anniversary the Party had already decided to build the Ho Chi Minh museum. Then came glasnost in Moscow and Doi Moi in Hanoi. Those who had known the Uncle best and had kept silent since his death, began anew to talk. During Nguyen Van Linh's time as Secretary General, Ho Chi Minh's friend and personal secretary, Vu Ky, managed to draw attention to the way the testament had been forged, and in 1989 the full content of the President's will was published by the party. When the museum opened, it exhibited the various versions of the testament so everyone could see how Le Duan had deceived the last wishes of his mentor. But the shock that the party leadership received from the events in Beijing and Eastern Europe in 1989 reversed the process towards cultural and political openness. At some point in late 1992 or early 1993 the full testament seems to have disappeared again from the bookstores, and the Ho Chi Minh Museum replaced some of the most controversial exhibits with innocent letters from Ho Chi Minh to local cadres, combatants and workers.

Today a discussion is going on in Hanoi on how to reorganise the national museums in conjunction with the three great anniversaries that are celebrated in 1994 and 1995. In November 1993, the Politburo issued a special resolution on these anniversaries with the aim to "educate everyone in the valuable national traditions so they can enhance their patriotism and belief in the success of the renovation undertaking." Steps must be taken, said the politburo, "to give a face-lift to museums and revolutionary and war of resistance relics." A "mass emulation movement" must be initiated in order to "create a jubilant and healthy atmosphere".<sup>25</sup> The Army is already renovating its museum and building its monument to the unknown soldier, in preparation of the 40th anniversary of the victory at Dien Bien Phu, the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Army and the 20th anniversary of the great victory of the Ho Chi Minh offensive. General Le Duc Anh, who was elected as

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<sup>25</sup> Voice of Vietnam, Hanoi, 2.11.93 (BBC Monitoring Service).

Vietnam's first military president in 1992, will be able to contemplate the unknown soldier's monument from his Palace. For the civilian museums the main event will be the 50th anniversary of national independence on 2 September 1995.

Three main options seem available to the civilian museums as far as their reorganisation is concerned. The first and most conservative which is also most likely, is to maintain the current leninist structure with mausoleum, statue of Lenin, Museum of Revolution and a strong element of leninist internationalism in the Ho Chi Minh Museum as well. The second option is academic and favoured by university professors. This is to de-emphasise ideology by merging the Museum of Revolution and the Ho Chi Minh Museum into a Museum of Modern History. The third option is to fulfill the Ho Chi Minh myth: Carry out at long last his wish for incineration, divide his ashes, bury the ceramic boxes in the vicinity of Vietnam's three capitals, build the spacious houses, plant the trees, and turn the mausoleum into a museum of Vietnam's leninist past. No one in Vietnam seems to have voiced this option openly, but it would be a bold attempt to achieve national reconciliation while preserving the best part of Ho Chi Minh's legacy.

### **The Permanently Endangered Order**

In much the same way as Mao Zedong, Sukarno carried with him the hope of a Permanent Revolution. While Ho Chi Minh let himself grow wiser and frailer in order to fill his role as Uncle, Mao and Sukarno could not let go of their aspirations to vigour and youth. Where Ho Chi Minh enjoyed the company of children, Sukarno preferred women. No more than anyone else could Sukarno stay young, and his dream of permanent or resurging revolutions was doomed from the start. Sukarno's successor regime has turned his dream into a nightmare and developed a chronic fear of upheaval and disruption. The Indonesian Army regime has replaced Sukarno's idea with an ideology of a Permanently Endangered Order. Only by remaining vigilant can the Army and its people suppress the continuously resurging dangers of religious fundamentalism, separatism and—above all—communism. The ideology of the Permanently Endangered Order is promoted in many ways, and also through three quite extraordinary museums. All three are dedicated to the evil. Modern national museums are in the main preoccupied with sources of pride. The Indonesian Army's museums instead resemble Dante's *Inferno* or the descriptions of hell in a medieval Christian altarpiece. Their purpose is preventive, they concentrate on sources of fear. Behind these museums of contemporary prevention is the Indonesian Army's chief

historian, General Nugroho Notosusanto, who died in 1986. In the museum shops of the Indonesian Army, virtually every book on sale is written, edited or at least prefaced by Notosusanto.

The first preventive museum carries the title *Bewaring of Religious Fundamentalism (Museum Waspada Purbawisesa)*. It opened in 1987 and is located inside the compound of the Army Museum. This museum starts with a diorama showing Hatta, Hadikusomo and Mohammad Hassan agreeing on the great religious compromise of 18 August 1945: belief in one almighty God (*Ketoehanan Jang Maha Esa*) as a sufficient religious basis for the state, thus allowing any monoteistic religion. All the rest of the museum's dioramas display stories of deviation from the compromise. They mainly concentrate on terrorist actions by groups demanding an Islamic state. Kartosuwiryo's long rebellion in Western Java figures prominently in the beginning. The following dioramas show a sabotage action in 1953, an incident in 1959, and defection and repentance in the early 1960s. Then the exhibition jumps directly to the bomb explosion of 1980 at the temple of Borobudur, the highjacking of an airplane in 1981 and a conspiratory meeting intercepted in 1984. The names of all the conspirators are listed on the wall.

The second preventive museum is the Central Museum of the Armed Forces. This museum of course tells the stories of the struggle against the Dutch, the "liberation" of Irian Jaya in 1962 and East Timor in 1975. The Konfrontasi period with Malaysia is not, however, mentioned. But there are several dioramas showing the fight against separatist movements in Indonesia itself, the second of the internal dangers that people have to beware of. According to General Notosusanto, the "freedom fighters consider themselves to be continuing the struggle which started with the War of Independence through internal security operations and counter-insurgency campaigns." In other countries it is normal to suppress information about separatist movements. At Satriamandala counter-insurgency is presented as a perfectly normal duty. Dioramas show the suppression of separatists in Sulawesi in August 1950, of the South Moluccan republic in the same year, of Islamic separatists in South Kalimantan in 1956, of the Permesta rebellion in West Sumatra in 1958, and so forth, up to the capture of Kartosuwiryo in 1962. For the period after Suharto's take-over, the Museum behaves more normally. The struggles which have been going on in Aceh, Irian Jaya, East Timor and the South Moluccas since then are not mentioned.

The third preventive museum is the Museum of Communist Unfaithfulness (*Museum Pengkhianatan PKI (Komunis)*), which was inaugurated on Pancasila Day 1 October 1992. So far the exhibition rooms have completed their dioramas only up to 1953, but the second floor is meant to take us closer to 1965. This museum forms a counterpoint to the Museum of Revolution in Hanoi. Indeed they are quite similar in that both are organised in a number of rooms dedicated to the main periods in the development of each country's communist movement. They both exhibit documents, artefacts, names and pictures of important cadres, and also models (dioramas) representing particularly dramatic episodes in the history of the movement: armed clashes, meetings where revolts were planned, etc. The difference is that in Hanoi the communists are heroes who eventually win despite of cruel repression, whereas in Jakarta they are villains who commit terrorist acts and have to be kept down. Another important difference is that the Vietnamese Museum of Revolution places the communist movement within a long national and anticolonial tradition, whereas the story of Indonesian communism begins only in 1945, and then as a threat to the cohesion of the national liberation movement. PKI's prewar history goes without mention. So, of course, does the 1965 massacre on the communists and their sympathizers. It is bound to be ignored also on the second floor.

The Museum of Communist Unfaithfulness is located at Lubang Buaya, and the killing of the seven Army officers, their dropping in the well and Suharto's rescue operation will form the climax of the museum, the negative parallel, so to speak, to the August Revolution in Hanoi. This climax is already strongly visualised and audited in the monuments which are located around the well itself. They were completed in 1981. Behind the well is a huge monument where full size statues of the seven assassinated officers stand in a half circle under the wings of an enormous eagle—the national bird *Garuda*. Underneath is a bronze bas relief visualising the main episodes in the history of Indonesian communism. We see party leader Musso commanding his savage troops in the Madiun affair of 1948, Sukarno presenting his prescription for chaos (*Nasakom*), half naked women dancing and encouraging the 1965 assassins, General Suharto directing his troops to restore order, and PKI leader Aidit facing the court that condemned him to death. Under the relief is the following text: "Beware.....and watch out so that such an event will never happen again."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Waspada.....Dan mawas diri agar peristiwa sematjam ini tidak terulang lagi."

From the left hand side of the well, in a house built of dark transparent walls so the visitor can see what's going on inside by pressing his/her nose against it, one hears angry shouts from the torturers and the moaning of their victims. Schoolchildren are fighting for a place along the wall so they can see the cruel members of the communist women's organisation encouraging their male comrades to mutilate and kill the Army's martyrs. Inside another building one sees a full scale wax reproduction of the famous *Supersemar* where a worried Sukarno, sitting in his sofa with his wife, signs away his powers and leaves the country in the hands of Suharto. On the wall in Sukarno's room are two paintings. One of them features his wife, the other two bare-breasted women with flowers. The message is subtle but clear: The men of the Army had saved the nation from the men who depended on women.

How long can the Permanently Endangered Order last? One should avoid a hasty answer. The Indonesian Army state has already survived longer than most military regimes. "If the younger generation accepts the values which have grown since 1945, then the future of our people, nation and country will be safe", wrote Notosusanto in 1972.<sup>27</sup> The problem is that in a country of suppression and indoctrination one can never know for sure what the younger generation would accept or not accept if it were allowed the opportunity to choose.

## Conclusion

National monuments must live up to certain requirements. They must display greatness, convey easily recognisable symbols, show unity in diversity and tell a chronologically organised story of the nation that builds on ancient roots, goes through a golden age and reaches the climax of national liberation.

All national stories have difficulties they need to gloss over, compensate for or do away with. Such defects are often easy to deduce from a national monument by seeing it as a mirror reflection of the historical reality. When a war memorial is dedicated to civilian victims, the state in question cannot have had soldiers of its own. Obsession with heights reveals a weakness of foundation. When flowers are made central, a country must have known much war, and when a regime must talk continuously about the evil from within, it is a clear sign that its indoctrination of the people has not had the desired effect.

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<sup>27</sup> Preface to the Guide Book to the Central Museum of the Armed Forces.

Which of the four complexes of monuments and museums stands the greatest chance of survival? The ones in Singapore are young and immature and are likely to be changed as a result of Singapore's present role in the construction of a new Chinese supra-nationality (*Zhonghua minzu*).<sup>28</sup> The Malaysian museums and monuments are likely to become less British and Western and more like the museums in Singapore; Malaysia is also likely to stop looking mainly at the sky and try to set national roots in more inspiring stories of the past. The Vietnamese monuments are the ones likely to undergo the most drastic change. The present obsession with Ho Chi Minh and his Communist Party is hardly compatible with Vietnam's current drive to become Asia's next tiger, except if the myth of Uncle Ho is liberated from its leninist straitjacket and planted solidly in national hills. Sukarno's Tugu has already survived one change of regime. When conceiving it, Sukarno declared that it should last "at least 1,000 years".<sup>29</sup> Suharto has let it survive so far, and the first decades are probably the most dangerous in the life of a monument. Of Suharto's own creations the museums of evil are unlikely to last long, at least in their present form. Not much political change is needed to deprive them of their *raison d'être*.

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<sup>28</sup> See Harald Bøckman's paper to this conference.

<sup>29</sup> McIntyre, "Sukarno as Artist-Politician...", p. 190.

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